

40 Days
Through
REVELATION

RON RHODES



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*To Kerri
with love and appreciation*

Acknowledgments

After I became a Christian, I read one prophecy book after another. I could not get enough, gravitating toward those written by professors at Dallas Theological Seminary—John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, and others. I found their books to be intelligently and persuasively written.

Little did I know then that in the not-too-distant future, I would actually enroll at Dallas Theological Seminary and take courses under these men, obtaining master's and doctoral degrees in theology. As I now write about the prophetic book of Revelation, I want to acknowledge my personal indebtedness to these teachers of the Word. Their work continues to bear fruit in my life.

I also want to offer continued praise to God for the wonderful family He has blessed me with—my wife, Kerri, and my two grown children, David and Kylie. With every year that passes (much too quickly!) I grow in appreciation for these three.

Thank You, Lord! I am grateful.

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Introduction

Thank you for joining me in this exciting journey through the book of Revelation. You are in for a spiritually uplifting time! My hope and prayer is that as you read *40 Days Through Revelation*, you will attain...

- a thorough understanding of God's sovereignty and control over human history,
- an assurance that God will one day providentially cause good to triumph over evil,
- a yearning for the soon coming of Jesus Christ at the rapture,
- a joyful anticipation of our future in heaven, where we will not only be reunited with Christian loved ones but also dwell face to face with God Himself,
- an exalted view of the true majesty and glory of Jesus Christ,
- a deep appreciation for the wondrous salvation we have in Jesus Christ,
- and an increased conviction of the trustworthiness of the Bible in general and the prophecies in the Bible in particular.

The book of Revelation is the only book in the Bible that promises a special blessing to those who read it and obey its message: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near" (Revelation 1:3). "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Revelation 22:7). So be encouraged. Blessing awaits you as you study this fascinating prophetic book.

As we begin our journey together, I want to address a few things that will lay a foundation for better understanding the book of Revelation. Let's look at the big picture first, and then we will zoom in on the details in subsequent chapters.

The Author and Recipients of Revelation

The author of the book of Revelation is the apostle John (see Revelation 1:1,4,9; 22:8). This is confirmed by second-century witnesses, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian.

John had been imprisoned on the isle of Patmos, in the Aegean Sea, for the crime of sharing the message about Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:9). This island is where John received the revelation. The book was apparently written around AD 95.

The original recipients of the book were Christians who lived some 65 years after Jesus had been crucified and resurrected from the dead. Many of these were second-generation Christians, and the challenges they faced were great. Their lives had become increasingly difficult because of Roman hostilities toward Christianity.

The recipients of the book were suffering persecution, and some of them were even being killed (Revelation 2:13). Unfortunately, things were about to get even worse. John therefore wrote this book to give his readers a strong hope that would help them patiently endure amid relentless suffering.

At the time, evil seemed to be prevailing at every level. However, Revelation indicates that evil will one day come to an end. Sin, Satan, and suffering will be forever banished. Believers will no longer know sorrow or death, and fellowship with God will be perpetual and uninterrupted. This was good news for the suffering church in John's day.

A Contextual Outline of Revelation

John provides a contextual outline of his prophetic book in Revelation 1:19: "Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this."

- The "things that you have seen" is a reference to Revelation 1,

where we find a description of Jesus in His present majestic glory and an introduction to the book of Revelation.

- “Those that are” relates to the then-present circumstances of the seven churches of Asia Minor recorded in Revelation 2–3. John directed his book to these seven churches.
- “Those that are to take place after this” refers to the futuristic prophecies of the tribulation period, the second coming, the millennial kingdom, the great white throne judgment, and the eternal state, which are described in Revelation 4–22.

The book closes by informing God’s people that they will enjoy His presence forever in a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). Jesus promises, “I am coming soon” (22:20). Such wonderful promises regarding the future empower suffering believers to patiently endure the present.

Approaches to the Book of Revelation

Scholars throughout the ages have taken four primary interpretive approaches in studying the book of Revelation.

1. *The historicist view.* This approach to Revelation holds that the book supplies a prophetic panorama of church history from the first century to the second coming of Christ. This approach emerged in the fourth century when some interpreters saw parallels between current events and biblical prophecy. Later, Joachim of Fiore (AD 1135–1202) developed the approach by dividing history into three ages. The Reformers were attracted to historicism and viewed the pope as the antichrist.

