

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 343 – December 9th – Revelation 1:1-20

Introduction to Revelation

Author

There is much discussion concerning the authorship of this (and each of the elements of the Johannine literature). This book was written by one who could be identified among the churches of Asia Minor simply by the name John. It may be argued that this fits none better than John the Apostle. Witherington, however, stresses that the author classifies himself as among the 'prophets' rather than the apostles. He concludes, "In short the author is John the seer who offers up prophetic testimonies and proclamations. He does not identify himself as an apostle, nor does he call himself the Beloved Disciple or, for that matter, the Elder (see 2 and 3 John)... Yet John the seer has some sort of relationship with those who wrote the rest of the Johannine corpus or with their communities or with both. In my view John the seer is a prophet from the Johannine community operating at a time when there is apparently no apostolic presence left in the community."

Date and Background

The book was probably written in the time of the Emperor Domitian (about 90-95 AD). Domitian regularly used the form of punishment known as relegation which in one form (*deportatio ad insulam*) meant deportation to an island where one enjoyed a degree of freedom. Witherington comments, "It is very possible that John was suffering such a lifetime ban from the western coast of Asia Minor, hence the urgency to write to his converts. Note that he nowhere states that he hopes to come to them soon. Indeed he only speaks of Jesus coming quickly."

Witherington adds, "If it is true that John had suffered banishment from Asia Minor, from a sociological point of view this strongly suggests that he was someone important not only in a general sense as I have just suggested but also as a leader in the churches of Asia Minor, and not merely as a peripheral prophet. This would explain why he takes it upon himself to exhort these various churches – he has some intimate knowledge of their spiritual and social conditions. Writing before the time of the monarchical bishops but probably after the time when the apostles were present in the region, John sought to assert his prophetic authority to help these churches get through a dark period of oppression and suppression that sometimes led to martyrdom."

There is evidence of the practice of emperor-worship which became widespread at this time. It was written to encourage embattled Christians to see that the last word is not with Satan or with the kingdoms of this world but with God and his Christ. The heavenly vision is to enable them to rise above the perplexity of their present experience and to trust God and remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

Rhetorical Form

Witherington comments, "Instead of pretending to be an ancient luminary, while actually writing 'history' in the guise of prophecy, John grounds his work in his own historical situation. He begins by addressing particular congregations dealing with specific issues. The 'attachment of an epistolary format to the visions, along with the personal identification of John, lifts the book out of the realms of pseudonymous apocalypses and places it within the context of real churches with specific problems in a fairly limited setting.' [Fekkes] John knows his audience and their issues, and he reflects a detailed knowledge of their geographical, historical, political, and religious circumstances. But what we find in this book should hardly be called mere prophetic letters. The epistolary form that frames this work involves too little of the document to be seen as a defining feature. No, John wishes to unveil

some of the revelation, in particular the revelatory visions, he has received from God and to do so in a manner that exhorts and comforts his audience. I tend to agree with Fekkes that the initial phrase 'revelation of Jesus Christ' is not some technical term for the genre of the work or the manner of the revelation or some specific sort of vision experience, but rather an indication that all that follows ultimately comes from God and is divine revelation."

Witherington continues by suggesting that the "command to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches (plural; cf., e.g., 2:7, 11, 17; 3:6, 13, 22)... refers not to what is said within each individual letter but to the contents of the rest of the work beginning with Rev. 4.

The rhetorical hyperbole in both the images and language of the work often involves caricature. Witherington comments, "Such is the stuff of polemics. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these are polemics about real persons and entities. While the language is not descriptive in any literal sense, it is none the less referential, which is also in keeping with the apocalyptic prophecy in this work."

Witherington comments, "John's revelation comes to him at a time when the imperial cult was increasingly being used as the social glue to bind each major Asian city, but also the province, together... These observations raise important questions about how particularistic John's Revelation really was intended to be. Are his symbols really multivalent (or universal) in character, or are they particularistic? Or do they involve the use of universal symbols in a particular way? It is my view that in fact the lattermost option is the case. John's Revelation is on target for his Asian audience, but the symbols he uses are flexible enough that they could and would be appropriately used to address many another situation of crisis in church life."

Moreover, the dramatic language was designed to do more than entertain or even inform. Callahan writes, "Those first ancient auditors of the Apocalypse came together not merely to be informed, but to be transformed, to undergo a collective change in consciousness, an aspiration that makes modern individual and group reading practices trivial by comparison, with the possible exception of the reading of wills. Reading the Apocalypse aloud, and hearing the Apocalypse read aloud, was effectual: through exhortations and exclamations, threat and thunder, the reading of the Apocalypse moved its hearers, affected them; the text *did* something to them."

