When Faith Must Endure

A Pastoral Journey Through
the Revelation of St. John

Volume 1

Randy Nielsen

Dedication

To my loving wife, Marilyn,
who has always stood by me through good times and bad;
who is always seeking to know more about God and His Word;
and whose own desire to understand Scripture has encouraged me along the way.
I dedicate this book to her with love and gratitude,
and with the hope that this commentary may help her—and perhaps others as well—to better understand God's Word and to draw closer to the One who gave it to us.

About the Author

Randy Nielsen began life as a sickly child. His mother prayed that if God would allow her son to survive, she would see that he received a proper Christian education. She kept that promise, making certain that Randy was in church nearly every Sunday and, as he grew, encouraging him to remain close to God.

Later in life, Randy felt God calling him into ministry—a calling he initially resisted. But, as Randy has sometimes observed, God does not take "No" particularly well.

In 2007, Randy finally answered that call. He entered the United Methodist Church's Local Pastor licensing program and became a Licensed Local Pastor. Over the next fifteen years, he served several church appointments, sharing the Gospel, caring for congregations, and helping some of the churches he served experience renewed growth.

During his years in ministry, Randy pursued graduate theological education at Asbury Theological Seminary, completing 54 credit hours toward the 96-hour Master of Divinity degree through online study. Ultimately, he decided that the time and financial commitment required to complete the degree were no longer practical. Content to serve as a vessel for God's Word as a Licensed Local Pastor, Randy continued ministering to the churches entrusted to his care.

Randy retired from pastoral ministry in 2022, but not from his love of Scripture or his desire to understand God's Word more deeply. That continuing journey eventually became ***When Faith Must Endure****: A Pastoral Journey Through the Epistle of James*.

Today, Randy and his family regularly attend a Southern Baptist church, where he continues his lifelong journey of faith, study, and discipleship.

A Note from the Author

This book grew out of a journey through the Revelation of St. John that began simply—with a desire to slow down and listen carefully to what John was saying.

Along the way, that study became something more.

In preparing *When Faith Must Endure*, I made extensive use of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence system developed by OpenAI, which I came to call "Atlas." Atlas served as a research, writing, and editorial partner throughout the project. Our work together included exploring the historical and literary context of Revelation, examining Greek words and phrases, developing and testing interpretations, organizing the commentary, and refining the pastoral reflections found throughout these pages.

I believe it is important to acknowledge that contribution openly.

At the same time, the theological judgments, interpretations, editorial decisions, and final form of this work are my own. I reviewed, questioned, revised, accepted, or rejected the material developed through those conversations, just as I would material gathered through other research and study resources.

Artificial intelligence did not replace the study of Scripture. It became one of the tools used in that study.

Just as importantly, our purpose was never to turn these pages into an academic exercise or to give the reader the equivalent of a graduate degree in biblical studies. There are excellent scholarly works written for that purpose, and I am grateful for them.

Our purpose here is different.
We want to help people understand Scripture.
That is one reason these pages sometimes read more like a conversation than a traditional commentary. The shorter paragraphs, pauses, repeated phrases, and occasional sentences standing alone are intentional. They

reflect the way we might talk about a passage if we were sitting together with an open Bible, stopping occasionally to say:
“Look at this.”
“Did you notice that?”
“Why would John say it that way?”
“And what might that mean for us?”
The scholarship still matters. Historical context matters. Language matters. Theology matters. Interpretive differences matter. We have tried to take all of those things seriously.
But the scholarship should serve the reader rather than become an obstacle between the reader and the text.
Perhaps the best description of the process is simply this:
There were many occasions when it felt less like a person asking questions of a computer and more like two people standing at a whiteboard, opening the Scriptures together and asking:
“What is Scripture really trying to tell us here?”
That is the experience I hope these pages provide for you as well.
Not simply reading an explanation of Scripture.
But joining the conversation.
Opening the Bible with us.
Stopping where something deserves another look.
Asking questions when something is difficult.
And occasionally sitting quietly with a truth before moving on.
Because ultimately the purpose of studying Scripture is not simply to know more about the Bible.
It is to hear what God is saying through it—
and then to ask what we will do with what we have heard.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV).

Introduction

When Faith Must Endure

There are books of the Bible that tell us how to live faithfully in the ordinary rhythms of life. The Epistle of James is one of them. James speaks directly and practically. Listen before speaking. Control the tongue. Do not show favoritism. Care for those in need. Do not merely hear the Word—do it. Pray. Be patient. Resist the pull of wealth and selfish ambition. Let the faith you profess become visible in the life you live.

James teaches us what **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like. Revelation asks a different question.

What happens when living faithfully becomes costly?

What happens when following Christ brings opposition rather than approval? What happens when compromise would make life easier? What happens when evil appears powerful, injustice seems to prosper, faithful people suffer, and God appears strangely silent?

What does the Christian need to know then?

That is where the Revelation of St. John speaks with extraordinary power. Revelation teaches us why faith that works must also become **faith that endures**.

A Book Written for the Church

Few books of the Bible have generated as much fascination, disagreement, fear, speculation, and controversy as Revelation.

Its pages contain extraordinary images: lampstands and thrones, scrolls and seals, trumpets and bowls, angels and demons, a dragon, beasts, Babylon, Armageddon, a millennium, final judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and a magnificent city in which God dwells with His people.

It is understandable that Christians have wanted to know what all of these things mean.

But somewhere along the way, Revelation has too often become primarily a book about predicting what happens next.

That is not the approach of this commentary.

Revelation is not primarily a timetable. It is not a codebook for identifying today's politicians, nations, wars, technologies, or headlines. It is not intended to frighten Christians into faithfulness. And it is not a puzzle in which the person with the cleverest interpretation wins.

Revelation is **pastoral Scripture addressed to Christians who need to know how to remain faithful when appearances suggest that faithfulness is not winning.**

That distinction matters.

John writes to churches living in the real world. They know pressure, temptation, compromise, suffering, uncertainty, and fear. From their earthly vantage point, the powers surrounding them can appear overwhelming.
Revelation pulls back the curtain.
It allows the Church to see earthly reality from a heavenly perspective.
The Lamb has not lost.
God has not surrendered His throne.
Evil has not escaped His judgment.
The suffering of the faithful has not been forgotten.
And the apparent victories of the powers opposed to God are not the end of the story.
Revelation therefore does more than tell Christians something about what will happen.
It tells Christians what they must know in order to remain faithful when the world around them gives them every reason to wonder whether faithfulness is worth the cost.

