



Revelation - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, given to him by God, to reveal what is yet to come. In this chapter, scripture reveals the writer of revelation to be the apostle John who, while in exile on the island of Patmos is called by God while in the Spirit, to write down what he sees in a book and send it to seven churches that are in the Roman Province of Asia.

When John looked to see who was speaking to him he saw seven golden lampstands, which represent these seven churches. In the midst of the seven lampstands he saw the Christ, who was clothed with a long robe with a golden sash around his chest. John provides a description of Jesus that symbolises him as High Priest and Righteous Judge.

In his right hand he held seven stars which represent the seven angels or messengers of the seven churches. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, representing divine judgment. His face was like the sun shining in full strength, representing God's glory.

I Revelation 1:1-8 - Prologue: Introduction and Salutation

John signals how to read the book and receive its promised blessings. The terms 'revelation', 'show', 'made it known', a Greek verb related to 'sign', and 'he saw' prepare the reader and hearers for symbolic visions, which make history's hidden realities visible.

I.a Revelation 1:1-3 - Title, transmission, promise of blessing

The opening paragraph identifies this book's genre as revelation or apocalypse, a disclosure of unseen realities; its divine author, Jesus Christ; and the process by which he is conveying it through the human author - his servant John - to believers, i.e. his servants. It then pronounces the first of seven benedictions on those who rightly receive the book's message.

¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Revelation 1:1-2

The revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus is both the One revealed, referred to variously as the Son of Man, the Lion of Judah, the Lamb, and the Word of God; and the Revealer. This is the only time that the word revelation appears in the book; on the other occasions the book is simply referred to as a prophecy. Paul received the Gospel in similar fashion: <<*For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ*>> (Galatians 1:11-12).

Which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. The fact that God chooses to show such things gives the reason why so much of the prophecy is portrayed in symbolic imagery.

He made it known. God transmits the unveiled truth to Jesus (5:7), and his angel conveys it to his servant John (10:9) for God's servants in the churches. If Jesus is the immediate source of the revelation, God is its ultimate source. The point is much the same as in John's Gospel, where Jesus insists again and again, e.g. <<*Then Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me'*>> (John 7:16).

Here, at the beginning of the book, the angel is unidentified, and he will play no recognisable role in John's early visions. Only in the two later visions will the reader come to know the angel by what he does for John as revealer and interpreter. Yet so important is the angel in John's experience that John twice falls down to worship him (19:10 and 22:8), and has to be reminded that the angel is merely a fellow servant. The angel may only be a messenger but he remained very fresh in John's mind as he wrote this book.

There is debate among scholars as to whether this angel referenced here is unidentified or whether it is an early reference to Jesus Christ whom John describes in vv.9-16.

The prophecy must take place because it is secured by God's sovereign purpose and power. It will take place soon, because <<*the time is near*>> (v.3). There was an expectation among the early church that Jesus would return almost immediately following his death and resurrection and such expectancy should continue in the church even though two thousand years has passed: <<*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*>> (2 Peter 3:8).

Much of the flavour and excitement of the book of Revelation is traceable to this fervent conviction that the end of the world is near. Many Christian readers and teachers today downplay that conviction in light of the fact that two thousand years have passed, and the expected end has not come. Christians tend to get nervous about any implication that the Bible might be mistaken. Yet a great deal is lost when the striking words 'soon' and 'the time is near' are not given their proper force. The conviction that the end of the world is near is what makes the book of Revelation larger than life.

Who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. The apostle John did just this in his Gospel account: <<*He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and*>>

he knows that he tells the truth>> (John 19:35), and now he does the same with what was revealed to him many years later. The **Word** and the **Testimony** are not two separate issues but one. The word of the Lord was a common theme in OT prophecy, refer to examples in Jeremiah 1:2, Ezekiel 1:3, Hosea 1:1, Joel 1:1, Jonah 1:1, Micah 1:1, Zephaniah 1:1, Haggai 1:1, Zechariah 1:1 and Malachi 1:1; and it is often based on what someone 'saw' (Isaiah 1:1, Ezekiel 1:1, Amos 1:1, Obadiah 1:1, Micah 1:1 and Nahum 1:1). This Word is fulfilled in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, his testimony.

