

Introduction: The Things Which Thou Hast Seen

by John F. Walvoord

The sermon introduces the profound themes of the book of Revelation, focusing on the glory of Jesus Christ and the importance of His prophetic message to the churches.

Scripture: Revelation 1:1-19

Topics: "Revelation Overview", "Second Coming"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the book of Revelation, emphasizing the central theme of the glory of Jesus Christ in His present and future majesty. The futuristic and prophetic nature of the book is highlighted, revealing truths about Christ's second coming and the rapidity of events to follow. The revelation is given by God to Christ, signified by an angel to John, emphasizing the importance of the message. The opening chapter sets the foundation for the entire book, introducing the purpose, subject matter, and human writer.

Transcript

Prologue (1:1-3)

1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.

The opening verse of the first chapter introduces immediately the central theme of the book of Revelation, namely, Jesus Christ in His present and future glory. The futuristic and prophetic character of the book is indicated in the words "a revelation of Jesus Christ" in which God will declare to John "things which must shortly come to pass." The word revelation is the translation of apokalypsis without the article, meaning a "revelation, disclosure, or unveiling." It is a revelation of truth about Christ Himself, a disclosure of future events, that is, His second coming when Christ will be revealed. It is as well a revelation which comes from Christ.

The common title of the book, "The Revelation of John," merely identifies the human author. The subject actually is a revelation of Jesus Christ, described as given by God the Father to Christ the Son and then revealed "unto his servant." The revelation of the Father to the Son is previously mentioned in John 3:34-35; 5:20-24; 7:16; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10, 24; 16:15; 17:8. The substance of the revelation is described

as "things which must shortly come to pass" (cf. a similar expression in Dan. 2:28-29, 45 and Rev. 4:1; 22:6).

That which Daniel declared would occur "in the latter days" is here described as "shortly" (Gr., *en tachei*), that is, "quickly or suddenly coming to pass," indicating rapidity of execution after the beginning takes place. The idea is not that the event may occur soon, but that when it does, it will be sudden (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20). A similar word, *tachys*, is translated "quickly" seven times in Revelation (2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20).

The channel through which the revelation comes from Christ is "by his angel unto his servant John." The communication spoken of as "signified," while often meaning revelation through symbols, as in this book, includes also revelation through words which communicate the meaning. The name of the angel is not given, though Gabriel has been suggested (cf. Dan. 8:16; 9:2, 21-22; Luke 1:26-31). John is declared to be the recipient of the revelation, his name occurring four other times in this book (1:4, 9; 21:2; 22:8). The best explanation is that the writer is the Apostle John (see Introduction). That John should be called a servant (Gr., *doulos*) rather than an apostle is not strange in view of common usage of the term in reference to the apostles in the New Testament (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1). The opening verse of this chapter therefore sets forth the basic scheme of the entire book, its subject matter, purpose, angelic channel, as well as its human writer.

1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

The expression "bare record" in verse 2 (Gr., *emartyre,,sen*), occurring three times in this chapter, means "to bear witness" or "to testify." The book of Revelation is not only "the Word of God," that is, originating in God, but John bears witness of his reception of it. It has the added weight of being "the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Gr., *martyria*), and the record of John is a complete recital "of all things that he saw." John is an eyewitness.

1:3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

An unusual feature of the opening verses is the special threefold blessing which is invoked in verse 3: (1) "blessed is he [singular] that readeth"; (2) "blessed are they [plural] that hear the words of this prophecy"; (3) "blessed are they that keep those things which are written therein." As all would not have a copy of the book, a special blessing attends the one who reads! Those who hear, however, are also blessed, but for both reader and hearer it is most important that they keep, that is, fulfill (observe or pay attention to) what is written. All three participles are in the present tense, implying continued reading, hearing, and observing. The book of Revelation is the only book of Scripture containing such a direct promise of blessing. The blessing here pronounced is the first of seven beatitudes in the book (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). It seems to anticipate that many would neglect this book or ignore its prophetic revelation. It is singular that the one book in the New Testament which invokes a special blessing on the reader should be often left unread.

