

# The Church Age

## Revelation 1: "Christ and the Church"



### Chapter Highlights

- [Read, Hear, and Keep](#)
- [Ruler of All Rulers](#)
- [Alpha and Omega](#)
- [Seven Golden Lampstands](#)
- [Our Great High Priest](#)
- [He Holds the Keys](#)

### Chapter Aids

- [Let's Get Started](#)
- [Study Questions](#)
- [Chapter Wrap-Up](#)
- [Biblical Maps](#)
- [Biblical Time Lines](#)
- [Biblical Illustrations](#)
- [Biblical Tables and Charts](#)

### Topical Index

- [Don't Jump Ahead!](#)
- [Who Wrote Revelation?](#)
- [Read, Hear, and Keep](#)
- [Grace and Peace](#)
- [Ruler of All Rulers](#)
- [We Are Subjects?](#)
- [Focus on This!](#)
- [The Beginning and The End](#)
- [My Spiritual Brother](#)
- [Why Should I Worship on Sunday?](#)
- [Jesus Picked Seven](#)
- [Seven Golden Lampstands](#)
- [Our Great High Priest](#)
- [Hair as White as Snow](#)
- [Rise Up and Crush Your Enemies](#)
- [Sharper Than Any Two-Edged Sword](#)
- [The Shekinah Glory](#)
- [Nothing Before or After](#)
- [He Holds the Keys](#)
- [Past, Present, and Future](#)
- [The Bible Interprets Itself](#)



### Let's Get Started

Since we will be studying Revelation, it is important to understand what a revelation is. The word revelation comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*. It means *the uncovering, the unveiling, or the disclosing*. Revelation is the disclosing of Jesus Christ. It can be taken two ways: as the revealing of the person of Jesus Christ, or as the revealing of what he intends to do starting with the Church Age and running through to the end of time.

The *Church Age* is that period of time that the Church is on earth. The *Church* consists of the followers of Jesus Christ, as opposed to a church which is a building where people meet to worship. The Church Age started fifty days after Jesus was raised from the dead on the Jewish holy day called Pentecost (The Feast of Weeks, Exodus 34:22,23; Acts 2:1-47). It will end when the Church is raptured (1 Corinthians 15:52). Just as one week is

divided into seven days, the Church Age is divided into seven periods (more on this later in Chapter 1).

John, one of Christ's original twelve disciples, was selected by Jesus to record Revelation. Since he knew Jesus personally, John is often called the Apostle John (Acts 1:21-26). He never boasted of that, but simply called himself a servant of Jesus.

## Don't Jump Ahead!

Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

Most people who study Revelation have a tendency to rush to those hot-button topics like the *Mark of the Beast* and the *Two Witnesses* that come later. They are skipping parts of the Bible that contain many great truths. Every verse in the Bible is important, and we should want to understand what each one of them has to say.

God gave the message of Revelation to his Son Jesus. He wanted Jesus to pass it on to his servants, so Jesus gave it to an angel. The angel then gave it to John, who gave it to the Church.

God's purpose for giving this message was to let the Church know what was to come in the future. *Must* means it is absolutely certain that these events will take place, and *soon* means they will begin in the near future. However, remember that God's definition of *soon* is a lot different than our definition.

## Who Wrote Revelation?

Revelation 1:2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John wrote it. It was his task to record what he saw, and what he saw was the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. The things written in this book *are* the Word of God and they come from God through his Son Jesus.

## Read, Hear, and Keep

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation is more than a book of *doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction* (2 Timothy 3:16, kjv). It is also a book of prophecy. The fulfillment of this prophecy began on the first day of the Church Age (Pentecost).

God did not have John write Revelation for it to be ignored. He had John write it to be *read, heard (hear), and kept (keep, take to heart)*. Yet some people won't read it because they are either uninterested, scared, or find it difficult to understand. All God asks is simply for us to read Revelation.

The word *hear* could simply mean to listen to someone else read Revelation. But it probably means to recognize that Revelation is the Word of God and needs to be heard with one's heart. The word *keep* requires obedient action to do what the Bible says. God promised a blessing to those who read, hear, and keep the Word of God.

## Grace and Peace

Revelation 1:4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,

Revelation is for all believers, but here at the beginning is a section specifically addressed to seven particular churches (see [Illustration #1](#)). The greeting is "grace" and "peace," the common need of all people. Without the grace of God we would perish. Without the peace of God we would be unsure of our salvation (John 3:16; Romans 10:19). The source of grace and peace is the eternal God; the God *who is, who was, and who is to come*.