Structure

Witherington suggests that "The storm centre of the debate about the work centres on Rev. 6-19. Is this a continuous chronological series of revelations, or does it represent a two- or threefold repetition of the same sequence? Put another way, are the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls or cups describing the same reality, perhaps with some variation?" Witherington suggests, "Perhaps the most helpful discussion of the structure and composition of Revelation is that of Bauckham [*Climax of Prophecy*]. It is the most helpful not least because he shows how both scholars who stress recapitulation and those who stress progression in the central section of Rev. 6-19 are partially correct. Bauckham stresses that the structure of the book, which is crucial to understanding its meaning must have been recognisable in oral performance (1:3), which requires clear linguistic markers; that is, it requires repetition of certain key terms and phrases." He quotes Bauckham who writes, "The three series are so connected that the seventh seal-opening includes the seven bowls. Thus each series reaches the same end, but from starting points progressively closer to the end. This is why the three series of judgments are of progressive severity."

There are many different suggestions concerning the main divisions of this book. Bauckham suggests the following structure:

1:1-8	Prologue
1:9-3:22	Inaugural vision of Christ and seven messages to churches
4:1-5:14	Inaugural vision of heaven leading to three series of sevens and two intercalations

6:1-8:1; 8:3-5	Seven seals
8:2; 8:6-11:19	Seven trumpets
12:1-14:20; 15:2-4	The story of God's people in conflict with evil
15:1; 15:5-16:21	Seven bowls
17:1-19:10	Babylon the harlot
19:11-21:8	Transition from Babylon to New Jerusalem
21:9-22:5	The New Jerusalem, the bride
22:6-21	Epilogue

Bennie Wolvaardt suggests that the Book can be divided into seven main sections, each covering the same period from the incarnation to the second coming but from a different point of view. While these are in one sense parallel cycles, there is yet development and progress – the latter parts focus progressively more on the final judgement and the new heavens and new earth. He suggests that the sections are chiastically arranged:

- A Chs 1-3 Christ and his battling and suffering church on earth
- B Chs 4-7 Persecution and trials of the church
- C Chs 8-11 Unbelievers are warned and punished
- D Chs 12-14 The church is victorious because of Christ's victory over Satan
- C* Chs 15-16 Unbelievers are judged
- B* Chs 17-19 Those who persecuted the church are judged
- A* Chs 20-22 Christ and his victorious church in the new earth and heaven

"This arrangement highlights the centrality of the role of Christ in the history of the world and in the well-being of his church. It also brings out the difference in emphasis between the first three parts and the last three. In the first three the emphasis is on the suffering of the church. In the last three it is on the judgment of the church's enemies and Satan." (*How to Interpret the Bible*, p.307).

Literary Style

The book of Revelation is generally classed with Apocalyptic literature on account of its symbolism and its theme of the establishment of God's kingdom. However, it is unlike other apocalyptic literature in that it claims to be prophecy – to continue the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. Witherington calls it 'apocalyptic prophecy' and suggests that it "reflects the confluence of the Jewish prophetic and sapiential traditions." He suggests that the "major cause of the shift from traditional prophecy to apocalyptic was ... the conviction that God's people were living at the dawn of or actually in the eschatological age."

Interpretation

Through the centuries the book of Revelation has been interpreted in a variety of ways. The principle views can be summed up as follows:

The 'preterist' view – understands the Seer to be wholly preoccupied with the church of his day. The book was full of meaning for the people to whom it was written, but has little direct relevance for us.

The 'historicist' view – sees the book as an inspired forecast of the whole of human history. The history of such an approach to interpretation exposes its folly. In the words of S. A. Cartledge, "No one who studies the widely divergent conclusions reached by this school through the centuries is likely to become a member of this school and believe in the particular scheme which makes his own days necessarily the last days."

The 'futurist' school – Apart from the first few chapters, the book is entirely concerned with what will happen at the end of the age. This tends to rob the book of significance for all generations except the last.

The 'idealist' view – argues that the book is not concerned with particular events but with ideas and principles. Morris comments, "This secures its relevance for all periods of the church's history. But its refusal to see a firm historical anchorage seems to most students dubious to say the least."