The book of Revelation is described by the phrase "the words of this prophecy," implying that the book as a whole is prophetic. The importance of the prophecy is emphasized by the phrase "for the time is at hand," "the time" (Gr., *kairos*) referring to a period of time. Daniel mentions the "time of the end" five times (Dan. 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9). "The time" is also declared to be at hand in Revelation 22:10, and there

are five other references to time, using kairos (11:18; 12:12, 14--three occurrences in v. 14). A season of time indicated by kairos is to be contrasted to "hour" (Gr., ho,,ra) and time in general (Gr., chronos). The expression "at hand" indicates nearness from the standpoint of prophetic revelation, not necessarily that the event will immediately occur.

Salutation (1:4-8)

1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.

Having introduced the content and general character of the book which follows, John addresses what he writes to the seven churches which are in Asia, that is, the province of Asia in Asia Minor described as Proconsular Asia, including at this time Phrygia, Mysia, Caria, and Lydia. All the seven churches were located in the western half of Asia Minor.

The customary invocation of grace and peace common to Paul's letters is used by John here and in his second epistle. These two words capture the richness of the Christian faith, grace embodying God's attitude toward the believer coupled with His loving gifts, and peace speaking of relationship, here especially the peace of God. Grace represents standing; peace represents experience.

The eternal God, the source of all grace and peace, is introduced as the One "which is, and which was, and which is to come." Because of subsequent references to Christ and the Holy Spirit, this is considered as relating to God the Father. The truth is presented in an unusual grammatical construction which occurs with variations four other times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). The concept of past, present, and future corresponds to the threefold chronological division of the book itself (1:19). Joining the Father in salutation are "the seven Spirits which are before his throne." Some have considered the term an allusion to the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2-3). Others believe these were seven angels in places of high privilege before the throne of God (cf. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The word spirit (Gr., pneuma) is commonly used of evil spirits, that is, demons or fallen angels; of the human spirit (cf. Mark 8:12); and occasionally of holy angels (cf. Heb. 1:7, 14). Angels are contrasted to spirits in Acts 23:8-9. Those who favor the seven spirits as referring to the Holy Spirit find justification in Isaiah 11. The message originates in God the Father and the Spirit.

1:5-6 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The salutation, according to verse 5, also climactically comes from Christ in His character as the faithful Witness (cf. 3:14), the first Begotten or, better, the Firstborn of the dead, referring to His resurrection, and as the Prince or Ruler of the kings of the earth. As the faithful Witness He fulfilled the role of a prophet (John 18:37). In contrast to those who were previously restored to life only to die again, Christ is the Firstborn, the first to receive a resurrection body, which is immortal (cf. Acts 26:23). As Christ is "the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15), indicating that He was before all creation in time, so Christ was first also in resurrection. His resurrection is out of the mass of men who died. Some manuscripts use ek, "out of." Compare a similar selective resurrection for the church (Phil. 3:11). As Christ is first (cf. "firstfruits," 1 Cor. 15:20) so others are to follow Christ in His resurrection. Christ and all the righteous dead are included in "the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5-6). The wicked dead are raised last, after the millennium (20:12-13).

His witness and His resurrection are now past. His fulfillment of the role of "ruler of the kings of the earth" is future, to be achieved after his victory over the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19), fulfilling Isaiah 9:6-7 and many other verses such as Psalm 72:11 and Zechariah 14:9.

Special emphasis, however, is given to what has already been accomplished for believers, mentioned in the form of ascription of praise. Christ is the One who keeps on loving us (present tense) and who "loosed us" (aorist tense) once for all, in or by His own blood.⁵³

Just as Christ has the right to rule, though He is not exercising this right over the kings of the earth now, so believers are made "kings⁵⁴ and priests" or, better, "a kingdom, priests unto God and his Father." Believers form both a priesthood and a kingdom (cf. I Peter 2:9; Rev. 5:10). The full manifestation and exercise of prerogatives of this royal priesthood are subject to future manifestations. To such a Saviour and Lord the right to everlasting glory and dominion is attributed (cf. Dan. 7:14) in John's benediction of worship and praise. To this the apostle adds, "Amen" ("So be it").

1:7 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.

