

**Historicist Approach:**

- John is given a vision of Christ, who announces that he is to write of things that would soon begin to take place, and which would extend through the entire age of the church.
- Seven churches in Asia received these letters, but they represent seven periods of church history, each exhibiting the special features of the respective original church.

**Preterist Approach:**

- Christ appears to John on Patmos, commissioning him to write things that would soon afterward find fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem.
- The letters reflect the conditions prevailing in seven churches in the Roman province of Asia prior to the Jewish war of A.D. 66–70.

**Futurist Approach:**

- While a prisoner on the isle of Patmos, John sees a vision of Christ, commanding him to write of events that would be fulfilled at the end of the present age, just prior to the Second Coming.
- Some futurists take the letters in the same manner as do the historicists, while others take them more as do the preterists or those taking the spiritual approach.

**Spiritual Approach:**

- The symbolic vision of Christ depicts His glorious character and sovereignty, conveying Christ's sovereign involvement in the affairs of the world and of the church, including his intimate concern for His suffering servants.
- The churches resemble churches that might exist at any time throughout the church age, and the letters are applicable to any churches that may share their conditions. The number seven is symbolic, suggesting application to the whole Christian church of all ages.

## Sermon Title: Unveiling the Risen Christ Among His Churches

Text: Revelation 1

**“We tend to approach Revelation as a puzzle to  
Solve instead of a person to behold.”**

### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Revelation Is

#### Revelation 1:1-3 (NLT)

1 This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, 2 who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near.

Notes:

#### **SPECIAL COMPARATIVE NOTE ON 1:1–3: “*must shortly take place ... the time is near*”**

Of the four approaches we are considering in this commentary, the early-date *preterist* is the most comfortable with such statements about near fulfillment, taken at their face value. This approach views the book as written shortly before a.d. 70 and predicting the fall of Jerusalem, which occurred in that year. Later-date *preterists* would apply the

fulfillment to the fall of Rome centuries after John's time or, possibly, to the downfall of Domitian.

*Historicists* would see the fulfillment as *beginning* shortly after John's time, but extending long beyond, through the entire age of the church.

To the *spiritual* interpreters, the time is always near, since the visions transcend any particular time period and may, in principle, recur or continue unceasingly throughout all times.

*Futurists* suggest that the terms "shortly" or "near" have some meaning other than that which first comes to mind. There are essentially two alternatives:

- (1) The word "shortly" means "quickly" or "suddenly"—thus meaning that there will be a rapidity of fulfillment whenever the proper time may come, but that may be thousands of years later than John's time. This view is taken by Walvoord, Ryrie, and Lange, among others. Though this may deal adequately with the word "shortly," it does not dispense with the problem of "the time is near."
- (2) The second alternative is to suggest that "shortly" means "soon," and that "the time is near" may be taken literally, but that John is speaking according to God's way of reckoning time and nearness. Since a day to the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day (2 Pet. 3:8), even an event two thousand years removed might be regarded as "near" from God's perspective. This is the view of Alford, Fausset, Vitringa, Henry Morris, and others. Perhaps the greatest question suggested by this proposal is whether the original human readers of Revelation would share God's perspective and would view such distant events as being "near."

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Revelation Is About

### Revelation 1:4-8 (NLT)

4 This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world. All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. 6 He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. 7 Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him—even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen! 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega--the beginning and the end," says the Lord God. "I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come--the Almighty One."

Notes:

### SPECIAL COMPARATIVE NOTE ON 1:7

**Behold, He is coming!** (v. 7).

But precisely what event is being announced?

The *futurist* approach takes this statement somewhat literally, seeing in it a prediction of the Second Coming of Christ in the clouds at the end of the present age. This seems to many to be the most natural way to understand the expression and is apt to be followed by most who favor the *historicist* and the *spiritual* approaches as well.

The *spiritual* approach may see this as one of several references to the Second Coming, though this approach is also at liberty to spiritualize the coming as does Rushdoony: "This Christ comes continually in the clouds of judgment over history."

The most elaborate arguments for an alternative meaning of this verse is presented by some *preterist* commentators, who suggest that the passage does not predict the literal Second Coming, but is a figurative description of Christ's coming in vengeance to destroy Jerusalem, not in person, but using the Roman armies in A.D. 70. This understands Christ's "coming" in the same way as does Rushdoony (see above), though limiting the reference to a single event. Such interpreters note the following considerations:

The principal features of the prediction are: (a) Christ **coming**, (b) His coming with **clouds**; (c) **every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him**; and (d) **all the tribes of the earth** [or land] mourning at His coming.