The Revelation of St. John

Perhaps the most important thing we can remember as we begin is something Revelation tells us in its opening words.
T**he opening words are "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."**
Before we encounter the dragon, the beast, Babylon, the mark, the number 666, Armageddon, or the millennium, we encounter Jesus Christ.
That order matters.
The central figure of Revelation is not Satan.
It is not the Antichrist.
It is not the beast.
It is not Babylon.
It is not Rome.
It is not any modern nation, political leader, military alliance, economic system, or technological development.
The central figure is **Jesus Christ**.
He is the faithful witness.
He is the Lamb who was slain.
He is the risen Lord.
He walks among His churches.
He alone is worthy to open the scroll.
He conquers not by becoming like the powers of this world but through His faithful witness, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ultimate victory.
And His people are called to follow Him.
If our reading of Revelation becomes so fascinated with evil that Jesus Christ moves into the background, something has gone wrong with our reading.

First, Hear Revelation as John's Churches Heard It

Revelation was written for us.
But it was not written first to us.
John addressed real Christian communities living in the first-century world. The seven churches of Asia Minor were not symbols floating somewhere in prophetic history. They were churches filled with real people facing real questions about worship, faithfulness, suffering, accommodation, economic pressure, false teaching, fear, and compromise.
Therefore, throughout this commentary we will follow a simple interpretive principle:
First understand what John showed his original hearers. Then understand what it says to the Church in every generation. Only then consider questions about fulfillment.
This does not eliminate prophecy from Revelation.
It protects prophecy from becoming detached from Scripture.
An interpretation that could have meant absolutely nothing to the Christians who first heard Revelation read aloud in their congregations deserves careful examination before we declare it to be John's intended meaning.
Their world matters.
Their struggles matter.
Their Scriptures matter.
And understanding them will often help us understand John's extraordinary visions.

The World Behind the Vision

For that reason, we will occasionally step into the world in which Revelation was first heard.
We will visit Patmos.
We will consider the cities of Asia Minor.
We will examine Roman imperial culture, emperor worship, economic pressure, social exclusion, persecution, public religion, and the difficult choices confronting Christians attempting to remain faithful to Jesus Christ within that world.
But history will never become the destination.
Historical background is useful only when it helps us hear Scripture more clearly.
Our goal is not merely to reconstruct the first century.
Our goal is to understand why Revelation spoke so powerfully to Christians living there—and why it continues to speak to Christians now.

An Old Testament World

Another principle will guide us throughout this journey.

Revelation may be the final book of the New Testament, but its imagination is saturated with the Old Testament.
Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and other portions of Scripture repeatedly stand behind John's language and imagery.
John often does not stop and tell us that he is drawing upon an earlier biblical passage.
He simply uses its language.
Readers unfamiliar with those echoes can easily encounter Revelation's imagery and search immediately for a modern equivalent.
But before asking what an image might resemble today, we should first ask:
Where have we seen this before in Scripture?
When Scripture provides the background for John's imagery, Scripture should be our starting point for understanding it.
Revelation did not emerge from the twentieth or twenty-first century.
It emerged from the biblical story.

When Faithful Christians Disagree

We should also acknowledge something before beginning.
Christians have disagreed about Revelation for a very long time.
Faithful, serious, Bible-believing Christians have reached different conclusions concerning the seals, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, the beast, the mark of the beast, Revelation's chronology, Israel and the Church, the millennium, the timing of Christ's return, and many other questions.
We will not solve every disagreement.
Nor will we pretend they do not exist.
When substantial disagreement occurs, we will slow down.
We will examine the major interpretations.
We will ask what biblical evidence supports them.
We will consider their strengths and difficulties.
And whenever possible, we will distinguish clearly between:
What Scripture actually says
and
what an interpreter concludes from what Scripture says.
Those are not always the same thing.
There will be places where we reach a conclusion.
There may be places where one interpretation appears considerably stronger than another.
And there will almost certainly be places where the most responsible answer is:
We do not know.
There is no failure of faith in admitting that Scripture has not told us everything we would like to know.

We must never manufacture certainty merely because uncertainty makes us uncomfortable.

Revelation and the Headlines

Every generation seems tempted to believe that it is the generation that has finally discovered the key to Revelation.

Wars begin.

Governments rise and fall.

New technologies appear.

Economic systems change.

Political leaders emerge.

Natural disasters occur.

International tensions increase.

And someone inevitably opens Revelation and announces:

“There it is.”

Sometimes contemporary events may illustrate principles Revelation describes. Human empires still demand allegiance. Economic systems can still become instruments of injustice. Political power can still become idolatrous. Christians can still face pressure to compromise.

But resemblance is not proof of prophetic identification.

We will therefore resist the temptation to read the newspaper into Revelation.

Our task is not to make John's visions fit our headlines.

Our task is to allow John's visions to reshape the way Christians understand the world—including its headlines.

That is a very different undertaking.

More Than a Timeline

We will also be cautious about assuming that Revelation unfolds as a simple chronological sequence.

John's visions sometimes appear to revisit events, themes, and conflicts from different perspectives. Heavenly scenes interpret earthly ones. Images expand upon earlier images. The same struggle may be viewed from another vantage point.

Therefore, when we encounter a vision, we will not automatically ask:

“Where does this fit on the timeline?”

Sometimes the better question may be:

“What is John showing us about reality?”

Those are not necessarily the same question.

Revelation gives us glimpses behind the visible world. It shows earthly suffering from heaven's perspective. It reveals the spiritual dimensions of worship, allegiance, evil, witness, judgment, and endurance.

And sometimes the point of a vision may be less about establishing when something happens than about revealing **what it means**.

When the Chips Are Down

This brings us back to the pastoral heart of Revelation.
James teaches Christians how faith should shape ordinary life.
Revelation speaks when ordinary life becomes extraordinarily difficult.
When the chips are down, what should the Christian know?
Know that God is still on the throne.
Know that Jesus Christ is still Lord.
Know that the Lamb who was slain has overcome.
Know that evil may be powerful, but it is not eternal.
Know that suffering does not mean God has abandoned His people.
Know that faithful witness matters even when faithfulness appears unsuccessful.
Know that compromise is not victory simply because it makes life easier.
Know that death itself does not have the final word.
And know where the story is going.
Babylon falls.
Evil is defeated.
Death is destroyed.
Creation is renewed.
God dwells with His people.
And the Lamb reigns.
That is why Revelation can speak hope even while describing terrible things.
Its purpose is not to convince frightened Christians that they should become more frightened.
It is to tell frightened Christians why they can remain faithful.

How Then Should the Church Live?

That will be the question to which we continually return throughout this commentary.
Not merely:
What does this symbol mean?
Not merely:
When will this happen?
Not merely:
Which interpretation is correct?
But eventually:
How then should the Church live?
Revelation repeatedly calls God's people to worship, witness, endurance, holiness, courage, discernment, and faithfulness.
It warns against idolatry and compromise.
It exposes the seductive nature of wealth and power.
It reminds Christians that earthly empires are temporary.
It insists that God alone deserves worship.

