

1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1)*

The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1-3)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Paul described how Revelation occurs in Ephesians 3:2-5.

2 . . . if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

We can understand the Revelation of John. "Which must shortly come to pass" places a time constraint on all who read this writing. The events "Which must shortly come to pass" (Verse 1) and "for the time is at hand" makes the events of the Revelation imminent to all those who read, wherever they find themselves on the continuum of time. Paul described the parameters of time in 2 Timothy 1:8-10, 12:

8 Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God; 9 who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us **in Christ Jesus before times eternal**, 10 but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. . . .

12 For which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him **against that day**.

Everyone who reads the Revelation confronts the imminence of the events of the book. All readers are inextricably tied to "that day" about which Paul speaks. The plan under which we live was given "before times eternal." In the meantime, we "are a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. James 4:14-15. All humankind faces the imminence of the end of time whether by death or by the coming of the Lord. Everyone, from the time of this writing until the end, faces exactly the same situation. The events of the Revelation are near and must soon take place in all our lives.

The Revelation spells out the major events that are to take place beginning in Revelation 10:6-7:

6 And swore by him that lives for ever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that there shall be delay no longer: 7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.

* All scriptures are from New American Standard Updated (NASU)

In Revelation 11:15, the seventh angel sounded his trumpet and identified the completion of the mystery of God with the establishment of Jesus as king over his kingdom:

15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, "The kingdom of the world is become (the kingdom) of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever."

The climax of these epoch events occurred when God resurrected Christ to sit at his right hand as described in Ephesians 1:19-23:

. . . 19 and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might 20 which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly (places), 21 far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all.

Paul also described this event as the event by which he destroyed death. [See 2 Timothy 1:8-12 above.] What follows plays out in the history of man as denouement—a playing out of events predetermined and set in motion before the foundation of the world

Who is the speaker? The angel speaks but he speaks the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. *Angel* is literally a messenger or one who delivers a message. The message in this case is the very word of God and the testimony of Jesus. To whom is the angel speaking? The angel speaks to the one who reads, the one who hears, and the one who keeps those things that are written.

What is the dramatic situation? The dramatic situation is that God has revealed to us his prophecy and the one who reads, hears, and keeps what is written shall be blessed. Christ's earthly ministry began with a pronouncement of blessings in Matthew 5. Commonly called the beatitudes, these blessings use the word *bless'ed*, just as here in verse 3. The word, used here and in the beatitudes in Matthew 5, appears seven times: Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14. The uses of *blessed* in the Revelation are so powerful as to track the development of the great single theme of the book. [See "Introduction to the Revelation" for further discussion and the relationship of the word *bless'ed* to the morality of the times. The seven appearances of the word *bless'ed* in Revelation describe the God-like happiness of the true believers now and in the world to come:

Revelation 1:3: 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Revelation 14:13: 13 And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 16:15: 15 ("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.")

Revelation 19:9: 9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God.

Revelation 20:6: 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Revelation 22:7: 7 "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

Revelation 22:14-15: 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

The introduction to these notes showed how Epicurus used *blessed* to describe the state of those given to pleasure: "The aim and end of life for every man is his own happiness, and happiness is primarily defined as pleasure. 'Wherefore we call pleasure the **Alpha and Omega of a blessed life.**'" [Emphasis added]. In truth, the state of blessedness comes only through the Christ and his gospel. The Revelation attacked the decadent pleasure-seeking lives of those caught up by Satan in their own lust of the flesh, lust of eye, and pride of life. The conflict in the Revelation is a conflict between the Godhead of God, almighty, Jesus Christ, the Lord and King, and the Holy spirit of God and the triad of evil composed of the dragon or Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

The dramatic situation takes added importance as the word prophecy shows us that God is the moving force behind the situation revealed in the Revelation. The apostle Peter explained how the power of God works in men who prophesy in 2 Peter 1:19-21:

19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The Revelation reveals that our eternal reward in Christ Jesus the Lord will soon take place.

The Message to the Seven Churches (Revelation 1:4-8)

4 John to the seven churches that 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 of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood — 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

John identifies himself as the writer. In Revelation 1:9, he describes himself as being "on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Nelson describes the situation:

*[PAT muhs] -- a small rocky island to which the apostle John was banished and where he wrote the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:9). The island, about 16 kilometers (ten miles) long and ten kilometers (six miles) wide, lies off the southwest coast of



Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Because of its desolate and barren nature, Patmos was used by the Romans as a place to banish criminals, who were forced to work at hard labor in the mines and quarries of the island. Because Christians were regarded as criminals by the Roman Emperor Domitian (ruled A.D. 81 AD - 96 AD), the apostle John probably suffered from harsh treatment during his exile on Patmos. An early Christian tradition said John was in exile for 18 months.

*From Nelson's illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers. Map from "The Seven Cities of Asia," *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*. Bible Soft.

John is writing to the seven churches of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea." (Revelation 1:11). These churches become the recipients of specific messages in chapters two and three. As pointed out in the Introduction, this region was also the initial sphere of the influence of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers whose lasting influence is felt to this day.

