

# REVELATION

## Chapter 1

### *Prologue*

**The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.**

Titles were not a part of the original texts of books of the NT, and so they were not considered an important and unchangeable part of the texts. In antiquity a title would be a strip or tag attached on the back of a roll; the title was also written inside the roll at the end of the text. Before such tags were attached, the “opening words of the document itself were sufficient to indicate its contents.” The earliest manuscripts of Revelation have the title ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου, “apocalypse/revelation of John,” taken from 1:1. As time went on, this title was sometimes expanded, such as ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου τοῦ θεολόγου καὶ εὐαγγελιστοῦ, “apocalypse/revelation of John the theologian and evangelist.” (CC p. 37)

The Christians suffering under the emperor’s persecution in Asia Minor direly needed a vision of God’s sovereignty to sustain them. The words of The Revelation, recording the vision of the seer John, offered them the hope they needed. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

The Greek text uses the word *oikonomia*, which signifies God’s plan or purpose in the management of the world. How astounding to realize that God’s best plan was to use the suffering and death of Christ and the weakness of His followers for the fulfillment of His purposes, which He manifested in Christ! (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

**1:1-8** Despite the promised opening blessing, people are resistant to hearing unsettling prophecies, let alone acting upon them by making changes in their lives. But take heart! Jesus Christ stands at the center of this every other Scripture. His first coming resulted in forgiveness and life for you, and His second coming will perfect the new creation. Given our continual failure to live up to such a high calling, we need to hear again and again the truth of our identity in Christ. When the Gospel of God’s grace is preached, the Church may speak a hearty “Amen” in its conviction that Jesus will return and then perfect our redemption. (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

**1:1-3** Within the original text, the first words, “the revelatory-unveiling [ἀπο-κάλυψις] of Jesus Christ,” serve as a title for the whole book. The rest of the introduction (1:1–3) then serves as a brief commentary on the title. (CC p. 37)

**1:1** *revelation*. Apocalypse (“unveiling” or “disclosure”). (CSB)

The noun is singular, describing the entire Book as a unified revelation from and about Jesus. (TLSB)

Ἀποκάλυψις—This appears only here in Revelation, but eighteen times in the NT. Often it is used in reference to the second coming of Christ and/or to the judgment at the End (Rom 2:5; 1 Cor

1:7; 2 Thess 1:7). It is used also to refer to a revelation from Jesus Christ (2 Cor 12:1; Gal 1:12). The meaning here depends on what kind of a genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is understood to be. If it is subjective then it is a revelation which comes *from* Jesus Christ. If it is an objective genitive then it is a revelation *about* Jesus Christ, that is, the prophetic message reveals something about Jesus Christ. Interpreted in light of the entire prophecy, both are true. That is, the revelation comes from Jesus Christ, and it is a revelation about Jesus Christ. Through everything that Jesus Christ reveals, he reveals (that is, unveils) his exalted glory and dominion. In 1 Pet 1:7 the expression ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ emphasizes the revelation, that is, the unveiling of Jesus Christ in his glory at the End (see also 1 Pet 4:13). So this commentary understands the sense of the word here. It refers to the revelation from Christ which is about Christ. Thus the translation “revelatory-unveiling.” (CC p. 33)

While the mediating agents of the revelation are Jesus Christ and his angel(s), the perceptible means by which John receives it are visions and/or visionary experiences. This is indicated by two verbs in 1:1, both done by Christ: δεῖξαι (aorist infinitive of δείκνυμι), “to show,” and ἐσήμανεν, “communicated in visible signs.” John also describes his reception in 1:2 with the verb εἶδεν (second aorist of ὁράω), “saw.” At the very beginning John is alerted to the fact that the primary means of his perception of the revelation will be visions (1:1), and he tells the reader(s) and hearer(s) that he will describe for them what “he saw” (1:2). However, the audible word will also be used, as indicated by λόγον, “word,” ἀκούοντες, “who hear,” and λόγους, “words” (1:2–3). Though visions will be used to convey the revelation to John, they only serve as visual aids in the revelation. The communication from John to the reader(s) and hearer(s) takes place through words. Of primary importance in the revelation is the word, the meaning and witness of the prophetic message which is portrayed by the visions (e.g., 7:13–17). *Thus the prophetic message of Revelation is the Word of God given in and with visual form.* (CC p. 38)

*of Jesus Christ.* † Means primarily “by or from Jesus Christ”; secondarily it is also an unveiling “about Jesus Christ.” A claim of inspiration. (CSB)

In Revelation Jesus will unfold as much as we need to know in order to face the future. He wants us to be fully confident of his final victory over our enemies. (PBC p. 9)

God first gave this revelation to Jesus. All that Jesus tells us came from the Father (John 14:10; Hebrews 1:1, 2). What Jesus received from the Father he gave to his angel to relay, in turn, to John. John carefully traces the source of his message so his readers can be confident that what he writes, like the rest of inspired Scriptures, is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). (PBC p. 10)

*to show* – ἐσήμανεν—This verb denotes communication by means of visual signifiers, or a communication which is aided or confirmed by visual perception. In the gospel according to John the noun σημεῖον (“sign”) is used to designate miracles of Jesus (Jn 2:11). In the LXX σημεῖον is used to translate τὸ σημεῖον, “sign, distinguishing mark.” σημεῖον is often used to refer to a visible sign or action that God produced or was active in to indicate his covenantal or saving presence (Gen 9:13; Ex 3:12; Is 7:14; see also σημεῖον in Lk 2:12). (CC)

*servants.* All believers. – This means to be a slave. A slave is owned by a master and owes his very life to the master. This was true for John and is so for us as well. This revelation is given to them so that they might know what is to happen soon. Information helps bring comfort and reduces anxiety. (CSB)

δούλοις ... δούλω—The distinction between δοῦλος (“slave”) and διάκονος (“servant”) is important. A servant, for whatever reason, renders service to another. A slave is owned by a

master and owes his very life to the master. John recognizes that he is a slave to Christ, as are the apostles and all believers. While δοῦλος appears some fourteen times in Revelation, διάκονος does not appear at all. (CC)

Revelation speaks to God’s servants in every age. What Jesus gave John to write is for our benefit. (PBC p. 9)

*soon take place.* The revelation is given to God’s people (his slaves) so that they might know what is to happen soon, immediately. (CC p. 37)

*his angel.* A mediating angel. The word “angel” occurs over 70 times in Revelation. (CSB)

The revelation is given to God’s people (“his slaves”) so that they might know what is to happen “quickly”—soon, immediately (1:1). The revelation comes from God to Jesus Christ, who in turn gives it to John through an angel, identified as “his angel” (1:1)—an angel of Jesus. In the epilogue, it is said that God through “his angel” gave the revelation to his people (“his slaves”) concerning things that would happen “soon” (ἐν τάχει, 22:6). In 22:16, Jesus says that he was the one who gave the witness of this revelation to the churches, and he gave this witness by means of “my angel.” (CC p. 37)

*There is, then, a clear sequence of mediation through which John and his audience received the revelation: God, Jesus Christ, his angel, John, and the seven churches.* The source of the revelation is God. The mediator of the revelation is Jesus Christ, who uses an angel to give it to John and the churches. Angels play an important role throughout the book of Revelation. They help in the meditation by leading or attending John through the visions. They help in the interpretation of the visions. They also help John to focus on what is important in a particular vision. And they also answer John’s questions concerning something within a vision (5:2). (CC p. 38)

We know from elsewhere in the Bible that no human being in this present age of sin and unrighteousness can actually see God in his majestic holiness and live to tell of it. God must condescend in some way or in some form so that he can meet people and communicate with them. Even heroic men of God like Moses, while still on earth, could not with their human eyes behold God in all his holy righteousness and glory (see Ex 33:18–20). God used various natural forms through which he approached and spoke to human beings, things such as the burning bush (Ex 3:2), a cloud (Ex 19:9; cf. Mt 17:5), a pillar of cloud (Ex 13:21; Ps 78:14), and a pillar of fire (Ex 13:21; cf. Ex 14:19–20). But in particular and in a personal manner God often appeared to individuals *in the form of an angel or by a heavenly figure in human form*. To Abraham (Gen 18:1–2), to Jacob (Gen 32:24–30), to Moses (Ex 3:1–4), to Joshua (Josh 5:13–15), to Gideon (Judg 6:11–16), to Samson’s parents (Judg 13:3–11), and to others (e.g., Gen 21:14–19) God thus appeared and communicated. The NT also reports that God gave the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai *through angels* (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). (CC pp. 206-207)

If this is so, why then does the exalted Christ begin mediating the first part of the message of Revelation directly to John before turning the role of mediator over to angels? Again, no explicit answer can be derived from Revelation. Nor does Scripture elsewhere reveal the mind of Christ in this action of mediation. However, one may conjecture that the exalted Christ first wanted to establish beyond doubt *that this revelation came from God and himself*. Once this was established, then he could turn the mediation of the message over to angels. The unique and esoteric character of the message of Revelation, different from the other writings of the Scriptures, would make it difficult enough to receive. If, in addition, there were any doubt as to

its origin, it would perhaps not have been received at all by the earliest church, even if it had come from angels out of heaven, for they alone could not vouch for its godly veracity. *But since the exalted Lord Christ himself by direct appearance and command told John to receive and write the revelation (1:1–3, 12–16, 19; cf. 22:6–7, 16), there is no doubt or question as to its origin and godly purpose.* Moreover, John immediately recognized the One who appeared to him and told him to write, for he had seen him before like this in his glorified state—at least in a preview of it—at the transfiguration (cf. Mt 17:2; Rev 1:16). *Once the Lord Christ had established the origin and the authority of Revelation by mediating the first part of it, he could safely turn over the mediation of the remainder of the revelatory message to angels, knowing that John would surely continue to receive it as from Christ himself.* John would assuredly know that, though angels were now to mediate the following message of Revelation, the seventh seal’s control of the rest of the message would indicate that the mediator is still Jesus Christ, his Lord, even though angels now take Christ’s place. (CC pp. 208-209)

Another possible reason that the Lord Christ began the mediation and then gave it over to angels is that he wanted John to know without doubt that, because Jesus was now in his glorified state as the Lord of lords (19:16), John could no longer stand before his holy presence and see his face—just as Moses on Mt. Sinai could not look on God’s face. To do so would mean death. Even while still on earth Jesus began to make this point. After his resurrection he told Mary Magdalene not to continue to hold on to him because, although he had not yet gone to his heavenly Father, he was soon to do so (Jn 20:17). Their relationship, when he would be in his state of glory and she still in her earthly life of decay, would sensately be quite different. After Christ had come into his exalted glory and met John in that glory on Patmos, this new relationship was clearly defined, for John fell down before the mighty Lord as one dead (Rev 1:17). Now he could no more approach the Lord Christ and look on his face than he could attempt to look on God’s holy face. Unless Christ had given him a special grace, he would have remained dead. But the exalted Son of Man did give him that grace by touching him with his right hand (1:17–18). John could now, for the moment, stand before the majestic and all-powerful Lord. (CC pp. 208-209)

