



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, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:4-6 ESV

Introduction

In 1715, King Louis XIV of France died. Having been placed on the throne when just four years old, his reign lasted 72 years and 110 days — the longest recorded ruling of any monarch of a sovereign country in European history. Over time, he called himself “the Great,” and adopted the sun as his emblem, believing that France revolved around him as the planets revolved around the sun. Indeed, his court was the most magnificent in Europe, and his funeral was equally spectacular. As his body lay in state in an exquisite golden coffin, orders were given that the cathedral should be dimly lit with only a special candle set above his coffin to dramatize his greatness. At the memorial, thousands waited in hushed silence. Bishop Massillon, who was noted for his direct preaching and unwillingness to compromise what he believed, rose to speak. Slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, “Only God is great.”

How easily we forget this truth. As we minimize God's greatness, He becomes relegated to dates and places in our calendars and ceases to occupy the center of our thinking, planning, praying, and being. As a cure-all, the greatness of our God is proclaimed in the book of Revelation with clarity and starkness that can move God back to center in our lives. Its opening chapter bursts forth with living insight about the sovereignty of God and the deity of Christ, themes that flow freely through the book.

In Revelation 1:8, Jesus is declared “the Almighty.” This matchless term for God's greatness is found nine times in Revelation and only once again in the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians 6:18. The throne of God, also introduced in this opening chapter, is mentioned more than 40 times throughout John's apocalypse. Time and again, symbolism and doctrine depicting our Lord as sovereign dominate chapter 1 and permeate the chapters that follow. By reflecting on their great God, the early saints found strength in their suffering. In like manner, those who meditate on these truths today will glean confidence for their challenges.

Three in One

John opens with a salutation that was standard in Paul's epistles: “Grace to you and peace.” Our great God offers us unmerited favor (grace) that can bring calm to our hearts (peace) even in troubling times.

John describes **God the Father** as one “who is and who was and who is to come.” His words link directly to Exodus 3:14, where God commissioned Moses and described himself as “I AM Who I AM.” The title “I AM” conveys the sense of a self-existent being who depends on no other, who lives outside of time, and who reigns over the past, present, and future. We can always find solace and strength from the God of the present (who is), the past (who was), and of the future (who is to come). This same declaration of eternal greatness is attached in verse 8 to the Son as well, for he is eternally divine.

Having introduced God the Father, John references “seven spirits before his throne.” To the ancient mind, the number seven represents eternity, perfection, and completeness. Revelation contains more than 50 specific mentions and applications of the number seven, emphasizing the finality and completeness of God's victory for us. In chapter one alone, we see seven churches, seven lampstands, seven stars, seven angels, and of course seven spirits representing **God**

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Revelation 1:7 ESV

the Spirit in full display, with nothing lacking or held back.

John next introduces **God the Son**, “Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.” The profound Biblical imagery packed into this single description of our sovereign Lord supports the historic understanding of Christ as *prophet*, *priest*, and *king*.

Prophet, Priest, and King

In the fourth century, church theologian and historian Eusebius of Caesarea taught that the Old Testament assigns to Jesus Christ the three-fold office of “prophet, priest, and king.” God’s leaders in the Old Testament were normally assigned only one of these varied functions and were each anointed for their specific tasks. This anointing involved the pouring of oil over their heads. Christ, fulfilling all three offices is thus known as *Messiah* which means, “Anointed One.” Few other Biblical books proclaim the fulfillment of the Messianic hope as clearly as does the book of Revelation.

As the faithful witness, Jesus spoke God’s Words. He was and is the ultimate *prophet*. His words are final because he **IS** the Word. He is the “Alpha and the Omega” (Revelation 1:8). These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and they are His, as is every letter in-between. He owns not only the letters but also every word they compose. Furthermore, His voice is described in Revelation 1:15 as “like the roar of many waters.” His words thunder with authority, drowning out all others. Next, we see that “from of his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword” (Revelation 1:16). Indeed, God’s Word is described as “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). There is efficacy in the words of our God. The Father spoke through Christ, and the world was created (Genesis 1:3, John 1:1-4, Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus shouted a command, and the sea was quieted (Mark 4:35-41).

Jesus is also the ultimate *priest*, “the firstborn from the dead” (Revelation 1:5). He died for our sins and was resurrected that all who believe might be raised. As our High Priest, Jesus bridged the gap between heaven and earth, between a holy God and sinful humanity. In Revelation 1:13, Christ wears the robe of the priest. High priestly promise and imagery, expanded and magnified throughout the book of Revelation, tells us unequivocally that Christ’s prophetic declarations and high priestly promises will be fulfilled. No one can take from us the salvation He offers. Indeed, He is the sovereign, the *king* of kings. Thus verse 5 declares our Lord to be “the ruler of kings on earth” (Revelation 1:5). When John described Jesus as “someone like a son of man” (Revelation 1:13), he was referring to Daniel 7:13, where Christ’s kingship was foretold prophetically:

And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one

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

Revelation 1:8 ESV

that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14)

Fittingly, John sees Christ girded with “a golden sash around his chest” (Revelation 1:13) a symbol of royalty. Such imagery, dominating the pages of Revelation, should convince us that our God reigns! Those who truly live for Him are destined to reign with Him forever.