But a comparison of Revelation with other prophetic Scriptures (for example, Daniel 9:25–27; Matthew 24–25, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12; Titus 2:13–14) reveals that these prophecies point to the future tribulation period, antichrist, second coming, millennial kingdom, great white throne judgment, and eternal state.

2. *The idealist view.* This view holds that the book of Revelation is primarily a symbolic description of the ongoing battle between God

and the devil, between good and evil. However, it is hard to see how the idealist approach to Revelation could bring any genuine comfort to the original recipients of the book, who were undergoing great persecution.

Moreover, this view ignores specific time markers within the book. For example, it refers to 42 months in Revelation 11:2 and 1260 days in Revelation 12:6. Further, the many symbols in the book of Revelation point to real people and real events in the future tribulation period—the antichrist, Christ’s second coming, Christ’s millennial kingdom, the great white throne judgment, and the eternal state.

3. *The preterist view.* This approach holds that the prophecies of Revelation were fulfilled in AD 70 when Titus and his Roman army overran Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish temple. So in this scheme, the book of Revelation does not deal with the future.

A primary problem with this view is that Revelation claims to be prophecy (see Revelation 1:3; 22:7,10,18-19). Further, multiple events described in Revelation bear no resemblance to the events of AD 70. For example, a third of mankind was not killed, as is predicted in Revelation 9:18.

Moreover, substantive evidence indicates that the book of Revelation was written about AD 95, far after the destruction of Jerusalem. Writing in the second century, Irenaeus declared that Revelation had been written toward the end of the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96). Later writers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorinus, Eusebius, and Jerome affirm the Domitian date. This being the case, the book of Revelation must refer to events that had not yet happened.

4. *The futurist view.* The futurist approach to interpreting the book of Revelation—the view we will follow in this book—holds that most of the events described in the book will take place in the end times, just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. This view honors the book’s claim to be prophecy. It also recognizes that just as the Old Testament prophecies of the first coming of Christ were fulfilled literally (more than 100 of them!), so the prophecies of the second coming and the events that will lead up to it will be fulfilled literally.

The early church took a futurist view of the book, seeing the

tribulation, second coming, and millennium as yet-future events. Later writers who took a futurist approach include Francisco Ribera (1537–1591) and John Nelson Darby (1800–1882). As we examine specific prophecies throughout Revelation, we will see that a futurist approach makes very good sense.

How to Use This Book

As you begin each chapter, pray something like this:

Lord, I ask You to open my eyes and enhance my understanding so that I can grasp what You want me to learn today [Psalm 119:18]. I also ask You to enable me, by Your Spirit, to apply the truths I learn to my daily life, and be guided moment by moment by Your Word [Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:15-17]. I thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.

Following this short prayer, read the assigned section of the book of Revelation using your favorite Bible. With your Bible still in hand, you can then go verse by verse through your Bible again, but this time, after reading each verse, also read the appropriate notes in this book.

You'll notice that some of the biblical phrases I comment on are in quote marks and some aren't. Whenever John is speaking, quote marks are not used. Whenever someone else is speaking (such as Jesus or an angel), quote marks are used.

After the insights on each verse in the passage, I provide four brief summaries:

- *Major Themes.* These topical summaries will help you learn to think theologically as you study the Bible.
- *Digging Deeper with Cross-References.* These will help you discover relevant insights from other books of the Bible.
- *Life Lessons.* This is where you learn to apply what you have read to your daily life. You will find that the book of Revelation will transform you!
- *Questions for Reflection and Discussion.* Use these for your own journaling or for lively group interactions.

Lord, by the power of Your Spirit, please enable my reader to understand and apply truth from the book of Revelation. Please excite him or her with Your Word and instill a sense of awe for the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.

John's Introductory Prologue

Revelation 1:1-8

Scripture Reading and Insights

Begin by reading Revelation 1:1-8 in your favorite Bible. Read with the anticipation that the Holy Spirit has something important to teach you today (see Psalm 119:105).

In the introduction, we noted the outline of Revelation in 1:19: “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.” In this chapter, we will begin to examine “the things that you [John] have seen.” With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on Revelation 1:1-8, verse by verse.

Revelation 1:1-3

The revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1): The word “revelation” carries the idea of “uncovering” or “revealing.” The book of Revelation uncovers and reveals prophetic truth. “Revelation of Jesus Christ” can mean either revelation that comes from Christ or revelation that is about Him. Both senses are probably intended in this verse.

Which God gave him (1:1): The Father gave this revelation to Jesus Christ.