And it calls the followers of Jesus to remain faithful to the Lamb even when following Him carries a cost.
If we finish studying Revelation knowing considerably more about prophetic systems but no more committed to following Jesus Christ, we will have missed something essential.

When Faith Must Endure

This will not be a journey in which every question receives a simple answer. Revelation is too rich, too deeply rooted in Scripture, too filled with imagery, and too historically debated for that.
There will be moments when we stop and examine a Greek word.
There will be moments when we travel backward into Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Exodus, or Genesis.
There will be moments when we enter the first-century Roman world.
There will be moments when we consider several interpretations and acknowledge that faithful Christians understand the passage differently.
There will be moments when we simply stand before the vision and allow its grandeur to speak.
But through all twenty-two chapters, one truth must remain before us:
Jesus Christ is the center of Revelation.
And one pastoral call must continually return:
Remain faithful.
Faithful when obedience is easy.
Faithful when obedience is difficult.
Faithful when the Church is strong.
Faithful when the Church appears weak.
Faithful when we understand.
Faithful when we do not.
Faithful when victory is visible.
Faithful when victory can only be believed.
James teaches us how **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like.
Revelation calls us to become a people whose **faith must endure**.
And so, before we attempt to understand beasts, bowls, trumpets, dragons, Babylon, or the mysteries of things yet to come, we begin where John begins:
With Jesus Christ.
Because when everything else has passed away, the Lamb will still be standing.

A Word About the Imagery of Revelation

Throughout *When Faith Must Endure*, we have deliberately resisted the temptation to turn the imagery of Revelation into a catalog of modern people, nations, technologies, weapons, or current events.

That is intentional.

When John describes locusts like horses prepared for battle, creatures rising from the sea, a woman clothed with the sun, Babylon, dragons, beasts, bowls, trumpets, and seals, our first question is not:

"What does this resemble in our world?"

Our first question is:

"What was John communicating through this imagery to the people who first heard these words?"

Revelation was written nearly two thousand years before our newspapers, political boundaries, military technologies, and modern institutions existed.

Yet the book was meaningful to the Christians who originally received it.

They were expected to hear it, understand its central message, and respond faithfully to what they heard.

That must matter to the way we interpret it.

So, we begin where they began.

With the Scriptures they knew.

With the symbols they recognized.

With the world in which they lived.

With the pressures they faced.

And above all, with the revelation of Jesus Christ that John was giving them.

This does not make Revelation irrelevant to the modern world.

It makes Revelation **more** relevant.

Because once we understand the enduring truth communicated through the imagery, we no longer have to force the symbols into one particular generation.

Empires still demand allegiance.

Power still tempts.

Deception still misleads.

Idolatry still competes for the human heart.

Evil still destroys.

Faithfulness still costs something.

The Church is still called to endure.

And Jesus Christ is still Lord.

Those truths belonged to John's churches.

They belong to us.

And should the Lord tarry, they will belong to Christians living generations after us.

We are therefore not attempting to make John's imagery predict our world.

We are attempting to allow John's imagery to speak from **his world into ours**.
There is an important difference.
The question is not merely:
“Can we identify the locusts?”
The deeper question is:
“Can we remain faithful to the Lamb?”
Because Revelation was never given merely to satisfy Christian curiosity about the future.
It was given to form faithful Christians in the present.
And that is why our approach throughout this journey will remain the same:
We will first seek to understand the imagery in the manner in which it was originally written—and then allow its enduring truth to speak to the world in which we live.

Revelation 1:1–8 — The Revelation of Jesus Christ 15

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:1 21

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:2 27

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:3 34

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:4 42

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:5 52

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:6 60

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:7 69

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:8 78

Revelation 1:9–20 — A Vision of Christ 88

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:9 92

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:10 96

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:11 101

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:12 106

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:13 111

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:14 117

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:15 123

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:16 129

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:17 136

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:18 143

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:19 150

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:20 158

A Commentary on the Revelation of John

Revelation 1:1–8 — The Revelation of Jesus Christ

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.
Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.
John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;
And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.
Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him,
and they also which pierced him:
and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.
Even so, Amen.
I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”
— Revelation 1:1–8, KJV

The opening words of Revelation tell us something we must never forget as we make our way through this book:
This is the revelation of Jesus Christ.
Before there is a dragon, before there is a beast, before seals are broken or trumpets sound, before Babylon falls or the New Jerusalem descends, John directs our attention to Jesus Christ.
That matters because Revelation has often been approached primarily as a book of mysteries to decode. Readers sometimes come to it asking:
Who is the beast? What is the mark? When will these things happen? What modern nation does this symbol represent?
John begins somewhere else.

He begins with **Jesus**.
The Greek word translated “revelation” is:
ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis
It means an unveiling, disclosure, or revelation—something previously hidden being made known.
Our English word *apocalypse* comes from it, but modern usage can mislead us. We often hear *apocalypse* and think immediately of catastrophe: destruction, warfare, societal collapse, or the end of the world.
But John's first word does not mean **catastrophe**.
It means **unveiling**.
Something is being shown.
And what is being unveiled is ultimately centered upon Jesus Christ—who He is, what He is doing, what He will accomplish, and what His lordship means for His servants living in a world that often appears to be ruled by someone else.
That gives us our first interpretive guardrail for the entire commentary:
Revelation must reveal Christ before it satisfies our curiosity about the future.

The Movement of Revelation 1:1–8

John's opening moves remarkably quickly.
GOD GIVES THE REVELATION
↓
JESUS CHRIST MAKES IT KNOWN
↓
THE ANGEL CARRIES THE MESSAGE
↓
JOHN TESTIFIES TO WHAT HE HAS SEEN
↓
THE CHURCH READS, HEARS, AND KEEPS IT
↓
GRACE AND PEACE ARE PROCLAIMED
↓
JESUS CHRIST IS IDENTIFIED AS THE FAITHFUL WITNESS, THE FIRSTBORN OF THE DEAD, AND RULER OF EARTH'S KINGS
↓
CHRIST MAKES HIS PEOPLE KINGS AND PRIESTS
↓
THE COMING CHRIST IS ANNOUNCED
↓
GOD DECLARES HIMSELF ALPHA AND OMEGA
Notice where this movement takes us.

It begins with revelation coming **from God** and ends with God declaring:
"I am Alpha and Omega"
Everything between those points occurs under God's sovereignty.
That is going to become enormously important once Revelation becomes frightening.