In the epilogue (22:10), John is told not to seal his prophecy unlike Daniel: <<**But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase**>> (Daniel 12:4). John's visions are important for his 1st Century readers as well as for later generations of believers.

³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

Revelation 1:3

Blessed. This is the first of seven blessings given to those who hear and who keep God's Word. Later blessings in 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7 and 22:14 commend purity and perseverance, even to the death. This book is filled with explicit and implicit groups of seven, a number that indicates completeness and perfection. The number seven appears fifty four times in the book.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy. This is very similar to a statement made by Jesus during his earthly mission: <<**But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!'**>> (Luke 11:28). In the early church, since there was no written NT and where copies of the Gospels and apostolic letters were in short supply, one person would read aloud while others listened, as indicated by Paul: <<**And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea**>> (Colossians 4:16). Revelation's message and its blessing can be received even by those hearing it read, but only if that hearing is accompanied by obeying as well.

For the time is near. This is a reference to the long awaited Day of the Lord that will come when it is least expected by those who are not in a right relationship with God. In fact, Jesus' Second Coming as been likened to that of a thief in the night: <<**But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour**>> (Matthew 24:43-44), <<**For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night**>> (1 Thessalonians 5:2), <<**But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed**>> (2 Peter 3:10). Paul makes it clear that becomes an ever closer reality in the lives of believers: <<**Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers**>> (Romans 13:11).

For John and his readers the lateness of the hour demanded that his letter not be a closed book but a disclosure, an actual revelation open for all to read, understand and obey. With the passage of two thousand years, it is tempting to assume that the time came and went long ago and nothing happened, or that the time is far off and the book is sealed up again, like Daniel, until some distant 'last day'. In either case, the book of Revelation becomes irrelevant. It is time to reclaim the book of Revelation for those who read it and for those who hear it read in church, and above all for those who are prepared to take its message to heart. Only in the conviction that somehow 'the time' is as near as ever can John's letter still be read as larger than life and vivid in its sights and sounds.

I.b Revelation 1:4-6 - Epistolary opening

This greeting identifies author and recipients, then pronounces blessing upon the recipients, which is a similar format to all of Paul's epistles. The greeting begins and ends (v.8) with God, who is and who was and who is to come, but in between focuses its attention on Jesus.

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 freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:4-6

John, unlike most other NT letter writers, does not identify himself beyond his name. Thus it is clear that he was well known in the Province of Asia. The apostle John moved from Jerusalem to Ephesus around AD67 when the Jewish War commenced, became a church elder there and was thus well known in the region.

The seven churches that are in Asia. Since churches existed in other cities of Roman Asia, e.g. Colossæ, Hierapolis, Magnesia, Miletus and Tralles, Christ's selection of seven, symbolising completeness in Jewish thinking, implies that he addresses the whole church through them.

Grace to you and peace echoes Paul's opening blessing in all of his letters, e.g. <<To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ>> (Romans 1:7), and: <<Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ>> (Philemon 3), except those to Timothy and Titus: <<To Timothy, my loyal child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord>> (1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2), and: <<To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour>> (Titus 1:4). Other NT writers offer similar greetings in their letters: <<May grace and peace be yours in abundance>> (1 Peter 1:2b), and: <<May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance>> (Jude 2).

Grace refers to God's unmerited favour, that is, the things people receive from God that they do not deserve. This can be compared to mercy, which is when God does not apply the punishment that is deserved.

Peace is not just the absence of conflict but echoes the OT concept of *shalom*, Hebrew for so much more than peace, where a person's life with God and with everything else is in ordered harmony, both physically and spiritually, and 'all is well' in a person's walk with God. This same peace cannot be known apart from the presence of God through his Holy Spirit.

