

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

INTRODUCTION

A. Introductory outline of Revelation

1. The Things Past (1:1-20)
 - a. Introduction (1:1-8)
 - 1) The prologue (1:1-3)
 - 2) A blessing on those addressed (1:4-5a)
 - 3) A dedication to Jesus Christ (5b-6)
 - 4) The theme (1:7)
 - 5) The divine confirmation (1:8)
 - b. The vision (1:9-20)
 - 1) The instruction (1:9-11)
 - 2) The revelation (1:12-16)
 - 3) The interpretation (1:17-20)
2. The Things Present: Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)
3. The Things Future (4:1-22:21)

B. Comments on Revelation 1:1-8

1. Thomas Constable, *This whole introduction (1:1-8) points to the main event of the following revelation: the return of Jesus Christ at His second coming (19:11-16). It also presents the triune God, who is and who was and who is to come, as Lord of time (past, present, and future), faithful to His promises, and powerful enough to bring these prophecies to pass.*
2. Merrill Tenney, *In summary, then, the book of Revelation is a disclosure of Christ and of His relation to the world process of redemption, extending beyond the day in which it was written. It is given especially for the benefit of Christ's servants, that they may be prepared for the strange events ahead of them, and that they may understand God's purpose for them.*
3. John Walvoord, *Because the last book of the Bible is primarily concerned with the revelation of Jesus Christ and His glory at the time of the Second Coming, it is fitting that these eight verses of introduction should introduce Christ as the eternal glorious God.*

C. Introductory comments on Revelation 1:9-20

1. The entire book is placed in context by John in this section as he gives the location of the vision, instructions concerning the vision, a description of the revelation, and a brief interpretation of the revelation. This section takes the book which is in apocalyptic form and gives it firm exegetical roots. The reader becomes privy to information which unlocks the interpretation and purpose of the Revelation.
2. Thomas Constable, *John next explained a vision of the glorified Christ that God had given him (cf. Isa. 6; Ezek. 1). First, he related the circumstances of his first commission to write (vv. 9-11). Second, he provided a detailed description of the source of that commission (vv. 12-16). Third, he explained more about his commission and the One who gave it (vv. 17-20).*

THE THINGS PAST, REVELATION, 1:1-20

THE VISION, REVELATION 1:9-20

A. The instruction (1:9-11)

1. Introduction
 - a. One is impressed by the book's intention to encourage believers undergoing persecution.
 - b. The authority of the book is based on the command of God to record the visions.
 - c. The reader is to understand that what is recorded is important.

2. John's physical circumstances (9), *I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*
 - a. John again declared his authorship.
 - 1) John Walvoord, *This section begins with the expression I, John. This is the third reference to John as the human author in this chapter and the first of three times in the book when he referred to himself as I (cf. 21:2; 22:8).*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *John now addressed directly the seven churches to which he sent this prophetic letter.*
 - b. He connected with the readers.
 - 1) Charles Ryrie, *John does not exalt himself above his fellow believers but calls himself a brother.*
 - 2) He declares his partnership with the readers on the basis suffering, endurance for the sake of God's kingdom.
 - 3) William Barclay, *It is the man who has gone through it who can help others who are going through it.*
 - 4) Grant Osborne, *In Revelation, enduring affliction and opposition means a lot more than just gritting your teeth and getting through it. It means overcoming temptation and remaining faithful and true to God when the world has turned against you. You must wait on God and stand fast against the evil demands of secular society. The basis for doing so is the kingdom, which means God has begun his reign.*
 - c. His location
 - 1) He was banished to Patmos, an island in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus where he had pastored.
 - 2) John Walvoord, *Victorinus, the first commentator on the Book of Revelation, stated that John worked as a prisoner in the mines on this small island.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *John remained there until shortly after the Emperor Domitian died in A.D. 96. Domitian's successor, Nerva, allowed John to return to Ephesus.*
 - d. His testimony
 - 1) Tertullian (3rd C.) declared that John was temporarily banished to Patmos because of his preaching the message of the Gospel.
 - 2) John Walvoord, *His suffering had come because of his faithful proclamation of and faith in the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus . . . "The testimony of Jesus" means John's testimony for and about Jesus, not a testimony given by Jesus.*
 - 3) Kendell Easley, *The Roman emperor Domitian called himself "savior" and "lord," claiming divine worship from Roman citizens. He hated the Christians, whose worship of Jesus used these same words, so he persecuted them. He may have been the direct cause of John being exiled to the island of Patmos.*
3. John's commission (10-11)
 - a. The circumstances (10), *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet*
 - 1) *I was in the Spirit*
 - a) Note the following passages.
 - 1] Revelation 4:2, *At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.*
 - 2] Revelation 17:3, *And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.*
 - 3] Revelation 21:10, *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,*
 - 4] 2 Corinthians 12:2, *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.*
 - b) Mark Hitchcock, *This phrase probably indicates that John was caught up in the spirit's control in a trance-like state as God transported him into the future to see and record the visions of the end of days . . . What John saw, heard, and recorded was the result of supernatural revelation.*
 - c) Robert Thomas, *In this kind of condition the natural senses, mind, and spirit are not operative in relation to and responsive to the natural world. God brings a man's spirit into direct contact with the invisible spiritual world and with the things in God's own mind, yet always accommodated to finite human perception.*