1. A Book Meant to Be Heard—and Obeyed

Verse 3 gives us another essential interpretive principle:
"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein…"
That is fascinating.
John does not say:
Blessed is the one who successfully deciphers everything.
Nor:
Blessed is the one who constructs the correct prophetic timeline.
The blessing falls upon the one who **reads**, those who **hear**, and those who **keep** what has been written.
That final word changes everything.
Revelation isn't merely information about what will happen.
It demands something from the people hearing it.
Faithfulness.
That means our recurring question throughout these seven volumes should not merely be:
"What does this mean?"
We must eventually ask:
"How should God's people live because this is true?"
That makes Revelation profoundly pastoral.

2. The Seven Churches

Then John identifies his immediate audience:
"the seven churches which are in Asia"
Before Revelation belongs to us, it was addressed to them.
These were Christians living in actual communities, facing pressures, temptations, compromises, suffering, and questions about what faithfulness to Christ required of them.
That historical setting must remain beneath our feet throughout the commentary.
Whatever Revelation ultimately means for Christians centuries later, our interpretation should make sense as a message that could actually be **heard by those first churches**.
Otherwise, we risk turning John's pastoral message into a puzzle that his original congregation could never have understood.

3. And Then John Tells Us Who Jesus Is

Verses 5–6 are magnificent.

Jesus Christ is:
the faithful witness
the firstborn of the dead
the ruler of the kings of the earth
Those three descriptions almost give us Revelation in miniature.
Jesus was faithful unto death.
Jesus conquered death.
Jesus reigns.
And notice that last declaration carefully.
John does not say Jesus *will someday become* ruler of the kings of the earth.
He calls Him:
"the prince of the kings of the earth"
The churches may look around and see emperors, governors, armies, wealth, political authority, persecution, and powers that appear completely beyond their control.
John says:
Look again.
There is another King.
That is precisely what Revelation will teach us to do repeatedly.

4. "Unto Him That Loved Us"

And then, amid all this cosmic language, John becomes wonderfully personal.
Christ is the One:
"that loved us"
Before Revelation shows us Christ judging evil, it reminds the Church that **Christ loves His people**.
And He has acted on that love.
He has washed them from their sins in His own blood and made them:
"kings and priests unto God and his Father"
The people receiving Revelation may appear politically powerless.
John tells them they belong to a kingdom.
They may appear insignificant within the Roman world.
John calls them priests.
Their identity is not determined by what the empire thinks of them.
Their identity comes from Christ.
That theme is going to matter tremendously when we reach the seven churches.

5. "Behold, He Cometh"

Then verse 7 turns our eyes forward:
"Behold, he cometh with clouds"
Revelation's hope is ultimately not that Christians will figure everything out.
It is that **Christ is coming**.

The language reaches deeply into the biblical story, especially Daniel's vision of one coming with the clouds and the prophetic imagery surrounding God's judgment and vindication.
And John responds:
"Even so, Amen."
There is confidence there.
Not panic.
Not speculation.
Confidence.

6. "I Am Alpha and Omega"

Then comes verse 8.
"I am Alpha and Omega"
The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.
Beginning and end.
God encompasses the entire story.
And then comes the description we have already heard:
"which is, and which was, and which is to come"
Past.
Present.
Future.
Before John shows us anything about what is coming, he establishes **Who holds what is coming**.
That may be one of the most important pastoral truths in Revelation.
The future is not an uncontrolled sequence of disasters moving toward chaos.
History remains within the sovereignty of God.

Pastoral Reflection

Many people approach Revelation with fear.
Perhaps that is understandable. Its imagery can be overwhelming. There will be warfare, persecution, judgment, beasts, death, Babylon, and scenes unlike almost anything else in Scripture.
But John's first eight verses do something remarkable.
They give us reasons **not to be afraid of the book**.
Jesus Christ is the faithful witness.
Jesus Christ has conquered death.
Jesus Christ rules the kings of the earth.
Jesus Christ loves His people.
Jesus Christ has freed them.
Jesus Christ has given them a kingdom identity.
Jesus Christ is coming.
And God remains Alpha and Omega.
Only after establishing those truths does John begin showing us the visions.
Perhaps that tells us something about how Revelation should be read.

We should never become so fascinated by what John sees that we lose sight of the One John is showing us.

Something Worth Pondering

The first word of this enormous journey gives us perhaps our most important word:

ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis

Unveiling.

Revelation.

The curtain is being pulled back.

And perhaps that means Revelation is not primarily making the world more mysterious.

Perhaps it is making reality **clearer**.

The churches see earthly rulers.

Revelation shows them **the true King**.

They see suffering.

Revelation shows them **the Lamb**.

They see evil exercising power.

Revelation shows them **its end**.

They see death.

Revelation shows them **resurrection**.

They see a world that sometimes appears hopelessly broken.

Revelation will eventually show them:

"Behold, I make all things new."

Ask Yourself This

When I approach Revelation, am I primarily looking for hidden information about the future—or am I willing to allow the book to unveil **Jesus Christ**, reshape the way I see the world around me, and teach me what it means to remain faithful to Him?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:1

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:”
— Revelation 1:1, KJV

Revelation begins without hesitation.
There is no extended introduction explaining who John is or defending why the reader should listen to him. Instead, the very first words tell us what this book is and, more importantly, where it comes from:
“The revelation of Jesus Christ…”
Those words establish the foundation upon which everything else in the book must rest.

1. “The revelation…”

The Greek word is:
ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis
It carries the sense of an **unveiling, disclosure, or revealing**.
That is worth emphasizing because the English word *apocalypse* has acquired a meaning quite different from the Greek word from which it came. In ordinary conversation, an apocalypse is usually imagined as some catastrophic destruction of civilization.
But John does not begin by announcing:
“The catastrophe of Jesus Christ.”
He announces:
“The revelation of Jesus Christ.”
Something is being uncovered.
Something that cannot be completely understood by looking only at the visible world is going to be shown from God's perspective.
That becomes particularly important as Revelation progresses. John will show us churches that appear weak, earthly powers that appear invincible, evil that appears victorious, martyrs who appear defeated, and a Lamb who appears to have been slain.
But appearances will repeatedly prove inadequate.
Revelation pulls back the curtain and says:
Look again.
There is more happening than you can see.

