
THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson #1 (15 January 2016): Revelation 1 The Majesty of Christ: “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last”

David A. LeFevre – Adult Education Class – Snohomish Stake

INTRODUCTION

Revelation is often considered mysterious and hard to understand. For example, John Calvin, the famous reformer, had such a hard time with it that it was the only book of scripture for which he did not write a commentary.¹

However, Nephi declared, “the things which [John] shall write are just and true;...the things which were written were plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men” (1 Nephi 14:23).

Additionally, Joseph Smith taught: “The book of Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written.”² Whether you have found that statement to be personally true or not so far in your study of Revelation, I hope there are some things here that might help it become a little plainer to you.

Revelation is primarily an apocalyptic work, meaning that it “purports to be a divine disclosure, usually through a celestial intermediary to some prominent figure in the past, in which God promises to intervene in human history to bring times of trouble to an end and destroy all wickedness.”³ Revelation’s title in Greek is *Apokalypsis*, because it is the first word in the book (translated “The revelation” in the KJV). Apocalyptic works are typically: 1) eschatological, meaning they speak of the end of time when God will bring the world to a final reckoning; 2) dualistic, or, binary, we might say in our computer age today, meaning, it deals with things in opposites—God and Satan, now and future, etc.; and, 3) rigidly deterministic, meaning everything happens and moves forward according to God’s plan.⁴

One of the best things you can do to start your study of Revelation is to read the whole thing through in a single sitting, like a good novel—it should only take you about an hour and a half. Don’t worry about trying to understand everything or make sense of it.

“Compositions like Revelation have structural integrity and are meant to be read front to back, not in piecemeal.”⁵ As you do this, you’ll see patterns, phrases, numbers, and themes that are repeated again and again. You’ll see images duplicated or doubled as opposites. Most importantly, you’ll feel the flow of the text and the message. Armed with that sense of the book, you can then begin a more detailed study of the contents, keeping that overall vision in mind the whole time.

SYMBOLISM

As mentioned above, the Greek name for the book is *Apokalypsis*, meaning ‘disclosure’ or ‘unveiling,’ perhaps ironic since many consider it baffling, confusing, and of hidden meaning. The main reason for this is its strong use of symbolism.

Some years ago I was walking through the Riverwalk mall in New Orleans. As I approached a store that sold books and pictures, I stopped to look at some odd images on display with lots of repeating patterns. The man running the store said, “Do you see it?” Puzzled by the question, I replied, “See what?” “Ah,” he smiled, “you don’t yet know the secret. Let me show you.” He instructed me to look at the picture with my eyes slightly crossed and focus on the reflection on the glass cover, not the image itself. I thought he was a little odd

¹ MacArthur, 1:1.

² TPJS, 290.

³ Mounce, 1; other apocalyptic works include Daniel, Ezekiel, Matthew 24 and Joseph Smith-Matthew, Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 13-14, and Enoch’s visions in Moses 6-7.

⁴ Mounce, 3-4.

⁵ Wall, Week 1.

and couldn't imagine what this exercise would do, but went along with it. After crossing my eyes and moving my head back and forth, suddenly I saw something, but briefly. "Hey," I exclaimed, "there's another image!" He smiled more broadly. I practiced some more and after several minutes could get my eyes to 'see' the images in all the art work and books. It was amazing! If I looked just right at what appeared to be a jumble of random images, they turned into an organized, three-dimensional picture that literally leapt off the page at me.

So it is with scriptural symbolism. As we study symbols and look at them in new, different angles, they become meaningful to us in unexpected ways.

OLD TESTAMENT

Though Revelation has no direct questions from the Old Testament, all agree that it is heavily dependent on the Jewish scriptures for its symbols and messages. One commentary notes that 278 of the book's 404 verses allude to Old Testament scriptures.⁶ Others might have a different number but agree with the dependence.⁷ Predominant are references to Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Psalms, but Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Joel, Zechariah, Judges, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon are all included.⁸

Scholars debate whether John was directly alluding to OT passages and images or that the revelation he received was simply couched in such terms and he simply recorded it as he saw it.⁹ But John appears to use the OT in seven ways:

1. Judgment and plagues.
2. Tribulation and persecution of God's people.
3. Seductive and idolatrous teaching.
4. Divine protection.
5. Victorious battle of God's people over an enemy.
6. Apostasy.

⁶ MacArthur, 1:15.

⁷ Beale and Carson (1082) give numbers of verses with OT influence tallied by various commentators ranging from 226 to 1000.

⁸ Osborne, 25; Smalley, 9. We see this in Joseph Smith's revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, which is full of OT and NT language. In some cases, he may have expressed the revelation he was seeing in terms familiar to him from the Bible, but in other cases, he may have been writing the exact words the Spirit gave him, which used 'scriptural' language. It's difficult to know the difference in most of his revelations.

7. The Spirit as the power of God's people.¹⁰

Two observations are worth noting here, with more influences noted in the commentary on the verses. First, there is a "dominant influence on the structure of Revelation" from the book of Ezekiel, with the order of the presentation of many things in Revelation following the same order in Ezekiel. This is especially noticeable in Revelation 20-22 which closely parallels Ezekiel 37-48.¹¹

Second, the various plagues in Revelation are certainly modeled after those in Exodus, though reworked for the last days and the structure of John's message. This is especially true for the trumpet (chapter 8) and bowl (chapter 16) plagues.¹²

The point is that a thorough understanding of OT scriptures, history, symbols, and prophetic techniques greatly increases an understanding of Revelation. "Indeed, the reader unfamiliar with the OT is hard pressed to make any sense of Revelation."¹³

NUMBERS

Numbers are a particularly important symbolic tool in Revelation. Nearly every use of a number in the book adds to the understanding of the symbol. For example, 3 represents the divine; 4 is completeness or wholeness on earth; 7 combines 3 and 4 to represent divine or total completeness; 12 multiplies 3 and 4 to represent priesthood, Israel, and God's ability to fulfill his covenants and promises; and 1,000 represents greatness or even infinity.¹⁴ It's also helpful to recognize that the entire structure of Revelation is organized into seven groups of seven, including seven messages to seven churches (chapters 2-3), seven seals (chapters 4-7), seven trumpets (chapters 8-11), seven bowls (chapters 15-16), and seven things about the fall of Babylon (chapters 16-19).¹⁵ There are also many small sets of three, four, seven, and twelve throughout

⁹ Beale and Carson, 1084.