Peace, Hebrew *shalom*, was the benediction given by the priests in the OT era and grace was added, although it has always existed, as they sought peace with God, peace in their own conscience, peace with all whom they meet. All these are found only in grace, and that grace is of God. It comes from God as the Father, who gives all good things, through the mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only means of receiving grace and peace in one's life.

From him who is and who was and who is to come. God is eternal, and in Christ he will come at the end of history to judge and save.

The seven spirits. Revelation presents the Holy Spirit as one person in 3:6 and 3:13, which is confirmed by Paul: <<*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling*>> (Ephesians 4:4), but he also appears as seven spirits, e.g. in 3:1 and 4:5 etc, representing perfection, and as 'seven torches of fire' (4:5) and 'seven eyes' (5:6) to express his omnipresence and omniscience. The prophet saw the Messiah as having different aspects of the Spirit of God: <<*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord*>> (Isaiah 11:1-2). The inference here is that they are aspects of the one Spirit and that he is in the presence of God, i.e. who are before his throne.

From him who is from the seven spirits and from Jesus Christ. John's greeting comes from all three persons of the Trinity. This is the third and final reference to Jesus Christ in this book. However, John does make other references to Jesus, Christ and Messiah separately on several other occasions.

The faithful witness. Witness through testimony (v.2) is central to the church's calling amid suffering. Just as Jesus was the faithful witness even to death, as indicated by Paul: <<*In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (1 Timothy 6:13-14), so must his followers be, as confirmed in 2:13, 12:11 and 20:4. Christians are called to be faithful witnesses, but Jesus is the faithful witness par excellence.

John comforts his persecuted readers with the truth that Jesus has triumphed over death, the firstborn of the dead: <<*I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth*>> (Psalm 89:27), and: <<*He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything*>> (Colossians 1:18); and that he is sovereign over all earthly powers, even Cæsar, since he is the ruler of the kings of

the earth (19:16), confirmed by Paul: <<*he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords*>> (1 Timothy 6:15b).

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood starts John's doxology to Jesus in the form of a song. Unlike many of the songs in this book, this is one that is sung now on earth. By using the terms us and our John is associating himself with the churches and them with each other.

Made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father. Israel's standing before God and their roles: <<*Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites*>> (Exodus 19:6), now belong to those of all nations who are freed from sins by Jesus' blood (5:10). From the outset, Jesus' death is central to the message of Revelation.

To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. The doxology concludes with confirmation of what Daniel's vision revealed was given by God to his anointed one: <<*To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed*>> (Daniel 7:14).

I.c Revelation 1:7-8 - Announcement of the coming King

John differs from Paul in his opening address only in appending to his doxology two prophetic pronouncements identifying the letter as a work of prophecy and introducing its major themes. It confirms the Lord's Second Coming as a guarantee that will be witnessed by the whole of creation.

7 **Look! He is coming with the clouds;
 every eye will see him,
 even those who pierced him;
 and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.**

So it is to be. Amen.

Revelation 1:7

Look! He is coming with the clouds is written as if by a future eye witness to the event itself and confirms what had been written before concerning the Second Coming of Christ: <<*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" with power and great glory*>> (Matthew 24:30), and: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Jesus will come as the Son of Man with universal dominion as foreseen in: <<*As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his*

presence. He was given authority, honour, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal – it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed>> (Daniel 7:13-14 NLT), even though it was his own subjects who pierced him: <<And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn>> (Zechariah 12:10).

Every eye will see him. Unlike his earthly ministry of salvation, which was undertaken in a relatively small geographic area and witnessed by only a small number of people in global terms, Jesus' Second Coming is something that will be witnessed by all, whether they believe in him or not.

On his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. Most scholars think the wailing is a reaction to judgment instead of the kind of grief that leads to salvation.