None of these traditional approaches to the interpretation of the book of Revelation is adequate. For all its peculiarity, the interpretation of Revelation requires the same disciplines that must be applied to any other NT book. It was written out of and into a particular historical context, a context which shapes the book and its message. Yet, at the same time it forms part of the larger story of the purposes of God in history, purposes set forth in the sweep of Scripture from its first page to its last and purposes which centre in the Lord Jesus Christ: it therefore needs also to be read in canonical context. Last, but by no means least, we who read this book are also embraced in the drama of the Scripture story: in this way, this book, as with every book of Scripture, speaks also to us. It will not do to look for hermeneutical shortcuts.

Of its first century setting Witherington comments, "The text's meaning must be understood in terms of the plausibility structure that existed between the original author and audience of this work. On the one hand, what the text meant back then is what it still means today, though of course with multivalent images it can have ever new applications and fresh significance. On the other hand, what the original author and audience could not possibly have understood the text to mean (e.g., the Beast is the European Common Market, or the anti-Christ is the Pope, etc.) cannot be the meaning of the text today either, if one believes meaning is not in the eye of the beholder but rather resides in the text, encoded by the original author."

Furthermore, there are over 500 allusions to the OT in the 404 verses in this book. Peterson writes, "No one has any business reading the last book who has not read the previous sixty-five... Much mischief has been done by reading Revelation in isolation from its canonical context." (*Reversed Thunder*).

The Text

Beckwith states that "The text of the Apocalypse is less certainly settled than that of any other book in the New Testament" (*The Apocalypse of John*, p.411). This is partly due to Revelation being omitted from several of the older MSS (Witherington writes, "Indeed there really is no Western text of Revelation"), and partly due to the peculiarity of style, grammar and vocabulary which led to scribal errors and emendations.

The Last Word

Let the last word again go to Witherington who writes, "The book of Revelation has much to tell us about 'what was, and is, and is to come.' It is our job to have ears capable of hearing what John says on all of these matters. If we do so, we will learn that God's yes to life is louder than evil's and death's no to it, that justice and redemption will one day prevail on earth, and that this is Good News coming in the form of a 'revelation from Jesus Christ,' which is to say coming from one who has both experienced death and triumphed over it. It is Christ who knows what is above and beyond our present mundane historical concerns and situation. He alone is worthy and is able to reveal such profound truths. Bearing these things in mind, we must now take up the challenge of working through the text of Revelation itself, praying that the scales will fall from our eyes as the seals are opened and that we will understand something more about the vision glorious."

Works frequently referenced in these notes on the book of Revelation

Morris, Leon	<i>The Revelation of St John</i> (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1969
Mounce, Robert H	<i>The Book of Revelation</i> (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977
Peterson, Eugene H	<i>Reversed Thunder</i> , San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1991
Witherington, Ben	<i>Revelation</i> (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003

Verse 1

Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ, ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ,

ἀποκαλυψις, εως f revelation

Mounce says that "The term as used here is not a literary classification, but an indication of the nature and purpose of the book." The work has similarities with non-canonical Jewish apocalyptic literature but it is also distinctly different.

The opening phrase could be understood in one of several ways:

- i) A revelation *about* Jesus Christ which God gave John to show...
- ii) A revelation *from* Jesus Christ which God gave Jesus to pass on to his servants...

Most probably it indicates that the revelation comes from Christ even though it is passed on via an angel.

ἔδωκεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s δίδωμι

δεικνυμι show, point out, reveal

δουλος, ου m slave, servant

δει impersonal verb it is necessary, must

ταχος, ους n speed, quickness; ἐν τ.

speedily, quickly, soon

Morris says that the prophetic perspective is sometimes foreshortened, "In other words the word may refer primarily to the certainty of the events in question." But Witherington comments, "The author anticipates that much of what he has seen is likely to be on a near historical horizon not over 2,000 years hence." Wilcock draws attention to the contrast between these words and Dan 2:28. The last days have now dawned. The book of Revelation is a drama of the last days. Mounce says, "History is not a haphazard sequence of unrelated events but a divinely decreed ordering of that which must come to pass. It is a logical necessity arising from the nature of God and the revelation of his purpose in creation and redemption."

σημαινω indicate, make known

"The Greek verb carries the idea of figurative representation. Strictly speaking it means to make known by some sort of sign... Thus it is admirably suited to the symbolic character of the book. This should warn the reader not to expect a literal presentation of future history, but a symbolic portrayal of that which must yet come to pass." Mounce.

