

When God Speaks From Heaven (Revelation 1:1-8)

Introduction

If God were to speak to you from heaven's throne what do you think He would say? What would be on His mind? Exactly what would He want to talk about? And consider this: what if it was the last time He would speak, His final word, what is it He would want us to know? Well I'm glad to tell you we don't have to wonder because God has given us an answer. We call it the book of Revelation, God's great unveiling concerning His favorite subject: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation is a book that has puzzled, confused and frustrated the minds of the best biblical scholars. Neither Calvin or Luther wrote a commentary on it, and Luther was quite harsh in his evaluation of Revelation's worth saying, "My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. There is one sufficient reason for the small esteem in which I hold it – that Christ is neither taught nor recognized."¹ Wow! One wonders if Luther was reading the same book we have in our Bible when he speaks in such a way. You see Revelation is not a mystery but a masterpiece, it does not constitute an unsolvable puzzle but contains a unique plan and unspeakable portrait of the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

In 404 verses with 285 Old Testament citations and as many as 550 Old Testament allusions we discover not a closed book but an open book, one to be studied not shunned, read and not rejected. Daniel 12:4 said "shut up and seal the book until the time of the end" but Revelation 22:10 says "seal not the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near." Revelation is to be explored, examined and embraced, for in it we discover a marvelous message whose theme is the theme of the Bible: the greatness and the glory of Jesus. From 1:1 to 22:21 the apocalypse is from Jesus and about Jesus. As He is the focus of the Bible, so He is the focus of this book.

Revelation 1:1-8 constitutes the prologue or introduction of the book. Here our God speaks from heaven with power and promise to His saints on the earth. What is it that He wants us to learn?

I. Long for the blessing for the true disciple. 1:1-3

- Revelation is the only book in the Bible that directly promises a blessing to its recipients (v.3).
- This word from heaven is intended to bless, comfort and encourage God's people to be faithful in the midst of trials and difficulties.

¹ Preface to Luther's 1522 Bible.

1) It comes from God's prophetic revelation from Jesus. 1:1-2

The revelation – *apokalupsis* – title of the book, meaning to disclose, unveil, uncover, reveal. This is its only occurrence in the book. It is God pulling back the curtain in order to show us something previously hidden and unknown. An apocalypse is highly symbolic, but the symbols stand for real truth and real things. What is the source and theme of this great unveiling?

Of Jesus Christ – it is from Jesus, but it is also about Jesus.

- Three times in 1:1-5 John says “Jesus Christ” (never again in Revelation).
- Note the divine or heavenly chain of communication of this great unveiling: God → Jesus Christ → angel → John → we His servants. The Revelation is a gift from the Father to the Son in honor of His work of salvation which He graciously shares with us.

Must shortly take place – (7 times in Revelation) emphasizes imminency, expectancy, it could happen soon. Hebrews 1:2 teaches it is the last days. 1 John 2:18 says it is the last hour. James 5:8 says “the coming of the Lord is at hand.” James 5:9 – “Behold, the Judge is standing at the door.” The unfounding of the events of Revelation are “possible any day, impossible no day” (Johnson, *BSC*, 22).

Signified by His angel – Angels (67 times; ¼ of the total in Scripture are in Revelation). Signified means to sign i fy, to show by sign and symbol, vision and revelation.

John the apostle is described as

- 1) His servant (*doulos*)
- 2) Bore witness (one who sees, speaks, and even suffers [true of John])
 - The word is faultless (“word of God,” 1:2, 9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11; 17:17; 19:9; 20:4)
 - The witness is faithful (“all...he saw”), nothing is withheld.

2) It comes in the church's public reading of God's Word. 1:3

Blessed (*makarios*; cf. Matthew 5 and the Beatitudes) First of seven (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14) Revelation commences and concludes with a blessing.

He (singular) who reads (cont) – public reading was sacred and special; few could afford even a portion of Holy Scripture. It was also one of the test of canonicity.