Things that must soon take place (1:1): This should not be taken to mean that the events described in Revelation would all take place within a few years of the time John saw them. John recorded Revelation in Greek, and the Greek word translated “soon” can mean “quickly,

swiftly, speedily, at a rapid rate” (see Luke 18:8). In Revelation 1:1, the term indicates that when the predicted events first start to occur in the end times, they will then progress rapidly.

He made it known by sending his angel (1:1): God the Father gave this revelation to Jesus Christ, and Christ then communicated it to John using an angel as an intermediary. The specific angel is not mentioned by name, but some speculate that it might be Gabriel, who delivered notable revelations from God to Daniel, Mary, and Zechariah (Daniel 8:16; 9:21-22; Luke 1:18-19, 26-31).

To his servant John (1:1): The angel was an intermediary between Christ and John. Elsewhere in Revelation John receives communications directly from Christ (Revelation 1:10-16), from an elder (7:13), and from a voice in heaven (10:4). John was commissioned to pass this revelation on to the seven churches of Asia Minor (2-3).

Witness (1:2): John faithfully testifies to and vouches for all he witnessed in this divine revelation of Jesus Christ.

Blessed (1:3): The word “blessed” means “spiritually happy.” This is the first of seven pronouncements of blessing in the book of Revelation (see 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14).

The one who reads aloud (1:3): Revelation is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing to the person who reads it aloud and the person who listens to it, responding in obedience. John’s contemporaries did not own copies of Scripture. They had to go to church, where they listened to Scripture being read aloud.

Blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it (1:3): Obedience brings blessing. We should not just be hearers of God’s Word, but doers of it (James 1:22-25).

For the time is near (1:3): This should not be taken to mean that the events in this book will necessarily happen soon. After all, Scripture elsewhere indicates that there will be enough of a delay in the second coming that some people will begin to wonder if it will ever occur (see Matthew 24:36-39; 2 Peter 3:3-4). “Near” communicates imminence. The next event in God’s prophetic calendar—the rapture of the church—could occur at any time.

Revelation 1:4-6

John to the seven churches that are in Asia (1:4): These seven churches were experiencing severe persecution. They were called to shine as lights in the midst of the darkness (see Matthew 5:14-16; Philippians 2:15). Revelation 2–3 reveals that five of these seven churches needed to make some internal corrections. One reason the book of Revelation was written was to encourage and motivate these suffering believers.

Grace to you and peace (1:4): “Grace” refers to God’s unmerited favor to those who believe in Jesus. “Peace” refers to the believer’s standing and experience in relation to God. It is rooted in Christ’s work of salvation on the cross.

From him who is and who was and who is to come (1:4): This is the eternal Father.

Seven spirits (1:4): In the Bible, seven is often associated with completion, fulfillment, and perfection (see, for example, Genesis 2:2; Exodus 20:10; Leviticus 14:7; Acts 6:3). The number seven occurs often in the book of Revelation. In addition to the seven spirits, we find seven...

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| churches (1:4) | spirits of God (4:5; 5:6) |
| lampstands (1:12) | angels and trumpets (8:2) |
| stars (1:16) | thunders (10:3) |
| torches before the throne (4:5) | heads of the dragon (12:3) |
| seals on the scroll (5:1) | heads of the beast (13:1) |
| horns and eyes of the Lamb (5:6) | golden bowls (15:7) |
| | kings (17:10) |

Some scholars suggest that the seven spirits are seven angels that are before the throne of God in heaven. Others suggest the seven spirits are the seven angels mentioned in conjunction with the seven churches of Revelation 2–3.

Still others understand the seven spirits to be a metaphorical reference to the Holy Spirit in His fullness. If this is correct, a possible cross-reference is Isaiah 11:2, which speaks of the sevenfold ministry of the

Holy Spirit as related to the divine Messiah: “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”

From him who is and who was and who is to come. . . the seven spirits. . . Jesus Christ (1:4-5): If the seven spirits represent the Holy Spirit, we witness each person of the Trinity in verses 4-5.

Jesus Christ the faithful witness (1:5): Jesus is a faithful and reliable source of the revelation being communicated to John. John could thus trust what he was being told.

The firstborn of the dead (1:5): This could mean that Christ was the first to be permanently raised from the dead. More likely, however, the term indicates that Christ is the supreme or preeminent One among those who have been or will be raised from the dead (see Psalm 89:27; Colossians 1:15).