¹⁰ See a detailed discussion with examples in Beale and Carson, 1085-1086.

¹¹ Beale and Carson, 1087.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Beale and Carson, 1088.

¹⁴ Draper and Rhodes, 58-59; Ryken, 599-600; Osborne, 15-19.

¹⁵ Faulconer, 492-495.

the text. These and more number meanings will be called out in the commentary as we work our way through the text.

SYMBOLISM HELPS

Below are three lists of seven things (John would be proud!) that can help us understand Revelation.

Here are important things to keep in mind about symbolism:

1. John wrote the book *to be understood* to the Saints of his day. We may have difficulty because we're not first century Greeks, but he wasn't trying to write something impossible to comprehend.
2. Some things *have been lost*. See 1 Nephi 13: 28 and 1 Nephi 14:23.
3. Revelation is *deeply symbolic*. Mentioned above, taking it too literally is far worse than taking it too figuratively. Commenting on modern misunderstandings of ancient Christian doctrine, such as transubstantiation and the Trinity, one scholar said, "They would never have arisen if it had been sufficiently observed that it was a characteristic of Christ's teaching to adopt the language of picture and of emotion. But to turn metaphor into fact, poetry into prose, rhetoric into logic, parable into systematic theology, is at once fatal and absurd."¹⁶
4. Though symbolic, the *symbols typically represent real things, persons, or events*, such as the sea of glass representing the earth in its celestial state. "The whole work is couched in symbolism and, to get at the message, one must see beyond these symbols to the important realities that lie behind them."¹⁷
5. Many of Revelation's *symbols come in contrasting pairs*, helping with interpretation. Two kingdoms; two women; two cities; two harvests; two marks, and many more. In some cases, the paired items are opposites and may not be presented together in the book, such as the sea of glass (4:6) and the lake of fire (21:8).¹⁸
6. Symbols can be *interpreted only by inspiration*. We can use other tools to help, but in the end, the Spirit gives the only true meaning.
7. We're not responsible for understanding symbols the Lord has not revealed. Said Joseph Smith, "Whenever God gives a vision of an image, or

beast, or figure of any kind, He always hold Himself responsible to give a revelation or interpretation of the meaning thereof, otherwise we are not responsible or accountable for our belief in it."¹⁹ Of course, we're to seek such revelation and not just shrug our shoulders and say, 'Oh, that one hasn't been explained.' But after our best efforts, we should not feel bad if we cannot declare with certainty what a symbol represents.

We have many tools to help us interpret the book of Revelation, and Latter-day Saints are especially blessed with resources well beyond what other students of the book have available to them:

1. Modern scripture, esp. D&C 29, 77, 88, and 130.
2. The Joseph Smith Translation, which includes seventy-five verses changed, or 24% of the book, though many just one word. Relevant JST changes are presented here in the notes side-by-side with the KJV with changes highlighted (deleted words struck out in the KJV and added words bolded in the JST).
3. Clarifying information in the Book of Mormon, especially Nephi's similar vision (1 Nephi 11-15).
4. Teachings of the modern prophets, especially Joseph Smith.
5. The Greek text of Revelation.
6. Old and New Testament prophecies, customs, culture, and practices.
7. Personal revelation is the ultimate key to understanding; D&C 136:32-33a – humility makes it happen.

Finally, here are seven important points to remember throughout your study of the book, all of which should increase your ability to comprehend John's messages:

1. It is essential to 'pay the price' to learn Revelation. Bruce McConkie said that "the language and imagery is so chosen as to appeal to the maturing gospel scholar, to those who already love the Lord and have some knowledge of his goodness and grace" (*Ensign*, Sep 1975, 87). In other words, it is not a casual read.
2. Revelation is a book of prophecy, plus a little history. Attempts to make it apply precisely to past

¹⁶ Frederic Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, p. 564, n. 4.

¹⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 55.

¹⁸ For a good list, see Parry & Parry, 312-314.

¹⁹ TPJS, 291.

or future events is likely to fail except in isolated cases.

3. Likewise, it is not a precise timeline but a roughly chronological vision that sometimes jumps around in time and subject to tell the story.
4. It was a letter written by the presiding authority of the Church to Saints in Asia (modern western Turkey), so it's easier to understand as we learn more about these people and their circumstances.
5. It is a book fundamentally about Christ, his atonement and triumph.
6. Because of the focus on Christ, it is also a book of hope to the people of John's day—and ours.
7. It is a book of binary contrasts and a challenge for us to choose between the two—good and evil; since we know God will win, we can 'bet on a winner' and choose to follow God.

JOHN, THE AUTHOR

John was one of Jesus' original Twelve and joined Jesus as a disciple right after Jesus' baptism. John was also the last of the twelve to survive; D&C 7:1-4 makes a very clear statement of John's mission and state, an understanding that is unique to Latter-day Saints. 1 Nephi 14:18-27 explains that Nephi, John, and others

shared similar visions. John was particularly charged with writing it—which is why he wrote Revelation and why it is preserved for us today.