2. “Of Jesus Christ”

The phrase can carry a richness that English does not immediately reveal.
“The revelation of Jesus Christ” can naturally suggest both:
a revelation from Jesus Christ

and
a revelation about Jesus Christ.
The immediate sentence emphasizes the first sense. God gives the revelation to Jesus Christ so that it may be shown to His servants.
But the entire book will certainly accomplish the second as well.
Revelation will reveal **Jesus Christ Himself**.
We will encounter Him as the faithful witness.
The firstborn of the dead.
The ruler of the kings of the earth.
The Son of Man walking among the lampstands.
The Lion of Judah.
The Lamb who was slain.
The rider called Faithful and True.
The King of kings and Lord of lords.
The Alpha and Omega.
The bright morning star.
So perhaps we should establish our first rule for reading Revelation right here at verse 1:
Never become so occupied with what Revelation reveals that we overlook Whom Revelation reveals.
The central figure of this book is not the beast.
It is not the dragon.
It is not Babylon.
It is not even John.
It is Jesus Christ.
That sounds obvious, yet history demonstrates how easily readers can become fascinated with Revelation's secondary characters while Jesus somehow moves to the background.
John will not allow that.
His opening words place Christ at the center.

3. "Which God Gave Unto Him…"

There is a remarkable movement of revelation within this verse.
The revelation originates with **God**.
God gives it to **Jesus Christ**.
Christ communicates it through **His angel**.
The angel communicates it to **John**.
John will communicate it to **the servants of God**.
The message therefore does not originate in John's imagination.
John is not presenting his personal theories concerning the future.
He is a recipient and witness.
That distinction will matter greatly when the visions become difficult. John may struggle to describe what he sees. He may use images drawn deeply from

Israel's Scriptures. He may sometimes need an angel to explain what he is seeing.
But John does not claim to have invented the message.
He received it.

4. "To Shew Unto His Servants…"

Notice who is supposed to receive this revelation:
"his servants"
The Greek word is familiar to us from James:
δοῦλος — doulos
Servant.
Bondservant.
One who belongs to another.
Well, Brother Randy, **look who followed us from James into Revelation.**
James introduced himself:
"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."
Now Revelation is given to show God's **servants** what must take place.
That creates a beautiful continuity between our two projects.
In James, *doulos* helped us express the fundamental confession:
I belong to God.
Revelation now asks:
What does belonging to God look like when the world around you seems to belong to someone else?
That question may become one of the great pastoral questions of this entire commentary.
The Christians who first heard Revelation lived within an empire that proclaimed its own power, celebrated its own victories, demanded loyalties, and surrounded people with economic, religious, social, and political pressures.
Yet Revelation addresses them first according to another identity.
They are God's servants.
They belong to Him.
Before Revelation tells them what will happen, it reminds them whose they are.

5. "Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass…"

And here we encounter a phrase that requires care from the very beginning.
"things which must shortly come to pass"
The Greek includes:
ἐν τάχει — en tachei
The expression conveys the idea of something occurring **soon, quickly, or with swiftness**.
This phrase has generated enormous discussion because nearly two thousand years have passed since Revelation was written.

We should resist the temptation to solve that entire question in one sentence.
Instead, we should first respect what John's original readers heard.
Revelation was not presented to them merely as information concerning events so distant that the message had little relationship to their own lives.
John tells them these things matter **now**.
That observation gives us another important interpretive guardrail.
Any interpretation of Revelation that makes the book essentially meaningless to the seven churches to whom it was originally addressed deserves careful scrutiny.
They were expected to hear it.
They were expected to understand enough of it to respond.
And, as verse 3 will soon tell us, they were expected to **keep what was written in it**.
At the same time, Revelation will clearly stretch our vision beyond John's immediate generation toward the ultimate victory of God, final judgment, resurrection, and new creation.
So already we encounter a tension that we should allow the text itself to develop:
Revelation speaks urgently to John's churches while also pointing toward God's ultimate completion of history.
We do not need to eliminate one in order to preserve the other.

6. "And Signified It…"

There is another fascinating expression here.
The KJV's "signified" translates **a verb** related to:
σημαίνω — sēmainō
It can mean to make something known, communicate, indicate, or signify.
That last sense is particularly interesting in Revelation because John is about to receive a book filled with **signs and symbols**.
Lampstands.
Stars.
Seals.
Trumpets.
Beasts.
Horns.
Crowns.
A dragon.
A woman.
Babylon.
A city descending from heaven.
Revelation communicates truth through imagery.
That does not mean the imagery is unreal.
It means imagery is one of the ways truth is being communicated.

And that gives us yet another guardrail:
A symbol should not be treated as though it has no meaning merely because it is symbolic, nor should every symbol automatically be forced into wooden literalism.
We must ask what John is communicating through it.
And very often, Scripture itself will provide the vocabulary we need.

7. "By His Angel…"

Angelic messengers will appear repeatedly throughout Revelation.
That should remind us that John is being shown reality from a perspective unavailable through ordinary human observation.
He is going to see heaven opened.
He will see the throne.
He will see worship.
He will see spiritual conflict.
He will see judgment.
He will see realities hidden behind earthly appearances.
Again:
ἀποκάλυψις.
The curtain is being pulled back.

8. "Unto His Servant John"

And finally the chain reaches a human witness.
John.
But notice how John describes himself.
He does not begin with an impressive title.
He does not say:
John the great apostle.
John the visionary.
John the prophet entrusted with the secrets of the end times.
He simply identifies himself within the same category as the people receiving the revelation:
servant.
And once again:
δοῦλος.
John belongs to God.
The people receiving his testimony belong to God.
And the revelation they are about to receive concerns what it means to remain faithful to God when competing powers demand their allegiance.

Pastoral Reflection

Revelation 1:1 may already challenge the way many of us approach this book.
We often come to Revelation wanting answers.
When will these things happen?
Who does this symbol represent?

What sequence of events should we expect?
John begins with something more fundamental.
Jesus Christ is being revealed.
Perhaps before asking Revelation to tell us what will happen tomorrow, we should allow Revelation to show us who Christ is **today**.
Because the Christians receiving this book did not merely need a timetable.
They needed courage.
They needed hope.
They needed endurance.
They needed to know that despite everything their eyes told them about the power of Rome, suffering, persecution, compromise, and death:
Jesus Christ reigns.
And perhaps we need precisely the same unveiling.

Something Worth Pondering

We spent a great deal of time in James with one small Greek word:
δοῦλος — doulos
And we summarized it simply:
I belong to God.
Now, on the very first verse of our journey through Revelation, that word returns.
Perhaps that is no accident worth overlooking.
James taught us what faith that works looks like in everyday Christian life.
Revelation will now show us what faithful belonging looks like when viewed against the enormous canvas of kingdoms, suffering, evil, judgment, death, resurrection, and new creation.
The scale has changed dramatically.
But the fundamental confession has not:
I belong to God.
And perhaps that is exactly the confession someone needs before walking into the visions that lie ahead.

Ask Yourself This

When I read Revelation, am I primarily seeking secret knowledge about events and symbols, or am I prepared for Jesus Christ to pull back the curtain, show me reality from God's perspective, and ask whether I will live faithfully as one who can truly say:

I belong to God!