The ruler of kings on earth (1:5): Christ is absolutely sovereign. He rules over all. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16). Though Christ is the absolute ruler of the kings of the earth, He will not fully exercise this authority until His second coming, when He sets up His millennial kingdom (Revelation 19–20).

Freed us from our sins (1:5): Jesus saves His people from sin, as His name proclaims. “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation.”

Made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father (1:6): All Christians become a part of God’s kingdom and submit to Christ’s rule. As priests, Christians have the privilege of entering God’s presence and serving Him forever.

To him be glory and dominion forever and ever (1:6): This is the yearning and utterance of praise of Christians of all generations who recognize that our God is an awesome God.

Revelation 1:7

He is coming with the clouds (1:7): Clouds are often used in association with God’s visible glory (Exodus 16:10; 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Matthew 17:5). Just as Christ was received by a cloud in His ascension (Acts 1:9), so He will return again in the clouds of heaven (Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27). Just as Jesus left with

this visible manifestation of the glory of God, so He will return at the second coming with the same visible manifestation of the glory of God. (Note that the second coming is different from the rapture. I'll address this when I discuss Revelation 3:10.)

Every eye will see him (1:7): The second coming of Christ might not be an instantaneous event. It may be visible for a full day or more so that as the earth rotates, every eye on earth can witness the coming of Christ with the armies of heaven. Of course, television broadcasts and the Internet will likely play a role.

Even those who pierced him (1:7): This is a reference to Christ's crucifixion (John 19:34) and to the Jews living on the earth at the time of the second coming (see Zechariah 12:10). These Jews will represent those who crucified Christ in the first century (see Acts 2:22-23; 3:14-15).

All tribes of the earth will wail on account of him (1:7): They will wail and mourn for fear of punishment from the divine Messiah, the Judge of humankind (Revelation 20:4; see also Matthew 24:30).

Revelation 1:8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega" (1:8): This is a powerful confirmation of Jesus' divine identity (compare with Revelation 22:13). "Alpha and Omega" is used exclusively of God in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12-13). The title expresses eternity and omnipotence. Jesus is the all-powerful One of eternity past and eternity future. He is the eternal God who has always existed in the past and who will always exist in the future.

"Who is and who was and who is to come" (1:8): Christ, as God, is an eternal being.

"The Almighty" (1:8): This depicts absolute deity. Christ is supreme and sovereign over all things, including the unfolding of events in the book of Revelation (see Revelation 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14; 19:15; 21:22).

Major Themes

1. *God is a revealer.* God takes the initiative in revealing Himself and His will (Hebrews 1:1-2). The ultimate revelation came in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:18).

2. *God is a Trinity.* The doctrine of the Trinity is based on three lines of evidence:
- There is only one true God (Isaiah 44:6; 46:9; John 5:44; 17:3; Romans 3:29-30; 16:27; 1 Corinthians 8:4; Galatians 3:20; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:5; James 2:19).
 - Three persons are recognized as God—the Father (1 Peter 1:2), Jesus (John 20:28; Hebrews 1:8), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4).
 - There is three-in-oneness within the one God (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

Digging Deeper with Cross-References

Angels—2 Kings 6:17; Psalm 91:11; Matthew 25:31; Luke 15:7-10; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:14; 13:2.

God is Almighty—Genesis 17:1; Psalm 91:1; 2 Corinthians 6:18; see also Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27.

Life Lessons

1. *You can trust the Bible.* The Bible is God's revelation to you. It is God's voice to you. It is God speaking to you (see Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).
2. *Obedience brings blessing.* Obedience to God brings blessing (Luke 11:28), long life (1 Kings 3:14), happiness (Psalms 112:1; 119:56), peace (Proverbs 1:33), and a state of well-being (Jeremiah 7:23; see also Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 4:40; 12:28; 28:1-14; Joshua 1:8; 1 Chronicles 22:13; Isaiah 1:19).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega. What difference does that make in the way you live your daily life?

2. Christ is coming again. What difference does that make in the way you live your daily life?
3. You have been freed from your sins. Does that motivate you to live for Christ? How?
4. Revelation 1:3 promises that obedient Christians will be blessed. Does this motivate you to obey God's Word? How?

John's Awesome Vision

Revelation 1:9-20

Scripture Reading and Insights

Begin by reading Revelation 1:9-20 in your favorite Bible. Read with the anticipation that the Holy Spirit has something important to teach you today (see Psalm 119:105).