The Holy Spirit occupies a place before the throne of God. He has a sevenfold nature (Isaiah 11:2). This nature is made up of *seven virtues* which are called the *seven spirits*.

Remember This...

- ✓ The Seven Virtues (seven spirits) are:
  - *the spirit of the Lord*—the nature of Jesus
  - *the spirit of wisdom*—the ability to make the right decision
  - *the spirit of understanding*—the ability to understand everything
  - *the spirit of counsel*—the ability to give sound advice
  - *the spirit of might*—the power to do what God wants
  - *the spirit of knowledge*—the ability to know beyond human comprehension
  - *the spirit of the fear of the Lord*—the ability to respect God's will

## Ruler of All Rulers

Revelation 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood

God intends to establish his kingdom here on earth, and Jesus is the Chosen One who will rule over that kingdom. Even at his birth, an angel visited his mother, the virgin Mary, and told her she would have a son who would sit on a throne and **his kingdom would never end** (Luke 1:29-33). The promise that God would send his Son Jesus the first time to die on a cross was literally fulfilled. Therefore, many believe the promise that God will send his Son Jesus a second time to rule over all things will also be literally fulfilled.

Jesus is called:

- ✓ *The Faithful Witness*—Jesus was faithful in all the things God gave him to do. He was the Word Made Flesh. A faithful example of the very nature of the Living God (Jesus).
- ✓ *The Firstborn from the Dead*—Jesus was the first to die and be raised from the dead.

He never died again. Others have been raised from the dead, but they eventually died again.

- ✓ *The Prince (Ruler) of the Kings of the Earth*—This is his position in the world. World rulers do not yet realize that Jesus is in charge, but he is. The day will come when he will physically reign over every power on earth.

We are also told that Jesus loves us. He loves us with an everlasting love; a love that never fails. And the proof of his love is in the fact that he removes our sins through the shedding of his own blood—his crucifixion.

### What Others are Saying:

David Breese: We should never forget that we are what we are, and we are participants in the grand scenario of history, because Jesus Christ in his own blood has given forgiveness and cleansing. <sup>14</sup>

### Remember This...

- ✓ *The Faithful Witness*—the first coming of Jesus (his physical birth and life on earth)
- ✓ *The Prince of the Kings of the Earth*—the second coming of Jesus (the Millennium)

## We Are Subjects?

Revelation 1:6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Jesus has made us a kingdom of priests, a *royal priesthood* (1 Peter 2:9). This is what he has done for us. Here is what we can do for him. We can give him glory and dominion throughout all eternity. Jesus is our king and we are subjects in his kingdom. Because he has exalted us, we will exalt him.

## Focus on This!

Revelation 1:7 Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

Jesus *went away in the clouds* (Acts 1:9) and he is *coming back in the clouds* (Matthew 24:30). When he does, it will not be a secret. Even those who rejected and crucified him will see him. Everyone will know who he is, and those who rejected him will mourn because they were so blind to the truth.

### Remember This...

- Q: Why will the **unbelievers** mourn?  
A: Because they rejected him.

## The Beginning and The End

Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Jesus says he is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is everything that can be said about God from start to finish, from *A* to *Z*. He is the creator of all things, and will be the final judge of all things. He is the Lord of all.

In verse four of this chapter we noted that God is the eternally existing God; the God *who is, was, and is to come*. Here again in this verse he calls himself the same thing. He is equal to the Almighty God who has power over all things.

### What Others are Saying:

J. Vernon McGee: From an alphabet you make words, and Jesus is called the "Word of God"—the full revelation and intelligent communications of God. Jesus is the only alphabet you can use to reach God, my friend. The only language God speaks and understands is the language where Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega and all the letters in between. <sup>12</sup>

## My Spiritual Brother

Revelation 1:9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

In verse 8, Jesus introduced himself. Now, John introduces himself. He is the Christian's spiritual brother, a brother in Christ. He is also the Christian's companion, a companion in suffering for Christ's sake. All Christians are members of God's spiritual kingdom (the Church), a kingdom that teaches, and requires patience.

John was on the Isle of Patmos, a small island in the Mediterranean Sea (see [Illustration #1](#)), where he was imprisoned by the Roman Emperor Domitian. That explains his suffering.

What was his crime? Two things: 1) he would not deny the truth of the Bible, and 2) he would not deny the witness of Jesus Christ. John would rather be cast in prison and killed than reject Christ.

Becoming a servant of God will not keep a Christian out of trouble. We are not going to slide through life without problems. We are in the process of winning crowns. However, there are crosses to bear (persecution, 2 Timothy 3:12) before we receive them.