Introduced by the first of many instances of "behold" or "see," announcement is made in verse 7 of the glorious second coming of Christ, one of the central revelations of the book. The present tense of "he cometh" has been interpreted by some as the prophetic foreview out of place chronologically, but it can be simply understood as the futuristic use of the present in which a future action is stated as already coming to pass. It is an emphatic form of declaration (cf. "I will come again," lit., "I come again," John 14:3). As Christ was received by a cloud in His ascension (Acts 1:9), so He will come in the clouds of heaven (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27). Clouds are also mentioned in Daniel 7:13, but this seems to be a scene in heaven rather than on earth. In Revelation 14:14, 16 the Son of Man is pictured sitting on a cloud. In contrast to the event of the ascension, when clouds removed Christ from sight, at His second coming "every eye shall see him" (cf. Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27).

There is no indication that the world as a whole will see Christ at the time of the rapture of the church. At His coming to establish His kingdom, however, all will see Him. Especially mentioned is the fact that they who pierced Him will behold His coming. This creates a problem in that those who crucified Christ are now dead. The difficulty is solved by reference to Zechariah 12:10 where Jehovah declares, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." Not only Israel as a nation shall behold Him, but also "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." This expression is almost identical to that found in Matthew 24:30, where it states, "Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn."

To this John adds, "Even so, Amen." The Greek word *amen* is a transliteration of a Hebrew word of similar sound meaning "truth" or "faithfulness," hence the meaning "be it true" or "so be it." An Old Testament illustration of its use is found in Isaiah 65:16 in the twice repeated phrase "the God of truth." Christ is called "the Amen" in Revelation 3:14, with the added ascription "the faithful and true witness." In John 14:6 Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

In concluding the salutation in verse 8, Christ is quoted as declaring Himself to be the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and "the beginning and the ending," that is, the eternal One. The eternity, present power, and future glory of Christ are in view. The description of the Father given in verse 4 is then repeated concluding with the title "the Almighty" (Gr., *pantocrato,r*), a word which occurs ten times in the New Testament, nine instances being in Revelation. It is probable that verse 8 applies to Christ and the ascription of eternity of verse 4 to the Father. There is no reason, however, why eternity should not be ascribed to Christ as well as to the Father (cf. Rev. 1:10-18; 22:12-13).

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the opening eight verses of Revelation. As the Source of revelation He is presented in verse 1. As the Channel of the word and testimony of God He is cited in verse 2. His blessings through His revealed word are promised in verse 3. In verse 5 He is the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. He is revealed to be the source of all grace who loves us and cleanses us from our sins through His shed blood. He is the source of our royal priesthood who has the right to gather in Himself all glory and dominion forever. He is promised to come with clouds, attended with great display of power and glory, and every eye shall see the One who died for men. He is the Almighty One of eternity past and eternity future. If no more had been written than that contained in this introductory portion of chapter 1, it would have constituted a tremendous restatement of the person and work of Christ such as found in no comparable section of Scripture.

The Vision of Christ Glorified (1:9-18)

1:9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The important facts which form the background for the revelation are introduced at this point. Though John mentions his name twice before, this is the first of three instances of the expression "I John" (cf. 21:2; 22:8). In the Gospel of John he refers to himself as "the disciple which testifieth of these things" (John 21:24). In his epistles John describes himself as an elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1). Here John describes himself only as "brother, and companion" of the seven churches in their trouble. He was of course well known to the churches to whom the book is addressed. He was bound by ties of spiritual life and kinship and therefore was a companion (partaker or sharer) with them in their time of tribulation. He snared not only trouble, however, but their place "in the kingdom and patience" in Jesus. In the Greek text the expression is more compact by omission of prepositions, hence reading, "brother and companion in tribulation, kingdom, and patience in Jesus."⁵⁵ The word patience (Gr., *hypomone*,) connotes the hope of faith which issues in endurance. The best texts omit the word Christ. John himself is in trial, being in exile on the Isle of Patmos because of his active preaching of the Word of God and his testimony concerning Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-19).

The exile of John to the Isle of Patmos is in itself a moving story of devotion to Christ crowned with suffering. This small island, rocky and forbidding in its terrain, about ten miles long and six miles wide, is located in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus just beyond the Island of Samos. Early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius state that John was sent to this island as an exile under the ruler Domitian. (See Introduction.) According to Victorinus, John, though aged, was forced to labor in the mines located at Patmos. Early sources also indicate that about a.d. 96, at Domitian's death, John was allowed to return to Ephesus when the Emperor Nerva was in power.