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:2

"Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw."
— Revelation 1:2, KJV

Revelation 1:1 established the chain through which the revelation comes:
God → Jesus Christ → the angel → John → the servants of God.
Now verse 2 tells us what John does with what he has received.
He **testifies**.
That is an important distinction.
John does not present himself primarily as an interpreter attempting to explain things he has independently discovered. He presents himself as a **witness** reporting what has been entrusted to him.
And that word—**witness**—will become enormously important as Revelation unfolds.

1. "Who Bare Record…"

The Greek verb is:
μαρτυρέω — martyreō
It means **to bear witness, testify, give evidence, or affirm what one has witnessed**.
From the same word family comes:
μαρτυρία — martyria
testimony or witness.
And eventually, through the experience of Christians who bore witness even when that witness cost them their lives, this word family contributed to our English word:
martyr.
That development is especially appropriate for Revelation.
John's world will contain witnesses who remain faithful even when faithfulness becomes dangerous.
Indeed, Revelation will eventually describe Jesus Himself as:
"the faithful witness" — Revelation 1:5.
So before we go any farther, we should notice something.
John is a witness.
Jesus is the faithful witness.
And later God's people will be called to faithful witness.
Witness is not merely something John does in writing Revelation. It becomes part of what Revelation asks the Church to become.

2. "Of the Word of God…"

John first says that he testifies:

“of the word of God”
The Greek expression is:
τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ — ton logon tou theou
the word of God.
John is not claiming ownership of the message.
That continues the humility we noticed in verse 1.
The revelation did not originate with John.
The message belongs to God.
John's responsibility is to receive it faithfully and testify to it faithfully.
That distinction becomes pastorally important.
A witness does not have authority to alter the testimony merely because the testimony becomes uncomfortable.
And Revelation will become uncomfortable.
It will confront compromise.
It will confront idolatry.
It will confront economic power.
It will confront political pretension.
It will confront violence.
It will confront churches that have become spiritually complacent.
It will confront evil.
And eventually it will confront death itself.
John's task is not to make that message more acceptable.
His task is to **testify to the word of God**.
There is something here for anyone who teaches or preaches Scripture.
Our responsibility is not to make God's Word say what we wish it said.
Our responsibility is to bear faithful witness to what it says.

3. “And of the Testimony of Jesus Christ…”

John then adds:
“and of the testimony of Jesus Christ”
Here again we encounter a phrase capable of carrying more than one shade of meaning.
It can naturally be understood as testimony **about Jesus Christ**.
But it can also carry the sense of testimony **given by Jesus Christ**.
And once again, perhaps we should not be too eager to force a choice where the book itself allows both ideas to resonate.
Jesus is the One through whom the revelation comes.
Jesus is also the One to whom John bears witness.
And Revelation will ultimately center its testimony upon Him.
That gives us an important relationship:
THE WORD OF GOD
↓
THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

↓
THE WITNESS OF JOHN
John's testimony is trustworthy precisely because it is not ultimately about John.
He points beyond himself.

4. “Of All Things That He Saw”

Then John adds something very characteristic of Revelation:
“all things that he saw”
That word matters.
Revelation is not merely something John **hears**.
It is something John **sees**.
Again and again throughout the book we will encounter expressions such as:
“I saw…”
“And I saw…”
“After this I looked…”
“And I saw another angel…”
“I saw a new heaven and a new earth…”
Revelation is profoundly visual.
John sees lampstands.
He sees the risen Christ.
He sees a throne.
He sees a Lamb.
He sees seals opened.
He sees horses and riders.
He sees angels.
He sees a dragon.
He sees beasts.
He sees Babylon.
He sees judgment.
And eventually he sees:
a new heaven and a new earth.
That means we should be careful when reading Revelation not to flatten its images too quickly into definitions.
John is frequently giving us **pictures before propositions**.
Sometimes the picture itself communicates something that a simple statement could not communicate nearly as powerfully.
Consider the difference between saying:
Jesus conquered through sacrificial death
and seeing:
“a Lamb as it had been slain”
The image carries theological meaning.
Likewise, John could simply tell us that evil is terrifying and destructive.

Instead, he shows us a great dragon.
He could tell us that worldly systems opposed to God are seductive, wealthy, and ultimately doomed.
Instead, he shows us Babylon.
The visions invite us not merely to decode them but to **see what John saw** and allow the imagery to reshape the way we perceive reality.

5. John Is a Witness, Not the Center

There is something else quietly important in this verse.
John receives one of the most extraordinary revelations recorded in Scripture.
Yet he does remarkably little to draw attention to himself.
Imagine how easily someone could make such an experience about personal importance:
God showed me things no one else has seen.
An angel spoke to me.
I was shown heaven.
I saw the future.
John does not begin there.
He simply says, in effect:
I am telling you what I was shown.
The revelation matters.
Christ matters.
The word of God matters.
John is the witness.
That is a healthy model for Christian ministry.
The messenger should never become more fascinating than the message.

6. The Importance of Testimony

We should also begin noticing how deeply the idea of **testimony** runs through Revelation.
Later John will describe believers who overcome the accuser:
"by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony"
That is Revelation 12:11.
The connection is worth remembering even this early.
Revelation begins with testimony.
Jesus is called the faithful witness.
John bears testimony.
The saints maintain their testimony.
Some suffer because of their testimony.
Faithful witness becomes part of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the powers opposing it.
This means Christianity in Revelation is never merely private conviction.
Faith becomes **testimony**.
Something believed becomes something confessed.

Something received becomes something lived.
And sometimes something lived becomes something costly.

7. What Does a Witness Do?

A witness has a wonderfully simple responsibility:
Tell the truth about what you have seen and heard.
The witness does not control how others respond.
Some will believe.
Some will reject.
Some may become hostile.
The responsibility of the witness remains the same:
Be faithful to the testimony.
That may help us understand why Revelation spends so much time calling Christians to endurance.
Faithfulness is not measured simply by whether testimony produces immediate success.
Sometimes faithful testimony leads to suffering.
From the world's perspective, that can look like defeat.
Revelation will radically challenge that assumption.
The Lamb was slain.
Yet the Lamb conquered.
The martyrs die.
Yet they stand before God.
The world appears powerful.
Yet its kingdoms fall.
Revelation repeatedly teaches us that what looks like defeat from the world's perspective may look very different when heaven pulls back the curtain.
There is that word again:
ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something wonderfully freeing about John's role.
John does not have to control history.
He does not have to defeat Rome.
He does not have to personally solve every problem facing the seven churches.
He does not even have to understand every detail of everything he sees immediately.
He has one fundamental responsibility:
Bear faithful witness.
Perhaps Christians sometimes assume responsibilities God never gave us.
We want to control outcomes.
We want to guarantee results.
We want to make people believe.