The point, then, that the Lord Jesus wanted to make was this: John could not *continue* to stand face to face before the holy, majestic presence of Jesus because of his earthly state of decay and Christ’s exalted state as holy God. *The Lord Christ, for the moment, permitted and empowered John to stand before him until John knew for certain that the message of Revelation was of God.* But after that moment the Lord Christ withdrew his visible presence and gave the remainder of the message through angels. “Flesh and blood” of sinful humankind “are not able to inherit the kingdom of God,” are not able to live in the presence of the holy God and his exalted Son, the Christ (see 1 Cor 15:50). John would have to wait for that gift when he had, in the resurrection, put on an immortal body in an incorruptible state (1 Cor 15:53–55). (CC pp. 208-209)

Therefore, just as God in the OT had angel(s) by whom and through whom he spoke to Moses (and others), so now Jesus Christ in his state of heavenly glory also has his angel(s), through whom he speaks to John (see Rev 1:1; 22:6, 16). These angels through whom Christ will now continue the revelatory message are introduced to John in 8:1–5. (CC pp. 208-209)

*his servant* – δούλοις ... δούλω—The distinction between δούλος (“slave”) and διάκονος (“servant”) is important. A servant, for whatever reason, renders service to another. A slave is owned by a master and owes his very life to the master. John recognizes that he is a slave to Christ, as are the apostles and all believers. While δούλος appears some fourteen times in Revelation, διάκονος does not appear at all. (CC p. 34)

**1:2** *witness...testimony* – Both from Greek *martyria*. John testified in written form about the visions he beheld so his readers might benefit from the message they communicate. (TLSB)

μαρτυρία—This is an important word in both the gospel and the Revelation of John. It refers to the eyewitness testimony which confirms the truthfulness of what John and/or Jesus said and did (John 3:11; 5:32; 19:35; 21:24; Rev. 1:9; 19:10). (CC p. 34)

Though visions will be used to convey the revelation from John, they only serve as visual aids in the revelation. The communication from John to the reader(s) and hearer(s) takes place through words. Thus the prophetic message of Revelation is the Word of God given in and with visual form. (CC p. 38)

**1:3** *Blessed*. The first of seven beatitudes in the book (see 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). (CSB)

Significantly, the number of beatitudes in this writing corresponds to the number of churches addressed in 2:1-3:22. The blessing attached to hearing this Book suggests that John wrote Revelation to stand along with the rest of the Scriptures. (TLSB)

To be sure that we understand the importance of receiving this revelation as it comes to us from God Himself, John continues by offering this guarantee: “Blessed the one reading and the ones hearing the words of the prophecy and heeding the things which are written in it.” In other words those who participated in the leading of worship by reading the seer’s letter to the early Christian would find blessing in that action, and those who attended the worship celebration and who applied the word of prophecy to their lives in practical ways would also benefit. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

μακάριος—There are seven beatitudes in Revelation. The first beatitude envisions the setting of corporate worship. It pronounces a blessing upon the one person (singular) reading out loud (cf. Acts 8:30) and upon those (plural) who are hearing the words of the prophecy and are keeping—that is, cherishing, receiving in faith, obeying, and living by—those words. The book ends by saying that its contents are directed to God’s “slaves” (Rev 22:6), that is, all Christians, but the blessing is pronounced upon each Christian individual (singular) “who keeps” (22:7) the book’s prophetic words. All of these verbs are present participles (“reading,” “hearing,” and “keeping”), which emphasize the *continuing* reception of God’s words, meditation upon them, and living according to them. Since τηρέω, “keep,” is in both benedictions, and in fact is the sole designation of the one who is blessed in 22:7 (he is “the one who *keeps* the words”), extra emphasis is placed upon that continual contemplation of God’s words in faith and obedience. (CC p. 34)

Finally, these verses speak a blessing upon “the one who reads [aloud] and those who hear ... and who keep” this prophetic message (1:3). The blessing is not here defined, but when the six other instances in Revelation of a pronounced blessing (see the textual note above on 1:3) are examined, it becomes clear that the blessing bestowed is the *participation in the heavenly banquet of the bride and the Lamb* (19:9). It is a blessing which is also now received by the *washing of the Christians’ robes* (22:14) *in the blood of the Lamb* (7:13–14) and is a *participation now in the first resurrection* (20:6). At both the beginning and the end of the prophecy this blessing is spoken upon the hearers (1:3; 22:7). It is also the present gift of God to the faithful recipients of the Gospel as it comes in the word of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection and in Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Thus it is spoken over the Christians

assembled for corporate worship, where the Holy Scriptures are read aloud to the assembly and the Sacraments instituted by the Lord Jesus are cherished and followed. (CC pp. 38-39)

“Blessed” means much more than “happy.” It describes the favorable circumstance God has put a person in. (CSB)

Supremely fortunate or well off spiritually. To have the kind of happiness that is with us even in difficult times. That is what is in store for those who read this letter. – A beatitude (statement of blessing) describes the blessedness that already belongs to all believers in Christ. (PBC)

The following was an article in USA Today in late July 2004 entitled (How many can pass the I’m blessed inspection test?) “For years now, I have taken my neighbors’ cars to be inspected. It’s a little gift I give them, one of those random ‘acts of kindness’ if you speak bumper sticker. Most people hate the chore. And it doesn’t help any that the inspection station is the District of Columbia isn’t in the best part of town. But for some perverse reason, I enjoy the outing. Maybe it has to do with the fact that it’s never my car. All pressure is off. Pass, fail – it doesn’t really matter to me, although I’m happier when I can bring good news back to the neighborhood. You passed! I always make the trip early in the morning. The station is on the other side of town, so I have to drive across the National Mall to get there. It’s one of the few times during the year I get to see the sun rising behind the Capitol, the mist rising off the Tidal Basin, the commuters barreling down the Southeast Expressway with road rage in their eyes. I could do without the last, but two of three isn’t bad. So there I was the other morning, waiting in line – Lane 4, to be exact – reading the paper, when I was finally told to pull up to the garage entrance. A man about my age waved me closer, then opened my door. It was 6:55 a.m. ‘How are you doing, this morning?’ he asked. ‘Fine,’ I said, bit startled at his perkiness. ‘And you?’ ‘Blessed,’ he said. ‘Blessed.’ I walked into the inspection station and down the long glass hallway where residents can view their cars going through the paces. He said ‘blessed,’ I thought to myself, blessed. There he was dealing with more-than-likely unhappy people, standing outside on a steamy July morning, and he felt blessed. I can’t get the man out of my mind. Why does it seem the people who appear to have the worst jobs often seem to be the happiest? (I’m not talking about the clerk at my local CVS, who is most unhappy to be there.) I’m talking about the woman here at the newspaper whose job it is to clean the bathrooms. She’s the happiest woman in the building. Always smiling. Always say hello. She just had an operation and is now back. Happy as ever. The men who painted my house this summer were happy. I couldn’t understand a word they were saying but they were in the hot sun, singing away. Lunch under the tree out front was even a festive affair, constant laughter floating up to my window. And why is it the people with the most seem the most unhappy? (I’m just asking the questions here, folks. I don’t have the answers.) Earlier this summer, a senator’s wife got into an altercation with another shopper at a local garden center. If I remember correctly, it was over mulch and loading of said mulch into the trunk of the car. Someone was being blocked, I think the senator’s was doing the blocking. In the end, charges were filed, lawyers were called, people went to court, ‘no comments’ were issued. The judge should have just ordered them all to get their cars inspected. Lane 4.

*who reads aloud* – In the ancient world, people typically read aloud, even when no audience was present (cf. Ac 8:30 Philip & Ethiopian). However, this verse’s twin reference to “the one who reads” and “those who hear” shows that Revelation was meant to be read within the context of a worship service (cf. Col 4:16; 1 Th 5:27). (TLSB)

*prophecy*. Includes not only foretelling the future but also proclaiming any word from God—whether command, instruction, history or prediction. (CSB)

*The revelatory message is called a “prophecy” (1:3).* Revelation is the only book in the NT which is referred to in this way. Whether or not John consciously thought of his work as the climax of the prophetic writings of the OT, he certainly viewed his work as belonging to that prophetic tradition. He understands that the church, as it witnesses the message of Christ, is the heir and fulfillment of the OT prophetic message (see Revelation 11). The witness of Jesus in the message of Revelation is also equated with the Spirit of prophecy (19:10), and in the epilogue the message is again referred to several times as a prophecy (22:7, 10, 18, 19). The fact that John understood his Revelation to be a prophecy suggests that he believed this writing would be the last message of God to his people before the End (cf. “prophecy” in 22:18) and that he was the last prophet of the salvation story which had begun with the promise of old and now was concluded in the revelatory-unveiling of Jesus Christ (1:3; 10:7; 15:8; 22:6–7, 10–12). (CC p. 38)

*who keep* – We are to remember the truths herein taught and do the duties required. (CB)

*time is near.* A reference to Christ’s second coming (see vv. 7–8) and the judgment associated with it. The NT insistence on imminence (e.g., in Ro 13:12; Heb 10:25; 1Pe 4:7; Rev 22:20) arises from the teaching that the “last days” began with the incarnation. We have been living in the “last days” (v. 3) ever since (see note on Heb 1:1). The next great event in redemptive history is Christ’s second coming. The NT does not say when it will take place, but its certainty is never questioned and believers are consistently admonished to watch for it. It was in this light that James expected the imminent return of Christ.) (CSB)

The Scriptures focus all of history on Christ. Through His death, resurrection, and ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit, God is completing His plan of salvation and the last days have begun (cf. Acts 2:17). Thus, the end is always near regardless of our reckoning of times and dates. (TLSB)

Each of us is born into the middle of the great strife between Christ and Satan. It is a short “seventy years” (Psalm 90:10) from the time we are born until we share in the great victory Jesus promises each of his servants. (PBC p. 11)

Instead of losing precious time in speculation as to when the end of the world will come, it is better for everyone to remember that the end of his earthly life will come in a comparatively short time and say with the psalmist, “O Lord...my times are Thy hand.” (Ps 31:14-15) (Poellot p. 7) (Ps. 90:12, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom”)

**1:1–3** As John begins relaying the prophetic word that God gives through him, he pronounces a blessing upon all who will listen and take to heart this revelation. Despite this promised blessing, however, people are resistant to hearing unsettling prophecies, let alone acting upon them by making changes in their lives. But take heart! Jesus Christ stands at the center of this and every other Scripture. His first coming resulted in forgiveness and life for you, and His second coming will perfect the new creation. • Lord Jesus, lead me to read, hear, and keep the message You revealed through John, for it tells about my final hope, even life eternal in Your presence. Amen.