It was in these bleak circumstances, shut off from friends and human fellowship, that John was given the most extensive revelation of future things shown to any writer of the New Testament. Though men could circumscribe his human activities, they could not bind the Spirit of God nor the testimony of Jesus Christ. John's experiences paralleled those of the Old Testament prophets. Moses wrote the Pentateuch in the wilderness. David wrote many psalms while being pursued by Saul. Isaiah lived in difficult days and died a martyr's death. Ezekiel wrote in exile. Jeremiah's life was one of trial and persecution. Peter wrote his two letters shortly before martyrdom. Thus in the will of God the final written revelation was given to John while suffering for Christ and the gospel.

1:10-11 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

John's statement in verse 10 that he was in the Spirit refers to his experience of being carried beyond normal sense into a state where God could reveal supernaturally the contents of this book. Such was the experience of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14; etc.), Peter (Acts 10:10-11; 11: 5), and Paul (Acts 22:17-18).

The expression "on the Lord's day" has been taken by some to refer to the first day of the week, by others to the day of the Lord. The word Lord in this passage is actually an adjective, used in the sense of "lordian." Though today the expression is used commonly of the first day of the week, it is nowhere so used in the Bible. The day of Christ's resurrection is consistently referred to as "the first day of the week" and never as the Lord's day (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20: 7; 1 Cor. 16:2). It is true that the same adjective (Gr., *kyriakos*) is found in 1 Corinthians 11:20 referring to the Lord's Supper characteristically observed by the early church on the first day of the week. Moulton and Milligan also call attention to the fact that the word is frequently used outside the Bible in the sense of "imperial" and cite Deissmann: "that the distinctive title 'Lord's Day' may have been connected with the conscious feelings of protest against the cult of the Emperor with its 'Emperor's Day.'"⁵⁶

There is no solid evidence, however, that the expression used by John was ever intended to refer to the first day of the week. It is rather a reference to the day of the Lord of the Old Testament, an extended period of time in which God deals in judgment and sovereign rule over the earth.⁵⁷ The adjectival form can be explained on the ground that in the Old Testament there was no adjectival form for "Lord," and therefore the noun had to be used. The New Testament term is therefore the equivalent to the Old Testament expression "the day of the Lord."

On the basis of the evidence, the interpretation is therefore preferred that John was projected forward to the future day of the Lord. It is questionable in any case whether the amazing revelation given in the entire book could have been conveyed to John in one twenty-four-hour day, and it is more probable that it consisted of a series of revelations. Although John was far removed from fellow Christians and the possibility of spiritual fellowship, he was given instead the transcending experience of seeing the Lord in glory and the unique revelations contained in the book he wrote.⁵⁸

While in the Spirit, John heard a great voice as of a trumpet. The speaker is identified in verse 11 as the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." This is undoubtedly a reference to Christ (cf. 1:8, 17). Some texts omit this description of Christ and begin immediately with "what thou seest." John is given the command to write what he sees in keeping with 1:2. The command to write, found twelve times in the

book, indicates that John was to write after seeing each vision, in contrast to 10:4, where he is told not to write. The message of the entire book is to be sent to each of the seven churches along with the particular message to the individual church. The seven churches are mentioned in the order of the letters of chapters 2 and 3, based on their location geographically. There seems to have been no superintending organization over these seven churches at this time, and Christ deals directly with the local church. For the location and characteristics of each of these seven churches, see chapters 2 and 3,

1:12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks.

The unusual expression, "I turned to see the voice that spake with me," in verse 12 is obviously a figure of speech meaning that he turned to see the one who spoke. Having turned, he sees the seven candlesticks. John then records the vision, "I saw seven golden candlesticks," more accurately translated "seven golden lampstands." In the Tabernacle and in the Temple one of the items of equipment was a seven-branched lampstand, a single stand with three lamps on each side and one lamp in the center forming the central shaft. It would seem from the description here that instead of one lampstand with seven lamps there are seven separate lamp-stands each made of gold and arranged in a circle.

The symbolism of the lampstands is explained in verse 20. The seven lampstands represent the seven churches and are significant symbols of the churches in their principal function of giving forth light. The golden metal, as in the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, represents the deity and glory of Christ, and the implied olive oil is symbolic of the power of the Spirit issuing in witness.

1:13-16 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.

