

#7 HE IS COMING (Revelation 1; cf. Daniel 7)

BRIEF NOTES

- **Scripture Made Real and Visible.** Our focus here is not to discuss Revelation's *every* allusion to the OT, otherwise we may lose the experience of seeing John's vision. Some allusions will be discussed while others will be noted in parenthesis. Read the OT allusion in its context to see how Revelation brings OT images and storylines to their completion. For future studies, the best preparation for Revelation is to drench oneself in all Scripture so one can see the old story come to life without getting lost in constant cross-referencing. Wright puts it well: "A great deal of this book is about ideas-made-visible, on the one hand, and scripture-made-real on the other."⁵³ In short, Revelation is not Scripture-made-real if we don't know Scripture, but it's ideas are not made visible if have to keep cross-referencing. Until we are as drenched in the OT as John is, we have to balance referencing allusions with seeing the vision.
- **Chain of Revelation (vs. 1-2).** Angelic messengers are a common feature in apocalyptic literature. Note the chain of revelation here: God >> Jesus Christ >> Angel >> John (who bears witness) >> Servants.
- **Read, hear, keep (vs. 3).** Revelation is plagued by two extreme approaches: churches either ignore it or obsess over it to satisfy end-times curiosity. In light of these extremes, the blessing pronounced upon those who *read, hear, and keep* this vision is instructive. This letter would have originally been read in its entirety before a listening congregation — we must not ignore Revelation! However, twisting Revelation as if it is meant to be detailed account of end-time history written in advance for our charts misses the fact that revelation is meant to be *kept* (also, 22:7). Revelation is for proclamation and transformation.

Remember to see the ideas and images in light of John's situational and symbolic context. The letters to the churches (ch. 2-3) and the vision of the dragon and the beasts (ch. 12-13) help here. The servants of God are living in a world seeming to be run by Satan's beastly empire and seductive city. Power, peace, and economic security are won by violence and injustice. Unity is preserved by an idolatrous allegiance to the state and worship of the emperor. Many who proclaim another God and Lord are marginalized, exiled, or killed. Many who appear to belong to God (Jews) are actually working with Satan. Furthermore, many Christians are defecting — either seduced by the prosperity of the prostitute or fearful of the persecution threatened by the beast.⁵⁴ The beast and Babylon seem unstoppable. All have gone after them and forgotten the true God who promises better hope. In that vein, consider three big picture perspectives offered by Revelation 1.

1. Greetings from God and Jesus Christ who are coming. Nothing is accidental here. The greetings from the Father, Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ are encouraging in light of the situation of these Christians. God is he "who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4, 8; 4:8). Constantly imitating and melding his identity with God's, the beast is described similarly (17:7-8, 11). While we can recognize God's eternality in this description, this is more of a description of his judging and saving activity in the world.⁵⁵ This is made clear when, after God's eschatological judgment and salvation, God is said to be "*the One who is and who was...*" God is no longer described as "*is to come*" — not because he will not exist but because his judging and saving actions are complete.

In contrast to those who have defected, Jesus is *the faithful witness*. In light of those who have died and who will die in tribulation, Jesus is *the firstborn of the dead*. Jesus is the first of many who will be raised from the dead. And, in contrast to the prostitute who has seduced and gained control over the kings of earth, Jesus is the true *ruler of kings on earth* (cf. Ps. 89:27, 37).

⁵³ N.T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, 8.

⁵⁴ I owe this comparison to a conversation with Drew Nelson and Travis Wise. "The beast intimidates; the harlot woos. The beast has the stick; the harlot has the carrot. Do you want the silver or the lead?"

⁵⁵ Bauckham, 28-30.

Parallel to God “*who is to come,*” John declares Jesus is “*coming with the clouds.*” Like much of Revelation, Daniel 7 provides the background to this image. There, Daniel sees a world run by human kingdoms depicted as beasts. The fourth beast is a particularly terrifying as it speaks against God and wears out the saints — a description worn well by the Roman Empire. But God issues judgment and kills the beast. In contrast to the ruling beast, Daniel sees “*one like a son of man*” who comes in the clouds and is given everlasting dominion over all peoples.

John and the Christians of this time were truly living out the tribulation seen by Daniel. God is repeatedly depicted as coming in the clouds for judgment in the past (Isa. 19:1; Ezek. 1:4; 30:3). But now, in contrast to Babylon who thinks to ascend to the clouds (Isa. 14:14), God has exalted Jesus and he comes in the clouds. The end times salvation seen by Daniel saw is here!⁵⁶ Every enemy and power has not been destroyed, but the salvation of the world is now coming.

Asking if Jesus coming in the clouds is a reference to a partial in-time judgment or to the full end-times judgment *may* cause us to miss the power of this image. As Beale says, “Jesus’ final coming is the end of a process whereby he continually ‘comes’ to the churches as their Savior and even Judge throughout the course of the church age.”⁵⁷ The end-times judgment and salvation is distinct and ultimate, but it is the culmination of partial in-time judgments. Jesus could lead judgment from heaven — whether partial (Matt. 24:30?) or full (1 Thess. 4:16). Either way, it is an image of his authority to come from heaven and exercise dominion.