*Greeting to the Seven Churches*

**4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even**

**those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”**

**1:4-6** John’s greeting explicitly mentions the persons of the Holy Trinity. (TLSB) See 1:4 – who is... Father / seven spirits...Holy Spirit / 1:5 – Jesus Christ – First born...Jesus

These verses give a trinitarian imprimatur by which God himself confirms the validity of the message of Revelation. It is given in the form of a greeting benediction in which John speaks the blessing of God’s grace and peace to his recipients, the seven churches. (CC p. 39)

The trinitarian formula is presented in the words “the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming, and from the seven Spirits ... and from Jesus Christ” (1:4–5). In these words John names the triune God: Father, Spirit, and Jesus Christ. At first glance it would appear that already in the first phrase, “the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming,” there is a representation of the triune God. Both Oecumenius (sixth century) and Andreas<sup>19</sup> (sixth century) in their Greek commentaries on Revelation interpret it thus: the “One Who Is” is the Father; the one “Who Was” is the Son, the Logos; and the one “Who Is Coming” is the Comforter, the Spirit. Victorinus (third century) in his Latin commentary apparently believed that this entire threefold first phrase is not a reference to the Trinity but to Jesus Christ, and Athanasius also so interpreted this first three-part title.<sup>21</sup> However, neither of those ancient interpretations is accepted by this commentary. It is better to hear 1:4–5 as naming three distinct persons: (1) “the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming”; (2) the seven Spirits; and (3) Jesus Christ. Each refers to one of the persons of the Trinity. (CC p. 39)

First, the revelation comes from God the Father. ὁ ὢν (“the One Who Is”) in the phrase ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming”) leads one to the LXX’s rendering of the holy name (the tetragrammaton, Yahweh) in Exodus 3. In Ex 3:14 the LXX translates יהוה יהוה יהוה (“I Am Who I Am”) with ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν (“I Am the One Who Is”). After God identifies himself, he then tells Moses to say to the children of Israel that, in the LXX’s rendering, ὁ ὢν (“the One Who Is”) sent him. In Rev 1:4 John follows the LXX rendering of the holy name by his use of ὁ ὢν; in the context of 1:4–6 ὁ ὢν then refers to God the Father. (CC pp. 39-41)

But what are the referents of ὁ ἦν (“Who Was”) and ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“Who Is Coming”), for these expressions do not appear in the LXX’s rendering of Exodus 3? Could ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“Who Is Coming”) be in the same or a similar tradition as the rendering of יהוה (“I Am”) with a future tense, as Aquila and Theodotion do in Ex 3:14? (Here in Rev 1:4 John uses the present participle ἐρχόμενος [“is coming”] in a future sense since it contrasts with the imperfect past tense of ἦν [“was”] and with the present tense of ὢν [“is”].) That might possibly be part of the answer, but the full tripartite title seems to be unprecedented. (CC pp. 39-41)

John, in his own way, uses ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming”) for the holy name in Exodus 3. He takes ὁ ὢν (“the One Who Is”) from the LXX of Ex 3:14 and then expands it by adding καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“and Who Was and Who Is Coming”). By so doing he states that the ever present One is continually present now, as he was in the past and as he always will be in the future. *The entire three-part phrase, then, is really a rendition of יהוה (“I Am,” which is in the Hebrew Qal imperfect tense) in Ex 3:14, which is God’s own explanation for the tetragrammaton, יהוה, the holy name, Yahweh (Ex 3:13–16).* John may not have been the only one to interpret the holy name in this way, for a rabbinic

tradition also interprets יְהוָה as “I am He Who has been, Who is now, and Who will be in the future.” (CC pp. 39-41)

Why does John have ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming”) in the nominative after ἀπὸ (“from”) instead of the genitive that normally follows that preposition? It is for the sake of emphasis. Whether John did this consciously in deference to the holy name, because to have used an oblique case would have necessitated a vocalized change of that name, can only be surmised. Certainly John, because of his Jewish background, would be aware of Jewish practices in deference toward the holy name. But more likely, if not also in addition, John wanted to make and emphasize a theological truth that the Father is the first among equals. The Father, while equal in essence with the Spirit and Jesus Christ, is nevertheless the primus of the three persons (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Jn 14:16-17, 26). In deference to the holy name, that is, in deference to God the Father, through worship of Jesus Christ by means of the Spirit, John keeps this Greek rendering of the holy name in the nominative and does not put it in an oblique case such as the genitive. (CC pp. 39-41)

Wherever this Greek form of the holy name (ὁ ὢν, “the One Who Is”) appears in Revelation, John keeps to this theological principle, namely, that the Father is the first among equals; he also keeps to this principle throughout the book whenever the heavenly court worships God and the Lamb (in that order; e.g., 4:8–11; 5:9–14). ὁ ὢν appears a total of five times in Revelation, *all in reference to the Father* (Rev.1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5) In 1:4 and 1:8 the elements of the three-part title “the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming” appear in the same order, but in 4:8 ὁ ἦν (“the One Who Was”) comes first and then καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“and Who Is and Who Is Coming”). In 11:17 and 16:5 only ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν (“the One Who Is and Who Was”) is present; ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“Who Is Coming”) is absent. In each case where there is a difference, the author is making a theological statement—each will be treated in the commentary on the respective verses. Here in 1:4 this Greek rendering of the holy name points to the fact that the message of Revelation comes first of all from God the Father. (CC pp. 39-41)

**1:4 seven churches.** Located about 50 miles apart, forming a circle in Asia moving clockwise north from Ephesus and coming around full circle from Laodicea (east of Ephesus). They were perhaps postal centers serving seven geographic regions. Apparently the entire book of Revelation (including the seven letters) was sent to each church (see v. 11). (CSB)

Second, the prophetic message of Revelation comes from “the seven Spirits” (1:4). Because of the number seven, commentators have wondered whether these are seven angels, corresponding to the seven archangels in Jewish tradition (see 1 Enoch 19:1; 20:1–7, where seven archangels are listed and named), or corresponding to the seven angels of the seven churches (and thus also to the seven angels with the trumpets [Rev 8:6–11:19] and censers [Revelation 15–16]). Against this identification is the fact that “the seven Spirits” (1:4) are on the same level of authority as God the Father and Jesus Christ. If these “Spirits” were angels, they would never be accorded the same status as God and Jesus Christ in Christian theology. (In Revelation angels are never worshiped, only God; cf. 19:10; 22:8–9.) Rather, these “seven Spirits” are a reference to the Holy Spirit. (CC pp. 41-42)

In biblical thought, the number seven symbolizes God. It is the sum of the number three, which symbolizes God himself (cf. Gen 18:1–2; Is 6:3), and the number four, which symbolizes creation (cf., e.g., Ezek 37:9; 1 Chr 9:24). Seven thus symbolizes the God of creation. Because God rested on the seventh day (Gen 2:2–3), the number is also used to picture or refer to perfection, completion, and holiness, especially in reference to God’s activities and creative works. (CC pp. 41-42)

Here in Rev 1:4 the “seven Spirits” are also a reflection of the seven lamps and seven eyes in Zech 3:9–4:10, where they represent the Spirit of God, by which God sees the whole earth. That is, *God is present with his creation through the sevenfold presence of his Spirit*. In Is 11:1–2 the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit from God will rest upon the Branch of Jesse, the Messiah. In Rev 5:6 the Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. And in Moses’ tabernacle there was the menorah, the sevenfold lampstand (Ex 25:31–40), which represented God’s presence with his people by way of his Spirit (cf. Zech 4:2–6). *The seven Spirits of Rev 1:4 represent the Holy Spirit in his sevenfold presence*. God, by his Spirit, is always present with his people—fully present. *Throughout Revelation the number seven represents God’s presence by his Spirit*. Thus the church, when represented in Revelation by the seven churches (Revelation 2–3), is pictured as always under the Spirit of God. The heavenly hosts worship God by the presence of the seven Spirits before God’s throne (4:5). The Lamb of God, with the seven horns and eyes (5:6), is he on whom the sevenfold Spirit rests (Is 11:1–2). And the exalted Christ, as the Son of Man, stands in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, which represent the church under the lordship of Christ by the Spirit (1:13). (CC pp. 41-42)

Throughout Scripture, the number seven symbolizes completeness (cf. Gen. 2:1-3; 7:2; Lev. 4:6, 17; Rev. 2:1; 6:1; 8:2; 15:7). Accordingly, these seven churches may represent the whole Christian Church on earth and the challenges churches face. However, this does not mean these churches represent epochs (A particular period of history – Dictionary of Church history. (TLSB)

John was not speaking about worship buildings or formally organized congregations. None of the early Christian churches had public buildings for worship as we know them today. Most met in homes; and a few may have met in synagogues. By the word churches, John was referring to readers as people who belong to God. To those gathered around the Word and sacraments at these seven localities, Jesus will now give the reassurance of his final victory. (PBC p. 11)

*Asia*. A Roman province lying in modern western Turkey. (CSB)

John wrote a letter to each of these communities. (TLSB)

*Grace and peace*. “Grace” is used only twice in Revelation (here and in 22:21) but over 100 times by Paul. (CSB)

Grace is the underserved pardon that God gave us in Jesus. It is a one-sided, forgiving love. Peace is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *shalom*. God’s forgiving love in the heart of the believer produces this peace. It comes from knowing that Jesus satisfied God’s anger over our sins and has declared an end to the war between himself and the sinner. (PBC p. 12)

“Grace” (*charis*) means “God’s undeserved love, God’s unmerited favor.” The theological importance of this word cannot be overestimated. It corresponds in meaning with the Hebrew word *chesed* usually translated “love,” “mercy,” or “loving-kindness.” “In the Old Testament the word *chesed* expresses Yahweh’s covenant grace to His people. Thus Yahweh is predicated as the God ‘who shows covenant grace to thousands of generations of those that love me and keep my commandment’” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 9, p. 383). This is the word in the well-known liturgical refrain “his love endures forever,” as in Ps 136. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

In the synoptic gospels *charis* occurs only in Luke, who uses it to characterize the message of salvation. The word is used frequently in Paul's epistles for the central concept that most clearly expresses his understanding of salvation: it is by *grace* and through faith. God's grace is his favor toward us based on the atoning crucifixion of Christ. It is opposed to righteousness through works of the law. The word is used by Paul in the *sedes doctrinae*, Eph. 2:89: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." John ends Revelation with a benediction that uses this powerful word: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all" (22:21). The book therefore both begins and ends with the theme of God's grace in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