ἀποστελλω send, send out

Mounce suggests that ἀγγέλου may here have the general meaning 'messenger' and could refer to Christ himself. Witherington, however, comments, "The revelation ... is mediated through an angel, which is typical of apocalyptic literature. This may provide the clue to the reference to the angels of the churches shortly after this introduction. Just as the word is mediated to John through an angel so it is mediated to the churches through angels, for this is visionary material that requires special handling and care."

The author does not call himself a prophet, but, in a manner similar to Paul in his letters, styles himself δουλος – though this is a term used in the OT of the prophets (cf. Amos 3:7).

Verse 2

ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσα εἶδεν.

μαρτυρεω bear witness, testify

Morris suggests an epistolary aorist.

μαρτυρια, ας f testimony, witness

ὅσος, η, ον correlative pronoun, as much as;

pl. as many as, all

εἶδεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s ὁραω see

The final clause is appositional and defines the scope of the initial phrases. Witherington comments, "Notice the language used here – the testimony of Jesus was something signified to John through an angel. Thus we are meant to think of images being given to John, an indirect means of revelation. Clearly we are not to think of these images as snapshots of heaven since they draw on and modify OT images over and over again, with which our author was already familiar."

Verse 3

μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες
τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ
ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

μακαριος, α, ον blessed, fortunate, happy

The first of seven beatitudes (cf. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). For this one, cf. Lk 11:28. Bauckham comments, "Together they spell out the adequate response to John's prophecy (reading/hearing and keeping: 1:3; 22:7; faithfulness as far as death: 14:13; 22:14; readiness for the Lord's coming: 16:15) and the fulness of divine blessing that attends that response (rest from labours: 14:13; invitation to the Lamb's marriage supper: 19:9; participation in the first resurrection: 20:6; the tree of life and entry into the new Jerusalem: 22:14; but these are only *representative* of the complete blessing indicated by the number seven). The seven beatitudes comprise a kind of summary of Revelation's message."

ἀναγινωσκω read, read in public worship

The book was written as a letter (see the following verse) to be read (out loud) in the churches. B Ramsay writes, "We do wrong to neglect this book of Scripture because of its supposed difficulty. God has spoken of the blessing which shall come to those who read or hear these words and take them to heart."

τηρεω keep, observe, maintain
γεγραμμένα Verb, perf pass ptc, n nom/acc pl
γραφω
καιρος, ου m time (occasion rather than
extent), appointed time, season, age

Used here and elsewhere in an eschatological sense to indicate a time of crisis or a decisive moment.

ἐγγύς adv near

Witherington comments, "These words are given so that they might be kept. In short, the function of these prophecies is hortatory. They are not given to satisfy idle curiosity about the future. They are imperatival, entailing a call to action. Unlike in some apocalyptic works, here the revelation is to be unsealed, not sealed up. It is to become known, not hidden for some remote future generation to discover. For John, since the eschatological time is at hand, the time for unsealing the revelation is now."

Verse 4

Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ·
χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ἔρχομένου,
καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ
ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ,

ἑπτα seven

ἐκκλησια, ας f congregation, church

These may have been seven churches with which John was particularly associated. Ramsay suggests that the towns mentioned were regional centres of the Roman province of Asia. However, the number seven is also indicative of completeness – the letter is for all churches.

χαρις, ιτος f grace

εἰρηνη, ης f peace

ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος A Christian elaboration of Ex. 3:14-16. "In the terrible days in which he was writing, John stayed his heart on the changelessness of God." Barclay. Witherington comments, "He is behind, among and ahead of the church."

ἐνώπιον prep with gen before

θρονος, ου m throne

"An unusual way of designating the Holy Spirit" Morris. Signifying the Spirit of God in all the fulness of his activity and power. Witherington, however, suggests that "the reference is to the angels who are the eyes of the great King, keeping watch over the church for the Lamb." Cf. Rev 5:6; 3:1; Heb 1:14. Caird comments, "Coins from the early part of Domitian's reign portray the emperor's heir, who had died in childhood, as an infant Zeus playing with the stars, as though he had compensation by a cosmic dominion for the earthly empire he was never to inherit. The use that John makes of seven spirits, lamps, or stars was a direct challenge to the imperial myth of the divine ruler, and, since defiance of emperor worship was one of the main themes of his vision, it is reasonable to suppose that the challenge was intended."