## Why Should I Worship on Sunday?

Revelation 1:10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,

By the time John was in prison, Christians had adopted the practice of worshipping on Sunday. There are two reasons for this: 1) Jesus arose on Sunday, and 2) Pentecost falls on

Sunday.

It was Sunday, the Lord's Day, and John was most likely praying when the Holy Spirit began to take control of him. While under the Holy Spirit's influence, John heard an unusual voice, a voice that sounded like a trumpet.

## Jesus Picked Seven

Revelation 1:11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

The voice told John to write on a scroll what he was about to see. That scroll is Revelation. By this time in history there were probably thousands of churches in the world. Out of all of those churches, Jesus picked seven. He even identified them in a precise order.

Looking back on history, we now realize why Jesus picked these seven particular churches, and why he listed them in that order. Their good and bad qualities and the problems they faced are ideal for instructing all of God's people, and those same qualities and problems have turned out to be prophecies revealing the future history of the Church.

What Others are Saying:

Hal Lindsey: If you are going to be an interpreter of the Scripture, you have to have a sanctified curiosity. You cannot study the Bible without having six friends. My six friends for studying the Bible are *who, what, where, when, why, and so what*. <sup>13</sup>

## Seven Golden Lampstands

Revelation 1:12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,

Upon hearing the voice, John turned around to see the speaker, but the first thing he saw was seven golden lampstands. In verse 20, we will learn that these seven golden lampstands represent the seven churches. These seven churches represent seven different periods of the Church Age. (see [Time Line #1](#)).

**Key Symbols:**

- ✓ Seven Golden Lampstands
  - [Seven churches/periods of the Church Age](#)
    - Ephesus
    - Smyrna
    - Pergamum
    - Thyatira
    - Sardis
    - Philadelphia
    - Laodicea

## Our Great High Priest

Revelation 1:13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.

Next, John saw where the voice came from. Someone who looked like the Son of Man was standing in the middle of the seven churches. He was wearing a long robe that went down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest.

What is the significance of this? Why this vision of Jesus standing in the middle of these seven churches dressed in the official attire of the high priest (Leviticus 8:7-9)? Jesus said, *For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them* (Matthew 18:20).

This vision means that Jesus will stand in the midst of the Church throughout the Church Age. He is the Great High Priest who is always with his Church; a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17-27); a priest who is always able to intercede for us.

## Hair as White as Snow

Revelation 1:14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.

When Jesus was crucified, his hair was probably a mess, so that the crown of thorns forced down on his head most likely created blood clots in his hair. Now his hair is like the hair of God (Daniel 7:9) in Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days. It shines with the pure white brightness of heaven.

While out in the wilderness, Moses told the Hebrews, *The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God* (Deuteronomy 4:24). The eyes of Jesus were burning like a blazing fire as he looked over the seven churches. Nothing escaped his penetrating glare. He could see every good deed and every bad deed for generations to come.

## Rise Up and Crush Your Enemies

Revelation 1:15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

In the Old Testament, God told the Hebrews to rise up and crush their enemies with hoofs of bronze (Micah 4:13). Here we see that the feet of Jesus were like burning bronze. This is a reminder that he will judge everyone. *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

His voice roared like the mighty waves of the ocean. It was the voice of the one who spoke everything into existence (creation, Genesis 1:1-31), the voice of the one who will raise the dead (the Rapture, Revelation 4:1,2), the powerful voice of the one who has authority over all creation (Psalm 33:6-9).

**Remember This...**

- ✓ Jesus is our GOD (Revelation 1:8).
- ✓ He is our great HIGH PRIEST (Revelation 1:13).
- ✓ He is our JUDGE (Revelation 1:15).

### What Others are Saying:

Hal Lindsey: John was put in a kind of divine time machine, shot up to the twentieth (twenty-first) century and then brought back to the first century and told to write about what he had seen. He had to use phenomenal language to describe what he saw. <sup>14</sup>

## Sharper Than Any Two-Edged Sword

**Revelation 1:16** In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Jesus tells us the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches (Revelation 1:20). Whether these angels are divinely appointed spiritual leaders of the churches is much debated. Whatever they are, it is their responsibility to look after the churches. The fact that they are in the right hand of Jesus means they are his own precious, personal possession.

Scripture tells us the sharp double-edged (two-edged) sword represents the Bible. We read, *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus will deal with his Church through his Word. The Bible is a very efficient sword, a sword that stabs and cuts both ways. We would be wise to heed what the Bible has to say. He will judge us by its standards.

