

A decorative frame consisting of thick black lines. It starts with a vertical line on the left side, then turns 90 degrees to the right at the top, forming a horizontal line. It then turns 90 degrees down at the right end, forming a vertical line. Finally, it turns 90 degrees to the left at the bottom, forming a horizontal line. The text is centered within this frame.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Chapter 1

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Direct, O Lord, we beseech you,
all our actions by your holy inspirations,
and carry them on by your gracious assistance,
that every prayer and work of ours
may begin always from you,
and by you be happily ended.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source Material

- *Revelation*, Peter S. Williamson
- *Revelation, Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger
- *The Antichrist*, Vincent P. Miceli, SJ
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)*
- *Douay-Rheims Bible*

Summary of chapter 1

■ Outline

- *Prologue (1:1-3)*
- *Greeting (1:4-8)*
- *John's Commissioning (1:9-11)*
- *The First Vision of the Resurrected Jesus (1:13-20)*

- We discussed the prologue last week, in which we met the author John, who was chosen by God to receive this extraordinary vision and to give witness to what he saw
- This short introductory chapter will introduce us to the glorified and resurrected Jesus, who confirms John's call and commissions him for the task ahead.

Greeting (1:4-8)

Here we see a greeting similar to those at the beginning of other biblical letters, for example, those of Saint Paul. We also learn the author's name, John, and his addressees: the seven churches of Asia

Note the trinitarian greeting, which is a little out of order...

- The Father is described as “he who is and who was and who is to come,” reminiscent of God’s self-revelation of his name to Moses in Ex 3:
 - *“I AM,” meaning that he is beyond time, existing in an eternal present and whose existence spans all of history.*
- Also note that God is he “who is to come,” affirming that he is indeed coming with salvation for the righteous in Christ and judgment for the wicked
 - *This three-fold description of the Father will change once he comes in his fullness*

Greeting (1:4-8)

- The Holy Spirit is described in an unusual way as the “seven spirits before his throne,” probably a reference to Isaiah 11 in which the Spirit of God bestows his seven gifts:
 - *wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord, in the same way that we understand him.*
 - *So it is not that there are seven Holy Spirits – rather, he is known by his seven gifts*
- Notice also that Jesus is mentioned third, which is unusual.
 - *This is probably simply a rhetorical device because what follows is a longer description of the attributes of Jesus*
 - *Also, John will segue into Jesus as the focus of this book.*

Greeting (1:4-8)

The four titles of Jesus

- Christ – he is the ‘anointed’ messianic king, whose arrival was prophesied throughout the OT
- Faithful witness – he bore witness to the Father and to himself as being sent from the Father as Messiah for the redemption of the world. He remained faithful to this truth all the way to the cross.
- Firstborn of the dead – also mentioned by St. Paul. A strange phrase at first, but it refers to the central Christian belief that Jesus is the conqueror of death.
 - *He was the first member of the human race (remember, he shared our humanity completely through his Incarnation) to rise from the dead unto eternal life, the promise held out to all the faithful*
- Ruler of the kings of the earth – as Jesus said just before his Ascension, “all power in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” (Mt 28:18) He possesses absolute authority as the risen Messiah over all things.

Greeting (1:4-8)

- “Who has made us a kingdom of priests...”
 - *An important Christian concept, totally new with the coming of Christ*
 - *Just as Christ is understood as the true High Priest, standing between God and man, so too do those baptized into his Body and given of the Spirit share in that priesthood.*
 - *It is exercised universally by all the baptized primarily through worship – offering themselves as a sacrifice of praise to the Father in union with Jesus and through intercessory prayer*
 - *Though fundamentally different from the ministerial priesthood, all the baptized rightly share in the priestly ministry of Christ.*

Greeting (1:4-8)

- “Behold he is coming amid the clouds...”
 - *Anytime you see “behold” you know to expect a big statement*
 - *Here we see a principal theme of Revelation – Jesus is coming!*
 - *The reference here is to Daniel 7, which prophesies the coming of the Messiah. Jesus himself spoke these words during his trial before the Sanhedrin in Mark 14*
 - *He will not come in secret this time (like he did last time). Rather, every eye will see him, even those who put him to death (“pierced him”)*
 - *“All will lament” – he’s talking about lamenting their sins. Heightened awareness of one’s sins is a common (and understandable) reaction to an encounter with God (Is 6:5, Lk 5:8)*
 - *“Yes, amen.” An excited double affirmation of the certainty of his coming in glory*

Greeting (1:4-8)

- “Alpha and Omega”
 - *These are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet.*
 - *God is saying that he is the beginning and end of all things.*
 - *It would be like saying he is the “A and the Z” (though that doesn’t have the same ring to it!)*
- The “Almighty”
 - *A rendering of God’s ancient title, “Lord God of hosts,” referring to the heavenly armies*
- With these titles alone, we come to understand the absolute power of God, who created everything that is and for whom nothing is impossible.
 - *We also understand infinitesimal puniness of all other worldly and spiritual powers (i.e., evil) compared to God.*

John's Commissioning (1:9-11)

■ "Brother"