Verse 5

καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ὁ
πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν
βασιλέων τῆς γῆς. Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ
λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ
αἵματι αὐτοῦ –

Wilcock sees the three phrases of the first half of this verse as a reference to the threefold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. Aune suggest the three images may echo Ps 89:24-40.

μαρτυς, μαρτυρος dat pl μαρτυσιν m
witness

πιστος, η, ον faithful, trustworthy

"Throughout Revelation the word [μαρτυς] is associated with the penalty of death which results from a firm and constant witness (cf. 2:13; 11:3; 17:6). To the Asian Christians about to enter into a time of persecution, Jesus is presented as the faithful witness. He is the model of how to stand firm and never compromise the truth of God (cf. 1 Tim 6:13)." Mounce.

πρωτοτοκος, ον first-born, first
νεκρος, α, ον dead

Cf. Col 1:18; Ps 89:27. The risen Christ exercises sovereign control.

ἀρχων, οντος m ruler
βασιλευς, εως m king
γη, γης f earth

Witherington comments, "All three of these traits are presented as models for John's audience – they should be faithful unto death, they will receive a good resurrection like Christ's, and they will rule with him over the earth (see Rev. 20). Put another way, John is reassuring his audience that the major factor that they might fear at this juncture, namely a shameful death at the hands of their own rulers, will be overcome, as it was for Christ. Neither death nor rulers are beyond the control of Jesus. He is ruling over them, and so Christians should not fear such authorities."

ἀγαπῶντι Verb, pres act ptc, m dat s ἀγαπαω
love

Note the use of present and aorist participles: the abiding love came to expression in a particular act.

λύσαντι Verb, aor act ptc, m dat s λυω
loose, release, set free

The TR, following later uncials and most minuscules reads λουσαντι, 'washed'

ἁμαρτια, ας f sin
αἷμα, ατος f blood

Verse 6

καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ – αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν.

ἱερευς, εως m priest

Cf. Ex 19:5-6; Isa 61:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9. "Christ is said to save believers *from* sin, but *for* the task of being a saved zone on earth, and priests to the world and to God's people. There is nothing here about a clerical class of Christians called to be priests. Rather the whole kingdom of believers are to be priests." Witherington.

δοξα, ης f glory; praise, honour
κρατος, ους n might, power, dominion
αἰωνων Noun, gen pl αἰων, αἰωνος m age, eternity

Witherington comments, "In AD 90, shortly before this work was written, the Roman Empire received a new name – *Imperium Aeternum*, the eternal empire – and the Emperor was meant to be the eternal king, as the court poet Statius suggested to Domitian. But John's theology is that Jesus alone is King of Kings, and his followers are not slaves but rather kings and priests."

Verse 7

Ἴδου ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἴτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. ναί, ἀμήν.

Combines quotations from Dan 7:13; Zech 12:10-13:1. This combination occurs also in Matt 24:30.

νεφελη, ης f cloud
ὄψεται Verb, fut act indic, 3 s ὄραω
οἴτινες Pronoun, m nom pl ὅστις, ἥτις, ὁ τι
who, which, whoever, whichever
ἐκκεντεω pierce

"The Fourth Gospel indicates that the piercing of Jesus' side by the Roman soldier fulfilled the Scripture, 'They shall look on him whom they have pierced' (Jn 19:37 quoting Zech 12:10). The reference in Revelation should not be limited to that incident or, as in Zechariah 12:10, to the tribes of Israel, but extends to all those of every age whose careless indifference to Jesus is typified in the act of piercing." Mounce.

Jesus is here presented as the 'pierced one'. Both Jews and Gentiles conspired in his death, but he will now return in triumph and glory to the shame and horror of all who despised him.

κοπτω cut; midd mourn, wail, lament

"The mourning of Zechariah 12:10-12 was that of repentance, but the mourning of Revelation is the remorse accompanying the disclosure of divine judgement at the coming of Christ (cf. 16:9, 11, 21)." Mounce.

φυλη, ης f tribe, nation, people
ναι yes, yes indeed, certainly

Verse 8

Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ἼΩ, λέγει κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

Ὁν τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ἼΩ cf. 21:6.

"God is the sovereign Lord of all that takes place in the entire course of human history." Mounce.

This name and title of God is here applied to the Lordly Christ. Compare 1:8; 1:17; 21:6 and 22:13 and also Isa 44:6. Bauckham notes, "The one designation of God which appears in Revelation as a self-designation by God also appears as a self-designation by Christ.... He has the first word, in creation, and the last word, in new creation. Therefore, within John's literary structure, he speaks twice, declaring himself Alpha and Omega first, before the outset of John's vision (1:8), and last, in declaring the eschatological accomplishment of his purpose for his whole creation: 'it is done' (21:6)."