- d) Grant Osborne, *John is introducing a Spirit-sent set of visions intended to tell the church that the sovereign God is in process of bringing history to a close.*
- e) Merrill Tenney, *The phrase “I was in the Spirit” occurs four times in Revelation (1:10; 4:2; 17:3 21:10) and has been regarded by some as marking off major sections of the revelation that John received.*
- 2) *on the Lord’s day*
- a) Charles Ryrie, *The phrase “the Lord’s day” could refer to Sunday or the Day of the Lord, that is, the Tribulation and the millennium, which are the subject of much of the prophecy . . . Unless this is a reference to Sunday, there is no place in the New Testament where this expression is used for that day, since the usual designation is “first day of the week.” It could, therefore, refer to that imperial day in the future when Christ will take the reins of earthly government, which is what John saw in his vision.*
- b) Mark Hitchcock, *Some take this to refer to the end-time “Day of the Lord” - that is, John was saying that he had been transported in a spiritual state to the future Day of the Lord . . . The second view, which is preferred, is that John is referring to the first day of the week or what we know today as Sunday.*
- c) John Walvoord, *The idea that the entire Book of Revelation was given to John in one 24-hour day seems unlikely, especially if he had to write it all down. Being transported prophetically into the future day of the Lord, he then recorded his experience.*
- 3) *I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet*
- a) Thomas Constable, *A loud voice—like a trumpet is loud—instructed John to write down what he saw and to send it to seven churches in Asia Minor. The trumpet reference perhaps implies that submission to its command was necessary. The voice belonged to Jesus Christ (vv. 12, 17–18).*
- b) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *John heard a trumpet like voice behind him. It was Jesus Christ speaking! As far as we know, the apostle had not heard his Lord’s voice since Christ had returned to heaven more than sixty years before.*
- c) Grant Osborne, *Note that the prophetic message is heard before it is seen, as John “hears a loud voice,” which is a frequent experience in the book (see 5:2; 7:2; 19:3, and elsewhere) . . . His cry resembling a trumpet is significant, for throughout the New Testament a trumpet sounds to signify the day of the Lord (Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16) or a manifestation of God (see Heb 12:19). The trumpet blast of the Lord’s voice presages the visitation of God himself and initiates the final events that will end the reign of evil as depicted in these visions.*
- b. The command (11), **saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”**
- 1) *Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches*
- a) Charles Ryrie, *All that John saw (cf. 22:8), not just the particular letter to each church in chapters 2-3, was to be communicated to all these seven churches mentioned in verse 11.*
- b) Kendell Easley, *The seven churches will each receive the entire scroll, perhaps making a handwritten copy for their own continuing encouragement. The message will be read aloud to the members of the churches.*
- c) John Walvoord, *Each of these churches was an autonomous local church and the order of mention is geographical in a half-moon circle beginning at Ephesus on the coast, proceeding north to Smyrna and Pergamum, then swinging east and south to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.*
- d) J. Ramsey Michaels, . . . *it is likely that these seven were intended to represent all of the Asian congregations, and perhaps all Christian congregations everywhere.*
- 2) *A brief overview of each city*
- a) The church at Ephesus (2:1-7), *The church at Ephesus is told of the authority of Christ over the churches. On the basis of Christ’s authority, the church is exhorted to repent and do the deeds which she had first done. One senses that the vitality of a spiritual relationship is in continued fellowship and service.*
- b) The church at Smyrna (2:8-11), *This church is given a vision of the eternity of Christ and his conquest of death. The church at Smyrna is a suffering church and may take heart in the Lord who has conquered all.*
- c) The church at Pergamum (2:12-17), *Our Lord stands firmly opposed to false teaching and believers must not permit false doctrine to stand within the church. Again, the character of the Lord determines appropriate behavior.*

- d) The church at Thyatira (2:18-29), Our Lord has eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished brass--He is holy. The church is to be holy, set apart, from immorality. Toleration of immorality and idolatry must not be permitted.
- e) The church at Sardis (3:1-6), The seven spirits of God probably refers to the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual life to the believer. Those in Sardis are said to be dead--spiritually. They need to return to a spiritual walk enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- f) The church at Philadelphia (3:7-13), Jesus Christ is faithful and able to accomplish His will. This church has endured suffering and has been faithful to Jesus Christ. The Lord will keep them from an unbearable time of testing, the tribulation. Endurance during persecution must be based on our Lord's promise to keep us from that which we can not endure.
- g) The church at Laodicea (3:14-22), The sovereignty of Jesus Christ is emphasized and stands against the complacent attitude of the church at Laodicea. The church was willing to seek the things of the world rather than the things of Christ. Such an attitude indicates a misunderstanding of Christ's sovereign authority.

4. Comments

- a. Grant Osborne, *This prologue is critical for everything that follows. Here we learn the kind of book Revelation is (an apocalyptic-prophetic letter) and the source of the information in it (the Triune Godhead). Since God, indeed all of heaven, is the source, we must treat the book all the more seriously; it can't be ignored at will! The Father, Son, and Spirit are on the throne, sovereign over this world even though it seems as if evil is in charge . . . The return of Christ is imminent, and the last days have indeed begun. The nations are the object of both mission and judgment. We have joined God in calling the nations to repentance, but those who refuse to respond will face God's wrath.*
- b. Thomas Constable, *Why did God select these churches in these particular towns? Obviously He did not do so because of their superior spirituality. Their popularity was not the criterion, either, since we only read about Ephesus, Thyatira, and Laodicea elsewhere in Scripture. John knew of the specific conditions in each of these churches, and God led him to communicate individual messages to them. Probably they were representative congregations from which this book could circulate easily.*

TO BE CONTINUED, LORD WILLING!

- B. The revelation (1:12-16)
- C. The interpretation (1:17-20)