"Peace" (*eirēnē*) is another tremendously important theological word. "In the NT the meaning . . . has the sense of wellbeing or salvation . . . the principal meaning is salvation in a deeper sense . . . three conceptions call for notice: a. peace as a feeling of peace and rest; b. peace as a state of reconciliation with God; and c. peace as the salvation of the whole man in an ultimate eschatological sense" (*TDNT*, vol. 2, pp. 411–12). "The peace of which John speaks here is peace between God and man. It is the peace of heart, mind, and conscience which flows from the assurance of the forgiveness of sin (John 14:27; Rom 5:1; 1 Cor 1:3; Phil 4:7; 2 Peter 1:2)" (Luther Poellot, *Revelation* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1962] p. 8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The NT epistles usually contain a greeting like "grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The greeting of Revelation is unique. God is not even described in the predictable sequence as the one who was, who is, and who is to come. Instead, the formula begins with the present, moves to the past, and ends with the future. The same form is used again in v 8. Perhaps this sequence emphasizes the Lord's living presence with his people in the present, just as he was with his people in the past, and will return for his people in the future. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The peace of which John speaks here is peace between God and man. It is the peace of heart, mind, and conscience which flows from the assurance of the forgiveness of sins (John 14:27; Rom 5:1; 1 Cor 1:3; Phil 4:7; 2 Peter 1:4-5) (Poellot p. 8)

*who is ... was ... is to come.* A paraphrase of the divine name from Ex 3:14–15. Cf. Heb 13:8. – This is "I am" language from Exodus 3:14 where God calls Moses to lead God's people out of Egypt. (CSB)

God the Father. This characterization stress that God is eternal, without beginning or end. (TLSB)

ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος—In standard Greek ἀπό takes the genitive, but here the nominative follows. John knows the usual usage of ἀπό for in 1:4–5 he uses it to govern the genitive (πνευμάτων, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). He *purposely* shifts from the genitive to the nominative. In Revelation ἀπό is used to point out the "source" of something and is never used of an angel. When an angel is the agent, the preposition διὰ (1:1), ἐν (10:8), or ἐκ (10:10) is used; in those cases too, the angel is only the *agent*, not the source. (CC pp. 34-35)

The description of God as the one "who is" alludes to Exod 3:14, where the Lord reveals the meaning of his name as "I am who I am." The God who speaks to us in Revelation is Yahweh, the same God who revealed himself to his people long ago (cf. also Is 41:4). The description of God as the one "who is to come" equates God with the returning Jesus Christ. Similarly, God's

description of himself as “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (also in 21:6) is echoed by Christ in 22:13, emphasizing that Christ is God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

*seven spirits.* † see Zec 4:2, 10 and the sevenfold description of the Holy Spirit in Isa 11:2: (1) of the Lord, (2) of wisdom, (3) of understanding, (4) of counsel, (5) of power, (6) of knowledge, (7) of the fear of the Lord. (CSB)

An unusual way of referring to the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

As this and the following verse contain a benediction from the Father and the Son, we must suppose that it is the Holy Spirit who is joined with them, as elsewhere, and not any created spirits. In accordance with the emblematical character of this book, he is described under the number seven, to denote his manifold and perfect divine operations. God is fully present. (Concordia Bible)

The Holy Spirit is referred to here as “the seven Spirits,” a reference to Is 11:2 which describes the seven-fold gifts of the one Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” Note the reference to all three persons of the Trinity in the greeting of vv 4–5. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

**1:5** *Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness* – Jesus, who fearlessly testified during His ministry and trial. (TLSB)

Third, in addition to the Father and the Spirit (1:4), the revelation comes “from Jesus Christ,” identified as the conqueror of death and as “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5). Jesus Christ, the witness to the truth of God, was faithful in his messianic mission and went to his death. But he is the firstborn of the dead, raised on the third day. Thus, he is described as the one who set God’s people free from their sins and as a result made them a kingdom for God, as well as priests to serve in the kingdom (the royal priesthood of all believers). The doxology voiced at the end of 1:6, while directly applied to Christ, is through him directed to God the Father by the Spirit. (CC pp. 42-43)

Why is Jesus Christ spoken of last, after the Father and the Spirit? It is because of his saving work, by which he has redeemed God’s people so that they can now worship God as his royal priests. This worship is directed through Christ to the Father and is inspired by the Spirit. (CC pp. 42-43)

This is the only book in the Bible which has such a trinitarian imprimatur (1:4–6), at least in this explicit form, by which the source and authority of God is placed upon a human’s writing. Because Revelation is the culmination of all scriptural revelation, this imprimatur is also placed, by inference, on the entire Scripture, both the OT and the NT. This imprimatur placed on Revelation may also indicate that there will not be another word of God spoken until the Lord Christ comes at the End. And God’s people must listen, for “the time is near” (1:3)—the time of judgment, but in particular the time of blessing in the presence of the exalted Christ. (CC pp. 42-43)

ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος—Again these are nominative when one would expect them to be genitive because they are in apposition to Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. While the use of the nominative in

place of the expected case is found in classical Greek, it is not the usual practice in literary Greek. (CC p. 35)

*firstborn* – The first born was privileged to receive a double portion of the inheritance (Dt. 21:7) and the leadership over the family (Gn. 35:23; 43:33; 2 Chron. 21:3). Sometimes the birthright was given to a younger son (Gn. 25:23; 49:3-4). The term also signifies the preeminence of the exalted Lord Jesus and His relationship to the heavenly Father (Col. 1:15, 18). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

πρωτότοκος—This word appears eight times in the NT. When used of the birth of a child, it refers to the firstborn, the first to open the womb. In the LXX it is used for בְּכֹרִית, which also means “firstborn” (Gen 25:13; 35:23). In Lk 2:7 it is used in reference to Jesus, the firstborn of Mary. Here in Rev 1:5, πρωτότοκος refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the first one to conquer death *after whom many others will follow*, those who by right of his victory over death conquer death (cf. Rom 8:29). (In LXX Ps 88:28 [MT/ET 89:27], David is called the πρωτότοκος of God.) In Col 1:18 Paul also calls Jesus the firstborn of the dead, just after calling him the firstborn over all creation (1:15). (CC p. 35)

Though it is true that some were raised from the dead before Jesus was (1 Ki 17:22; 2 Ki 4:35; 13:21; Luke 7:14; John 11:43), Jesus may still be called “the firstborn from the dead.” This is because those who were raised were able to be raised only because of Jesus’ death and resurrection for them. Jesus is the first in the sense of being the cause of the resurrection of every believer, a fact obvious in Luke 7:14; John 11:43. He is the one who “has freed us from our sins by his blood.” Therefore, Jesus is able to make the divine claim, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25–26). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

*ruler* – ἄρχων—In Rev 19:16 Jesus is called the βασιλεὺς βασιλέων. Here ἄρχων points to Jesus not only being *the* king among all kings, but the ruler or king who is the source of the royal authority and power given to all other kings (see Rom 13:1). ἄρχων is related to ἀρχή, which points to the source or origin or first cause of all things. Jesus Christ is called the ἀρχή of God’s creation in Rev 3:14 (cf. 21:6; 22:13). (CC p. 35)

Christ is the risen and ascended One, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (cf. Mt. 28:19; Eph. 1:20-23). Jesus’ heavenly coronation is depicted in Rev. 5:1-14. (TLSB)

*freed* – λύσαντι—This is the aorist participle of λύω, “to release, loose.” A variant reading has λούσαντι, which is the aorist participle of λούω, “to wash” (uncials P and 046<sup>c</sup> and several minuscules and also the Latin Vulgate). Either reading makes good sense, but the manuscript evidence strongly supports λύσαντι. For the baptismal idea of cleansing from sin through washing, see 7:14; 22:14; and the textual note on ἱμάτιον in 19:13. (CC p. 35)

**1:6 a kingdom and priests.** † This OT designation of Israel is applied in the NT to the church (1Pe 2:5, 9). Cf. also 5:10; 20:6. (CSB)

Cf. Ex. 19:6. The Christian Church stands in continuity with God’s OT people. The Church exercises its priestly function by offering intercessory prayers and by proclaiming “the excellencies of Him who called (them) out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Revelation repeatedly depicts the saints sharing in Christ’s rule (Rev. 2:27; 3:2). Luther: “We have nothing from God except the pure Word, namely, that the Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of

the Father and is the Judge of the living and the dead, and that through Him we are kings and priests (Rev. 1:6)...Meanwhile we should believe and hope. For it one could see it now before one's eyes, there would be no need of faith" (AE 4:357). Hus: "That person, Christ, is everywhere present, since he is very God whose right it is to be everywhere without limitation. He is the bishop, who baptizes and takes away the sins of the world, John 1:29. He is the one who joins in marriage so that no man may put asunder...Mt. 19:6. He is the one who makes us priest...(Rev. 1:6). He performs the sacrament of the eucharist.. (Luke 22:19). This is he who confirms his faithful ones...Luke 21:15)" (The Church, p. 120). (TLSB)

Note on Ex. 19:6 Israel was to constitute the Lord's kingdom (the people who acknowledged him as their king) and, like priests, was to be wholly consecrated to his service and to do his will. – We are also priests. Our sacrifices are to be sacrifices of repentance, prayer, and praise in a life of service and thanksgiving. (Poellot p. 12)

*be glory and dominion* – αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος—A number of similar doxologies appear in Revelation: 4:11; 5:12, 13; 7:10, 12; 19:1. Other passages that are similar to the doxologies include 4:9; 12:10; 14:7; 19:7. There is a fine line between doxologies that *call for* the ascription of qualities to God and/or the Lamb in praise, and passages that *describe* the praising as it is or was voiced by others. Actually, both kinds of passages really function as *calls* for the Christian reader(s) and hearer(s) to *join in the praise*, and by reading aloud or by silently praying or meditating upon the words of the passages, the Christian does in fact express such worshipful praise. Doxologies to the Lamb alone are in 1:6; 5:12; doxologies to God alone are in 4:11; 7:12; 19:1; and the doxologies in 5:13; 7:10 are to both him "who sits on the throne" and "the Lamb." (CC pp. 35-36)

Most of the doxologies share a common vocabulary. Most common is δόξα, "glory" (1:6; 4:11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 19:1). Next in frequency are δύναμις, "power" (4:11; 5:12; 7:12; 19:1), and τιμή, "honor" (4:11; 5:12, 13; 7:12). Then follows εὐλογία, "blessing" (5:12, 13; 7:12). Appearing in two doxologies are ἰσχύς, "strength" (5:12; 7:12); κράτος, "dominion" (1:6; 5:13); σοφία, "wisdom" (5:12; 7:12); and σωτηρία, "salvation" (7:10; 19:1). Making a single doxological appearance are ἀλληλουϊά, "alleluia" (19:1); εὐχαριστία, "thanksgiving" (7:12); and πλοῦτος, "wealth" (5:12). The largest number of qualities is found in 5:12, which has seven elements, while 7:10 contains a single element, "[All] the *salvation* is with our God, who sits on the throne, and with the Lamb." (CC p. 36)

Most of the doxologies include the definite article before the qualities ascribed to God and/or the Lamb. In doxological contexts the articles imply the idea of "all": "*all the glory* and *all the dominion*" (1:6; other passages are similar). Therefore throughout this commentary the translation of such doxologies will include "all" in brackets. (CC p. 36)