So it is to be. Amen. This echoes the simple amen that concludes John's doxology (v.6) and serves as a prophetic response to his song, while at the same time introducing a final pronouncement in v.8 by <<*the one who is and who was and who is to come*>>.

⁸ '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

The one who is to come is the Lord God, the Alpha and Omega, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; refer also to Revelation 1:17 and 22:13. Jesus is the beginning of all history, i.e. the Creator of all things: <<*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people*>> (John 1:1-4), and also the goal for whom all things are made, for all history is moving toward glorifying him. This is the first of only two occasions in the book that directly quotes God speaking to his people: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, the other occasion being 21:5-8.

The Almighty is a description attributed to God the Father: <<*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless*>> (Genesis 17:1), <<*I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?*>> (Ruth 1:21), and: <<*How happy is the one whom God reproves; therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty*>> (Job 5:17).

II. Revelation 1:9-3:22 - Things that are: Christ's presence with and knowledge of his churches

John's first vision, of the glorious Son of Man who is spiritually present with his struggling churches on earth, initiates a cycle of seven letters or edicts in which Jesus omnisciently diagnoses each church's condition and sovereignly commands appropriate responses of repentance and persevering faithfulness.

II.a Revelation 1:9-20 - A Vision of Christ

Jesus Christ appears in resplendent and overpowering glory to reassure his churches that by his death and resurrection he has control of the danger and death that threaten them. Although he is exalted in heaven, he is also present with his churches on earth and knows their needs better than they themselves do.

⁹ I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 1:9

I, John, your brother. Unlike Paul, e.g. <<Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus>> (2 Timothy 1:1), and Peter: <<Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ>> (1 Peter 1:1a), John does not assert his authority as either an apostle or as a church elder, e.g. <<The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth>> (3 John 1). However, his status as a brother does not diminish his authority as an apostle and leader in the church. Instead, like the mighty angel whom John tried to worship but was told not to for he too was only a fellow servant (22:9), it maintains his authority but as one who is a fellow sufferer in the tribulation of the church age.

John's confinement on Patmos, an Aegean island to which Rome exiled political criminals, shows that he shares with the churches in their persecution and patient endurance. He makes no appeal for sympathy for his own plight but simply acknowledges it as a fact of his service to Christ: <<Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted>> (2 Timothy 3:12). Sharing in persecution and suffering is part of the Christian experience, e.g. <<There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, 'It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God'>> (Acts 14:22), <<Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation>> (2 Corinthians 1:7), and: <<In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress>> (Philippians 4:14).

To share in the kingdom is not just a future hope that will be for believers in the age yet to come, but the participation in God's Kingdom on earth, which is available to all who accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. It is a function of the church to see God's Kingdom operating on earth during this age and it was what Jesus had taught his disciples to pray for: <<Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven>> (Matthew 6:10).

Patmos is an arid island approximately 24 square miles or 62 sq. km in area and roughly 40 miles or 64 km from the mainland of Asia Minor. Since antiquity, it has possessed a working protected harbour near its centre, modern Skala, and other places for small boats to anchor. Inscriptions and archæological remains indicate the existence of a fortress before John's arrival, and the clear presence of the Artemis cult afterward. The limited population of the island during John's day was probably largely pagan. Assuming, as with church tradition, that John had been officially banished to Patmos, he may have been granted some freedom of movement on the island, even if, as claimed in later tradition, he lived in a cave, and may not actually have been in a prison, although he would have been barred from leaving Patmos. The reason for John's exile, presumably by a Roman governor of Asia, was because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, i.e. John's perseverance in teaching and testifying to the truth of the Gospel to which he had been an eye witness.

¹⁰ I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, 'Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.'

Revelation 1:10-11

In the Spirit. John was conscious of being surrounded by the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit. Such strong influence of the Holy Spirit leads to prophetic visions, as recorded in 4:2, 17:3 and 21:10 when, on each occasion he is taken somewhere. This is similar to the experience of Ezekiel: <<*Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the Lord rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling*>> (Ezekiel 3:12).