DATE

It is not known when John wrote the book, but there are two most likely dates. Most believe that it was probably written about AD 94. It was a time when pagans, Jews, and Christians struggled in the religious and political arena. In AD 92, there was an anti-Christian outbreak in Asia because a serious famine was blamed on the Christians. Sanctions were applied against the churches, along with arrests, banishments, imprisonments, and executions. Then in AD 94, Domitian persecuted Christians because they would not worship Roman gods—especially him. This was possibly when John was banished and when the book was written.²⁰

The second possibility is earlier, before the AD 70 fall of Jerusalem. Advocates of this time period cite stylistic distinctions and the tie to the tenth Jubilee year, which ended in AD 66.²¹ They also see the topics addressed in Revelation as being appropriate for the Neronian persecution circa AD 68.²² However, this is a minority opinion and has gained few followers.²³

OUTLINE

There are many ways to outline any book, and Revelation is no exception. Below are the lessons in this series with chapter summaries mostly taken from Draper and Rhodes. For the lesson in these notes, the chapter is broken down into more detailed sections and bolded.

1. **The Majesty of Christ (1:1-20)**
 - a. **Opening of the Vision (1:1-3)**
 - b. **The Almighty (1:4-8)**
 - c. **The Vision of the Son of Man (1:9-18)**
 - d. **John's Commission (1:19-20)**
2. The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1 – 3:22)
3. God and the Lamb
 - a. The Vision of Heaven (4:1-11)

- b. The Sealed Book and the Worthy Lamb (5:1-14)
4. The Scroll Begins to Open
 - a. The Six Seals (6:1-17)
 - b. The Seal of the Living God (7:1-17)
5. The Opening of the Seventh Seal
 - a. The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets (8:1-13)
 - b. The Great War (9:1-21)
6. John's Mission; Two Prophets
 - a. The Little Scroll (10:1-11)
 - b. The Seventh Trumpet (11:1-19)
7. The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon
 - a. The Church and the Devil (12:1-18)
 - b. The Beasts of Revelation (13:1-18)
8. Judgment and Praise
 - a. The Winepress of the Wrath of God (14:1-20)

²⁰ Draper, 3-4.

²¹ Draper and Rhodes, 34-35.

²² Smalley, 2-3; Wilson, 246-247 makes an especially strong case for the early date.

²³ See also Mounce, 15-21 and Osborne 6-9 for a full discussion.

- b. The Seven Angels (15:1-8)
- 9. Seven Last Plagues and Babylon the Great
 - a. The Seven Bowls (16:1-21)
 - b. Babylon the Great (17:1-18)
- 10. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb
 - a. The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)

- b. The King of Kings (19:1-21)
- 11. Heirs of the Celestial Glory
 - a. The Thousand Years (20:1-15)
 - b. The New Jerusalem (21:1-27)
 - c. Blessed Are They That Do His Commandments (22:1-21)

THE MAJESTY OF CHRIST (1:1-20)

The first chapter of Revelation marvelously sets up the entire book. It quickly focuses our attention on the central character of the story—Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, the Lamb slain for the sins of the world. He is portrayed in beautiful, symbolic language that tells of his many attributes, which are repeated in chapters 2-3 in the messages to the churches and throughout the work to bring us back to this opening vision of majesty and glory.

John’s work is both prophetic and epistolary. Like Hosea, Joel, and Amos, it opens with a declaration of source and authority—it is the “word of God” to the prophet. It also follows letter-writing conventions of the day, similar to Paul’s greetings (grace and peace in the greeting, which mixes Hellenistic and Jewish terms).²⁴

OPENING OF THE VISION (1:1-3)

The introductory verses of the Revelation tell us who received it, who gave it, what it is about (at a summary level), and how others will be blessed as they receive it. It was validated to John by heavenly signs and tokens, so he (and we) could have confidence in the message. This revelation is designed to be read, heard, understood, and lived. It is to prepare us for what is coming soon. As we see the messages of Revelation unfolding, we, too, will know that “all things that he saw” are true.

1:1 KJV	1:1 JST ²⁵
The Revelation of Jesus Christ , which God gave unto him, to shew unto	The Revelation of John, a servant of God , which was given unto him of

²⁴ Osborne, 50.

²⁵ All JST quotations taken from Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, and compared with Wayment for verifying the marking of differences.

²⁶ Draper, 25; Smalley, 27.

²⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 151-152.

²⁸ Draper and Rhodes, 152.

his servants things which must shortly come to pass; ~~and~~ he sent and signified ~~it~~ by his angel unto his servant John:

Jesus Christ, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass, **that** he sent and signified by his angel unto his servant John:

In the KJV, the Greek is ambiguous; the revelation could be either *from* or *about* Jesus Christ.²⁶ But the JST makes it clear that John’s revelation is *from* Jesus. Some ancient sources called it ‘*apokalypsis iōannou*,’ meaning John’s revelation, supporting the JST change.²⁷

1:1 **The Revelation.** “Revelation” is the Greek *apokalypsis*, meaning ‘disclose’ or ‘uncover.’²⁸ It also has the sense of making something fully known.²⁹ The first word should be “A” instead of “The”; it is “part of God’s ongoing self-disclosure: a revelation, one of a number, the origin of which is to be found in God himself, rather than *the* definitive vision, which is never repeated.”³⁰

“Had God not taken the initiative, the human mind could never have understood the real forces at work in the world. Nor could anyone have known how it would all turn out.”³¹

The ties to Daniel 2 and verse 1 here are worth noting, as that chapter also refers to apocalyptic secrets which must shortly come to pass and are signified by a divine means to the prophet and the king and his court (Daniel 2:28-30, 45-47).³²

1:1 **Jesus Christ.** This full name and title of the Savior is only found three times in the book, and only in the first five verses.³³ The word “Jesus” by itself appears eleven times (1:9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4, 22:16; 22:20, 21) and “Christ” alone four times (11:15; 12:10;

²⁹ Danker, 112.

³⁰ Smalley, 27.

³¹ Mounce, 40.

³² Beale and Carson, 1088-1089.

³³ The KJV translators added the word “Christ” to “Jesus” in English four more times (1:9; 12:1; 22:21) but it is not in the Greek in those verses.

20:4, 6). Mostly Jesus is known by various symbolic titles and images, including in the rest of this chapter.