Note how we are dependent upon God as the source of everything good. "He has made us"—creation was God's act alone, and so is re-creation. Birth is God's prerogative, and so is rebirth. It is the Lord who has made us members of his kingdom; "For Thine is the kingdom," we pray in the Lord's Prayer. It is the Lord who has made us priests who serve him with our lives and our highest worship, hence the acclaim, "To him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." It would be appropriate to end the sermon with a paean of praise in the finest doxology. You may wish to have the congregation rise at the end of the sermon and sing one of the hymns that would express such a doxology, such as "The Lord, My God, Be Praised" (LW 174). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

**1:7** *he is coming with the clouds.* † See Da 7:13; Mt 24:30; 26:64; Mk 13:26; 14:62; Lk 21:27; Ac 1:9. The first prophecy in the book, which opens, as it closes (22:20), with a reference to the second coming of Christ. (CSB)

The prologue concludes with a reference to the returning Lord: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds” (1:7). Jesus’ words to Caiaphas were, “You will see the Son of Man ... coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64; cf. 1 Thess 4:17). This suggests that the thought “the time is near” (Rev 1:3) refers to the coming of the Lord Christ at the End. The epilogue also leads to this interpretation (22:6–7, 12, 20). (CC p. 43)

Clouds were a symbol of God’s presence. A cloud by day and fire by night led them out of Egypt and also gave them direction in the desert. At Mt. Sinai he spoke from a cloud. In the New Testament the Transfiguration was another example. – The whole human race will witness his coming. No one will be exempt from this confrontation with Jesus Christ, not “even those who pierced him.” – The whole history of the world and the Church is patterned toward and converges upon the glorious reappearance of Christ. (Stoekhardt p. 2)

The description of Christ coming on the clouds reminds us of the many times Scripture records the awesome events of God’s dealings with mankind, making his presence known through the veil of the cloud. But this time the cloud does not conceal him, but is the vehicle of his return. The scene is also pictured in Dan 7:13. Our verse also quotes the well-known prophecy of Zech 12:10. Christ died also for all the unbelievers of the world, and so they are described as “those who pierced him” who will mourn at his return in glory. But for believers, it will be a day of great joy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

*every eye will see him* – This refers to Christ’s second coming on the Last Day. Note that Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, sitting at God’s right hand, and returning to judge are all mentioned in vv 5-7. (TLSB)

*pierced.* See Ps 22:16; Isa 53:5; Zec 12:10; Jn 19:34, 37. (CSB)

The whole human race will witness his coming. No one will be exempt from this confrontation with Jesus Christ, not “even those who pierced him” (1:7). While this is not a direct quote of Zech 12:10, it brings to mind that prophecy that the Lord will pour out his Spirit of grace on the house of David, and, says Yahweh, “They will look upon me whom they have pierced.” The reference to this verse brings to light again Christ’s death (cf. Rev 1:5); note that John alone among the four evangelists recounts the piercing of Jesus on the cross (Jn 19:33–37; cf. 1 Jn 5:6). And this piercing will cause people to beat their breasts and wail over him. (CC p. 43)

These are most probably God’s manifest enemies. (CC p. 43)

*even will wail* – Here in Rev 1:7 John states that “all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him.” While “those who pierced him” most probably refers to God’s manifest enemies, “the tribes” who wail and mourn over him probably refers to God’s own repentant people (Zech 12:12–14 suggests such an interpretation; see also Lk 2:35; 23:27; Jn 20:11). The fact that the Lord Christ at his second coming will be recognized as *the one who was pierced* is a witness and confirmation of the truth that *by his death and resurrection* he alone is the Savior and Judge of the human race (see Jn 19:33–35; 1 Jn 5:6–12). (CC p. 43)

*even so. Amen.* A double affirmation. (CSB)

**1:8 the Alpha and the Omega.**† The first direct message of Jesus in the book (cf. v. 17); he makes the same claim at the end of the book, 22:13 (cf. 21:6). The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God is the beginning and the end (see 21:6). He rules over all human history. (CSB)

First and last letters of Greek alphabet. As such, this title underlines God's eternal nature. It should be noted that both here and at 21:6, this title is applied to God the Father, while at 22:13 it is applied to Jesus. This demonstrates Jesus' eternal divinity. (TLSB)

We understand the name "Alpha and Omega" in the light of Is 44:6: "I am the First, and I am the Last, and beside Me there is no God." It is "the Lord God," the only true God. He will not give His glory to another, neither His praise to graven images (Is 42:8). All other explanations of the name "Alpha and Omega" must flow out of this. For example: Only the true God could be "the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2) (Poellot p. 15)

The last verse of the prologue (Rev 1:8), while strange when compared to ordinary literary style, is characteristic of the style of both the prologue and epilogue of Revelation (22:7, 12). The divine voice (first person singular) breaks in to confirm the authority of God the Father as the prime source and originator of the revelatory-unveiling of Jesus Christ. It is the voice of God himself, by which he confirms the exalted status of his Son, Jesus Christ, as the Lord and Judge of all history, the human race and the world. (CC pp. 43-45)

There is no consensus as to the identity of the speaker of 1:8. Some commentators take the speaker to be Jesus Christ, others God the Father. To take the voice to be that of Jesus Christ would break up the literary symmetry of the prologue, which begins with God the Father as the giver of the revelation and ends with the Father as the authenticator of it. While Jesus Christ is the subject and object of the message, only God the Father, who originates and gives it to Jesus, can also then be the one who authenticates it (cf. Mt 3:17). Swete is correct when he says, "The solemn opening of the book reaches its climax here with words ascribed to the Eternal and Almighty Father." It is the voice of almighty God himself, who by these words testifies to the position that his Son has earned and merited. The revelation of his Son's exalted position is now to commence and unfold in the prophetic message of Revelation. There is no greater witness, and the affirmation of the divine authority of the book calls for no less a witness (Jn 5:36-37; 8:18). (CC pp. 43-45)

The title τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὰ ("the Alpha and the Omega," Rev 1:8) expresses the eternity of God. In rabbinic theology the letters א and ת, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, represented totality and entirety, and in particular they represented the Shekinah, that is, God's visible presence for the benefit of his people, as at the burning bush (Exodus 3). That rabbinic theology draws on OT passages such as Is 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12. The title "the Alpha and the Omega" appears again in 21:6, where it also is applied to God the Father, and in 22:13, where it is applied to Jesus Christ. Christ is the revealed glory of God (Jn 1:14, 18), the one through whom God graciously appears to his people. He is the eternal one who has entered human history and time. "The Alpha and the Omega" is one of the titles which God the Father and Jesus share in Revelation. In this case it is shared because the Son of God is eternal in the same absolute sense as is the Father. (CC pp. 43-45)

It is the Lord God, "Yahweh, the [only] God" (κύριος ὁ θεός, 1:8), who thus cries out that he is "the Alpha and the Omega." Only here and in 21:5 does God the Father speak directly. God is further identified in 1:8 by ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, "the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming" (first mentioned in 1:4), but now he is also called ὁ παντοκράτωρ, "the Almighty." While in Revelation God shares with Jesus Christ the title τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὰ ("the

Alpha and the Omega”), the titles ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (“the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming”) and ὁ παντοκράτωρ (“the Almighty”) in Revelation are reserved for the Father alone. This is done so as to preserve the prime position of God the Father while at the same time displaying the equality of the Father and the Son. (CC pp. 43-45)

Thus the Father’s speaking of this word (1:8) here is analogous to the word at the transfiguration (with the added understanding here about the role of the Spirit from Jn 15:26–27; 16:13–15). At the transfiguration the Father confirms the Son, whom he has sent and on whom the Spirit rests: “This is my beloved Son; hear him” (Mk 9:7). Here in Rev 1:8 the Father confesses that this Spirit-given (Jn 15:26–27; 16:13–15) prophecy about the sent, crucified, and exalted Son (whose exaltation is the chief focus of the revelation) has its origin in himself, the Father, and so has his authority behind it.

(CC pp. 43-45)

*Lord God* – κύριος ὁ θεός—This is the usual LXX translation of the Hebrew combination יהוה (יה)יםללה. Compare the MT and LXX of, for example, Gen 2:8; Is 17:6; 1Chr 22:19; Neh 9:7. The language and thought of Revelation draw heavily and frequently from the OT. To reflect that background, this commentary translates κύριος as “Yahweh” when it is used in combination with ὁ θεός after the pattern of יהוה (יה)יםללה in the Hebrew OT; that usage occurs in Rev 1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5, 6. (CC p. 36)

ὁ θεός—Here the definite article acts as a “pointer” which suggests that “the God” is *the only* true God, “in distinction from the mythological gods.” See further the textual note on τῷ θεῷ in 19:4 and the excursus “The Use of the Definite Article with ‘God.’” (CC p. 36)

The description of God as the Alpha and the Omega (also in 21:6; 22:13) means first of all that there is no other God. But it also means that he is the creator of the world and the one who will bring this world to a close. He is the cause of all that exists, and the goal and purpose of all creation is to glorify and serve him (cf. the description of Jesus as “the author and perfecter of our faith,” both the source and the goal of faith, Heb 12:2). This idea is also contained in the title “Almighty,” which does not just emphasize the surpassing power of God, but also divine monergism in effecting our salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Luther’s explanation of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism is applicable: “Therefore it is the intent of this commandment to require true faith and trust of the heart which settles upon the only true God, and clings to Him alone. That is as much as to say: ‘see to it that you let Me alone be your God, and never seek another.’” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

*Almighty*. Nine of the 12 occurrences of this term in the NT are in Revelation (here; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). The other three are in Ro 9:29; 2Co 6:18; Jas 5:4. (CSB)

Because Revelation reserves this title for the Father (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), it stands in contrast with “the Alpha and the Omega” designation, which is applied to both Father and Son. Luther: “We are not the ones who can preserve the church, nor were our forefathers able to do so. Nor will our successors have this power. No, it was, is and will be he who says, ‘I am with you always, to the close of the age.’ AS it says in Hebrews 13:8, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever’ and in Revelation 1:8, ‘He who is and who was and who is to come’” (AE 47:118). (TLSB)

ὁ παντοκράτωρ—This means “the Almighty, the All-Powerful.” It is a compound noun from πᾶς (πάντα, “all”) and κράτος (“power”). It appears ten times in the NT, nine of which are in Revelation<sup>b</sup> (the other occurrence is in 2 Cor 6:18). In every instance it refers to God. The LXX uses παντοκράτωρ to translate תְּיָדָוּת, “[Lord of] hosts,” and אֱלֹהֵי, “the Almighty,” and uses it only of God. (See also the commentary below and the textual note on this title in 11:17.) Paul in Eph 6:12 calls Satan the κοσμοκράτωρ. At the time of John the Roman emperors were called αὐτοκράτωρ. (CC p. 37)