The Lord's day is Sunday, the first day of the week, the day on which Christ rose: <<*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb*>> (John 20:1).

I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet. The sound was dominant yet the words were clear and understandable.

Write in a book what you see. John is commanded to make a record of what he is about to be shown so that a permanent and accurate record remains for the churches then and in generations to come.

Send it to the seven churches. The order in which the churches are listed traces the route along which a courier from Patmos would have carried the scroll.

¹² Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.

Revelation 1:12-13

Seven golden lampstands draws the reader's attention the original design for God's Tabernacle: <<*You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The base and*

the shaft of the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its cups, its calyxes, and its petals shall be of one piece with it; and there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on the other branch>> (Exodus 25:31-33a).

That Jesus stood in the midst of the lampstands is an indication that he remains permanently with his churches through the Holy Spirit, just as he promised: *<<For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them>> (Matthew 18:20).*

The Son of Man is Jesus' preferred self-designation in the Synoptic Gospels, e.g. *<<For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born>> (Mark 14:21)*, derived primarily from the book of Daniel. In contrast to four beasts, symbolising evil kingdoms, the Son of Man receives from the Ancient of Days universal and eternal dominion as the saints' representative (Daniel 7:1-14). Verses 12-20 display Christ's divine glory both visually and audibly, setting the scene for his royal edicts to the seven churches as recorded in Chapters 2-3.

Clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. The long robe may recall a vision of God: *<<In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple>> (Isaiah 6:1)*. This vision also has similarities to that of both Ezekiel 9:2-3 and Daniel 10:4-6 who beheld angels. The description also symbolises Jesus as the High Priest and Judge of all things. However, despite this rich background, nothing in John's account suggests that he recognised the figure that stood before him or that he identified it with any of these figures out of Ezekiel or Daniel. At this point John might have thought it was an angel speaking for he did not immediately realise who it was.

¹⁴ His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters.

Revelation 1:14-15

His head and his hair were white as white wool indicates infinite, divine wisdom, as noted in: *<<As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire>> (Daniel 7:9)*, and further alluded to in: *<<You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord>> (Leviticus 19:32)*, *<<Grey hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life>> (Proverbs 16:31)*, and: *<<The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their grey hair>> (Proverbs 20:29).*

As he stands among the lampstands, Jesus' eyes were like a flame of fire that can see through facades. He can say to each church, 'I know', infallibly diagnosing its

condition, e.g. <<And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze: 'I know your works – your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first'>> (Revelation 2:18-19).

Christ's feet were like burnished bronze (2:18), and will crush any opponents. It is symbolic of Christ standing in the midst of the churches in divine and righteous judgment that will come at the end of the age.

His voice was like the sound of many waters is reminiscent of the living creatures in Ezekiel's vision: <<When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army; when they stopped, they let down their wings>> (Ezekiel 1:24). It symbolises power and majesty.

¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

Revelation 1:16

In his right hand he held seven stars. The stars are explained later on in v.20 to be the emblems of the angels of the seven churches; they are described as stars in his right hand; they, perhaps, appeared as a wreath, or as a royal and star-adorned diadem in his hand: <<You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God>> (Isaiah 62:3). It expresses their preciousness in Christ's sight, and the care he takes of them. A similar emblem is used of Coniah: <<As I live, says the Lord, even if King Coniah son of Jehoiakim of Judah were the signet ring on my right hand, even from there I would tear you off>> (Jeremiah 22:24), where he is compared to the signet ring upon God's right hand.

A sharp, two-edged sword from his mouth is a reference to God's Word, which searches hearts and judges rebels and is the tool of divine judgement. It can be used as a metaphor for the word spoken by a prophet: <<He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away>> (Isaiah 49:20); the equipping of disciples: <<Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God>> (Ephesians 6:17); the Gospel message: <<Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart>> (Hebrews 4:12); and the primary weapon of Christ: <<From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty>> (Revelation 19:15).