Christ is portrayed in verse 13 as in the midst of the lampstands, that is, in the midst of the seven churches. The title assigned to Him is that of "the Son of man," a frequent title in the Gospels, but infrequent in Revelation, being found only once more (14:14). The title emphasizes His humanity and Messianic character.

The description which follows is a symbolic representation of the attributes of Christ in special relationship to the events which are portrayed in the book of Revelation. His being clothed with a garment to His feet is best explained by the clothing of a priest and judge, like Aaron's robe being designed "for glory and beauty" (Exodus 28:2). The golden girdle corresponds to that used by the high priest to bind his garments higher on the body than at the loins. Josephus explains this as being in keeping with the dignity and majesty of the high priest and as being designed to allow greater freedom in movement. The golden girdle corresponds to the girdle of the high priest which has golden thread in it, but here it is made entirely of gold. The somber presence of Christ in His role as judge and priest in the midst of the churches is a significant introduction to chapters 2 and 3.

The graphic description of Christ given in verse 14 and following verses portrays various aspects of His deity. The fact that His head and His hair are as white as snow corresponds to the vision of God described in Daniel 7:9, where "the ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool." The reference to the fact that "his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace" corresponds to Daniel's description: "his throne was like the fiery

flames, and his wheels as burning fire." The Ancient of Days in Daniel's vision (Dan. 7:13-14) is represented to be the Father or the First Person of the Trinity to whom the Son of Man, that is, Christ, comes to receive power and authority over the entire world. The attributes of the Father, however, are also attributes of the Son to whom power and authority have been given and who with the Father possesses all the attributes of God.

The fact that His head and His hair are white like snow seems to have the primary significance of complete purity rather than age, but may imply also the eternity of the Son of Man in His divine nature. His eyes as a flame of fire speak of the searching righteousness and divine judgment upon all that is impure. This is further emphasized in verse 15 where His feet are described like unto fine brass burning in a furnace. The metal described as brass or, more properly, bronze (a copper alloy), symbolizes divine judgment as embodied in the Old Testament types of the brazen altar and other items of brass used in connection with sacrifice for sin (cf. Exodus 38:30). The burning brass, which may be taken as highly refined brass, represents Christ standing in the midst of the churches on the basis of divine and righteous judgment portrayed both in the fire and in the metal mentioned. Representation of His attributes is completed by the declaration that "his voice" boomed "as the sound of many waters." The scene which John saw is accompanied by the tremendous sound of many waters used to describe the thundering voice of the Son of God revealing the majesty and power before which human authority must bow.

Three additional aspects of the revelation are mentioned in verse 16. John records that in the right hand of the Son of God were seven stars. Stauffer relates the seven stars to a gold coin minted in a.d. 83 by Domitian, picturing the dead child of Domitian

sitting on the globe of heaven, playing with the stars. The legend runs *divus caesar imp domitiani* f--the divine Caesar, son of the Emperor Domitian. The seven stars indicate the seven planets, a symbol of heavenly dominion over the world.⁵⁹

The symbolism of the seven planets originated in Crete where the mythical god Zeus was born. On Cretan coins he is shown playing on a heavenly globe, symbolizing a rule over the world from heaven. Stauffer further observes,

In the context of Domitian's whole coinage this means that the imperial Zeus child, who has been exalted to be lord of the stars, ushers in the age of universal salvation which is to come.⁶⁰

The mystery of the seven stars is defined in the Scriptures, however, in verse 20: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." The heavenly messengers ordinarily indicated by the word angel seem here to refer to messengers from the seven churches, rather than to the seven stars on Domitian's coins. It is possible that these messengers had come actually to the Isle of Patmos, but it is more probable that they refer to the leaders in these churches to whom the messages primarily are addressed. The spiritual significance is that these angels are messengers who are responsible for the spiritual welfare of these seven churches and are in the right hand of the Son of Man, indicating possession, protection, and sovereign control. As the churches were to emit light as a lampstand, the leaders of the churches were to project light as stars.

