

Encountering Christ in Revelation's Prologue

Introduction

The narrative that introduces the apocalyptic book of Revelation originated with God, who conveyed it to Jesus. Jesus, in turn, communicated it to “*His angel*,” who then transmitted it to John. The destination of John’s record: the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 1:1-4a, 22:16).

- The sovereign God is the source of **all** prophetic truths within this apocalyptic document.
- Jesus’ *communiqués* are called “*the testimony of Jesus Christ*” (verses 2 and 9).
- The angel is likely Gabriel, who works closely with Christ (Daniel 8:16). One of his roles is to transmit prophecy into human understanding (cf. Daniel 8:15-26).
- John is the writer, the recorder, of these messages (Revelation 1:11, 19).
- The churches represent unique groups that claim loyalty to God.¹

“The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place, He made known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1-2 – NIV).

The substance of this book relates to urgent missives for God’s people that are event driven and point to the period surrounding the eschaton. They detail the final conflict between good and evil, the antichrist and God’s remnant. As Christ begins His testimony, the varied images in which He is portrayed are amazing and instructive. These, in turn, introduce the many functions He will execute throughout this book. He will be seen proleptically, not in a static role but as an unexcelled Advisor, Leader and Teacher of what lies just ahead. He is portrayed in His final roles as our Representative just before and when He returns!

Time is on God’s Mind

It is so interesting that, with all the **events** this book anticipates surrounding Christ’s Second Advent, “**time**” is a companion issue. The “when” factor establishes the need to prepare and the element of urgency! In the very first verse of Revelation, Jesus states that its content “*must soon take place*.” This pertains to Daniel’s prophetic interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image when he said that it was for the “*latter days*” (Daniel 2:28). The word “*latter*” (*acharyth*) is Aramaic, which has timing allusions associated with Christ’s Second Coming.² Revelation 1:1-3 announces the imminent fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy.³

¹ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 53-54

² Doukhan, Jacques B.; *Daniel* (Andrews University Press, Southerland House, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-1700; 1987) (referencing Bowman), p. 126, 1987.

³ Beale, Gregory K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), p. 153.

- In this last Biblical book, many of Daniel’s prophecies come to their final fulfillment.
- The imminent end of history is at the heart of Revelation.⁴

In verse 3, John is again informed: *“the time is at hand.”* The word for *“time”* is *kairos* (G). It is used with the word *“near,”* found only in one other place – Revelation 22:10. ***Thus, once again, the book is framed within the theme that Christ’s coming is imminent!***⁵

- There is also a verbal association with Luke 21:8, *“the time is near”* and Daniel 7:22, *“the time has come.”*⁶
- This is wonderful, and demands that we view the book of Revelation as the consummation of many other prophecies.

To rivet this more deeply, John was informed, in this introductory chapter, that this urgent time actually did relate to the Second Coming!

- *“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen”* (Revelation 1:7).
- This immediately follows greetings from the Trinity (Revelation 1:4-6) – an important reference regarding the executive Being of the universe.

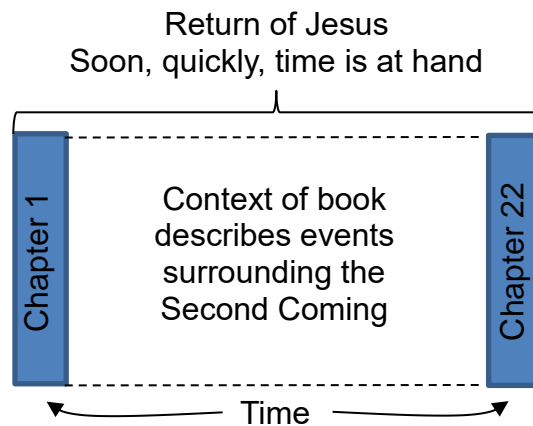
Whatever messages, signs or events are found within this book, they must have an eschatological orientation. Revelation begins that way and ends that way. It is Advent-bound thematically at its beginning and at its end. Those timing messages also act as “covers” to this book.

1. *“And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done”* (Revelation 22:6).
2. *“Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.... And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be”* (Revelation 22:7, 12).
3. *“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus”* (Revelation 22:20).

⁴ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁵ Johnson, Alan F.; *Revelation*, p. 514, from Gaebelin, Frank E. (gen. ed.); *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. II (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 49530; 1981), p. 418.

⁶ Aune, David E.; *52A World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 1-5* (World Books; Dallas, Texas – 1997), p.21.