In yesterday's reading, Christ was described as the Alpha and the Omega and as the One who is and who was and who is to come. In this chapter we will focus on John's description of the glorified Christ in heaven and on Jesus' intimate familiarity with churches on earth. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Revelation 1:9-11

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation (1:9): John and his readers were persecuted by Roman authorities for their faith in Christ. Jesus had affirmed, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). The apostle Paul taught the same (Acts 14:22).

Patient endurance (1:9): The trials John and his readers faced called for patient endurance amid conflict. The prophecies in the book of Revelation were intended to empower them to patiently endure, for God assured them of victory in the end.

That are in Jesus (1:9): Jesus gives us His strength and peace in the midst of the storm. Recall what He had told His followers: "Peace I

leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

On the island called Patmos (1:9): Patmos is a mountainous and rocky desert island on the Aegean Sea with an area of about 60 square miles. It lies off the southwest coast of Asia Minor—modern Turkey. People were banished and exiled to this desolate and barren island for crimes committed on mainland Rome and were usually forced to engage in hard labor in mines. Patmos was a Roman penal colony.

The testimony of Jesus (1:9): John gave relentless testimony for and about Jesus. This is why he was persecuted by Rome.

I was in the Spirit (1:10): This refers to the state of spiritual ecstasy in which John received a vision containing a revelation from the Lord. The Lord supernaturally “pulled back the veil” so John could see things to come (see Acts 10:10-11).

On the Lord’s day (1:10): Some scholars take this as Sunday, the first day of the week, on which Christians gathered to worship and celebrate the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20). This may be the case, or John may have been saying, “I was in the Spirit on a Lord-glorifying and Lord-manifesting day.”

I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet (1:10): John probably had not heard the voice of his beloved Savior for more than 60 years. Now he hears it again, this time “like a trumpet”—loud, majestic, and otherworldly.

“Write what you see in a book” (1:11): “Book” indicates a scroll made of parchment. God often directed people to write down His revelations for future generations (Exodus 24:4; Joshua 24:25-26; 1 Samuel 10:25; Isaiah 8:1).

“Send it to the seven churches” (1:11): These churches are addressed in Revelation 2–3. The order of mention of these seven churches forms a geographical half-moon, beginning with Ephesus, going north to Smyrna and Pergamum, and moving east and south to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. John had apparently been like a spiritual father to these churches.

Revelation 1:12-16

I saw seven golden lampstands (1:12): Jesus reveals in Revelation 1:20 that “the seven lampstands are the seven churches”—that is, the ones addressed in Revelation 2–3. The churches are symbolized as lampstands because they bear God’s light in a dark world (see Matthew 5:16).

A son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest (1:13): “Son of man” is a messianic title derived from Daniel 7:13. It was Jesus’ favorite title during His three-year ministry (it occurs 81 times in the Gospels).

Jesus, the Son of Man, is in the midst of the churches—that is, He is intimately acquainted with all that is going on in each of them. Revelation 2:1 tells us that Jesus walks among the churches. The long robe and sash designate Christ as a priest (see Exodus 28:4; Leviticus 16:1-4; Hebrews 2:17).

The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow (1:14): This points to the infinite wisdom and purity of Christ, the divine Messiah. The white hair may also symbolize eternity, much like “Ancient of Days” (Daniel 7:9,13,22).

His eyes were like a flame of fire (1:14): This description points not only to Christ’s absolute holiness but also to His penetrating scrutiny in seeing all things as they truly are. For example, He accurately diagnoses the strengths and weaknesses of the seven churches in Revelation 2–3. Christ’s eyes of scrutiny will also play a key role at the future judgment (see 1 Corinthians 3:13).

His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace (1:15): The polished brass feet may symbolize divine judgment. Fire consumed sin offerings on the bronze altar. Seen in this light, Christ the divine Judge moves among the seven churches to judge what is right and what is wrong.

His voice was like the roar of many waters (1:15): No one would dare challenge One with such a voice!

In his right hand (1:16): Scripture always portrays the right hand as a place of honor and distinction (see Ephesians 1:20).

He held seven stars (1:16): Revelation 1:20 reveals that the seven stars

are the angels of the seven churches. This could indicate that each church has a guardian angel assigned to it. Or “angels” could refer to the pastors of each of the seven churches, because the Greek term for “angel” literally means “messenger” (see Luke 9:52; James 2:25). If this is correct, then the fact that Christ holds the stars in His hand demonstrates Christ’s providential control over each church and its leaders.