- (a) The expression **coming** of the Lord is used in many contexts that do not appear to be referring to the Second Coming (e.g., Rev. 2:5; 3:20; cf. Deut. 33:2; Isa. 19:1; Zech. 1:16; Mal. 3:1–2; Matt. 10:23), thus leaving open the possibility of another meaning here;
- (b) The specific language of the Lord coming **With clouds** is used in the Old Testament with reference to historic judgments not associated with the end of the world (Isa. 19:1; Ps. 104:3) and may be so understood here as well;

- (c) Jesus placed the time of His “coming with the clouds” within the lifetime of some of His contemporaries (Matt. 16:28; 24:30, 34; 26:64). This would allow one to understand **they who pierced Him** as the actual generation that crucified Christ, which would be the natural understanding to the literalist. In agreement with this suggestion, we find that the “coming of the Lord” is announced, elsewhere in Revelation, to be impending at the time of writing (3:11; 22:20);
- (d) The judgment of Jerusalem is implied by the expression **all the tribes of the earth** (which can be translated, “all the tribes of the land [Israel]”) **will mourn**. The Old Testament passage which is alluded to is a prophecy concerning “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:10). This view finds further support in the fact that Israel is divisible into tribes, whereas the earth is generally divided into nations.

Many will not find these arguments sufficient to overthrow the more dominant opinion, and the ultimate decision on the meaning of this passage will, in the final analysis, depend upon the reader’s view of Revelation as a whole.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Is Standing

#### Revelation 1:9-16 (NLT)

9 I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus. 10 It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. 11 It said, "Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea." 12 When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. 13 And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. 15 His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. 16 He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.

Notes:

#### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Says to Fearful Believers

##### **Revelation 1:17-20 (NLT)**

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the living one. I died, but look--I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave. 19 "Write down what you have seen--both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen. 20 This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

##### **NOTES:**

##### **SPECIAL COMPARATIVE NOTE ON 1:19**

***"The things which are, and the things which will take place after this."***

Dispensational *futurist* interpreters believe that **the things which are**, are the developments pertinent to the church age, and John's record of these things is found in chapters 2 and 3 of this book, in the form of the seven letters to the churches. Some dispensationalists think that the seven letters foresee the entire church age from John's day until the Rapture (see note: *The Interpretation of the Letters*, page 62).

The dispensationalists also believe that "these things" (Gr. *meta tauta*) in the phrase "after these things" (more literal than **after this**) is a reference to the church age. On this view, the recurrence of the phrase in Revelation 4:1 (see *futurist* note there) signals the Rapture of the church and the end of the church age.

***The things which will take place after this*** could be more literally translated “the things which are about to take place after these things,” a fact that is seized upon by *preterists* as another evidence for their belief that the fulfillment of the book would be quick in coming. If the book was written prior to A.D. 70, it would thus refer to the fall of Jerusalem.

## **Application:**

### **Three Practices for This Week:**

1. Read Revelation 1 aloud
  - With family, roommate, or friend
  - Ask: What is one obedience step I need to keep?
2. Write a one-sentence testimony of Jesus
  - Who He is
  - What He has done for you
  - Share it with one person this week
3. Create a “Fear-to-Worship” reflex
  - When anxious or overwhelmed by news:
  - Pause
  - Pray through Revelation 1
  - Picture Jesus reigning among His churches before scrolling

Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 51.

## **Life Group Discussion – Revelation 1**

### **Theme: Unveiling the Risen Christ Among His Churches**

#### **1. Get to Know You**

##### **Icebreaker (connection-focused):**

When you hear the word “*Revelation*,” what’s the first image, emotion, or thought that comes to mind (confusing, fascinating, scary, end-times charts, beasts, hope, etc.)?

##### **Follow-up (optional):**

Where do you think that impression came from (church background, movies/books, teaching you’ve heard, avoiding the book altogether)?

#### **2. Digging Deeper**

##### **Expectation Check:**

What do you expect Revelation to be “about,” and how does Revelation 1 challenge or correct that expectation?

##### **Re-centering Jesus:**

Which details in Revelation 1 most reshape or expand your view of Jesus?

### **Additional Digging Deeper Questions (to fill out the section):**

- Revelation 1:3 says there is a blessing for those who *read, hear, and keep* this book. Why do you think obedience (not just understanding) is emphasized so strongly at the very beginning?
- John describes Jesus standing *among* the lampstands (the churches). What does that communicate about Jesus' relationship to local churches—especially ones that are struggling or under pressure?
- How is the picture of Jesus in Revelation 1 similar to or different from how people often imagine Jesus today?

### **3. Living It Out (Application)**

#### **From Study to Obedience:**

What would it look like for you to “keep” Revelation rather than just study it?

#### **Personal Application:**

- What is one way Revelation 1 invites you to respond differently this week (in worship, courage, witness, or trust)?
- When fear or anxiety rises (news, culture, personal stress), how could the picture of Jesus in Revelation 1 help re-center your heart?

#### **Group Application (optional):**

What could it look like for our group to live as a “lampstand” in our community—bearing Christ's light in practical, visible ways?