The words of this prophecy - (7 times in Revelation) John knew this revelation to be the very Word of God. It was a revelation from Jesus Christ. It was a word of prophecy. It came from the one true God. It was therefore infallible and inerrant.

Illustration

How different is the attitude of John to that of another John, the Episcopal bishop John Spong who says, “There is no God external to life ... The Bible is not the word of God in any literal or verbal sense. It never has been! The Gospels are not inerrant works, divinely authored... All evangelical and missionary activities designed to convert the heathen are expressions of our sense of superiority and our hostility toward those who are different... I would choose to loathe rather than worship a deity who required the sacrifice of his son.” (John Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die.*)

When it comes to which John we will follow, the decision is not difficult is it!

3) **It comes with our personal response of obedience. 1:3**

Those (plural) hear (pre. tense) and keep (pre. tense)

- What we hear we must heed.
- What we believe we must live.

Why? Because the time (*karios*), the season, epoch, era is near, imminent. Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.”

II. **Listen to the greeting from the Triune God. 1:4-6**

- God loves the church. Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for her (Eph. 5:25). Though she may become sick and even unfaithful, God’s interest in her never fails.
- 7 churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) all in the vicinity of Ephesus, 7 (54 times in Revelation) emphasizes fullness, perfection, completion. These 7, literal, historical churches in and around Ephesus are representative of the church universal and various local churches throughout history.
- Grace (unmerited favor) is Greek and peace (God’s blessing of wholeness and well-being) is Hebrew: the order is important.
- From whom do these blessings flow? Answer: Our Triune God, and notice what we learn about each member.

1) **The Father is perfect in His person. 1:4**

Him who is and who was and who is to come.

- This title only in Revelation (cf. 4:8; 11:17; 16:5).
- A paraphrase of the I AM of Exodus 3:14
He is the God of the present, past and future! (cf. Heb. 13:8); title always begins in the present tense!
 - Counters a pagan formula to Zeus of that day: “Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus will be.”

- Mounce, “An uncertain future calls for one who by virtue of His eternal existence exercises sovereign control over the course of history.”

2) **The Spirit is perfect in His presence. 1:4**

Seven (perfection, completeness, or fullness) cf. Isa. 11:2; Zech. 4:1-6! Not angels as some argue, but the perfect Holy Spirit. (There were 7 archangels in Jewish literature).

Before the throne – the Spirit who energizes and equips the churches for service is the Spirit who proceeds from the very throne of God. We are indeed made sufficient for every assignment, every challenge, for the God who lives in us (1 Cor. 6:19) is the God who is before the throne! The one who is in heaven is the one who is in us!

3) **The Son is perfect in His provision. 1:5-6**

- Son is placed last in this greeting for emphasis; the focus is on Him. 5 tremendous truths concerning what He does for us are highlighted and explained.
 - Perfect in His revelation (1:5)** – the faithful witness – the reliable, credible, trustworthy testifier. By his perfect life in the past He showed us the character of God (John 1:18). By his present activity among the churches He shows us the concern of God. When you see Jesus you see God (John 14:9). He and His Father are one (John 10:30). He is the faithful witness, perfect in His revelation.
 - Perfect in His resurrection (1:5)** – Jesus did what no person has ever done: He died, rose from the dead, and stayed alive. However, He is not the only one who will do this, He is simply the firstborn, the first of a new order, the pledge and promise of our resurrection! (cf. 1 Cor. 6:14). Firstborn is messianic and Davidic (cf. Ps. 89:27 – “And I will make Him [Messiah] my Firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.”) Jesus is first in time but also in importance as God’s firstborn over death. Jesus himself puts it in perspective in 1:18 when He says, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”
 - Perfect in His rule (1:5)** – ruler over the kings of the earth is a recurring theme in Revelation (11:15; 17:15; 19:16).
 - Kings of the earth could be 1) earthly rulers, 2) Satan and his subjects or 3) believers. Probably 1 and 2 are in view.
 - Revelation 19:16 brings this aspect into focus. No thing is over Jesus, all things are under Jesus.

d. Perfect in His redemption (1:5)

- Loved (pre. tense!) better loves. He loves us continually now and forever.
- Loosed (*aorist!*) loosed once and for all.
- Loosed is best translation and views sin as a chain. Some have the word washed, views sin as a stain.
- He has loosed us from sins penalty → justification.
He is loosing us from sins power → sanctification.
He will loose us from sins presence → glorification.

