

# THE REVELATION

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## Chapter 1:1-3

### II. The Study of the Book

#### A. The Authority of the Book (1:1a)

*Rev 1:1a The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him*

The first verse says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” What does the word Revelation mean? If we look at the Greek word, we see *apokalupsis* from which we obtain our word *Apocalypse*. The books and movies have put a gloomy spin on that word but all it really means is *to uncover* as with something hidden or concealed. More than fifteen years had passed since the completion of that little book called Jude, the last book of the Bible until the Lord offered this Revelation, this uncovering of things concealed from plain sight in God’s Holy Word. Time had come for all the loose ends of the prophecies to be summed up in one last book, the uncovering, the Apocalypse, the Revelation. Of Whom? We find that name right in the text – Jesus Christ. Jesus means *Yahweh is salvation*; Christ means *the anointed one*. This book is the uncovering of the things yet to be in eternity future and it was a story to be presented by no other than *Jesus Christ*.

From Whom did Jesus Christ obtain the authority to uncover that which was concealed in order that mankind might know the future? The authority to tell the tale of this story was that “which God gave Him.” Jesus obtained His authority to unveil the rest of the mysteries of His Second Coming and have them written for the Church from God the Father Himself! That was nothing new! Jesus, while on earth, during His earthly ministry said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). No one else possessed the authority to give this permission but God the Father – not another, no one at all!

#### B. The Purpose of the Book (1:1b)

*Rev 1:1b to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place;*

Look at the purpose of the book. “To show to His bond-servants.” The word bond-servants may be misleading. Our English translators wanted to instill the idea of a voluntary servant’s position between man and God and therefore they used the word *bond-servants*. But we find it as one word in the Greek, *doulos* and it simply means *servants*. They are not slaves to God; they are servants of God. Servants, in the true definition, *want to serve their leader*. Slaves on the other hand, forced into labor, do not serve with a *willing heart but out of compulsion*. For instance, an employee who volunteers to work for a master for pay is called a servant; an employee forced to work for a master is called a slave. Between the two, there is a great difference.

The plural *doulos* (servants) cannot mean one person, it must mean all of God's true servants. God wanted His servants to be shown the message within the pages of this book that refers to "the things which must soon take place." *Ginomai* is the Greek word for "place" and it means *to come into being*. *Tachos* is the Greek word for *soon*, but it does not indicate any specific length of time. How short is *soon*? How long is *soon*? Some commentators teach that *soon* means within a few years. They attach this passage to the fall of the Temple in 70 AD at the hands of Titus. They relegate all the rest of the Revelation as being fulfilled then and dismiss anything within its pages that still must be fulfilled. One problem can be found in that thinking – this Revelation was delivered 25 years after the destruction of the Temple. How do we know? We know the ruler who used the Island of Patmos as a prison. His name was Caesar Domitian and he reigned from September 14, 81 AD to September 18, 96 AD. The beginning of his reign was a full decade after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The "soon" could mean after 95 AD when John received this Revelation. But then we still have a problem with that interpretation. In chapters 2 and 3, the Lord mentions seven Churches by name. As we will see, none of the "things soon to take place" can begin to occur until those seven Churches cease to exist in their cities. Here we must look deeper into the word "soon." In the translations of Wycliffe (1380) and Tyndale (1525) the word "soon" meant *sudden as without notice*. It was not used to describe a length of time, but rather the quickness in which it will happen when it occurs. And so, the purpose of this book is to reveal those things that will happen suddenly and without warning in the world when the seven Churches are no more. And when these things begin to occur, they will happen in rapid succession, soon, or rather, suddenly!

#### C. The Communicator of the Book (1:1c)

*Rev 1:1c and He sent and communicated it by His angel*

The text says, "and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel." Who sent the angel to communicate this message? Was it God the Father or Jesus Christ? Why does it matter? The angel was sent by God – either the Father or the Son. What is the name of the angel? That did not matter either and we will never know. What matters is that an angel was sent to deliver the message as the messenger of God!

#### D. The Recorder of the Book (1:1d-2)

*Rev 1:1d to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*

And God sent the angel to deliver this message "to His bond-servant John." We met this John about 67 years earlier in the Gospel records. He was the younger son of Zebedee and Salome. His older brother was James. Their mother, Salome, and Mary, Jesus' mother, were sisters (John 19:25); therefore, James and John were first cousins of Jesus. These two had a nickname in the Gospels – the sons of thunder because of their father, Zebedee.

In the early years the two boys worked in the fishing trade on the Sea of Galilee with their father. When they heard of John the Baptist and his ministry in the wilderness of Judea, James and John, along with their parents and many others, gathered around the Baptist and were deeply influenced by his teaching. We must not forget that the Baptist's mother was Elizabeth and she was the first cousin of Mary and Salome; therefore, Jesus, James and John were second cousins to the Baptist.