From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword (1:16): This is apparently a reference to the Word of God. Ephesians 6:17 refers to “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.” Christ stands against His enemies with the sword of His Word (see Revelation 2:16; 19:19-21).

His face was like the sun shining in full strength (1:16): Christ’s bright white appearance here is similar to Christ’s appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, where “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (Matthew 17:2). Christ is the God of glory (see John 17:5).

Revelation 1:17-18

I fell at his feet as though dead (1:17): Falling before the Lord was a common response among those who saw the Lord in Bible times (Genesis 17:3; Numbers 16:22; Ezekiel 1:28; Acts 9:4). This too reminds us of the Mount of Transfiguration, where the disciples “fell on their faces and were terrified” (Matthew 17:6).

“Fear not” (1:17): The Lord comforted and reassured John by touching him and speaking to him. Just as Christ had exhorted His followers not to fear during His three-year ministry (Matthew 10:31; Luke 8:50; 12:7,32), so He encouraged John.

“I am the first and the last” (1:17): The phrase “the first and the last” is used of Almighty God in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:6). Christ’s use of this title here (and Revelation 2:8; 22:13) demonstrates His equality with God.

“The living one” (1:18): Christ was crucified, and then He defeated death by rising from the dead (John 2:19; Revelation 1:5).

“I have the keys of Death and Hades” (1:18): In the New Testament, a key implies authority to open a door and give entrance to a place or realm. Jesus’ words here imply that as God, He has the authority to grant entrance and exit from the realms of death and Hades (John 5:21-26; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 20:12-14). Jesus sovereignly decides who lives, who dies, and when.

Revelation 1:19

“Write therefore...” (1:19): Here we find a three-part outline of the book of Revelation. “The things that you have seen” points to the things John saw and recorded in chapter 1. “Those that are” points to the current state of the seven churches (chapters 2–3). “Those that are to take place after this” points to future events (chapters 4–22).

Revelation 1:20

“As for the mystery” (1:20): A biblical mystery is a truth that cannot be discerned simply by human investigation and that requires special revelation from God. Generally, this word refers to a truth that was unknown to people living in Old Testament times but explained in the New Testament (Matthew 13:17; Colossians 1:26).

“The seven stars...the seven golden lampstands” (1:20): Jesus is apparently referring to the seven pastors of the seven churches.

Major Themes

1. *Names and titles.* In the ancient world, names and titles were not mere labels as they are today. A name revealed important characteristics about a person. That is why we learn much about Jesus Christ in Revelation 1.
2. *The glory of God and Jesus.* God’s glory is the luminous manifestation of His person. Brilliant light consistently accompanies His glory (Matthew 17:2-3; 1 Timothy 6:16). The word “glory” is often linked with verbs of seeing (Exodus 16:7; 33:18; Deuteronomy 5:24; Isaiah 40:5) and appearing (Exodus 16:10).

3. *The kingdom.* Scripture uses the word “kingdom” in two primary senses. Presently, God spiritually rules over His people from heaven (Colossians 1:13; see also 1 Corinthians 4:20). In the future, after His second coming, Christ will reign on earth in the millennium (Revelation 20:1-6; see also Isaiah 65:17–66:24; Jeremiah 32:36-44; Zechariah 14:9-17).

Digging Deeper with Cross-References

Fear—Psalms 27:1; 56:11; Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 51:12; John 14:27; Romans 8:31; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18.

Death—Psalms 23:4; 116:15; Ecclesiastes 3:1-2; 7:2; 8:8; Isaiah 25:8; Ezekiel 33:11; Romans 14:8; 1 Corinthians 15:26; Philippians 1:21; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 21:3-4.

Being a witness of Christ—Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:18-20; 10:39-40; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1.

Life Lessons

1. *Strength from other Christians.* Each of us is a “brother and partner” for every other Christian (Revelation 1:9). Remember that “a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). We gain strength from each other, especially during trials.
2. *Trusting God with the future.* We may not know every single detail of what the future holds, but we do know the One who does. Let’s trust Him (Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 3:5-6).
3. *A worshipful attitude toward Jesus.* Though Jesus is our Savior and Friend, let’s not forget that He is also our glorious and majestic Lord and sovereign God who deserves our utmost reverence (Revelation 1:17; see also Exodus 3:5).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What evidence do you see in Revelation 1 that Revelation is a Christ-centered book? Be specific. What implications might this have for your own life being Christ-centered?
2. John refers to “patient endurance” in Revelation 1:9. What does James teach us about this (James 1:2-4)?