He Reigns

Because Jesus reigns, those who love Him will reign with Him. And in a certain measure, our kingship begins now. We are part of a kingdom in which we serve as priests. John writes, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5b-6).

Those who serve Messiah, the priest, become his priests helping others to be reconciled with God. We do so under the authority and protection of the King of Kings until He returns. Let us then fulfill our duty, not in fear but in full confidence, for we are part of a “kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28a). Let us then boldly worship and serve our Lord until He returns. For John, this coming is so imminent and important that he describes it in the present tense: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen” (Revelation 1:7).

The angels of God promised that as He was taken up in a cloud, so will He return “in clouds” (Mark 13:26). Clouds in the Bible often represent the glorious light of God's presence (Exodus 40:34). When Jesus ascended, only his growing band of followers were around to watch His departure. When He returns, “every eye will see Him,” just as He promised (Revelation 1:7b). How can this be so? Some point out that it is now possible technologically for the whole world to simultaneously witness a live event due to satellite capabilities and the development of the Internet. However, it has always been possible spiritually. When the Lord breaks into our world to establish His eternal reign, His appearing will be impossible for any living and breathing being to ignore. Even those who died long ago and yet await this consummation will not miss the moment, for human souls are eternal.

When Christ returns, those who pierced Him will mourn because of Him. Such mourning may be a sign of repentance. Or it may represent grief for not having believed when they still had a chance. Zechariah saw and described this day as a time when Jewish people in great numbers would mourn as they saw the one who was crucified (Zechariah 12:10). Yet, not only they but all the tribes and peoples of the world will see and know that this Jesus is none other than “the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

Final Thought

The closing chapter of Revelation highlights some of the book's opening imagery: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:12-13).

Jesus, our Lord, is divine. As prophet, priest, and king, all who believe in Him will celebrate His



greatness forever. He is the One and Only, God Above All, The Almighty!

Spending Time With God

This 12-week study series, *Revelation Made Relevant*, is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The Devotion questions are written for your personal study. The Discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The Digging Deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion: Personal Study

1. What thought or insight from the sermon or commentary would you like to explore further? Why?

2. “Seven churches” are mentioned in Revelation 1:4. Write out the names of these churches from verse 11. Do you know much about any of them? If one is a favorite, tell why.

3. John opens with the salutation, “grace to you and peace...” Ponder the meaning of the words “grace” and “peace” (Use a Bible dictionary if you wish). How do these two words correlate?

4. Think about the way we commonly open our letters and emails or greet people on the street today. Would John's approach (“grace and peace”) be a better approach? Would you consider using such words in your greetings? Why or why not?

5. God is described as the one “who is, and who was, and who is to come?” What is the importance of this description? Explain why.



SERIES

REVELATION MADE RELEVANT

LESSON 2

Above All | Revelation 1:4-8

Discussion: Small Group Study

6. What thought or concern from the above “Personal Study Questions” would you like to bring into the group discussion?

7. The eternal “isness” and unchanging “being” of God is captured by the phrase used for God, “who is, and who was and who is to come.” A shorter version of the same concept is captured in the words, “I AM” (Revelation 1:8). From John 8:48-59, why did the Jews seek to stone Jesus? What does this tell you about what they and the Lord understood the words “I AM” to mean?

8. From Exodus 3:11-15, what do you learn about the meaning and origins of the phrase “I AM”?

9. Seven is an important number in the Bible. Note its uses in Revelation 1:4, 11-20. Why do you think seven was the number in these contexts rather than another number?

10. The commentary describes our Lord's role as prophet, priest, and king. Imagine if He had only fulfilled one or two of these roles. How would things have changed? How is His three-fold function essential for the fulfillment of His calling as the Messiah?

11. Complete this thought: “If Christ is fully divine, our response should be...” (list several practical ideas).

Digging Deeper: Further Study

12. Referencing Revelation 1:5-6, what to you is the greatest thing about the ministry of Christ for us? Why?

13. Compare Revelation 1:7 with Zechariah 12:10. Do you believe people will still have a chance to repent when the Lord returns? Or do you think the mourning in these texts represents grief arising from the realization that it is too late for them to repent? Explain.

14. In Revelation 1:8, Christ makes profound declarations about himself. Record the insights you draw from this verse and how it encourages or challenges your life.

15. The word “Almighty” is found nine times in the book of Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). Select two or more of these instances and record the context and what it shows you about your God.

16. Ponder (and if need be, skim) the life of Christ in the Gospels and select one account, story, or teaching that illustrate for you the Almighty nature of Christ. Why did you select that particular one? Take a minute to give our God praise for being the most awesome and powerful and loving being in the universe!

Scripture for Meditation

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

Revelation 1:8 ESV