In 27 AD, at about the age of 17, John heard the Baptist announce, “Behold the Lamb of God” at the Jordan River. It was directed at Jesus, John’s cousin. Jesus invited him to become a disciple along with his brother along with all the other followers of the Baptist. For a while they joined the thousands of disciples who were following Jesus from Judea to Galilee and back. But when it came time to earn a living, John, with his brother and father, returned to their fishing business in Bethsaida. Passing through that region, Jesus again called them to follow Him and they left all they had and permanently attached themselves to His company of disciples. After about eighteen months, Jesus selected twelve of the disciples to become His Apostles and John became part of the Lord’s innermost circle. The Scripture says he was the disciple whom Jesus loved.

At the betrayal of Jesus, John and Peter followed Jesus at a distance to see what the Sanhedrin was going to do to Him while the other Apostles hid in the woods. At the trial, he followed Jesus right into the council chamber and thence to the praetorian and then on to the place of crucifixion.

At the crucifixion, John was with Mary, Jesus’ mother. From the cross, Jesus asked John to take care of Mary after His departure (John 19:25-27).

John and Peter were the first to be told by Mary Magdalen of Jesus’ resurrection. They were the first to arrive at the tomb to see it empty. John and Peter then returned to the Sea of Galilee where Jesus approached them and invited them to have breakfast.

With Jesus’ ascension, John remained in Jerusalem and became a leader in the Church. However, he was not there at the time of Paul’s last visit after his Damascus Road conversion which was about four years after Jesus’ ascension. It seems that John had moved to Ephesus, but when, we do not know. Tradition tells us that Mary was with John in Ephesus where they both eventually died and were buried. He was especially close to the seven churches in Asia mentioned in the Revelation. He appointed pastors to these churches from his group of disciples. He suffered persecution and banishment to Patmos by Caesar Domitian. He then returned to Ephesus upon release after Domitian’s death in 96 AD. John died in 98 AD, having outlived all the Apostles by many years and nearly all those who were alive during the days of Jesus’ life here on earth.

We are especially thankful for the written accounts of John. Had it not been for his Gospel, all we would have known about Jesus’ ministry covered about eighteen months of His ministry also included in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke along with the final week in Jerusalem and the crucifixion. Matthew was a tax collector in the Galilean area. As the oldest of the Apostles, he held an important job in the Roman Empire. He was an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry but from a distance for most of his life. He personally knew about Jesus’ miraculous birth because Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth within his taxing district. He knew Jesus’ heritage because he was a Jew in that lineage. But as a businessman he was limited in what he knew about Jesus’ ministry until he dropped everything and became one of Jesus’ Apostles. Therefore, his Gospel did not record the entire ministry of Jesus. The Gospels of Mark and Luke represent the eyewitness testimonies of Peter and Paul. Peter was a fisherman in the Galilean area and his experience with Jesus was much like that of Matthew – he had to work, he had a family to feed, he had little knowledge of Jesus’ ministry until he dropped everything to be an Apostle. On the other hand, Paul was known during the days of Jesus’ ministry as Saul the Pharisee. He was opposed to everything Jesus did during His time on earth.

He followed Jesus, watched Him, listened to Him, reported back to the Sanhedrin about Him and was part of the plot to put Him to death. From that counter position, Paul knew more about Jesus than most of His Apostles except this John whose Gospel filled in all the gaps in the story telling what was left out by the other three authors. His three letters to the Church added more detail in his Gospel and they all shed great light on the intent of Jesus' eternal message.

In a similar way, in the Revelation, John was privileged to be selected by Jesus to tie together all the unfulfilled prophecies into one dramatic story, sent from the Father, through the Son and onto the pages of the Holy Bible.

The passage said that John was the one "who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw." Yet, at this point in the story of the Revelation, John had not seen anything. This statement from Jesus must have been a reference to the eyewitness testimony that John had already written about and dispersed throughout the body of the Church within the pages of his Gospel and three letters. In one letter he said, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). In his Gospel and letters, John had fully and faithfully testified to what he had seen during the days of Jesus' life on earth. And now, in this new communication with Jesus, he will see more than he ever could have imagined and will faithfully record it and send it to the whole body of the Church.

#### E. The Blessing of the Book (1:3)

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

Without this prophecy, many unexplained mysteries from the pages of the other sixty-five books of the Bible would still exist. This special book holds an extra blessing for those who read its words, hear its message and heed its warnings. "Reads" is not a mistake in this translation, it is absolutely correct. The Greek word is *anaginosko* and it means *to know over and over again* or *to learn it over and over again*. We might say it like this, "Read it until it makes sense! Read it until you know it by heart." This instruction was given through John to the Church, mainly a Converted Jewish Church that understood all the history and prophecies back to "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1). For that body of believers in John's day, the message in this book might have been alarming, but by no means was it new. We will find that out as we discover all the many references extending back through the New and Old Testaments to the first chapter of the first book called Genesis. For the Church today, which is composed mostly of Gentiles, it is imperative that its members accept and incorporate the entire Old and New Testaments into their hearts and minds so that they, too, can have the same assurance of the promises Jesus' Second Coming found within the pages of this book as its first readers did in 95 AD.

We understand the word "hear;" it means the same today as it did in the original. However, a distinction exists between *hearing* and *listening*. We can hear something while not listening to its message. We do that all the time with music from the radio and racket from the TV. But here, to "hear" means *to listen*, to take into account the message being presented.