Christ is described as having a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of His mouth, representing divine judgment corresponding to that given in Revelation 19:15 where it is recorded, "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations." As Vegetius stated, the Romans were accustomed to using the sword as a principal weapon of offense. They were instructed to use it in such a

way as not to expose themselves to a thrust from their enemy. They were to employ the sword in a stabbing action, as a stroking movement with its edge would seldom kill an enemy. The objective was to kill, not merely to wound. Hence, as used here in Revelation, it implies slaying the wicked.⁶¹ The particular word used for sword (Gr., *romphaia*) here refers to a long and heavy sword mentioned five other times in the book of Revelation. By contrast, a different word for sword is used in Hebrews 4:12 where it speaks of the Word of God as "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword." The sword mentioned in Revelation has the character of a sword of devastating judgment rather than a sword uncovering unbelief as in Hebrews 4:12, and indicates the omnipotence and sovereignty of the Son of Man.

The concluding reference in verse 16 is to the brilliant glory of His countenance represented by the sun shining in his strength. The bright light which seems to attend the glory of God was that which blinded Paul on the road to Damascus and that which is the terror of the sinner as well as the assurance of the saint. In their glorified body, saints will be able to see the glory of God. The assurance is given in I John 3:2: "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." In this revelation of the Son of Man are seen the attributes of omnipotence, righteousness, sovereignty, majesty, truth, and love.

1:17-18 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

The majesty and the glory of the vision as seen by John were such that he records in verse 17, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." In contrast to those periods of intimate fellowship which characterized John's relationship with Christ in His earthly life when frequently John laid his head upon the bosom of the Saviour and had intimate fellowship with Him, John is now in the presence of the glorified Son of God whose power and majesty are no longer veiled and whose righteousness is revealed to be a consuming fire.

The revelation of God and His glory on other occasions in the Bible had a similar stunning effect, as illustrated in the case of Abraham (Gen. 17:3), Manoah (Judges 13:20), Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:23; 43:3; 44:4), Daniel (Dan. 8:17; 10:8-9, 15-17), and the disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:6). Those who do not fall down before God at the revelation of His glory and majesty are brought to immediate self-judgment and reverent fear as illustrated in the case of Gideon (Judges 6:22-23), Job (Job 42:5-6), Isaiah (Isa. 6:5), Zacharias (Luke 1:12), and Peter (Luke 5:8). In compassion toward the disciple whom He loved, Christ "laid his right hand" upon John and assured him, "Fear not; I am the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17). The very sovereignty of God revealed in the earlier verses, though the terror of the wicked, is the comfort of the saint.

In verses 17 and 18 the eternity of Christ is described in the expression "the first and the last" found in some texts in verse 11. As the eternal One, He is the One who lives (present tense, i.e., "lives continually"), who in time died, and in resurrection is "alive for evermore." As the One who conquered death, He has "the keys of hell and of death."

The expression "was dead" is literally "became dead," the state of death, in contrast to His being alive from eternity past and living on into eternal future.

The statement that He has the keys of hell and of death implies that He is sovereign over physical death which terminates life in this world as well as over hell (Gr., hades), the life after death. The Greek word hades commonly translated "hell" refers to the intermediate state and is to be distinguished from the lake of fire or Gehenna, which refers to the eternal state. To avoid confusion it is better to transliterate the word hades and to use the word hell as referring to the eternal state only. The confusion is in the translation, not the original.

In His death and resurrection, Christ wrested from Satan any authority the devil may have had over death (cf. Heb. 2:14-15). In some texts the order is reversed to read, "and have the keys of death and hell." As Christ possesses the key or authority over death, no man can die apart from divine permission even though afflicted by Satan and in trial and trouble. As the One who is in authority over Hades, Christ is sovereign over the life to come.

John Commissioned to Write (1:19-20)

1:19-20 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

John, restored to normal activity, is commanded in verse 19, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." Though many outlines have been suggested for the book of Revelation, none seems to be more practical or illuminating than the threefold outline given here.⁶² The things referred to as having already been seen are those contained in chapter 1 where John had his preliminary vision. This vision, of course, introduces the main subject of the entire book, Jesus Christ the glorious coming King. The second division, "the things which are," most naturally includes chapters 2 and 3 with the seven messages Christ delivered to the churches. This contemporary situation gives the historical context for the revelation which follows. The third division, "the things which shall be hereafter," would naturally include the bulk of the book which was to be prophetic as anticipated in 1:3 in the expression "the words of this prophecy."