John praises the one true God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—while simultaneously clarifying the identity of God’s people: they are the “kingdom” and “priests” for whom He will soon come. Given our continual failure to live up to such a high calling, we need to hear again and again the truth of our identity in Christ. When the Gospel of God’s grace is preached, the Church may speak a hearty “Amen” in its conviction that Jesus will return and then perfect our redemption. • Lord, You promise to return soon and transform us perfectly into Your image. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

### *Vision of the Son of Man*

**9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.**

**1:9-22** The first scene of John’s vision is the Son of Man and the letters He dictates to the seven churches. (TLSB)

**1:9** *your brother* – Notice that when the seer John identifies himself he calls himself a brother and fellow participant in the tribulation. He does not write as one superior to his readers or distant from them. He understood their sufferings from the inside. He is participating in their anguish, too. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

*tribulation ... kingdom ... patient endurance.* Three pivotal themes in Revelation: (1) “suffering” (2:9–10, 22; 7:14), (2) “kingdom” (11:15; 12:10; 16:10; 17:12, 17–18), (3) “patient endurance” (2:2–3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). (CSB)

John was on the island of Patmos because of his proclaiming “the Word of God” and because of his “witness” to Jesus Christ (1:9). Even as Jesus was “the witness, the faithful one” (1:5), so also John was an eyewitness (1Jn 1:1) who testified faithfully to the truthfulness of Jesus’ life, death,

and resurrection. Because he would not back down, he suffered exile. He was a “partner” with Christ “in the *suffering*”—placed first for emphasis—and in the “kingdom” of God and in the “patience” given to him by Christ (Rev 1:9). Others also were suffering persecution in this time of affliction (cf. Mk 13:19), some even death (Rev 2:9–10, 13). (CC p. 48)

John was suffering persecution when he wrote this Book, as were many other Christians at that time. In fact, John wrote Revelation while exiled. (TLSB)

What exciting things can happen when we join in the action of God’s incursions into human history and life and become reoriented in God’s future – when we recognize the precious commodity we carry with us, in us, through us, wherever we go. Have you ever stopped to think that you bring the kingdom of God to your local grocery store? (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

*Patmos*. A small (four by eight miles), rocky island in the Aegean Sea some 50 miles southwest of Ephesus, off the coast of modern Turkey. It probably served as a Roman penal settlement. Eusebius, the “father of church history” (A.D. 265–340), reports that John was released from Patmos under the emperor Nerva (96–98). (CSB)

Patmos, an island about forty miles west-southwest of Miletus (see figure 2), thus became the locale where Revelation was written. It was during a moment of worship and meditation “in the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι, 1:10) on the Lord’s day that John heard a loud, trumpet-like voice commissioning him to write the revelation and to send it to the seven churches. In the midst of suffering (ἐν τῇ θλίψει, 1:9), the affliction which is part of the kingdom (Acts 14:22), John received the grace of the vision of the exalted Christ through which he received the revelation. (CC p. 48)

*on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*. † Exiled as a punishment for preaching the gospel (cf. v. 2). (CSB)

martooreeah – Someone who gives a witness to the evidence and records it in report form. Originally meant eyewitness testimony that could stand up in a court of law (Luke 22:71). A witness was a person who gave such testimony, and he would, if necessary, back it up with his name, wealth, and life. It was used to describe the apostles and others who were witnesses of Jesus’ earthly ministry and of his suffering, death and resurrection (Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:20-22) and thus who were able to be his witnesses to the world (Acts 1:8). Eventually their witness got them into trouble with the authorities, and they then had to back up their witness with their lives (Acts 7:54-60; 12:1-5). In the apostolic and post-apostolic church “witness” was used to refer not only to those who died for the faith but to all Christians who gave faithful witness by word and daily living. Another word used when a Christian gave his life because of his witness was ἡμῶν - meaning to exit or depart (figurative for death) taken from Luke 9:31, where the word is used in Luke’s account of the transfiguration in reference to Jesus’ death and resurrection. Only after the first few centuries A.D. did “martyr” displace “exodus” when referring to a martyr’s death. (CC pp. 46-47)

**1:10** *the Lord’s Day*. A technical term for the first day of the week—so named because Jesus rose from the dead on that day. It was also the day on which the Christians met (see Ac 20:7) and took up collections (see 1Co 16:2). (CSB)

Sunday. Already by the late first century, Christians were worshiping on the first day of the week, in honor of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. It is possible that John received his heavenly

visions during a worship service. That would be most fitting, since heaven and earth are united a unique way during Christian worship. “Because it was necessary to appoint a certain day for the people to know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church designated the Lord’ Day (Rev. 1:10) for this purpose” (AC XXVIII 60). (TLSB)

*in the Spirit.*† In a state of spiritual exaltation—not a dream, but a vision like Peter’s in Ac 10:10. Cf. 2Co 12:1–6. (CSB)

Because of the Spirit’s role in his visions, John message was inspired and authoritative as those of the OT prophets. (TLSB)

No other person has been permitted to see and describe the exalted Christ in such detail. Stephen saw the exalted Christ at the right of God and was thus comforted and fortified for his death, but he gave no detailed description (Acts 7:55–56). Paul was met on the way to Damascus by the exalted Christ (Acts 9:1–9) through a light (φῶς), and he was once taken up into the third heaven and given revelations (ἀποκαλύψεις) of the Lord (2 Cor 12:1–4), but in neither case does he give a description of Christ. John was given the grace not only to see the exalted Christ but also to share his vision with the church. (CC pp. 48-49)

In an ecstatic state but maintained his personality. Spirit in the OT involved (1) creativity – where human possibilities end, there the Spirit begins, (2) eschatology, Is. 11:42; 61:3), (3) charismatic gifts (Judges 13:25; 14:6, (4) prophecy (2 Peter 1:21; Ez. 2:2) (Stuenkel p 17)

John was in a spiritual mood, deep in thought with Bible study and prayer. God led him to a state of mind that was receptive to what Jesus was about to reveal to him. (PBC p. 19)

He was fully conscious, but his senses, especially of sight and hearing, were completely given over to those things which God conveyed to him. (Poellot p. 17)

*like a trumpet* – That is loud and clear (PBC p. 19)

John is overwhelmed by the sound here not so much as an instrument of music but as a signal to alertness. (Stuenkel p. 17)

**1:11** *book.* Pieces of papyrus or parchment sewn together and rolled on a spindle. The book form was not invented until about the second century A.D. (CSB)

*seven churches.*† The order mentioned is no doubt the order in which the churches would be visited. (CSB)

**1:12** *see the voice* – This is a curious expression, since one cannot really “see” a voice. John stresses the mystery of the One appearing to him. (TLSB)

*golden lampstands.*† The seven churches (see v. 20). Cf. symbolism in Mt 5:14–16. (CSB)

(1) Ephesus where John had spent most of the last 30 years. He must have known practically every member there. (2) Smyrna with its model congregation, one of the two that escaped all censure in the letters which John was to write. (3) Pergamos where faithful Antipus had suffered as a martyr (2:13). (4) Thyatira the home of Lydia who had helped to open all Europe to the Gospel by opening the doors of her house to Paul at Philippi (Acts 16:14-40). (5) Sardis how the church had there needed spiritual strengthening! How its faithful few needed encouragement! (6)

Philadelphia with its model congregation, like the one at Smyrna. (7) Laodicea rich in this world's goods, but poor in spiritual riches. (Poellot p. 18)

Christ is here seen dwelling in the very midst of his churches, and so of the Church itself. So Christians are to think of Christ, not as a Lord in heaven only, but as One who is ever with them, having set up his abode in their very midst. (Stoekhardt p. 3)

**1:13** *son of man*. In his description of the exalted Son of Man, John draws upon several sources in the OT. These sources serve as a literary palette from which he creates in artistic language the image of the one who commissioned him. But also he draws from his own experience and memory of the event of the transfiguration. He recognizes the one before him, but yet there is a difference. When John saw the glorified Christ on the holy mount, he received a preview of the glory into which Jesus would come as a result of his death and resurrection. Now in Revelation 1 he sees the same Lord in that glory, the merited glory that John saw beforehand on the holy mount, he now sees in all its fulfillment. Daniel had prophetically seen this merited glory of the Son of Man long before (Dan 7:13), and, as Peter says about all the prophets (1 Pet 1:10–12), Daniel longed for the time when Christ would come into that glory. John on the holy mount saw a preview of that glory, and now he sees the Christ fully in that glory. The prophetic promise, *seen prophetically by Daniel and momentarily experienced by John at the transfiguration shortly before the promise's fulfillment*, stands *now consummated* in all its everlasting beauty. (CC p. 49)

The Lord Christ appeared to John “like the Son of Man” (Rev 1:13). John recognized the one whom he saw, but he noted some differences—not essential differences, but more a matter of degree. John had once before seen the heavenly glory of Jesus at his transfiguration, when Christ gave to the three disciples a *preview* of the heavenly glory that he would merit by his cross and resurrection and come into *fully* at his ascension (cf. 2 Pet 1:16–18). Here again John sees the Lord Christ in his heavenly glory, and as he sees Christ *he is reminded that his Lord is now in this glory because he has completed his mission through his death and resurrection* (Rev 1:18). (CC p. 49)

#### Excursus

##### **Son of Man**

Though the title “son of man” is used in Ezekiel as an appellation of the prophet, identifying him as a spokesman for God, it is chiefly the use of the term in Daniel that gives the theological background for its usage in the NT. Already in the intertestamental period a theology of the Son of Man developed. For example, 1 Enoch comments on and interprets the Son of Man described in Dan 7:13–14. The Son of Man *represents* the Ancient of Days and *rules* God's people on his behalf (1 Enoch 46:1–8; 48:1–10). The Son of Man's preexistence is affirmed, he is identified as the Anointed One (Messiah), and he will be the light of the Gentiles (1 Enoch 48:1–10). He is also identified with Wisdom and will be in charge of the resurrection and the judgment (1 Enoch 49:1–4; 51:1–5). (CC pp. 54-55)

When Jesus began to call himself the “Son of Man,” the term already had a theological meaning within Judaism. It was the favorite title that Jesus used when speaking of himself in the third person. It appears some eighty-eight times in the NT, eighty-four of which appear in the four gospels and two in Revelation (1:13 and 14:14). In the gospels it is used in connection with all of Christ's ministry, but in particular in connection with statements that say that *because of his death and resurrection he will come again in judgment* (Mt 24:30; 26:64; cf. Ps 8:3–9). Jesus' use of this title to identify himself and his ministry expresses that he is the fulfillment of the prophetic picture and word of the Son of Man in the OT (Dan 7:13–14; Ps 8:3–9; cf. also Ps 2:12). It also invites hearers to recognize him as such. He is *the* man whom God had chosen (Is 42:1; 49:7) to

take Israel's place (Is 49:3), and also that of the Gentiles (Is 49:6), and to represent them before God (Is 53:12). He is the one who established God's kingdom (Rev 1:6), incorporating into it both Jews and Gentiles, and he did this by his own death and resurrection (Mk 8:31; Rev 1:5-6). (CC pp. 54-55)