1:1 **things which must shortly come to pass.** Or, “events that must soon take place” (BYU); “what must happen very soon” (CJB). “Shortly” is *en tachei*, which can mean “soon” or “suddenly.” The sense here is not that the event is in the immediate future but that it will happen quickly once it begins.³⁴ There is a certainty to Revelation, an assurance that God will care for his people. This was immensely uplifting to the people of the late first and early second century, to whom the Revelation is addressed through their “servants” (see chapters 2-3). It is also very comforting to us in troubled times.

1:1 **sent and signified it by his angel.** John saw God the Father and Christ in the vision, but an angel (Greek *angelos*, “messenger”) or more precisely several angels directed him through it all, as evidenced in 1:1; 10:1-10; 14:6-11; 17:1, 7-18; and 22:8-9. This is similar to the experience that Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah had in the OT. To certify that what he said was true, the angel “signified it,” which is *sēmainō*, meaning to give a sign or token to validate the authenticity of the vision.³⁵ The use of this term serves also a reminder that we should not take the book literally but as a symbolic communication of truth.³⁶ Compare D&C 129:4-9.

1:1 **his servant John.** “Servant” is *doulos*, meaning “slave.” However, in Roman society of that day, the term “slave” doesn’t have the same connotation that many of us think of today. Slaves could hold positions of prominence in a household, being trusted representatives of their masters. People were often slaves for a limited time or a specific purpose. In the New Testament, Paul, James, Peter, and others referred to themselves as slaves of God, emphasizing their surrendering of their will to God but also their authority to act in his name.³⁷

1:2 **Who bare record.** John’s testimony is based on first-hand knowledge, as it was in his gospel. He is accurately recording “all things that he saw” in the vision.

1:2 **the word of God.** Greek *ton logon tou theou*. Given the importance and meaning of “the Word” in John’s

gospel relating directly to Jesus’ role (see John 1:1-14), its introduction here at the beginning of revelation portends the role of Jesus in this unveiling of divine knowledge and action. Jesus is the hero of the book from beginning to end. Like so many other things, the phrase “the word of God” (in Greek) appears seven times in Revelation (1:2, 9; 6:9; 7:17; 19:9, 13; 20:4).

1:2 **the testimony of Jesus Christ.** “Testimony” is *martyria*, meaning “confirmation or attestation on the basis of personal knowledge or belief.”³⁸ It can be associated with martyrdom (and is the source for that word in English). Players throughout the book of Revelation boldly bear testimony seven times of Jesus and suffer for it (1:2; 1:9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 19:10). By bearing his own testimony of Jesus here, John demonstrates his willingness to suffer for Christ. In the final citation of this phrase in the book (19:10), such a testimony is defined as “the spirit of prophecy.”

1:3 KJV	1:3 JST
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 .	Blessed are they who read, and they who hear and understand the words of this prophecy, and keepeth those things which are written therein: for the time of the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

John expected his letter to be read in church meetings; one would read and others would hear or listen. The JST change emphasizes that many would read it and many would hear it, and that they both had the responsibility to “understand the words” and keep them (take care of, guard, observe to do; compare Luke 11:28). It also clarifies what is at hand—the second coming of Jesus Christ.

1:3 **Blessed is he that readeth.** The first of seven beatitudes in Revelation; the others are 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14, and are all eschatological (focused on the end of time) in nature.³⁹ Like those in Matthew 5, the beatitudes in Revelation both exhort to live God’s standards and comfort with promised rewards.⁴⁰ This first one especially conveys the key message for readers starting the book—we are blessed

³⁴ Osborne, 54-55.

³⁵ Draper and Rhodes, 157; Mounce, 42.

³⁶ Beale and Carson, 1089.

³⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 155-157.

³⁸ Danker, 618.

³⁹ Arnold, 4:250; Smalley, 30-31.

⁴⁰ Osborne, 57.

as we study it because it brings hope, inspires repentance, and prepares us for the future.⁴¹ The word “blessed” is *makarios*, meaning “fortunate or happy.”⁴² Living according to the laws of God is a reward of itself, bringing happiness to faithful disciples.

1:3 **the time is at hand.** “Time” here is *kairos* (an occasion or a set time; “a divinely ordained moment in the line of history”⁴³) not *chronos* (an interval or period of time). In other words, an important event was coming soon, which is reflected in the JST change at the end of this verse (“the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”). Joseph Smith stated:

The things which John saw had no allusion to the scenes of the days of Adam, Enoch, Abraham, or Jesus, only so far as is plainly represented by John, and clearly set forth by him. John saw that only which was lying in futurity and which was shortly to come to pass....Now, I make this declaration, that those things which John saw in heaven had no allusion to anything that had been on the earth previous to that time, because they were the representation of “things which must shortly come to pass,” and not of what has already transpired.⁴⁴

Indeed, Revelation has 404 verses. Only 82 deal with events before or during John’s time and only 38 verses talk about the Millennium and after. Most of the book discusses the events immediately preceding the Second Coming or visionary experiences that set up or explain those events.

THE ALMIGHTY (1:4-8)

This section opens with an epistolary greeting but quickly shifts to a description of the greatness of Jesus Christ, the power of his atonement, his eternal nature, and the promise of his second coming when the entire earth will declare him “the Almighty.” “...what begins as a normal greeting is immediately transformed into a lyrical hymn of praise to Christ....He is singled out as the one whose love purchased freedom from sin. He is the one who by his death and resurrection has equipped us to serve the Father. It is to him that glory and power are ascribed. He is the one who will come on clouds of

glory, and the entire human race will witness that triumphal return.”⁴⁵

These few verses introduce themes found throughout the book: the character of the Father and Son; the situation of the believers; Jesus paying the price for us; the promise of a shared eternal reward; and the return of the triumphant King.