The advantage of this outline is that it deals in a natural way with the material rather than seizing on incidentals as some expositors have done or avoiding any outline at all, as is true of other expositors. It is not too much to claim that this outline is the only one which allows the book to speak for itself without artificial manipulation and which lays guidelines of sufficient importance so that expositors who follow this approach have been able to establish a system of interpretation of the book of Revelation, namely, the futurist school. It is significant that practically all other approaches to the book of Revelation yield widely differing interpretations in which there is little uniformity when one interpreter is compared to the next. The futurist school at least agrees on some of its main lines of interpretation.

The decision to follow this outline is a major one and can only be supported by the self-consistency of the interpretation of the book as a whole to which it gives rise. Further support will also be found in the exposition of chapter 4 with its evidence for prophecy of future events.

Criswell, commenting on the threefold outline here, states,

Is there a key to this book from God? Does God have an analysis of it? Does God have an interpretation? Is there something from heaven by which we can study the meaning of these visions? Yes, there is. When

I was a student in school, I remember some lecturers saying that there was a key to the interpretation and the meaning of the Revelation, possessed in ancient times, but that key has been lost and we do not possess it today. Therefore, those lecturers concluded, the book is an enigma to us. I have learned just the opposite of that as I have studied the book. The same key that those first and primitive Christians had in the Roman province of Asia to whom the letters were addressed, we have today; because the key is written here in the first chapter of the book itself. This is the grand foundation. This is the great starting point. This is the key to the meaning of this vast outline of God's future.⁶³

Baines, while accepting the threefold division of Revelation based on verse 19, notes that the "things which thou hast seen" is by nature of introduction; "the things which are" is properly the first division. The second division relates to judgments falling on the earth before the second advent, followed by the third division dealing with the reign of Christ, the millennium, and the eternal state.⁶⁴

The concluding verse in chapter 1 gives the key to the symbolism of the preceding revelation. The mystery of the seven stars is revealed to be a representation of the messengers to the churches, and the seven golden lampstands are the churches themselves. It is significant as indicated in this verse that the revelation embodied in this book, though often in symbols, is designed to reveal truth, not to hide it. Though all the symbols are not explained, in the great majority of cases the symbols are interpreted in one way or another in the Word of God.

The first chapter, emphasizing as it does the glory of Christ, is in essence the theme of the entire book moving progressively to the climax, the second coming of Christ in power and glory to the earth, in chapter 19. The spiritual significance of the person of Christ and His coming to judge the world is applied in chapters 2 and 3 to the spiritual problems of the contemporary church, and forms the second major division of the entire book.

53 This rendering follows Westcott and Hort rather than the text used in the Authorized Version, where "loved" is past tense and *louo*, (washed) is substituted for *luo*, (loosed). Either rendering makes sense. On the basis that it is easier for copyists to drop out a letter than to add a letter some prefer "washed" to "loosed." As there are many variations of texts in the book of Revelation, the tendency of modern scholars is to overdo the correction of the text used in the Authorized Version. In either case there is a heartwarming testimony to the love of Christ and His effective redemption through sacrificial blood.

54 "Kings" (lit., "kingdom"; Gr., *basileia*); for the concept of the kingdom in the Revelation, see John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scripture, Excursus on the Basileia*, by E. R. Craven, pp. 93-100.

55 Henry Alford comments at length on the order of the words tribulation, kingdom, and patience. He states that the probable significance is that "the tribulation brings in the kingdom (Acts 14:22), and then as a corrective to the idea that the kingdom in its blessed fulness was yet present, the *hypomone*, is subjoined" (*The Greek New Testament*, IV, 553).

56 James Moulton and George Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, p. 364, citing Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, cf. pp. 362-64.

57 E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse*, pp. 9-15.

58 William Hoste, who considers the Lord's day here as the first day of the week, holds that the expression "the Lordian day" is distinct from "the day of the Lord" because of the fact of the differing expression in the

Greek New Testament where the day of the Lord is he hemera tou kyriou (cf. 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). However, he does not offer any factual evidence that the expression used by John is indeed the first day of the week (The Visions of John the Divine, p. 13).

59 Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, p. 152.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *The Military Institutions of the Romans*, pp. 19-21.

62 See Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV, 297.

63 W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, p. 177.

64 T. B. Baines, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 2.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-f-walvoord/introduction-the-things-which-thou-hast-seen/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net