His face was like the sun shining with full force. John tries to portray the luminescence and magnificence of the one who stood before him. When Moses had met with God his own face had shone so that he had to wear a veil to avoid causing fear among the Israelites (Exodus 34:29-34). Jesus' appearance is perhaps reminiscent of Deborah's song: <<So perish all your enemies, O Lord! But may

your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might>> (Judges 5:31). Here, John is symbolising God's glory.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

Revelation 1:17-18

I fell at his feet as though dead. On realising that he was seeing the Lord, John fell prostrate on the floor. He was once again in the presence of the one who had been dead, yet had conquered death when he rose again. There is no explicit acknowledgment by John that he has recognised who has spoken to him, no moment of recognition like Mary Magdalene's <<*Rabboni*>> in John 20:16 or Thomas' <<*My Lord and my God*>> in John 20:28, yet the reader now knows, just as John knows, that Jesus is indeed the voice that had spoken (v.12).

But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid'. This is both a sign of Jesus' affection for the disciple whom he loved and an act of compassion to help him overcome his natural fear of being in the presence of his Lord. God frequently wants to reassure his people that they need not fear his presence, something that goes back to the time of Abraham: <<*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great'*>> (Genesis 15:1).

From this point on until 4:1 it is the voice of Jesus that is recorded as the narrator in these final verses of Chapter One and throughout the royal edicts to the seven churches in Asia.

I am the first and the last. The Son of Man affirms his divine eternity, echoing the Lord's boast over idols: <<*Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last*>> (Isaiah 41:4), and: <<*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god*>> (Isaiah 44:6).

I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever. Paradoxically, this ever-living one died to redeem believers and now lives forever as <<*the firstborn of the dead*>> (v.5). Because Jesus died and rose again, John must not be afraid, and the churches should not fear death, because Jesus has conquered it forever. Paul explains what Christ's resurrection means for all believers in his extended summary in 1 Corinthians 15:42-57.

I have the keys of Death and of Hades. The allusion here is to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. That resurrection gave him the authority, i.e. the keys, to ultimately open both death and Hades. Death and Hades are not the same. Death claims the human body; Hades is the abode of the soul. By implication, therefore, a distinction between body and soul is made in this passage.

¹⁹ Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.

Revelation 1:19

Jesus' command now write what you have seen, repeated from v.11, is reminiscent of a similar command given to the prophet: <<*Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it*>> (Habakkuk 2:2), and forecasts the book's main divisions. The letters or royal edicts to the churches in the next two chapters address the things that are current or what is. Thereafter John's visions turn primarily to the future or what is to take place after this: <<*After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this'*>> (Revelation 4:1).

²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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.

Revelation 1:20

As for the mystery. Despite what he has revealed throughout the ages, there remain many mysteries of God. Paul reveals nineteen such mysteries in his letters, including the mystery of the Christian faith, the revelation of God incarnate in the person of Jesus: <<*Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory*>> (1 Timothy 3:16). Revelation is the only other NT book to discuss these mysteries. Here, Jesus explains just two of them, using the symbolism of the lampstands from the Tabernacle or Temple to illustrate the church and the stars as its angels. Note the explicit repeated use of the number seven.

That John records Jesus as saying that he holds the seven stars 'in my right hand' is symbolic of the power and authority of God, for example: <<*Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power – your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy*>> (Exodus 15:6), and: <<*He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel; he has withdrawn his right hand from them in the face of the enemy; he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around*>> (Lamentations 2:3).

The angels of the seven churches might be human messengers, human pastors, or literal angels sent as messengers or who have been given responsibility for the spiritual oversight of a given church, but they are probably personifications of each church's identity. Jesus will address his encouragement and/or rebuke for each church to that church's angel.

The seven lampstands are the seven churches is perhaps an allusion to what Jesus had said in his Sermon on the Mount: <<*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house*>> (Matthew 5:14-15), signifying one of the purposes of the church in the world in this present age.