1:4 KJV	1:4 JST
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;	Now this is the testimony of John to the seven servants who are over the seven churches are in Asia: Grace unto you, and peace, from him who is, and who was, and who is to come; who hath sent for this angel from before his throne to testify unto those who are the seven servants over the seven churches;

The JST reemphasizes what the first few verses said—this is “the testimony of John.” It also reiterates the delivery mechanism—it was received from an angel who left the very presence of God to deliver it. Replacing the term “seven Spirits” with “seven servants” clarifies the meaning of the verse, as many commentators attempt to tie the seven spirits to the Holy Spirit or the seven archangels of Jewish tradition or the seven eyes of the Lord from Zechariah 4:1-10.⁴⁶ Instead, the JST prefigures the next section where John directly addresses the seven churches and their leaders. The message is to the churches through their priesthood leaders, whom John surely knew well and likely even called and set apart.

1:4 **John.** As mentioned in the introduction, the author of this book is John the apostle of Jesus Christ, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, the last surviving member of the original Twelve. Some have tried to promote another John (or possibly one of seven different authors) but the earliest and best evidence is that the book was in fact written by John the apostle.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Wall, Week 1.

⁴² Danker, 610-611.

⁴³ Smalley, 31.

⁴⁴ *TPJS*, 289-290.

⁴⁵ Mounce, 52.

⁴⁶ For example, see Mounce, 46-47 and Arnold, 252-253.

⁴⁷ See the excellent discussion of this topic in Osborne, 2-6.

1:4 **the seven churches**. These seven churches are listed in 1:11 and in chapters 2-3. The word “church” today generally means a building where people meet for religious services or a formal organization with leadership and a group sharing similar beliefs. But in the NT it is *ekklesia*, meaning a gathering or assembly. It was used of the gathering of a legislative body in Greek, but the early Christian church adopted it as a term to represent their own meetings both to tie them to the OT practices (the LXX uses *ekklesia* for the gathering of Israel) and to offer a more legitimate impression of their religion in political circles.⁴⁸ John’s use of seven churches doesn’t mean his message was limited to just those congregations; because seven represents completion or fullness, the seven stand in for the entire body of Christians.⁴⁹ Indeed, as we will see in chapters 2-3, the characteristics John calls out for each take in a large number of things seen in the church of his day and ours.

1:4 **Asia**. Today we would call this Roman province western Turkey.

1:4 **Grace be unto you, and peace**. Like Paul⁵⁰ and Peter,⁵¹ John evoked both Greek (“grace”) and Jewish (“peace”) elements in his greeting.⁵²

1:4 **him which is, and which was, and which is to come**. This unique phrase occurs only in the Bible in the book of Revelation, and here five times (1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5, though slightly differently in the last three). Though John doesn’t say it expressly, from the context and the mention of the throne that later ties to chapter 4, we surmise he is speaking here of the Father, though later (1:8) the same expression will be used of Christ. This attribute of God provides comfort to those struggling under the weight of worldly challenges—God always is now, always has been, and always will be there for us. It is the fundamental message of Revelation captured in a few words—God is in charge, has always been and will always be. It ties back to the name of God in the Greek version (LXX) of Exodus 3:14, where the Lord told Moses that his name is “I AM THAT I AM.”

1:5 KJV

| 1:5 JST

⁴⁸ Danker, 303.

⁴⁹ Draper and Rhodes, 179.

⁵⁰ E.g., Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2. In his later pastoral

~~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,~~

Therefore, I John, the faithful witness, bear record of the things which were delivered me of the angel, and from Jesus Christ, the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth, and unto him who loved us be glory, who washed us from our sins in his own blood,

The JST shifts the identity of “the faithful witness” from Jesus to John, who is bearing a careful and true testimony of the things he received from the angel and from Christ himself. This change also puts the emphasis in verse 4 on the Father who ultimately is the one from whom John receives the revelation.⁵³ Whether in the KJV order or the JST, this verse is the third and last time the name and title “Jesus Christ” are used together in the book. Mostly he is identified through highly symbolic references.

1:5 **the faithful witness**. Similar to “testimony” in 1:2 above, the word here for “witness” is *martus*, meaning a witness who speaks of and gives testimony of things known firsthand (as in a court of law).⁵⁴ Because early Christians who bore fervent testimony sometimes gave their lives, the term came to be associated with that kind of sacrifice, which is how we get the word “martyr” today. In the KJV, Jesus is the faithful witness who willingly gave his life for his testimony. In the JST, John is the faithful witness who dedicated his entire very long life to bearing testimony of the Savior.

1:5 **the first begotten of the dead**. Jesus was the first dead person to be ‘reborn’ or born again to a new state of existence, a resurrected being. It also signifies his authority because the title “carried both messianic and royal nuances” and likely ties to Psalm 89:27 where the

letters, he added “mercy” (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).

⁵¹ 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2.

⁵² Smalley, 32.

⁵³ Draper and Rhodes, 173.

⁵⁴ Danker, 619.

Lord proclaimed he would make his firstborn higher than the kings of the earth.⁵⁵

1:5 **the prince of the kings of the earth.** “Prince” is *archon* which is better translated “ruler” (so NIV, NASB, NAB, RSV, CJB, and NLT). Jesus rules over all other kings.

1:5 **Unto him that loved us.** “Loved” here is actually in the present tense, so it should read “To him who loves us” (NIV, NASB, NAB, RSV, NLT). Jesus’ love for us is continuous.⁵⁶

1:5 **washed us from our sins in his own blood.** Most modern translations now render this differently, such as the NIV and RSV: “has freed us from our sins by his blood.” The difference in Greek between “washed” and “freed” is a single vowel (*lousanti* versus *lysanti*) which was apparently added to later manuscripts used in the work on the KJV but is not present in the older manuscripts. Hence “freed” is the better choice.⁵⁷ The Atonement frees and releases us from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood.

