

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 1: The Revelation of Jesus Christ; the Son of Man Among the Lampstands -- Revelation 1:1-20

Picture an old man on a rocky island, exiled by an empire that has decided his Lord is a threat. The waves of the Aegean break against the cliffs of Patmos, and somewhere across the water seven small congregations are leaning into the wind, wondering whether faithfulness is worth the cost. This is where the last book of your Bible opens. Not in a palace, not in a temple, but on a prison rock, with a man named John who had once leaned his head against Jesus at supper and who now hears a voice like a trumpet behind him. We tend to approach Revelation as if it were a coded almanac of the future, a puzzle to be cracked. But its first word tells us what it really is: it is a revealing, an unveiling, an opening of the curtain so that a suffering church can see who actually runs the world.

The book begins by tracing a chain of love. The revelation comes from God, who gave it to Jesus Christ, who sent it by His angel to His servant John, who then bears witness to us (1:1-2). And right away John tells us how to read it: the message was “signified” (1:1), made known in signs and symbols. That single word is the key that unlocks the whole book. We are not meant to count beasts and bowls like a man balancing a checkbook. We are meant to watch a great drama painted in vivid pictures, the way a stained-glass window preaches without a single sentence. Lampstands, swords, stars, a slain Lamb, a dragon, a bride: these are signs that carry weight far heavier than their literal shape.

Then comes a promise so warm it almost surprises us in a book this strange: “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” (1:3). Revelation is not given to satisfy our curiosity about timelines. It is given to be read in the assembly, taken to heart, and lived. There is a blessing waiting for the believer who lets this book do its work, who hears the trumpet voice and obeys. And the heart of what we are about to hear is not a what but a who. Before John shows us a single seal or scroll, he shows us a Person.

He turns to see the voice that is speaking, and what he sees drops him to the ground as though dead. The risen Christ stands in the middle of seven golden lampstands, robed and golden-sashed, hair white as snow, eyes like flame, feet like burnished bronze, a voice like many waters, a sword from His mouth, a face like the sun (1:13-16). This is no longer the carpenter of Galilee carrying a cross up a hill. This is the crucified One who died and is alive forevermore, holding in His hand the keys of Death and Hades (1:18). And here is the truth that will carry us through fifteen lessons: this glorified, reigning Christ is not far away in some distant century. He is walking among the lampstands. He is present in His churches now. The Lord already wins, and He is already here.

Group Discussion: When you imagine Jesus right now, today, what picture comes to mind, and how does John's vision of the glorified Christ standing among the lampstands either confirm or stretch that picture?

Personal Reflection: John fell at Jesus' feet as though dead, yet the first thing Christ did was lay His hand on him and say, "Fear not" (1:17). Where in your life right now do you most need to hear that the One who holds the keys of Death and Hades is telling you not to be afraid?

Read Revelation 1:1-20

Study Questions

1. Revelation 1:1 says God gave this revelation to Jesus Christ to show His servants, and that it was "signified" (made known in signs) through His angel to John. What does this opening verse teach us about both the source of the book and the symbolic, picture-language way we are meant to read it?
2. The book opens with a blessing on "the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and those who hear, and who keep what is written in it" (1:3). Honestly, do you tend to treat Revelation as a puzzle to decode or as a word to obey, and what would change in you if you read it for the blessing of keeping it?
3. John calls Jesus "the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth" (1:5). How do these two titles together answer the fear of a church facing Roman power, and what do they claim about where real authority sits right now?

4. Verse 5 says Jesus “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,” and made us “a kingdom, priests to his God.” When you consider the cost at which you were freed and the dignity to which you were raised, what response does that stir in you toward Christ this week?

5. God declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (1:8). In a book written to comfort the persecuted, why does it matter that history is bracketed by God Himself, and how does this guard us against reading Revelation as a nervous countdown to the end?

6. John names himself our “brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (1:9). He does not promise escape from tribulation but endurance through it. Where are you tempted to expect that faithfulness should spare you suffering, and how does John’s honesty reframe your expectations?

7. John was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (1:10). What does this phrase tell us about the first day of the week as the day Christ’s people gathered to worship, and how does the risen Lord meeting His exiled servant on that day dignify the assembly we still keep?

8. Before John sees the vision he is told the lampstands are the seven churches (1:20). Knowing that Christ Himself walks in the middle of His congregations, watching and present, how does that change the way you will walk into the assembly and live as part of His church this week?

9. The vision climaxes with the glorified Christ saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (1:17–18). Drawing on the whole vision, what does this reveal about who is reigning right now, what authority the risen Christ already holds over death itself, and why this single truth is the foundation of the entire book?

10. Looking back over the whole vision, from the chain of revelation in verse 1 to the keys of Death and Hades in verse 18, name one specific way the sight of the glorified, reigning Christ is reshaping how you will face this coming week, and what concrete change it calls for in you.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Daniel 7:13–14, the Son of Man given everlasting dominion that shall not pass away; Daniel 10:5–6, the heavenly figure with eyes like flame and feet like burnished bronze; Colossians 1:15–18, Christ the firstborn from the dead who is preeminent in everything; Acts 2:29–36, the risen Jesus enthroned at God's right hand and reigning now; 1 Corinthians 15:24–26, Christ reigning until death, the last enemy, is destroyed.