John begins with a blessing of grace—unmerited favor—and peace which is from God. It includes a harmonious relationship with God and man, plus inner peace that comes through Him who is, and who was. It comes through Christ at one's obeying of His gospel. The blessing is from Him who is eternal: He is now, He was, and He is before the beginning, and He is for ever and ever.

The eternal and unchanging nature of God's eternal purpose reoccurs over and over (six times) in the Revelation. In Revelation 1:6 he begins by speaking of the Father:

6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Not only is the grace and peace from God, but from the seven spirits before Him and from the throne. The term seven spirits is unique to the Revelation. Appearing here with God, seven spirits makes the seven spirits before his throne have power in extending such great blessings. The Greek word for seven is *hepta* and implies fullness:

Hepta corresponds to the Hebrew *sheba'* (which is akin to *saba'*, signifying "to be full, abundant"), sometimes used as an expression of fullness, e. g., Ruth 4:15: it generally expresses completeness, and is used most frequently in the Apocalypse; it is not found in the Gospel of John, nor between the Acts and the Apocalypse, except in Heb 11:30 (in Rom 11:4 the numeral is *heptakischilioi*, "seven thousand"); in Matt 22:26 it is translated "seventh" (marg., "seven"). (From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Revelation uses the word *seven* over 100 times. It uses the term seven Spirits only four times in the Bible and each use is in Revelation:

Revelation 1:4: 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.

Revelation 3:1-2: "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the *seven Spirits* of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.'"

Revelation 4:5: 5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the *seven Spirits* of God;

Revelation 5:6-7: 6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the *seven Spirits* of God, sent out into all the earth.

The seven spirits of God are sevenfold in the sense of the sevenfold blessing in Ruth 4:14-17, which describes the importance of the birth of Obed:

14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. 15 "May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you *than seven sons*, has given birth to him."

The line of David began here:

16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. 17 The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

The fullness of the word *seven* is similar in meaning to *the Spirit without measure* given to Christ in John 3:33-35:

33 "He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. 34 "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

Christ has the seven spirits in Revelation 3:1-2: "He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.'" The seven spirits are before the throne of God in Revelation 4:5: "5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." The seven spirits are the eyes of the Lamb sent out unto all the earth in Revelation 5:6: "6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth."

The seven spirits represent the Holy Spirit of God.

Isaiah 11:1-2 speaks of the Spirit of God metaphorically where the parts stand for the whole:

11 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Beyond the issue of the lineage of Christ, this passage foretells a pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Holy One beyond what has ever happened before or since. There are seven Spirits of God foretold here: the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of strength, the spirit of knowledge, and the spirit of fear (respect) of the Lord. All of these, in their totality comprise the Spirit of God, or as John the Baptist explained, in John 3:34-35, how Jesus was endowed with the full measure of the Holy Spirit: "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure." Isaiah's prophesy uses the parts for the whole of the unlimited and all-powerful Spirit of God—the Spirit that he gave his son without limitation.

Finally, the grace and peace come from the third person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ. He is the firstborn from the dead, according to Colossians 1:18:

18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

His preeminence extends as ruler in heaven and on earth in this world and that which is to come in Ephesians 1:19-23:

19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

In this resurrected Jesus is the fullness of Deity in bodily form, as described in Colossians 2:9-10:

9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.

Christ is now reigning at the right hand of God and all things are under his feet. Any true reading of Revelation must accept that both Christ and the church are complete in the victory won at the cross and the resurrection of the Lord. The final victory in Jesus will be the resurrection of the saints found in 1 Corinthians 15:53-57:

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is now "above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." Praise to him who gave himself for us and made us free from all sin. In Matt 26:28, Jesus said: "28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."

To this the Hebrew writer added in Hebrews 9:14:

14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

We are now a kingdom, and we are now priests. This is not something deferred to the second coming. Revelation repeats this present status of the saints throughout the book. In Revelation 5:9-10, they sing a new song:

9 And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

10 "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

There is no idea of a future kingdom yet to come in the entire Bible. In fact, the teaching is emphatic:

Mark 9:1: 9 And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

Colossians 1:13-14: 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Hebrews 12:28-29: 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Where is the scripture for a kingdom yet to come? It is missing in action!

He also made us to be priests to serve his God and father. Peter describe our priestly duties in 1 Peter 2:4-6:

4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

"To him be the glory and power" describes the exalted and empowered savior. Just as the exaltation and empowerment are complete, so is the duration—"for ever and ever." For ever and ever is literally into the ages of the ages. The power and glory of the Lord are complete in his resurrection and complete for ever and ever.

Christ is coming with the clouds and all shall see him—those who are now living and those who have gone before. Philippians 2:9-11 teaches that every knee shall bow:

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Nowhere does the Bible say that Jesus will set foot on the earth again. In fact, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 teaches that we and He will forever be together in the air:

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

"I am the alpha and omega," or we would say, "The A and the Z." This verse is the thematic statement of the book. All that follows demonstrates now and for ever and ever that God is truly Almighty: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." The dragon, the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and all who follow them will suffer defeat before the power to God, Almighty, and His Lamb.