1:6 KJV	1:6 JST
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him <i>be</i> glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.	And hath made us kings and priests unto God, his Father; to him <i>be</i> glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

This small one-word deletion in the JST makes “God” and “Father” the same person, where the KJV “and” would seem to separate them. This is supported by other translations which generally put “his” in front of both (e.g., “his God and Father” in NIV, NAS, NASB, and RSV). Interestingly, later in his life, Joseph Smith used the KJV language as a proof text that God has a father as he developed and taught the doctrine of plurality of gods.⁵⁸

1:6 **hath made us kings and priests.** In ancient Israel, kingship and the priesthood were typically separated, but in Exodus 19:6, Israel was promised to become “a kingdom of priests.” Thus ultimately in God’s kingdom,

⁵⁵ Draper and Rhodes, 174.

⁵⁶ Smalley, 35.

⁵⁷ See Bruce M Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 2000), 662.

the righteous receive authority in both realms, civil and ecclesiastical. John’s verse tense for “made” shows that this is an ongoing activity—that some were already kings and priests and others would yet be.⁵⁹ Indeed, those reading John’s letter could be assured that they are already kings and priests: “Their reign with him has already begun, even though it is yet to be consummated.”⁶⁰ This prepares us for the vision of the twenty-four elders in chapter 4 who have already received their crowns and the multitudes who will in chapters 19-22.

1:6 **to him be glory and dominion.** John’s praise of Christ seeks for him to have eternal honor and power.

1:7 KJV	1:7 JST
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.	Behold, he cometh in the clouds with ten thousands of his saints in the kingdom, clothed with the glory of his Father ; and every eye shall see him, and they who pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

This JST change to “ten thousands of his saints” is an interesting tie back to Jude 1:14 which is on the previous page in the Bible and something Joseph Smith would have just considered in his translation efforts prior to starting Revelation. In Jude, the reference comes from the apocryphal 1 Enoch 1:9, so in essence the Prophet added another reference to that book into the Bible. It’s not clear from the JST text if “clothed with the glory of his Father” refers to Jesus or to the thousands of saints with him. Likely it is both. The reference to “ten thousands” would be like saying something like “billions and billions” today—it represents a number that is too large to count.

1:7 **he cometh.** Greek *erchomai*, the verb is in the present tense, meaning he is coming now. It is hopeful and sure—it is already happening. Jesus is ‘the coming one’ nine times in Revelation.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Draper and Rhodes, 177; Parry and Parry, 15-16.

⁵⁹ Draper and Rhodes, 175-176.

⁶⁰ Osborne, 66-67.

⁶¹ MacArthur, 28.

1:7 **with clouds**. The Greek word translated “with” here could also be “amid” (NAB), “on” (NJB) or ‘after.’ The JST change is that Jesus and the saints are in the clouds. Clouds are a symbol of the presence and power of God (see Exodus 13:21 and Daniel 7:13), so either they come with or just after the manifestation of God’s power.

1:7 **they also which pierced him**. An allusion to Zechariah 12:10-12 where the house of David looks upon “me whom they have pierced” and mourns that event at the second coming. However, John expands that so that all people “shall wail” when they see him. Perhaps this alludes to the Atonement saving every single person; we have all pierced him with our sins.

1:7 **Even so, Amen**. The two phrases mean essentially the same thing, but “even so” (*nai*) is Greek and “amen” is Hebrew, calling for the coming in words that appeal to all of John’s audiences.⁶²

1:8 KJV	1:8 JST
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.	For he saith , I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

The JST makes clear from the beginning of the verse that the voice John heard was Christ and improves the transition from the statement of the future second coming in verse 7 to the words of the Lord in verse 8.

1:8 **Alpha and Omega**. The first (Α) and last (Ω) letters of the Greek alphabet, they represent Christ’s eternal nature, that he is there from the beginning of all things to the very end.

1:8 **which is, and which was, and which is to come**. Like the Father in verse 4, Jesus has the attribute of being present with and for us now but also in the past and future.

1:8 **the Almighty**. This is *pantokratōr* in Greek, the ruler over all things. It is used nine times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22) but only this one applies to Christ—in all the rest it is the Father who is the Almighty. The term is only used one other time in

the NT (2 Corinthians 6:18), and there Paul is quoting 2 Samuel 7:8. In the OT, it appears as *šadaay* or *š̄ba’ot*, translated almighty or hosts/armies.

THE VISION OF THE SON OF MAN (1:9-18)

These verses, especially 14-16, describe the Savior in magnificent vision; see also Daniel 10:5-6. This is a great example of how John used Old Testament imagery. Then compare D&C 110:2-4 where Joseph Smith described the Savior as he saw him in the Kirtland temple. The dress reflects elements of kingship and of priesthood, portraying Jesus as both the great High Priest and the King of kings.

1:9 **your brother**. Like a good brother, John’s message is loving but also direct. The term “brother” is used in the NT as a category of leadership (as in Acts 15:22-23 and 2 Peter 3:15) but also to represent the tightness of their community (e.g., Matthew 28:10; Romans 1:13; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Hebrews 3:1; James 1:2).⁶³

1:9 **companion in tribulation**. Or, “partner in hardships” (NJB). John is not just a sympathetic fellow member of the church, but is personally suffering from the same trials and persecutions as others. “Tribulation” is *thlipsis*, literally ‘pressing,’ symbolic of suffering, affliction, or distress.⁶⁴

1:9 **in the isle that is called Patmos**. The last of the apostles, John was banished to Patmos, an island off the coast of Asia (modern Turkey; see the maps in the LDS Bible). The island is about ten miles long and five to six miles wide.⁶⁵

There were two kinds of banishment in Roman times: *deportatio* and *relegatio*. The first was permanent and meant loss of property and rights; it could only be applied by the emperor. The second was temporary (as little as three years), where the person maintained rights and property; a governor or higher could do impose this. According to early Church writings, John received the *relegatio*, and may have had this given to him in lieu of a death sentence because of his high status in the church.⁶⁶

1:9 **for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ**. The second occurrence of this phrase; see 1:2.

⁶² MacArthur, 34.

⁶³ Smalley, 49.

⁶⁴ Danker, 457.