“Coming quickly” suggests the imminence of Christ’s return. It is at the time He rewards the faithful (Revelation 22:7). **Why, then, in John’s day, is it seen as “near” or “at hand”?** Some assert that this view is only in God’s eyes (II Peter 3:8). That would fragment the higher purposes of this prophecy to detail the future for the *final generation* of saints.

- There is another view that is a wonderful contextual answer:
- ***At the time of Revelation’s fulfilment, His coming will be near, will be at hand – it will occur quickly!***

“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (I Thessalonians 5:6). These event-driven prophecies can help us to objectively watch.

An Active Savior – At the End

Apart from Christ, God promises nothing but wrath. Revelation depicts a Savior working to minimize that judicial confrontation. Redemption’s ultimate purpose will not be in jeopardy. An eternal kingdom of righteousness will be established.⁷

“... and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5 – NIV). Early in the narrative, God wants us to understand this Christ.

- Jesus is alive, symbolic of all those who will be resurrected.
- He is “*the faithful witness*” for God to His people (John 1:14, 18). He is also our faithful witness, our advocate, before the Father (I John 2:1-2).
- And – Christ is above all the rulers of planet earth.

The latter is an encouragement to the believers who will come under oppressive persecution. He is over all, including the kings of this wicked world. He is also our Passover Lamb (our crucified Savior), who has risen and offers His shed blood to cleanse us!⁸

⁷ Fortner, Don; *Discovering Christ in Revelation*, pp. 15-16.

⁸ Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 191.

He is *“the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood”* (Revelation 1:5b – NET). What a Savior! He is seen as an all-powerful link between ourselves and heaven!

Knowing that there would be many false Christs and prophets, the New Testament previously identified who the true Christ is! He is our Deliverer and Savior (cf. Matthew 1:21), who was **raised from the dead** as the firstfruits of the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:23).⁹ It is marvelous that early in this first chapter we are given enough information to want this Jesus to be our friend and king! Then comes this amazing promise:

“... and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen” (Revelation 1:6 – NIV).

- It is almost surreal that these thoughts move forward, beyond the amazing gospel story of Jesus that teaches how *“He loved us”* (cf. Isaiah 43:4, Malachi 1:2, Revelation 3:9) and saved us. Beyond His life, the grave and moving into the future, we are immersed in a divine trust so deep He promises us to be part of God’s kingdom! It is unfathomable!
- This awesome Christ, associated with the very Administrator of the universe, is presented as our personal Friend! Then God says:

*“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 – NIV).

- These words come directly from God *“our Father.”* Nothing related to man is outside of His purview. He must be a Friend as well!
- He is part of the beginning and the end of redemptive history.¹⁰
- As the *“Alpha”* and *“Omega,”* all history is summed up in God. Then, Jesus is shortly noted to be the *“first and the last”* (1:17). We are a divine investment of that love!
- Finally, Jesus will also be called the *“Alpha and Omega”* (22:13).¹¹ This emphasizes the bond between the two – on our behalf!

The phrase *“Lord God”* is the title for the Father in 1:4. In this, associated with the word *“Almighty,”* one cannot help but be re-impressed by the initial observation that the Father is the speaker of this book.¹²

⁹ Fortner, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-28.

¹⁰ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

¹¹ Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹² Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. I (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 80.

Christ in His Key Roles

“And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:13-16).

This is a great metaphor, an emphasis, of the unique functions which Christ (the “*Son of man*”) will perform during the rest of the book. He is in the middle (pastoral imagery) of seven lampstands or churches with a:

1. Long robe – High Priest vestments (Exodus 28:4, Zechariah 3:4; cf. Daniel 10:5)
2. Sash – symbol of a ruler, king, dignitary, exalted figure
3. White head/hair – a symbol for eternal wisdom and respect due His person. This description of Christ was previously reserved for the Father (Daniel 7:9).
4. Blazing eyes – divine penetrating insight, judge (cf. Daniel 10:6), omniscience
5. Fiery bronze feet – Scholars are divided as to its meaning. Likely, it represents total dominion over wherever He stands and moves.
6. Powerful voice – it has already been noted that it is like a trumpet. What He says is to be heard by everyone. It represents a Feast of Trumpets era (another study).
7. Stars held tightly in His right hand reveal Christ’s protection and care of the leaders of the seven churches.
8. Sword from mouth – Christ’s judicial authority, based on truth
9. Radiant face – His glory (cf. Matthew 13:43, Revelation 10:1, Matthew 17:2) – His divinity¹³

In this brief first chapter, we have so far been privileged to see Christ as a sovereign Associate with God the Father, a witness to His end-time prophecies, a Savior in love with mankind, and in the expectant roles of Priest, King and Judge throughout its apocalyptic events.