παντοκρατωρ, ορος m Almighty

This word occurs only 10 times in the NT, nine of which are in Revelation – the tenth being in a quote from the OT. It is grounded in the OT revelation of God's character (cf. 2 Sam 5:10; Jer 5:14; Hos 12:5; Amos 3:13; 4:13). "The stress in this book is not on divine sovereignty in the abstract but on the exercise of that sovereignty on behalf of the church. The Lord is in control, the churches are being reassured, despite appearances to the contrary." Witherington.

Verse 9

Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

συγκοινωνος, ου m sharer, participant
θλιψις, εως f trouble, suffering

"Refers to the suffering which accompanies faithfulness to Christian principles (cf. Jn 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12) but extends to include the first period of intensified affliction which precedes the establishment of the... kingdom." Mounce.

ὑπομονη, ης f patience, endurance

"The order of the three is instructive. Since the present is a time of tribulation and the kingdom a period of future blessedness, believers must during the interim period exercise that kind of patient endurance which was exemplified by Jesus." Mounce.

νησος, ου f island

Patmos was one of the islands off the coast of Asia Minor regularly used for political banishment. Ramsay first suggested that it was a penal settlement in which John was sentenced to hard labour in the quarries, but there is no evidence to support this view. Witherington suggests that the aorist ἐγενόμην may indicate that John had returned to the mainland before the letter was completed – perhaps after the death of Domitian.

μαρτυρια, ας f see v.2

Verse 10

ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος

'In the Spirit' Mounce says "refers to a state of spiritual exultation best described as a trance. Peter at Joppa (Acts 10:10; 11:5) and Paul at Jerusalem (Acts 22:17; cf. 2 Cor 12:2-4) had similar ecstatic experiences." Cf. 4:2; 17:3; 21:10. Witherington comments, "This use of the Spirit language is more like the references to the Spirit falling on the prophetic figures (see Ezek 3:12, 14) than like the NT discussions about being filled with the Spirit."

κυριακος, η, ον belonging to the Lord

Some have argued that the phrase refers to the eschatological 'day of the Lord' and that John is carried forward by the Spirit to receive revelation concerning that day. Mounce says, "It is more probable that this is the first mention in Christian literature of the Lord's day as a technical term for the first day of the week. It is the Lord's day because on the first day of the week Christ rose victorious from the grave. As paganism had set aside a day on which to honour their emperor, so also Christians chose the first day of the week to honour Christ." In contrast with the Jewish sabbath which ends the week, this day marks the dawn of a new creation.

ὀπισω prep with gen after, behind
μεγας, μεγαλη, μεγα large, great
σαλιξ, ιγγος f trumpet; trumpet blast

Verse 11

λεγοῦσης· Ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἐφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.

βλεπω see, look

γράφον Verb, aor act imperat, 2 s γραφω
βιβλιον, ου n book, scroll

Witherington comments, "If βιβλίον here actually means book, Revelation was possibly one of the first Christian documents to be produced in book form."

πεμπω send
έπτα see v.4

Verses 12-20

"The Christians were a pitifully small remnant, persecuted by mighty forces. To all outward appearances their situation was hopeless. But it is only as Christ is seen for what he really is that anything else can be seen in its true perspective. So for these persecuted ones it was important that first of all the glory and the majesty of the risen Lord be brought out. In doing this John persistently makes use of words and concepts associated in the Old Testament with God. He does not hesitate to employ divine attributes to describe the glorious Christ." Morris.

Verse 12

Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ· καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς,

ἐπιστρεφω turn back, turn round, turn
ὅστις, ἣτις, ὅτι who, which
λαλεω speak, talk
ἐπιστρέψας Verb, aor act ptc, m nom s
ἐπιστρεφω
εἶδον Verb, aor act ind, 1s & 3pl ὁραω see
λυχνία, ας f lampstand, stand

Witherington comments, "John turns and sees seven gold lampstands or candlesticks, suggesting a temple setting."
Mounce comments, "λυχνία was a lampstand, not a candlestick. λυχνος was the portable lamp which was placed on the stand. Candles as we now know them were not in use.
"Exodus 25:31-37 records the instructions given to Moses for making the seven-branched lampstand of pure gold. In John's vision, however, there are seven separate lampstands, perhaps like those placed before the inner sanctuary by Solomon when he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 7:49). From Revelation 1:20 we learn that the lampstands signify the seven churches to whom the letters were addressed. The purpose of the church is to bear the light of the divine presence in a darkened world (Mt 5:14-16). Failing this, its reason for existence has disappeared (cf. Rev 2:5)."
Caird says that the church is the new Israel, but with this difference, that each local congregation of Christians is also the church in all its fullness.