The Patmos Vision (Revelation 1:9-20)

9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, 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."

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20 "As for 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 are the seven churches.

John identifies himself as a companion in the suffering and the kingdom. As noted before, the kingdom is present and not to be established at some future time. See the note on verse 4 for Patmos, where John was imprisoned because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

“The Lord's Day” receives significance throughout the New Testament:

Matthew 26:29: 29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Mark 16:9-10: 9 Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.

John 20:1: 20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.

Acts 2:1: 2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Acts 20:7: 7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2: 16 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

Hebrews 10:24-25: 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The time of John's vision was on the Lord's Day and, by most scholars, around 96AD. This day is not to be confused with the last day when the Lord shall come again and the end is upon us. Peter quoted Joel 2:31-32. Other passages support the view that the Lord's Day is the first day of the week. “In the day of the Lord,” refers to that last day when the Lord shall return:

Acts 2:20-21: 20:

‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS

AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,

BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

21 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.' Joel 2:31-32.

1 Corinthians 5:5: 5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

2 Corinthians 1:14: 14 just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

1 Thess 5:2: For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

2 Thess 2:1-2: 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

2 Peter 3:10: 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

John describes himself as in the spirit. The Lord and Paul describe this state as the state of true worship:

John 4:24-25: 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

1 Corinthians 14:14-16: 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. 16 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?

Eph 6:18: 18 With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

Col 1:8: 8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

It was during this period of worship that the some of the visions occurred as illustrated by the subsequent uses of the phrase in the spirit:

Revelation 4:2: 2 Immediately, I was **in the Spirit**; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

Revelation 17:3-4: 3 And he carried me away **in the Spirit** into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

Revelation 21:10: 10 And he carried me away **in the Spirit** to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

The loud voice was like a trumpet, and this phrase introduces figurative language that begins to describe what John heard and saw. *Like* and *as* are the signal words of the simile—a figure of speech that compares two things that are essentially unlike. The trumpet and the voice are essentially unlike. The voice is not a literal trumpet, but only has the characteristics of a trumpet: perhaps it was loud and with great clarity as one often thinks of the trumpet sounding. One thing is for sure—the voice was a voice and not a literal trumpet. The voice ordered him to write what he was to see and send the message to the seven churches.

Verse 20 identifies the symbolic meaning of the seven golden lampstands: "the seven lampstands are the seven churches." "Like the son of man" is a phrase often used in the Old Testament to describe mankind. The phrase is a favorite of Ezekiel. Prophetically, it is used of the Christ:

Psalms 80:17-18:

17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.

Daniel 7:13-14: 13:

"I kept looking in the night visions,

And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days

Jesus used the term “son of man” of himself many times during his earthly ministry—most likely to indicate his humanity. Philippians 2:6-8 tells of his human nature:

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

But again, like a son of man is not a son of man. The characteristics of Christ present a human form: he is dressed, he has feet, a chest, a head, hair, eyes, etc. Each specific characteristic receives a metaphoric description of its own, thus the metaphor extends. The extended metaphor of Christ is beauty, power, glory, brilliance. This is not the first time that the Bible describes the Christ in glory and beauty beyond ordinary imagination and words:

John 1:1-5: 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Colossians 1:15-18: 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Hebrew 1:1-4: 1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

Garments and clothes characterize good works. They are used of the saints in Revelation 3:4, 18; 16:15 and of Christ in 6:15; 19:13; 19:16.

Hair white like wool, white as snow is used of God in Daniel 7:9.

9 "I kept looking
Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;
His vesture was like white snow
And the hair of His head like pure wool.

Eyes like blazing fire and feet like bronze repeats in Revelation 2:18:

The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this.

His voice was the sound of rushing waters. The seven stars are the angels the seven churches (1:20). Out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. The sword is the word of God as verified in Hebrews 4:12

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The influence of seeing the Lord provoked John to sudden worship as he fell at his feet as one dead. In Revelation 1:17-18, the Lord comforted John by describing his victory:

"Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

The resurrection of the Lord gave him keys to death and Hades. He prophesied this in Matthew 16:18-19:

18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

He fulfilled this prophecy in Acts 2 with the establishment of his church according to Peter's sermon of Acts 2:24-25:

24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

Peter adds in Acts 2:33-35:

33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

"THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,
"SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,
35 UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET."

A major part of the Revelation story is that Christ has overcome death and Hades for all of us who are children of God, and he will put an end to death and Hades per Revelation 6:7-8:

7 When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." 8 I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

The end of death and Hades is the lake of fire as accounted in Revelation 20:13-15:

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Paul describes this final victory 1 Corinthians 15:54-57:

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS

YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

John's charge is to write "what is now" and "what will take place later." The letters to the seven churches of chapters two and three are immediate, and the end of death and Hades are to take place later. There is no more valuable tool in reading the Revelation than that of correctly identifying what is now and what will take place later. For example, we have already seen that we now are a kingdom and priests. No interpretation can change this fundamental principle and say that the kingdom is still to come.