We want to fix everything.
But perhaps our first responsibility is simpler and harder:
Tell the truth about Jesus Christ and live as though that testimony is true.
That does not guarantee that everyone will listen.
Revelation certainly does not promise that.
But it does call us to faithfulness.
And perhaps that is why Jesus will shortly be introduced not first as the successful witness, the influential witness, or the admired witness.
He is:
"the faithful witness."
That is the standard.

Something Worth Pondering

Verse 1 gave us:
δοῦλος — doulos
I belong to God.
Verse 2 now gives us:
μαρτυρέω — martyreō
I bear witness.
Those ideas belong together.
If I belong to God, then my life inevitably says something about the God to whom I belong.
That means testimony is larger than words.
We testify through what we say.
But we also testify through what we refuse to compromise.
Through how we treat others.
Through how we respond to suffering.
Through whether we remain faithful when faithfulness becomes inconvenient.
Through whether our allegiance to Christ changes the way we live.
Revelation will eventually show us believers for whom testimony becomes costly.
But before we reach them, John quietly establishes the pattern:
He received the word of God.
He saw.
And he testified.
Perhaps faithful discipleship has always been that simple—and that demanding.

Ask Yourself This

If someone examined not merely what I say I believe about Jesus Christ, but the testimony given by the way I actually live, what would my life tell them about the One to whom I say I belong?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:3

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”
— Revelation 1:3, KJV

We have reached only the third verse of Revelation, and John does something that may surprise anyone who approaches this book primarily as a puzzle to be solved.
He pronounces a **blessing**.
That alone should influence the way we approach Revelation.
This book was not given to frighten God's people.
It was not given merely to satisfy curiosity about the future.
It was not written as a collection of mysterious symbols intended to remain incomprehensible until some distant generation finally discovered the key.
Revelation was given to the Church to be:
read,
heard,
and **kept.**
And John says that those who do so are **blessed**.

1. “Blessed Is He…”

The Greek word translated “blessed” is:
μακάριος — makarios
It means **blessed, fortunate, or favored**—describing the condition of one who stands within God's favor.
It is the same word family we encounter in the Beatitudes:
“Blessed are the poor in spirit…”
“Blessed are they that mourn…”
“Blessed are the peacemakers…”
And here Revelation begins its own series of blessings.
This is the first of several beatitudes scattered throughout the book.
That is worth remembering.
Revelation contains dragons, beasts, judgments, plagues, warfare, persecution, Babylon, and death.
Yet woven through all of that are declarations of:
Blessed.
The book that many Christians have learned to fear begins by telling us that there is blessing in hearing it.
Perhaps Revelation is not meant to produce terror among God's people.

Perhaps it is meant to produce **faithfulness, courage, endurance, worship, and hope.**

2. "He That Readeth…"

John first blesses:

"he that readeth"

That singular expression likely reflects the way Revelation would originally have been experienced within Christian worship.

Books were not sitting in every person's home.

The congregation gathered.

Someone stood before them and **read**.

The others **heard**.

That helps explain John's grammar:

Blessed is the one who reads…

Singular.

And blessed are those who hear…

Plural.

We should picture Revelation not first as an individual Christian sitting quietly with a Bible, notebook, prophecy chart, and commentary.

Picture instead a congregation.

Perhaps the believers at Ephesus.

Or Smyrna.

Or Pergamum.

They gather together.

Someone receives John's scroll.

The reader stands.

The congregation becomes quiet.

And then they hear:

"The revelation of Jesus Christ…"

For many of them, their first encounter with Revelation was probably not **seeing** the words.

It was **hearing** them.

That matters because Revelation is written to be heard.

Its repetition matters.

Its images matter.

Its rhythms matter.

Its worship matters.

Its contrasts matter.

Its repeated declarations matter.

John is not merely constructing an argument.

He is giving the churches something they are supposed to experience together.

3. "The Words of This Prophecy…"

John calls what he has written:

“the words of this prophecy”
That immediately places Revelation within the biblical prophetic tradition.
And this is another place where our modern assumptions can mislead us.
When many people hear **prophecy**, they immediately think:
prediction of future events.
Biblical prophecy certainly can speak about what is coming.
Revelation obviously does.
But the prophets did much more than predict.
They called God's people back to faithfulness.
They exposed injustice.
They confronted idolatry.
They warned against compromise.
They announced judgment.
They offered hope.
They reminded God's people who God is.
And they interpreted the circumstances of their world from **God's perspective**.
That sounds remarkably like Revelation.
So when John calls this book **prophecy**, we should not reduce that word to:
a schedule of future events.
Revelation is God's prophetic word to His people.
And like the prophets before him, John will repeatedly say, in effect:
Look at your world again—but this time see it as God sees it.

4. “And They That Hear…”

Hearing in Scripture frequently means more than sound reaching the ears.
There is hearing—
and there is **hearing**.
A person can hear words without allowing those words to penetrate the heart.
Jesus repeatedly used the expression:
“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”
Revelation itself will soon echo that pattern in the messages to the seven churches:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
So John is not pronouncing a blessing upon passive exposure to the text.
Something more is expected.
And the next phrase makes that unmistakable.

5. “And Keep Those Things Which Are Written Therein…”

Here we reach what may be the most important phrase in the verse:

“and keep those things which are written therein”
The Greek verb is:
τηρέω — tēreō
It can mean **to keep, observe, guard, preserve, or hold fast to something**.
This changes the entire way we read Revelation.
Because if Revelation can be **kept**, then Revelation must contain more than information.
Information is learned.
Predictions are anticipated.
But commands, testimony, faith, and allegiance can be **kept**.
John therefore expects this book to affect behavior.
That means the proper response to Revelation is not merely:
“Now I understand what the symbols mean.”
The proper response must eventually become:
“Therefore, this is how I will live.”
That sounds remarkably familiar after our journey through James.
James told us:
“Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only”
Now John tells us:
Blessed are those who hear—and keep.
Different books.
Different circumstances.
Different literary forms.
But the same fundamental truth:
God's Word is not merely given to be understood. It is given to be lived.
Brother Randy, apparently James followed us into Revelation in more ways than one.

6. Revelation Is Therefore a Pastoral Book

This little word **“keep”** helps confirm something we decided before writing the first word of this commentary.
Revelation is profoundly **pastoral**.
John is not merely giving Christians privileged information concerning the end of history.
He is preparing them to live faithfully within history.
Think about the seven churches that will shortly receive individual messages.
Some need encouragement.
Some need correction.
Some are suffering.
Some are compromising.
Some have grown complacent.
Some appear alive but are spiritually dead.
Some have remained faithful despite tremendous pressure.