The earth both ignores God’s reign in Jesus and plots to overthrow them (*cf.* Ps. 2), but no one will be able to ignore him in the final day: *every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.* It seems that John has curiously melded an image of Jesus’ judgment and salvation with an image of mourning and repentance (*cf.* Zech. 12:10-14). Whether one is guilty of rejecting Jesus or directly responsible for killing him, all will be given the opportunity to both see Jesus’ exaltation and mourn in repentance over their rejection [and murder] of the one they now see is the true God and king.

This may show us one function of John’s vision in conjunction with Jesus’ partial judgments. This is a Revelation *of Jesus Christ*. The witness of the church about what is really going on in the midst of the Lamb’s judgments upon the earth is an opportunity for all to see Jesus as the true judge and king and mourn their participation in his rejection *now* before it is too late.

In light of the original context and our own, how all can we properly organize our lives around this vision of God and Jesus who come now and are to come? How all is this intended to impact the church?

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2. Jesus has made us a kingdom enduring tribulation. The organized violent and seductive forces of Satan seem unstoppable in comparison to the messy churches scattered across the earth, but John states that Jesus has made us a kingdom and priests. We may seem powerless, *but we have*

⁵⁶ Beale, G K. *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, 36.

⁵⁷ Beale, 42.

been granted royal power⁵⁸ to participate in bringing God's dominion on earth. We are priests witnessing to the truth and bringing the nations to worship God.

John again draws from Daniel 7 when he describes us as a kingdom. Daniel 7 does not only depict a kingdom given to *one* like a son of man, but to *the people of the saints of the Most High*. But how John uses this image is unexpected. In Daniel 7, the saints endure tribulation under the beast until God judges and transfers dominion to the son of man and the saints. But with John, this end times promise of dominion is happening in-time *during* tribulation. John describes himself as "*your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus*" (1:9). The saints must patiently endure tribulation while exercising royal power?⁵⁹

But this is not surprising when compared to King Jesus. It was only by Jesus' death that our sins were forgiven and that we were granted the royal power of priesthood. Only in the Lamb's suffering and death is God's territorial rule expanded (cf. Jn 12:20-24, 31-33). Similarly, our royal power and priesthood are most effective when we clothe ourselves with good deeds and witness to the truth *in tribulation unto sacrificial death* (6:9-11; 11). In contrast, the beast and prostitute exercise power by killing, seducing, and deceiving. A time will come when tribulation will end—the saints will later be comforted (7:13-17) and rule with a rod of iron (2:26-27). Until then, we are a kingdom in the midst of tribulation for the salvation of the nations.

How can the church properly order itself around this description of the saints as a kingdom and priests patiently enduring tribulation? How all are these descriptions intended to impact the church?

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3. Jesus: the Ancient of Days and Priest tending to the lampstands. John's vision begins with what will be a common sequence after this: he hears, turns, and sees. Here, he hears a loud voice like a trumpet, turns and sees one like a son of man who is described like the Ancient of Days. It is like the Ancient of Days and the son of man of Daniel 7 have been merged into one. Similarly, the Lord God is *the Alpha and the Omega* while Jesus, after John falls down as dead at his feet, declares himself to be *the first and the last* (cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). Beale explains, "This phrase refers to the complete sovereignty of God over human history from beginning to end, and its use by the exalted Christ here shows that He too is Lord over history... Christ is the force behind history, causing it to fulfill His purposes."⁶⁰

John's response to fall down at Jesus' feet fits because this is what one must do when they see Jesus as he is (and we must at least try to grasp that breath-taking experience). Furthermore, worship of God and Jesus is a theme throughout Revelation. The world has left off worship of God to marvel at the beast and the prostitute. But Revelation presents a transcendent perspective of God, the Spirit, and Jesus ruling over history, the only ones who deserve worship.

⁵⁸ Beale, 41. He explains being a kingdom as being given "royal power." My use of this phrase hereafter borrows from him.

⁵⁹ Wright, 10.

⁶⁰ Beale, 49. Bauckham, 27, is also helpful: "God precedes all things, as their Creator, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment. He is the origin and goal of all history. He has the first word, in creation, and the last word, in new creation."

But what is Christ doing? He is standing *in the midst of the lampstands*. A lampstand was in the tabernacle and the temple. Israel was tasked with continually providing oil and the priests were to tend to the lamp so that it remained lit (Ex. 27:20-21).⁶¹ Here, the lampstands represent the seven churches. Jesus tends to the lampstands to ensure they remain lit, which will be seen in his exhortations to the church in chapters 2-3.⁶² The one who precedes all history and brings it to its eschatological goal knows the churches — whether they are and aren't doing their part. As we will see in the letters, Jesus is not only the judge of the nations, he watches and judges the churches. He stands ready to take action — whether to protect the lamp, to fan the flame, or to remove the lampstand altogether.

How all should this vision of the churches as lampstands — which were in the temple and are now scattered in the world — impact the church then and today? How all should the vision of Jesus as the priest tending to the lampstands impact us?

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What else stands out to you as interesting or significant from Revelation 1? Explain.

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⁶¹ In Zechariah 4, the lampstands represent Israel as the light of God's presence to the world. They must keep building the temple which will be brought to its completion not by human power but by the Spirit. This will come up in Revelation 11.

⁶² Beale, 48.