χρυσους, η, ουν made of gold, golden

Verse 13

καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν·

μεσος, η, ον middle; ἐν μ., εἰς μ. among
ὁμοιος, α, ον like, of the same kind as

Cf. Dan 7:13. See also Rev 14:14.
Witherington comments, "Jesus is being identified with this human and yet more-than-human figure, who is seen in Daniel as a representative of God's people to God, and of God to God's people. While in Daniel the son of man is distinguished from the Ancient of Days, here the son of man is described as if he were the Ancient of Days."

ἐνδεδυμένον Verb, perf midd ptc, m acc s
ἐνδυω dress, clothe; midd put on,
wear

ποδηρης, ους m long robe

The clothing of the high priest (cf. Ex 28:4; 29:29).

περιεζωσμένον Verb, perf pass ptc, m acc s
περιζωννυμι wrap around (of clothes)
μαστος, ου m breast, chest
ζωνη, ης f belt

Morris points out that the girdle of the priest was a woven sash not a golden clasp. The latter is a symbol of royalty. Here are further symbols of Christ's threefold office of Prophet, Priest and King.

Verse 14

ἢ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκόν, ὡς χιῶν, καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός,

κεφαλη, ης f head
θριξ, τριχος f hair
λευκος, η, ον white, shining

Cf. the description of the 'Ancient of Days' in Dan 7:9-10.

ἐριον, ου n wool
χιων, ονος f snow
φλοξ, φλογος f flame
πυρ, ος n fire

Cf. Dan 10:6. "Expresses the penetrating insight of the one who is sovereign, not only over the seven churches, but over the course of history itself." Mounce.

Verse 15

καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ, ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν,

πους, ποδος m foot

ὁμοιος, α, ον like, of the same kind as

χαλκολιβανον, ου n and χαλκολιβανος, ου m brass (or copper) melted in a furnace and then polished

"The etymology of this Greek word (which occurs nowhere in the literature independent of Rev) is difficult but best understood as an alloy of gold or fine brass." Mounce.

καμινος, ου f furnace
πεπυρωμένης Verb, perf pass ptc, f gen s
πυροομαι burn; perf. be refined

Witherington writes, "The bronze feet refined in the furnace likely are meant to indicate his stability or unmoveableness. He is no god with feet of clay."

Peterson similarly, contrasting this vision with the statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2), writes, "The succession of kingdoms of this earth, no matter how impressive and powerful, is set on a base that is flawed. Christ's kingdom is set on a base that is as strong as its superstructure is magnificent. The bronze base is firm. Bronze is a combination of iron and copper. Iron is strong but it rusts. Copper won't rust but is pliable. Combine the two in bronze and the best quality of each is preserved, the strength of the iron and the endurance of the copper. The rule of Christ is set on this base: the foundation of his power has been tested by fire."

ὕδωρ, ὕδατος n water

"Suggesting the awe-inspiring power of a great waterfall." Mounce.

Verse 16

καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη, καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

δεξιός, α, ον right, δεξιά right hand
χειρ, χειρός f hand, power
ἀστὴρ, ερος m star

Cf. v.20. "That Christ has the full complement of stars in his right hand indicates his sovereign control over the churches. It may also imply protection (Jn 10:28)." Mounce.

στόμα, τος n mouth
ῥομφαία, ας f sword
δίστομος, ον double-edged
ὀξυς, εια, υ sharp, swift

Cf. Is 11:4; 49:2.

ἐκπορευομαι go or come out

The effective power of the word of Christ.

ὄψις, εως f face
ἥλιος, ου m the sun
φαινώ shine, give light
δυνάμει Noun, dat s δυναμεις

Cf. the transfiguration (Mt 17:2, see also Ex 34:29; Jud 5:31; Mt 13:43).