Illustration - Radical feminist theologian Delores Williams missed it when she said, “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all ... I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.”

Illustration - Oh, but Philip Bliss the hymn writer got it right when he wrote: “Guilty, vile, and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He; full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!”

e. Perfect in His reign (1:6) – Bloodfreed sinners now flood His kingdom. To be forgiven would be enough, oh, but He does so much more.

- Drawing of Exodus 19:6 – John declares our induction into Christ’s kingdom as priests (serve). All believers are now (has made) a kingdom and priests (cf. 1 Peter 2:5). We reign with Him, have free access to Him and serve for Him.
- Such a glorious salvation can result only in worship, praise and adoration: glory and dominion forever Amen!

Fairest Lord Jesus (4th stanza)

“Beautiful Savior! Lord of the nations!
Son of God and Son of Man! Glory and honor,
Praise, adoration, now and forevermore be Thine! Amen.

III. Look for the coming of the triumphant Lord. 1:7-8

Illustration - “Marvelous message we bring, glorious carol we sing. Wonderful word of the King; Jesus is coming again. May-be morning, may-be noon, may-be evening and may-be soon. O, what a wonderful day it will be – Jesus is coming again!” What does John say about that day?

1) **His coming will be seen. 1:7**

Behold (25 times in Revelation) – a call to attention. “Look here!” “Listen up!”

He is coming – a Messianic title (cf. Matt. 11:2-3; John 3:31)

With clouds – literal yes; theologically symbolizes the presence of God (Israel in wilderness, law given at Sinai, the tabernacle and temple, the ascension [Acts 1:9]). Daniel 7:13 and Matthew 24:30 also tells us Christ will return with clouds.

Every eye will see Him – it will be supernatural, historical, visible and universal.

2) **His coming will bring sorrow. 1:7**

John combines two significant Old Testament Messianic prophecies: Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10.

- All will see Him coming with the clouds is Daniel 7:13
- They who pierced him is Zechariah 12:10
- In that day Israel will see its Messiah whom it crucified. Many will repent and be saved (Zech. 13:1; Rom. 11:25-26; Rev. 7).
- In that day all the tribes of the earth will also mourn. Some will repent, others will simply lament. Mourn literally means “to cut” and was often associated with pagan worship (cf. 1 Kings 18:28) [MacArthur, 34].
- It is a signed, sealed and settled destiny: “Even so. Amen.”
- Jew and Gentile alike worldwide will understand in that day our sin nailed to a cross the Lord of Glory.

3) **His coming will be in strength. 1:8**

Four of the many marvelous names of God are mentioned in verse 8 as something of a guarantee that these things will come to pass.

Alpha & Omega (A & Z) – emphasizes God’s omniscience.

The Beginning and the End – emphasizes God’s infinity.

The Lord who is and who was and who is to come – emphasizes God’s eternity.

The Almighty – a title which appears only 10 times in Scripture, 9 in Revelation and once in an Old Testament citation in 2 Cor. 6:18, emphasizes God’s sovereignty.

- You can take it to the bank. Jesus is coming again. You have God’s word on it.

Conclusion

Dr. Jerry Vines tells the story of a special children's home in the hills of Kentucky for special kids with special needs. "Newsong" has written a song about the home, their teacher, Mrs. Jones, and those children called "Fingertips and Noses." Because she taught them about the coming of Jesus, they can't keep the window panes clean.

Question: What is the condition of the window panes of your heart?!