- *Already at this early stage, we see the familial ties amongst believers.*
- *As Jesus said, those who, like him, do the will of the Father are his brothers and sisters. (Mk 3:35) It was a radically different understanding of one's relationship with God and with fellow believers who are joined through faith and baptism.*
- *John is acknowledging the suffering of many amongst the brethren for their faith*
- *John himself is suffering too, having been exiled to the island penal colony of Patmos (off the coast of Turkey) for the "crime" of evangelizing.*

John's Commissioning (1:9-11)

- “the Lord’s Day”
 - *Sunday, the day of gathering and worship for Christians then as now, in particular remembrance of the Resurrection.*
 - *This is the only use of this phrase in the entire NT*
 - *It may be that it was in the midst of the assembly (the Mass) that he had this vision that he is now about to describe in the rest of the book.*
 - *It is a moving thought to consider that our Sunday gatherings are in such continuity with those of our ancient brethren.*

John's Commissioning (1:9-11)

■ "Seven Cities"

- *All within a couple day's walk from each other*
- *Beginning with Ephesus, which was a hub of Christian activity since St. Paul's very successful evangelization efforts in that city. It is likely that the faith spread to the other cities from there.*
- *It is probable that the messenger traveled to all these towns in the order listed – they follow a clockwise pattern on a map.*
- *There were certainly other surrounding towns with Christian populations besides those listed. The message of Revelation would have been carried to each in turn*
- *Also, the listing of "seven" cities, referring to completeness, means that these words are for all the churches of the region, and for all churches of all time!*

The First Vision (1:12-20)

■ “One like a son of man”

- *As we know, Jesus often referred to himself using this term. In one sense, it means a simple human being, but based on OT prophecy, the term takes on deeper meaning*
- *In the way that Jesus and John mean it, “Son of Man” refers to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13: “I saw coming with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man. When he reached the Ancient of Days (the Father) and was presented before him, he received dominion, splendor and kingship; all nations, peoples and tongues will serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away; his kingship, one that shall not be destroyed.”*
- *This was the quote Jesus spoke, referring to himself, during his trial before the Sanhedrin (Mk 14:61) which led to the charge of blasphemy.*
- *This mysterious OT figure, the Son of Man, will be given all dominion and kingship forever, something that belongs be right to the Father alone. This is what John is describing to us, teaching us that Jesus is this person.*

The First Vision (1:12-20)

■ Elements of his appearance

- *Ankle-length robe – exclusively used in the OT to describe the vestments of the High Priest*
- *Gold sash – a symbol of great authority*
- *Hair as white as wool or snow – an OT symbol of wisdom and eternity*
- *Eyes of fiery flame – meaning all-seeing*
- *Feet of polished brass – a symbol of power and glory*
- *Voice like rushing water – connoting power in his words*
- *Seven stars – representing the totality of celestial powers, which belong to him*
- *Two-edged sword from his mouth – his Word is all-powerful, able to create, judge and destroy*
- *Face shown like the sun – a common description of God in the OT, referring to his splendor. Reminiscent of the Transfiguration (Mk9)*

The First Vision (1:12-20)

■ Elements of his appearance

- *All of these are images and symbols telling us of Jesus' absolute power, splendor, wisdom, holiness, authority and kingship.*
- *They are already telling us, in the very first verses of the book, one of our biggest themes – the God is in complete control and Christ is already reigning. We will see these descriptions again in ch. 2-3.*

■ “Once I was dead...”

- *An explicit self-identification that it is in fact Jesus that John now beholds.*
- *Rightfully, John falls to the ground before the glorious presence of Christ, much like the three apostles did at the Transfiguration (Mt 17:6)*

■ “I hold the keys...”

- *Jesus was dead and now is alive, never to die again*
- *He has total dominion over death and the place of the dead.*
- *He can now promise life to those who believe in him.*

The First Vision (1:12-20)

■ Seven lampstands

- *Represent the seven churches to whom the book is addressed.*
- *It is fitting that these churches are thus depicted...Jesus said that we are to be the “light of the world” (Mt 5:14), a beacon of Christ’s invitation to life before the whole world.*
- *Jesus is in the midst of them, just as he promised before his Ascension (Mt 28:20)*

■ Seven stars

- *These represent either the local bishop of each of the seven churches, or the guardian angel of each church, or perhaps a literary personification of the spirit of the congregation, a point to which we will return.*
- *Whatever their interpretation, they are in the palm of the Lord’s hand, demonstrating his presence and tender concern for his Church.*

The First Vision (1:12-20)

■ Reflection

- *We must imagine that what John saw and is trying to describe and put into words is the single greatest thing his eyes had ever beheld – the glorious and triumphant Jesus, risen from the dead.*
- *John thus joins the ranks of those primary witnesses of the risen Christ. It is their testimony that is the foundation of the Church. There is no higher authority for the message he will now write.*
- *John is commissioned to ‘write down’ (and therefore spread) the words Jesus will speak, first to the seven churches and then to the world.*
- *The reader now understands that what he will now hear comes directly from Jesus, who with love and mercy, calls his people to repentance and to faith.*
- *It is a fruitful thing to pray and hope that we will one day see this same vision!*

End of Chapter 1

- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.