Verse 17

Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός· καὶ ἔθηκεν τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ λέγων· Μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος,

ὅτε conj when

εἶδον Verb, aor act ind, 1s & 3pl ὄραω see, observe

ἔπεσα Verb, aor act indic, 1s πιπτώ fall, fall down

πόδας Noun, acc pl πους, ποδος m foot

Cf. Josh 5:14; Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17; 10:15; Matt 17:6; Acts 26:14.

νεκρός, α, ον dead

Indicates that this is not an Oriental prostration designed to show respect but the physical effect of this tremendous vision.

ἔθηκεν Verb, aor act indic, 3s τιθημι place, set

δεξιός, α, ον see v.16

The same hand that holds the stars. Christ has the whole church in his hand yet he also cares for the needs of the individual.

ἐμὲ Pronoun, acc s ἐγώ
φοβεομαι fear, be afraid (of)

Cf. for instance Mt 14:27; 17:7.

πρῶτος, η, ον first, foremost

ἔσχατος, η, ον adj last, final

Means much the same as the 'Alpha and Omega' used of God in v.8 (see also 22:13). Recalls Is 44:6; 48:12, applying a divine title to Christ.

"This prerogative is three times claimed for the Lord Jehovah in Isaiah (41:4; 44:6; 48:12) and in like manner three times in this book (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). It is the expression of absolute Godhead: 'I am the first and the last, and beside me there is no God' (Is 44:6). He is from eternity to eternity, so that there is no room for any other. All creation comes forth from Him (Jn 1:1-3), and creation returns to Him again, as from whom and by whom and to whom are all things." Trent. In particular, in the context of the Book of Revelation, there is no place for any other Lord. Caesar is dethroned.

Verse 18

καὶ ὁ ζῶν – καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρός καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων – καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου.

ζῶω live, be alive

"The designation is based on OT references to 'the living God' (Josh 3:10; Ps 42:2; 84:2 etc.) and is used freely in the NT (Mt 16:16; Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26; etc.). It declares that in his essential nature Christ possesses life." Mounce. There is paradox here in the death of ὁ ζῶν.

αἰώνων Noun, gen pl αἰών, αἰῶνος m age, world order, eternity
 κλεις, εἶδος f key
 θάνατος, οὐ m death
 ᾄδης, οὐ m Hades, the world of the dead, death

The reference here is probably not to 'hell' but to the OT concept of the place of the dead. Caird comments, "By the resurrection he had not just resumed the eternal life which he had with the Father before the world began; he had entered upon a new victorious life in which death was for ever conquered. Not only had he burst out of the prison, he had carried away the keys. His followers may pass confidently into the dungeons of death and the grave, knowing that he holds the authority to unlock the gates and set them free."

Verse 19

γράφον ὃν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα.

γράφον Verb, aor act imperat, 2 s γραφῶ
 εἶδες Verb, 2nd aor act indic, 2 s ὄραω
 μελλῶ (before an infin) be going, be about, be destined

Mounce points out that, "Many commentators accept a threefold division of the verse, interpreting 'the things which thou sawest' as a reference to the vision of the Son of man (in the verses immediately preceding), 'the things that are' as referring to the present condition of the church in chapters 2 and 3, and 'the things which shall come to pass hereafter' in reference to the visions beginning in chapter 4 and continuing to the end of the book." However, Caird says that this is an oversimplification, "It is better to take the words ἃ εἶδες to mean the whole of John's vision, which in all its parts is equally concerned with the interpretation of past and present and future." Witherington similarly points out that "Rev 11 makes evident that the whole book involves the past, present and future."

Verse 20

τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὓς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου, καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσὶν, καὶ αἱ λυχνίαὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν.

μυστηριον, ου n secret, mystery

Something that men could never work out for themselves but which God has now made known. Cf. Dan 2:47.

ἄστηρ, ερος m see v.16

λυχνια, ας f see v.12

χρυσους, η, ουν see v.12

"Many explanations have been proposed for the angels. If they are human beings (Mt 11:10 and other verses would allow this), they could be prominent officials of the local congregations or delegates sent to Patmos to be entrusted with the letters. The use of 'angel' in the book of Revelation (it occurs some sixty times) favours identifying the angels with heavenly beings. They could be guardian angels (cf. Dan 10:13,20-21; Mt 18:10; Acts 12:15) or perhaps heavenly counterparts which came to be identified with the church. The most satisfactory answer, however, is that the angel of the church was a way of personifying the prevailing spirit of the church. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that all seven letters are addressed to separate angels, a strange phenomenon if they refer to anything but the church since the contents are obviously intended for the congregation as a whole." Mounce.