⁶⁵ MacArthur, 41.

⁶⁶ Draper, 3; Draper and Rhodes, 122-126.

John is on the island because he has borne testimony of Christ and speaks the words of revelation.

1:10 ***I was in the Spirit.*** John was “in the Spirit” four times in this revelatory experience (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; and 21:10). John does not explain what he was doing to be “in the Spirit,” but other examples in the scriptures when people have been “in the Spirit” include Lehi (1 Nephi 1:8); Nephi (1 Nephi 11:1); Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:2; 3:12, 14 24; 11:1, 24; 27:1); Joseph Smith (D&C 76:10, 12, 18); and Joseph F. Smith (D&C 138:11). Each time John is “in the spirit,” seeing and hearing is involved.⁶⁷

1:10 ***on the Lord’s day.*** Revelation is the first Christian text to refer to Sunday as “the Lord’s day” and the only one in the Bible. The best known early non-Biblical text to use the same phrase is the *Didache*.⁶⁸ The term may have derived from the Roman custom of calling the first day of each month “Emperor’s Day,” especially in Asia, the territory John is addressing.⁶⁹ Or it may have simply been so named because early Christians got together on that day and took the emblems of his death as he had commanded them at the last supper.

1:10 ***a great voice, as of a trumpet.*** This evokes the voice of the Lord on Mount Sinai as it spoke to Moses (Exodus 19:16, 19-20).⁷⁰

1:11 ***Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.*** Alpha and Omega are repeated from verse 8, symbolic of but not duplicating the next phrase, which uses different Greek words. “First” is *protos*, meaning first in time, rank, or influence. “Last” is *eschatos*, meaning last in time or series, or of lowest rank or worth (from which we get the term eschatology). Jesus is the firstborn in the spirit and first in rank among God’s children—he is Yahweh/Jehovah of the Old Testament. But he condescended to become the lowest, taking on the curse of all our sins and pains, and thus made himself last or least. Compare Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12.

1:11 ***write it in a book.*** Not a book as we know it but a papyrus scroll (or perhaps parchment). John’s scroll was probably eleven or twelve feet long, based on the length of the Greek text of Revelation. The command to immediately write down a revelation did not start nor end with John—compare Exodus 17:14; Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 30:2; 36:2; D&C 76:28, 49, 80, 113, 115.

⁶⁷ Smalley, 53.

⁶⁸ See *Didache* 14:1 for the reference.

⁶⁹ Smalley, 51.

1:11 ***the seven churches which are in Asia.*** There were clearly more than seven churches in the region; several more are mentioned in Acts and Paul’s letters. As explained above, John’s use of the number seven indicates that these churches represented all Christians, present and future. The churches named in this verse are presented in the same order as in chapters 2-3 are in a relative circle in the region (see image).



1:12 KJV

And I turned to see the voice ~~that~~ spake ~~with~~ me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

1:12 JST

And I turned to see **from whence** the voice **came** that **which** spake **to** me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

This very sensible JST change fixes an awkward phrase—you don’t typically see a voice, but you do see the source of the voice, which is identified in verse 13. However, the phrase is literally “saw the voice” in LXX Exodus 20:18, so the original wording in Revelation may relate to that.

1:12 ***candlesticks.*** Candlesticks did not exist in John’s day. This is ‘lamp stands’ of gold, perhaps like the seven-branched *menorah*, holding olive oil. The oil in the stands symbolizes light, healing (think Good Samaritan, Luke 10:34), and peace. The lamp stands do not produce light but hold the light up for all to see.⁷¹ So these lampstand/churches (as interpreted in verse 20) hold up the true light, even Christ, to the world. The image of the lampstand likely is inspired by Zechariah 4:2, 10 and from the temple itself, which had a menorah

⁷⁰ Beale & Carson, 1091.

⁷¹ Draper, 34

on the left side in the holy place (John is in the heavenly temple, as shown in chapters 4 and 14).

1:13 **one like unto the Son of man.** Christ was in the midst of the churches; he knew them, loved them, and supported them in their many trials. The term “son of man” was used in the OT typically to represent a human (e.g., Job 25:6; Psalm 80:17; Isaiah 51:12; Jeremiah 49:18; Ezekiel 2:1, 3). But Daniel uses it once (7:13) to represent someone coming to the Ancient of days with the clouds of heaven, making him divine or at least divinely appointed. John’s usage here matches that of Daniel 7:13.

1:13 **girt about the paps with a golden girdle.** Or, “with a golden sash around his chest” (NIV). This portrays him with priesthood clothing; cf. Exodus 28:4; 29:5; and 39:29.

1:14 **white like wool, as white as snow.** White equals purity which also equals victory; one of the messages of Jesus’ appearance is that purity brings victory! This also hearkens back to an image in Daniel 7:9, where the “Ancient of days” had “the hair of his head like pure wool,” and D&C 110:3 where the Prophet described Christ as “the hair of his head was white like the pure snow.”

1:14 **his eyes were as a flame of fire.** This could signify that he is looking at the lampstands (his eyes reflecting their flames) or that his look is one of judgment (like the two-edged sword below). One commentary proposes that this represents God’s glory penetrating all things;⁷² another, ‘discriminating insight, as well as sovereignty.’⁷³ Daniel 10:5-6 describes the appearance of “a certain man” as having “eyes as lamps of fire,” and in Joseph Smith’s vision of the Savior in the Kirtland temple, he said, “His eyes were as a flame of fire” (D&C 110:3).

1:15 **feet like unto fine brass.** *Chalkolibanon*, burnished copper or bronze, perhaps an alloy of gold and copper. This was a symbol for many gods (see the message to Thyatira in chapter 2).

1:15 **the sound of many waters.** The imagery is from Ezekiel 43:2 and echoed in D&C 110:3. The voice of God is powerful (like rivers and waterfalls) but also peaceful like flowing water.

⁷² Parry and Parry, 22.

⁷³ Smalley, 54.