The Bible bestows on Jesus the son of Mary three great titles: "Christ," "Lord," and "Son of Man." There are of course many other descriptive names and terms that are applied to Jesus which help to explain the fullness of those three great titles, such as Savior, Holy One, Redeemer. In addition there are terms that describe his essence and person, such as Son of God, son of Joseph. To these can be added terms that describe the mystery of his being, such as Logos, light, truth. But the three great titles conferred upon Jesus of Nazareth *identify and encapsulate all that the Son of God became and did on behalf of the human race.* (CC pp. 54-55)

The title "*Christ*" ("Messiah") designates Jesus of Nazareth as the chosen one, the anointed Redeemer of the world. As a result of his redemptive activity he became the "*Lord*" of God's people, the church. And furthermore, as a result of his being the Christ and the Lord of God's people, he is also the "*Son of Man*," that is, the master of all history, of the human race and of the final judgment of God. The title "Son of Man" is bestowed upon Jesus because, as *the man* who represents God's people before the heavenly Father, he reconciled them to the Father by his being the Christ. And now, as the Lord of the church, this same Son of Man will also be the Lord and Judge of the whole human race and of the world. (CC pp. 54-55)

This title, "Son of Man," not only identifies Jesus, the Son of God, as the true man who came to take the place of the human race in his life and death and resurrection. It also emphasizes the fact that Jesus Christ, as *the human being*, was elevated to the high and unique status of being *the Man* to rule everything on behalf of God the Father. (CC pp. 54-55)

The OT roots, the intertestamental Jewish development, and the self-revelation of Jesus testified to in the NT all lead one to see that when the title "Son of Man" is applied to Jesus, the God-man, it emphasizes how he *represents* God's people as he establishes for them God's kingdom, and he also *rules* God's people (and judges the whole world) by the authority of and on behalf of God the Father. These are the very emphases of Dan 7:13-14, the seminal passage that narrates how "one like a Son of Man" approached "the Ancient of Days" and received from him "authority, glory, and kingship" to the end that those from all peoples of the earth who are brought into his eternal kingdom will worship him forever and ever. (CC pp. 54-55)

Occurring over 50 times in the book of Ezekiel and at a strategic spot in the book of Daniel, the term was well known in Israelite circles, to the extent that when Jesus called himself by that name, he was greeted immediately with charges of blasphemy (see Mark 14:62-64). (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

Favorite self-designation of Jesus, used c 80 times in the Gospels but almost never in the rest of the NT. Its meaning varies somewhat depending on the context. Indicates that though Jesus is fully man, He is much more. As a messianic title, it combines the ideas of a servant who will suffer and die for all people (Is. 53; Mt. 20:28) and the exalted Son of Man, whose reign is everlasting (Dan. 7:13-14; Mt. 24:30). (TLSB p. 2098)

Christ was anointed to be my Prophet, Priest and King. (Luther's Small Catechism)

As my Prophet, He revealed Himself by word and deed, and by the preaching of the Gospel still reveals Himself as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the World. (Luther's Small Catechism)

As my Priest, Christ fulfilled the Law in my stead perfectly (active obedience), sacrificed Himself for me (passive obedience, and still intercedes (pleads) for me with His heavenly Father. (Luther's Small Catechism)

As my King, Christ with His almighty power rules all creatures, governs and protects His Church, and finally leads it to glory. (Luther's Small Catechism)

*long robe.* The high priest wore a full-length robe (Ex 28:4; 29:5). Reference to Christ as high priest is supported by the reference to the golden sash around his chest. (CSB)

He is attired like the prophets of old. He is a prophet, the eternal Prophet, who teaches his people and intercedes for his own before God. (Stoeckhardt p. 3)

As the Son of Man, the Lord Christ is clothed in a *long flowing robe* (ποδήρης). In the LXX this word refers to the stately garment of the high priest (Zecch 3:4; cf. Ex 28:4 and Josephus, Antiquites, 3,159 {3.7.}) Here then we have a reminder of the high priestly role of the exalted Christ before the heavenly Father (Heb 4:14–16). (CC p. 49)

His long flowing robe reaching to His feet differs from the usual short tunic worn by warriors and lords of power. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

A *golden sash* is tied around his chest. Such a high tying of a sash, around the chest rather than around the waist, was usual with this robe (ποδήρης). The seven censer-angels in Rev 15:6 are girded or tied about the chest (στῆθος, the more common word for chest) with golden sashes or belts. According to 1 Macc 10:89 and 14:44, such a golden belt indicated royalty. In Dan 10:5 the heavenly figure dressed in fine linen has a golden belt tied around his waist. Thus noting the golden belt attached to the Son of Man (Rev 1:13), John deliberately links the heavenly figure of Daniel 10 with the Son of Man figure of Dan 7:13. The golden belt is indicative of the kingship of the exalted Christ and of his identification with the Son of Man figure of Daniel. (CC pp. 49-50)

And the golden girdle that he wears indicates his royal dignity. As a king he rules. All things are in his hands. He rules the world and directs his Church. (Stoeckhardt p. 3)

**1:14** *white like white wool.* † Cf. Da 7:9; Isa 1:18. The hoary head suggests wisdom and dignity (Lev 19:32; Pr 16:31). Whiteness is symbolic also of purity, holiness and righteousness. (CSB)

His head is *white like wool and snow*. In the OT the hoary or grey head of the aged commanded respect and was worthy of honor (Lev 19:32); it also symbolized a crown of splendor and righteous wisdom (Prov 16:31; 20:29). The Ancient of Days, to whom the heavenly court presents the Son of Man in Dan 7:9–14, has clothing white like snow and his head was white as wool. In Dan 7:13–14, when the Son of Man is presented to the Ancient Days, he is given authority to establish an everlasting kingdom. Here in Rev 1:14, the Son of Man now has this whiteness; glory and honor are now due him because he has successfully carried out his commission of establishing—through his “suffering” (1:9), death, and resurrection—this everlasting “kingdom” (1:9). *Ascended, he now reigns. The whiteness of the Ancient of Days has been transferred to the victorious Christ.* The glory and worship given to God the Father now is also fully given to God the Son (see 5:11–14). (CC p. 50)

His head and hair are unusual in their brilliant wholeness – as wool and as snow. In the context of this picture such an image does not signify premature aging, but His purity and victoriousness

and undoubtedly, the wisdom and spiritual maturity that are associated with white hair in the Hebrew Scriptures. The whiteness of wool and snow reminds us of Isaiah 1:18 and comforts us with the assurance that this Son of Man is the one who forgives our scarlet sins and makes us white and pure, too. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

*eyes were like a flame of fire.*† Penetrating insight (see 4:6). In the OT God’s eyes suggest his knowledge or his concern for his people (see Da 7:9; 10:6). (CSB)

The eyes of the Son of Man are “*like a flame of fire*” (1:14). In Dan 7:9 the throne of the Ancient of Days was flaming with fire. The eyes of the heavenly figure in Dan 10:6 were like lamps of fire. This is another hint that the Son of Man of Revelation is to be identified with the heavenly figure of Daniel 10 and is the same as the Son of Man of Daniel 7. In the OT fire symbolizes the holy purifying presence of God, before whom only those thus purified can stand (Ex. 19:10-19; Is. 6:1-7; Mal/ 3:1-4). The corollary is that the holy presence of God destroys evil. (Mal. 4:1-3 {MT 3:19-21}; Heb. 12:18-24). In antiquity, Greek and Roman authors spoke of eyes like flaming fire. The penetrating glance of Jesus while here on earth held a foreboding of righteous anger for those upon whom it fell (Mk 3:5). John now sees these piercing, fiery eyes in the exalted Christ, the one whom God had authorized to destroy evil and purify his people. (CC p. 50)

Also stands for agelessness. (PBC p. 21)

The blazing eyes call to mind the scrutiny and wisdom of a great ruler who care for his subjects and opposes their enemies. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account” (Hebrews 4:13). (PBC p. 21-22)

**1:15** *feet were like burnished bronze* – Feet of brass represent a strength that conquers all enemies. – This is as if they burned in a furnace, that is, like shining brightly, like metal under intense heat. God is not an idol, with feet of clay (Daniel 2:31-45). He shall stand forever and tread all his enemies underfoot, they shall be burned by the fire of his wrath and consumed by his anger and hot displeasure. (Poellot – p. 20)

The feet of the exalted Christ are like *fiery burnished brass* (Rev 1:15), reminiscent of the legs of the heavenly figure in Dan 10:6. Feet of brass represent a strength that conquers all enemies (Dan 2:33). The enemies of death and the grave now lie vanquished beneath his feet (Rev 1:17–18; 1 Cor 15:25–27). (CC p. 50)

These feet make his enemies his footstool: “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25). (PBC p. 22)

*voice was like the roar of many rivers* – Like waters, surging, restless, rising and falling, overwhelming, and irresistible in persistence and power. (Poellot – p. 20)

His voice was like the *roar of mighty waters* (Rev 1:15), similar to the voice of the heavenly figure in Dan 10:6, whose voice sounded like a great crowd of people. But Christ’s voice suggests especially the mighty voice of God which attended the coming of his glory, which voice is like the roar of many waters (Ezek 43:2); compare the sound of the wings of the four winged creatures of God’s glory in Ezek 1:24. *When John stands before the exalted Son of Man, he is standing before the very majesty and glory of God* (see Rev 10:3). (CC p. 50)

When the King lifts his thundering voice (Ezekiel 43:2), “the earth melts” (Psalm 46:6) (PBC p. 22)

**1:16** *seven stars* – They represent the angels of the seven churches. (CC p. 51)

The angels assigned to guard the seven churches. The fact that Jesus held these seven stars in His hand means that He plays an active part in protecting and caring for His people. (TLSB)

The Son of Man has *in his right hand seven stars*, which represent the angels of the seven churches (1:20). It is by his right hand of mercy (Mt 25:34; Rev 1:17) that the Lord Christ blesses and comforts his church through the sevenfold presence of the Spirit (Jn 14:15–17; 16:7). The angels are also a reminder that the church is represented before God’s heavenly throne by angels, through whom God also protects his people on earth (Heb 1:14; Mt 18:10; 25:31). (CC p. 51)

*sharp two-edged sword.*† Like a long Thracian sword (also in 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21). The sword in 6:4; 13:10, 14 was a small sword or dagger. The sword symbolizes divine judgment, authority and God’s word (see Isa 49:2; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12). (CSB)

But in particular the angels represent the human messengers of Christ’s Word to his church. The “*two-edged sword*” (Rev 1:16) indicates that the Son of Man will execute the judgment of God according to his Word (Heb 4:12). (CC p. 51)