## The Shekinah Glory

Jesus is also known as the Sun of Righteousness and the Light of the World. Let there be no doubt, that when John looked upon Christ's face, he was seeing the "shekinah glory."

## Nothing Before or After

**Revelation 1:17** When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."

What would you do if you met Jesus face-to-face? John collapsed. But Jesus did not leave him lying there. He placed his right hand upon him and said, *Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last*. There were none before Jesus and there will be none after. Nothing came before him and nothing will come after. There never was a time when he did not exist, and there never will be a time when he does not exist. He is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 41:13).

### What Others are Saying:

David Breese: We are going to stand in the presence of one who occupies a throne, from which the heavens and the earth flee away, and we will see Jesus Christ, not

now simply as the Person of Galilee in the old days, but as the God who presides over history. <sup>1-5</sup>

## He Holds The Keys

Revelation 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Jesus said about himself:

- ✓ *I am the Living One.*
- ✓ *I was dead.*
- ✓ *I am alive for ever and ever.*

He has risen from the dead and will never die again. His crucifixion will not be repeated. He holds the keys, so he is in total control of death and hell. He conquered both by rising from the dead (Acts 2:31-36; resurrection), so John and any other Christian need not fear death or hell.

## Something to Ponder

- ✓ Why are people so afraid of Revelation when it is such a book of comfort? After all, Jesus has removed the sting of death and hell for those who follow him.

## Past, Present, and Future

Revelation 1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

What John had seen was not for his own personal knowledge. Jesus wanted it written down for all of God's people. *What you have seen* (Chapter 1) refers to the events we have covered so far in this chapter. Notice that several of Chapter 1's verses are written in the past tense (Revelation 1:9, 10, 12, 17). *What is now* (Chapters 2–3) refers to the events of the present Church Age. They describe seven churches which actually existed when John had this vision, but they were selected for this revelation because they reveal aspects of the seven periods of the Church Age. *What will take place later* (Chapters 4–22) refers to future events that will take place after the Church Age is over. They reveal what will happen during the Tribulation Period plus what will happen during the Millennium and beyond. That is why this book is divided into three sections: 1) The Church Age, 2) From The Rapture to The Second Coming, and 3) The Millennium and Beyond (see Time Lines: #1, #2, and #3).

### Warning!

- ✓ **The events in Revelation must be kept in their proper time periods. John's vision in Chapter 1 is of *past events*. They will not be repeated. The events in Chapters 2–3 are *present events*. They do not have anything to do with *future events* found in Chapters 4–22. The stage is now being set for these future events, *but they will not be fulfilled until after the Church Age is over.***

## Key Point

- ✓ It is wrong to divide the Bible by shifting events from one time period to another.

## The Bible Interprets Itself

Revelation 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

## Key Symbols:

- ✓ Seven Stars
  - angels of the seven churches
- ✓ Seven Lampstands
  - seven churches

To avoid any misunderstanding, God often uses the Bible to interpret itself. Jesus clearly identified the seven stars in his right hand as the angels of the seven churches. Again, whether they are literal angels or great spiritual leaders is debatable, but they clearly have authority over their respective churches. The seven lampstands signify the seven churches. They also foretell the history of the Church from Pentecost to the Rapture.

## Something to Ponder

- ✓ A mystery is a hidden truth that has not been made known before. Until it is revealed, it is meaningless to the reader. Once it is revealed, it ceases to be a mystery and becomes a revelation.

## Study Questions

- ✓ How did Jesus make his message known to John?
- ✓ Should we be afraid of Revelation?
- ✓ Who will see Jesus when he returns?
- ✓ What is the relevance of the seven churches today?
- ✓ What is the importance of the high priest?

[Go to Answers](#)

## Chapter Wrap-up

- ✓ God promised a blessing to those who read, hear, and keep the Word of God. ([Revelation 1:3](#))
- ✓ Christ is the Ruler of All Rulers, and the day will come when he will reign over all the nations of the earth. ([Revelation 1:5](#))
- ✓ Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. He is everything from the beginning to the end. ([Revelation 1:8](#))

- ✓ **The seven lampstands symbolize seven churches and seven church periods. Each church represents one of the seven periods of the Church Age. ([Revelation 1:12, 20](#))**
  - ✓ **Jesus is the Great High Priest of the Church. He works on our behalf to reconcile our relationship with God that has been damaged by sin. ([Revelation 1:13](#))**
  - ✓ **Jesus holds the keys to death and hell since he conquered both through his death and resurrection. ([Revelation 1:18](#))**
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