1:16 **seven stars.** The leaders of the seven churches (see verse 20).

1:16 **a sharp twoedged sword.** The word of God which comes out of his mouth, speaking truth, providing both deep blessings and judgment. “It penetrates to the very soul and moves [the righteous] to action, testimony, and faithfulness.” For the wicked, it pierces deeply with guilt and hopefully repentance. The image is used five times in Revelation (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). Compare Helaman 3:29-30; Isaiah 11:4; 49:2; D&C 6:2; 33:1.

1:17 **I fell at his feet.** John knew Jesus during his mortal life, but here recognized that this was a different Jesus, the exalted Son of God. Others similarly fell when encountering God’s presence (Genesis 17:3; Joshua 5:14; Matthew 17:6; Ether 3:6; 3 Nephi 11:12).⁷⁴

1:17 **he laid his right hand upon me.** Daniel’s experience was very similar: he is overwhelmed by the vision, falls down, is touched by the messenger and told not to fear, and is strengthened to stand up to learn more (Daniel 10:8-20). We see something similar in the Mount of Transfiguration experience of Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:5-8). That it was the right hand, the same one that held the seven stars and which is symbolic of blessing and protection, demonstrates that with the hand that sustains the entire church, the Lord also blesses the individual.⁷⁵

1:18 **I am he that liveth.** Or, “I am the Living One” (NIV). When the women went to the empty tomb on the morning of the resurrection, the angel asked, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5). The word for “living” there is *zaō*, which is the same one Jesus uses to describe himself to John in this verse. ‘The living God’ can be found describing the Lord in Joshua 3:10; Psalm 84:2; Hosea 1:10; Matthew 26:63; Acts 14:15; Romans 9:26; Hebrews 3:12; 1 Peter 1:23; and more. The verse break between 17 and 18 is unfortunate because it breaks the thought, which should be, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and he who lives. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever” (BYU).

1:18 **keys of hell and of death.** Keys in those days were large objects, made of either wood or sometimes metal. Locks were few and were reserved for the most valuable treasures. Having keys showed power and

⁷⁴ Parry and Parry, 24.

⁷⁵ Smalley, 55.

authority; the bearer was someone of great importance.⁷⁶

JOHN'S COMMISSION (1:19-20)

1:19 **Write.** Or, "Write therefore" (NASB). The Greek include the word *oun*, which means either 'so' or 'therefore.'⁷⁷ This ties the message back to the vision he just had of Christ and the previous command to write. A paraphrase might be, 'Because of what you have just learned of Christ and your commission to write to the seven churches, you should therefore write what you have seen, what I am showing you now, and what I'm going to show you next.'

1:19 **Write the things which thou hast seen.** This tells us two things: John's commission to write the vision was divine, not just a man's decision, strongly implying that the interpretation of the vision comes the same way. See also 1 Nephi 14:24-27. Second, the book of Revelation was probably given in stages, perhaps over multiple days but at least with enough of a pause between sections for John to write it down. We see similar injunctions and experiences in D&C 76.

1:20 **The mystery.** To *mystērion*, meaning something that is known only by revelation.⁷⁸ This passage "refers to mysteries not as hidden spiritual matters known only to a few initiates, as in ancient mystery religions, but as divine secrets now revealed to all believers."⁷⁹

1:20 **seven stars...seven golden candlesticks.** The interpretation of the images is given: the stars are the "angels" or church leaders and the lamp stands are the churches. Note that the JST changes "angels" to "servants" here and in every other similar instance in chapters 1-3, so they more clearly represent the leaders of each of the congregations of saints. That change aligns with the meaning of the term used, *angelos*, which has the connotation of both an earthly or heavenly messenger, not just an "angel" as we think of it today. Says one, "It could be argued the 'angels' in this context are the responsible leaders of the churches."⁸⁰ Michael Wilcox notes the powerful nature of using stars to represent the local church leaders: "In the ancient world, people used the stars for navigation. People looked to them for direction because they were constant and unchanging...The local leaders must be constant in order to direct their members. The Savior's upturned hand is a testimony of his willingness to succor them."⁸¹

CONCLUSION

John is writing a letter, but one that doesn't just contain exhortations or instruction. The opening vision of Revelation sets the tone for the entire unveiling of truth that we experience in these pages—it's all about Christ. The images in these verses will appear again in chapters 2-3 and throughout the book. We are comforted each time by the symbolism of a Savior who is powerful, truthful, supportive, watchful, present, involved, and loving in every way. He knows us collectively and individually and ministers to us in both manners. He is always with us, even when we might think he is not, when we feel alone, when we struggle with our own sins or the impact of the sins of others on our lives. He is coming again to wage the battle that has

already been won. He has "washed [freed] us from our sins in his own blood" (1:5) and made it possible for us to be "kings and priests unto God" (1:6). John bears this testimony in no uncertain terms so we might know to be on the side of God and his Son and not have the sword of judgment come down upon us, but rather experience the sword of blessing, that commends us for our righteousness, perhaps like a king would recognize the service of a noble servant by knighting him with a sword touched on the shoulders. We acknowledge that Jesus is eternal, there from the beginning and there until the end, "the Almighty" (1:8), and we shall one day fall at his feet as did John in love and respect.

⁷⁶ Millet, 266-267.

⁷⁷ Smalley, 56.

⁷⁸ "A mystery is a truth that cannot be known except through divine revelation—a sacred secret" (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, p.

141; see also D&C 42:61, 65; 76:5-10; 89:18-19; 1 Nephi 10:19; Alma 12:9-11).

⁷⁹ Arnold, 259.

⁸⁰ Smalley, 58.

⁸¹ Wilcox, 23.

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 - JST – Joseph Smith Translation
 - BYU – BYU New Testament Rendition (from Draper and Rhodes)
 - CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
 - LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
 - NAB – The New American Bible
 - NASB – New American Standard Bible
 - NIV – New International Version
 - NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
 - NLT – New Living Translation