Represents the Word of Christ, who rules in His Church by means of His Word. (CC p. 51)

The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12). Here John saw the sword moving to action, and in Rev 19:15,21 it effectively accomplishes its purpose, striking and slaying the nations. This sword of the Word is a devastating thing for the unbelievers, but a warm comfort for the children of God. (Poellot p. 21)

The Word of God alone changes the lives of people: it drives them to repentance when it convicts them of their sins through the preaching of the Law, and it gives them hope and comfort and empowers them for service through the Good News that God has been merciful to them by sending Christ to die for them. (LL p. 29)

*face was like the sun* – Last of all John mentions how *the whole appearance* of the Son of Man is *like the sun in its most powerful brightness* (Rev 1:16). In the OT the sun is used as a metaphor for God, in particular for his glory, by which he blesses his people and bestows upon them the light which produces life, bringing them out from darkness (Is. 60:1-3, 20; Ps. 84:11; cf. Num. 6:22-27). In Mal 4:2 the prophet declares that “the Sun of righteousness” will arise with healing in his wings, a heavenly figure which is associated with the Messiah because of Mal 3:1–4 and 4:1–2. The heavenly figure of Daniel 10 is pictured with a face like lightning (Dan 10:6). In Matthew’s account of the transfiguration we are told that Jesus’ face was like the sun (Mt 17:2). Here in Revelation *the face and the whole person of Jesus show that the exalted Christ is the person through whom the glory and the life-giving light of God are now present*. Christ’s face and person radiate God’s glory, which brings light to a world of darkness (Jn. Jn 1:4; 8:12; Heb. 1:3; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). (CC p. 51)

To his enemies that brings disaster and death, but his own bask in this light, as they experience nothing but goodness, loving kindness, and mercy. (Stoekhardt p. 4)

**1:17** *fell at his feet*. A sign of great respect and awe (4:10; 5:8; 7:11; 19:10; 22:8). (CSB)

An act of worship and response to Jesus' awesome appearance. Jesus is fully divine and worship is rightly directed toward Him (cf 19:10; 22:8–9). *the first and the last*. More or less synonymous with “the Alpha and the Omega” title of v 8; 21:6; 22:13. (TLSB)

The majesty of God turns us upside down, and we fall on our face in unworthiness. It throws us to our knees in adoration and utmost humility. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

When John now sees the exalted Christ in all his glory, he falls down before him as dead, as a corpse (1:17). Before the transfigured Christ, John (and Peter and James) first stood (Mt 17:1–5) and then, when the voice spoke from the cloud (Mt 17:6), fell on their faces (in a posture of worship) because of the fear that the experience evoked. But now John is completely knocked down and out as dead. While he could stand before the transfigured Christ and then in fear *willingly* bow down, here he is completely overwhelmed and *unwillingly*, as it were, forced down as when death strikes the body (cf. Jn 18:4–6). Perhaps when Jesus displayed his glory on the holy mount, it was dimmed just enough so that John could still remain standing. But here before the exalted Lord he is struck by a full blast of that consummate majestic glory, and as a result he is knocked down as a corpse. John could no more stand before the heavenly Christ than he could approach the solar sun and touch it. Indeed, he could no more stand before the glorified Christ than Moses could stand before God and see his face at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:9-25; 33:18-20; 34:29-30; cf. Heb. 12:20-21) – unless given special grace and permission. It is similar to what Isaiah said when he saw Yahweh on his throne:

Woe to me, for I am ruined, for I am a man unclean of lips and in the midst of a people unclean of lips I am dwelling, for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts. (Is 6:5)

No human person can stand before the exalted Son of Man because of the corruption of sin and God's own holiness. Not even John could stand before Christ on his own ability and merit because of John's state of sinful corruption and Christ's own holiness and glory. John's falling down as dead is like the action of every proclaimer of the Word as he falls down in repentance before the Word that comes to him. Every ministry of the Word begins with the repentance of the minister and Christ's forgiveness of his sin (cf. Rev 10:9–11). (CC p. 51-52)

*right hand* – The right hand always symbolizes fellowship in the Bible. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

But Jesus Christ gave John the grace and permission to stand before him. Placing his right hand on John, Jesus tells John, “Stop being afraid,” (1:17). This word of gracious comfort ( Cf. Gen. 15:1; Dan. 10:7-11; Mt. 28:5; Lk. 1:13, 30) empowers Christ's slave to stand up in his presence. (CC p. 52)

*fear not.*† A fitting introductory message to the gospel, as to Zechariah, to Jesus' mother Mary and to the shepherds (Lk 1:13, 30; 2:10). (CSB)

As long as fear holds men in its grip they are all their lifetime subject to bondage and slavery (Heb. 2:15). (Poellot p. 21)

For the people of God those words of assurance come as a great comfort, assuring them that God has put away their sins, that they stand cleansed before God, and that God has declared them to be his people. (LL p. 30)

1 John 4:18 “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

*I am.* The first of seven self-descriptions of Jesus introduced by “I am” (see 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5). In the Greek the words are solemnly emphatic and echo Ex 3:14 (CSB)

*the First and the Last.* Essentially the same as “the Alpha and the Omega” (v. 8; cf. Isa 44:6; 48:12). (CSB)

The Lord Christ identifies himself as “the First and the Last” (ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, 1:17). Like “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8), “the First and the Last” also denotes the eternalness, but the titles are not synonymous. “The Alpha and the Omega” refers to the eternalness of God (1:8) and Christ (22:13), an eternalness that is far beyond creation, but “the First and the Last” refers to the eternalness of Christ *in relationship to his bride, the church*. It is a reflection and fulfillment of Is 44:6 and 48:12, where Yahweh says to the people of Israel as their King and Redeemer, “I am the first and I am the last” (LXX Is 44:6: ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγὼ μετὰ ταῦτα). In using this title Jesus assures John that, as the Eternal One, he is his Savior; therefore John should not be afraid (see also Is 44:8, where Yahweh tells his people not to be afraid). (CC p. 52)

A fitting introductory message to the gospel, as to Zachariah, to Jesus’ mother and to the shepherds. (CSB)

As long as fear holds men in its grip they are all their lifetime subject to bondage and slavery (Hebrews 2:15). (Poellot p. 22)

**1:18** *Living One.* Based on OT references to the “living God” (e.g., Jos 3:10; Ps 42:2; 84:2). In contrast to the dead gods of paganism, Christ possesses life in his essential nature. (CSB)

Refers not merely to Jesus’ resurrection, but also to His capacity to impart eternal life to others (cf. John 11:25-26). (TLSB)

Furthermore, Jesus identifies himself as “the Living One” (Rev 1:18), a title used in the OT to contrast the true God with all idols, which are dead and thus have no existence (Deut. 32:40; Josh. 3:10; Is. 49:18; Jer. 5:2; Dan. 12:7; cf. Mt. 16:16; Acts 14:15; Rom. 9:26; Rom.9:26; 2 Cor. 3:3) . Jesus Christ was dead *but now lives forever*. Because of his death and resurrection Jesus Christ now has the keys of death and the grave. As the conqueror of death and the grave he demonstrates that there is only one true God, the God who now reaches out to all through Jesus Christ in order to bring life. All other gods are false and dead idols. The death *and resurrection* of Jesus Christ validate the truth that the God (“the first and . . . the last,” Is 44:6) who is now present in the exalted Christ is the only true God (Is 44:8–10), Creator (Is 48:12–13) and Judge/Redeemer (Is 48:14–22). (CC p. 53)

*keys of death and Hades.* Absolute control over their domain. (CSB)

**1:19** *write* – Having revived John with the gracious and life-giving touch of his hand, Jesus now commissions John to “write” (Rev 1:19) to the seven churches in order that they might receive and know the prophetic message of the unveiling of the Lord’s majesty. (CC p. 53)

Many take the threefold division of this verse as a clue to the entire structure of the book. “What you have seen” would be the inaugural vision of ch. 1; “what is now” would be the letters to the seven churches (chs. 2–3); “what will take place later” would be everything from ch. 4 on. An alternative interpretation sees the initial clause as the essential unit (it parallels v. 11), followed by two explanatory clauses. The sense would be: “Write, therefore, what you are about to see, i.e., both what is now and what will take place later.” Some who hold the latter view make no attempt to outline the book on this basis, maintaining that there is a mixture of “now” and “later” throughout. (CSB)

**1:20** The first of several places where the symbols are interpreted (see also 17:15, 18). (CSB)

*angels.*† Either (1) heavenly messengers, (2) earthly messengers/ministers or (3) personifications of the prevailing spirit of each church. In v. 1 the reference no doubt is to a heavenly messenger or spirit; in v. 20 and 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14 the reference is to earthly messengers, probably the pastor of each congregation. (CSB)

*lampstands* – Like the lampstand, the church does not produce the light of the world, but it rather bears the Light to the world by speaking the Word of God which has been committed by his people. (LL p. 29)

The book of Revelation generally presents the Lord Christ as either the Son of Man or the Lamb of God. When he appears as the Son of Man, it is fearful to contemplate him, for as such he is the judge of all the human race on behalf of God the Father (Rev 19:11–16; cf. Jn 5:22–23, 27). When he appears as such, it strikes fear and terror in the hearts of all people (Rev 6:12–17), even momentarily in the hearts of God’s own people (1:17). *He has the authority to carry out God’s judgment as the Son of Man because as the Lamb of God he suffered God’s judgment in place of the human race* (5:6–10; 6:15–17; 19:13–15). When, however, he appears as the Lamb, it is to his own people only, and there is no fear. God’s people can stand before him in his love as ones washed in his blood (7:9–17). They have no fear, no uncertainty, only the love that assures them that they are God’s people (19:5–9). In the final appearance of Jesus Christ in Revelation, the grand vision of his second coming as the Son of Man in judgment (19:11–21), God’s people are not to fear. He is coming not as their judge, but as their deliverer. This is demonstrated in the first vision of Christ’s second coming in Revelation 14, where the two pictures, the Son of Man and the Lamb of God, coalesce. As he comes as the Son of Man to judge (14:14–20), God’s people are to view him as the Lamb (14:1–5). At his coming they will see him as the Son of Man and will (momentarily) be afraid, but they are to look upon him not as judge but as the Lamb, the Savior. All fear then disappears as he says, “Come, you blessed, into the kingdom that has been prepared for you.” (See. Rev. 14:9-13; 19:6-8; 22:14-15; cf. Mt. 25:32-34). (CC p. 5)

**1:9–20** John describes his awesome vision of the risen and exalted Christ. Jesus is such an imposing figure that John instinctively falls down before Him, trembling with fear. We would surely react the same way in His presence. But Jesus is not merely about overwhelming power and glory. He was made like us in every way except without sin. Having overcome death and the grave, He now promises to share His eternal life and glory with us. • “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (Ps 95:6–7). Amen.