There is Yet Another Profound Message Regarding our Savior

“I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:18 – NIV).

According to Paul, the “*last enemy that will be abolished is death*” (I Corinthians 15:26). Because Christ broke the shackles of death and has overcome all demonic power (symbolized by “*hades*”), He now has the keys and authority over that domain (Matthew 16:19). This means that He has defeated the powers of evil (the twin forces of death and hades) and has executive

¹³ Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-93; Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-105.

control (Colossians 2:15, I Peter 3:19-20). He has gained mastery over the evil “cosmic forces.”¹⁴

- Jewish literature claims that this power belongs to God alone.
- This, then, becomes an elevated view of Christ, a “high Christology” – He is God over all!¹⁵

His eternity is emphasized (for “*ever and ever*”). That characteristic He offers to all. The **resurrection** of all those who died in the Lord is now part of the Christian hope.

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.... For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (I Thessalonians 4:13, 16-18 – NIV).

“Amid the reeling of the earth [referring to the sixth Seal – Revelation 6:12-17], the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ [cf. Daniel 12:2] Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.”¹⁶

This refers to the incredible resurrection that occurs when Jesus comes again and has arrived at planet earth.

That Wonderful Prophecy of His Coming Again – Looking Deeper

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,’ and ‘every eye will see him, even those who ‘pierced him’; and all peoples on earth ‘will mourn because of him.’ So shall it be! Amen” (Revelation 1:7 – NIV).

- This is the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14, when He receives His kingdom.
- He is man’s wonderful hope: *“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13).

That “*coming*,” sadly, has another dimension: It will be a time for God’s wrath against the wicked.

¹⁴ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), pp. 61-62.

¹⁶ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

- *“And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him”* (Revelation 1:7).
- *“Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn”* (Matthew 24:30).
- *“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25:41).
- *“For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?”* (Revelation 6:17 – NIV).

“The wicked are filled with regret, not because of their sinful neglect of God and their fellow men, but because God has conquered. They lament that the result is what it is; but they do not repent of their wickedness. They would leave no means untried to conquer if they could.”¹⁷

Christ’s eschatological victory over evil and those in rebellion then occurs!¹⁸ At the end, holiness will be all that is left – the saints with a universe that is pure, without any taint of sin.

Christ urges all to prepare for that time:

1. *“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame”* (Revelation 16:15)
2. *“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”* (Revelation 3:3).

That coming is alluded to in this book many times (2:5, 16; 3:11; 4:8, 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20). It actually makes this verse (1:7) a “theme verse” for all of Revelation.¹⁹ His sovereign role is clear, and as a Savior, He is man’s hope!

- Elsewhere in God’s Word are perpetual reminders of His Second Coming.
- *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”* [II Peter 3:10 (cf. Jude 14, John 19:25, Daniel 7:13-14, Acts 1:11, I Thessalonians 4:16, I Peter 5:4, John 14:3)].

Christ will come with clouds, representing the angelic host of heaven. The Bible knows nothing about an invisible or secret Second Coming. Every eye will see Him. When He comes, everyone will know Jesus has arrived.

- *“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and **they shall see** the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matthew 24:30).
- This will be a literal, bodily return of the Son of God.
- Every believer will look at Him with satisfaction and delight (I John 3:2).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 654.

¹⁸ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

With the hope and the wonders of that time, our imagination expands: “The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. [The approaching ‘cloud’] In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. Not now a “man of sorrows,” to drink the bitter cup of shame and woe, he comes, victor in Heaven and earth, to judge the living and the dead. ‘Faithful and True,’ ‘in righteousness he doth judge and make war.’ And ‘the armies in Heaven follow him.’ [Revelation 19:11, 14.] With anthems of celestial melody the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend him on his way. The firmament seems filled with radiant forms, – ‘ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.’ No human pen can portray the scene, nor mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor. ‘His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light.’ [Habakkuk 3:3, 4.] As the living cloud comes still nearer, every eye beholds the Prince of life. No crown of thorns now mars that sacred head, but a diadem of glory rests on his holy brow. His countenance outshines the dazzling brightness of the noonday sun. ‘And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.’ [Revelation 19:16.]”²⁰

Revelation 1 elevates our hope for eternity. It clarifies and elevates Jesus Christ as our Savior. It sets the stage for the amazing end-time prophecies in the rest of the book.

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²⁰ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 640.