Revelation speaks into those conditions.
The visions that follow are not disconnected from the lives of those Christians.
They are intended to help them **endure**.
The throne matters because they need to know who truly rules.
The Lamb matters because they need to understand how God conquers.
Babylon matters because they need to recognize the seductive character of worldly power.
The martyrs matter because they need to know that faithfulness unto death is not defeat.
New Jerusalem matters because they need to know where God's story is going.
They must hear these things because they must **live differently because they are true.**

7. “For the Time Is at Hand”

Then comes the final phrase:
“for the time is at hand”
The Greek word here is:
καιρός — kairos
It refers not simply to chronological time passing on a clock or calendar, but often to an **appointed, decisive, or significant time**.
John says:
the kairos is near.
Once again, as we encountered with **“things which must shortly come to pass”** in verse 1, we should resist the temptation to make two thousand years of interpretive debate disappear with a convenient explanation.
John's words communicate **urgency**.
The seven churches were not being told:
Keep this scroll somewhere safe. Someday, thousands of years from now, another generation may find it relevant.
They were expected to respond.
Now.
Whatever else Revelation says about the ultimate future, its message was immediately significant for the Christians who first heard it.
That gives us an interpretive principle worth carrying through the entire commentary:
Revelation must mean something to us without first having meant nothing to them.
The Christians in those seven churches were supposed to hear this prophecy and keep it.

Therefore, when we encounter an interpretation that depends entirely upon people, technologies, nations, political arrangements, or events that did not exist for another two thousand years, we should at least stop and ask:
How could John's original hearers have kept this?
That question will save us from a considerable amount of speculation before we're finished.

8. Nearness Creates Faithfulness, Not Calculation

There is something else important about John's declaration that the time is near.
He does not follow it by saying:
Therefore, calculate.
He says:
Therefore, keep.
That distinction may be one of the healthiest things we can carry into Revelation.
Throughout Christian history, people have repeatedly attempted to calculate dates, identify prophetic timetables, and announce that particular contemporary events prove exactly how close the end must be.
John directs our attention somewhere else.
If the time is near, the Christian response is not obsessive calculation.
It is **faithful living**.
If Christ comes tomorrow:
Be faithful.
If Christ comes centuries from now:
Be faithful.
If the Church faces prosperity:
Be faithful.
If the Church faces persecution:
Be faithful.
If Babylon appears powerful:
Be faithful.
If following Christ becomes costly:
Be faithful.
The timing belongs to God.
The testimony belongs to us.

Pastoral Reflection

There may be people who have avoided Revelation because they were told it was too difficult.
Others may have avoided it because it frightened them.
Still others may have encountered so many competing interpretations that they finally concluded:
“Nobody really understands Revelation anyway.”

But listen again to John's opening words.
Blessed is the one who reads.
Blessed are those who hear.
Blessed are those who keep.
That does not sound like a book God intended His people to avoid.
Nor does it sound like a book reserved for prophecy specialists.
It was addressed to ordinary Christians gathered in ordinary churches trying to remain faithful in a difficult world.
Perhaps Revelation is not asking us first:
Can you explain everything you see?
Perhaps it is asking:
Will you listen?
And then:
Will you remain faithful to what you hear?
That is a question every Christian can answer.

Something Worth Pondering

Three verses into Revelation, we already have three words worth carrying with us:
ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis
God unveils.
μαρτυρέω — martyreō
John bears witness.
τηρέω — tēreō
God's people keep what they hear.
There is almost a pattern forming:
God reveals.
The witness testifies.
The Church hears.
The faithful keep.
And perhaps that is how Revelation is supposed to work.
The goal is not simply for information to travel from heaven into our minds.
The goal is for God's revelation ultimately to produce **faithfulness in God's people**.
That gives us a standard by which we can judge our own work as we move through these 22 chapters.
If, after studying Revelation, we know considerably more about beasts, seals, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, and competing interpretations—but have become no more faithful to Jesus Christ—
we may have learned Revelation without actually keeping it.

Ask Yourself This

When I read Scripture—especially a book as fascinating as Revelation—am I satisfied simply to understand more than I understood before, or am I willing to ask the much more demanding question:
What must I now keep, obey, or live differently because I have heard the Word of God?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:4

“John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;”
— Revelation 1:4, KJV

With verse 4, Revelation begins to sound like something remarkably familiar.
A letter.
After the language of revelation, prophecy, angels, testimony, and things that must soon take place, John suddenly writes:
“John to the seven churches which are in Asia”
That simple greeting grounds everything that follows.
Revelation contains extraordinary visions, but it was written to **real Christians in real churches facing real circumstances**.
Before it became a book over which generations would debate, it was a pastoral message sent to congregations.
And John's first word to them is not judgment.
It is:
Grace.

1. “John…”

There is beautiful simplicity here.
John does not introduce himself with an elaborate title.
He simply says:
“John.”
Verse 1 has already described him as God's **servant**.
Verse 2 identified him as the one who **testified** to what he saw.
Now:
John.
Later he will identify himself to these believers as their:
“your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ”
John does not stand above these churches as someone untouched by their struggles.
He stands **with them**.
That will become especially important when we reach Patmos.
The man delivering God's message concerning endurance is himself enduring.
The man writing about faithful witness is himself suffering because of his witness.
There is pastoral credibility in that.
John will not ask these Christians to walk a road he knows nothing about.

2. “To the seven churches…”

And here they appear for the first time:
the seven churches.
In the next two chapters we will meet them individually:
Ephesus.
Smyrna.
Pergamum.
Thyatira.
Sardis.
Philadelphia.
Laodicea.
These were actual Christian congregations.
That must remain one of our firm interpretive anchors.
The messages of Revelation were not originally addressed to an abstract future audience.
They were sent to churches that existed in John's world.
They had strengths.
They had weaknesses.
They faced pressures.
They struggled with compromise.
Some suffered.
Some endured.
Some needed correction.
Some needed encouragement.
One thought it was alive when Christ said it was dead.
Another appeared weak but was commended for its faithfulness.
And Christ knew them.
That may be one of the most pastoral truths we encounter when we reach chapters 2 and 3.
Christ knows His churches.

3. Why Seven?

Of course, the number immediately catches our attention.
Seven.
We are going to see that number repeatedly.
Seven churches.
Seven spirits.
Seven lampstands.
Seven stars.
Seven seals.
Seven trumpets.
Seven bowls.
And more.

Seven carries deep biblical associations with **completeness and fullness**, reaching all the way back to the seven-day creation pattern.
But we should begin carefully.
These seven churches were **real churches**.
We should not allow their symbolic significance to erase their historical reality.
At the same time, John's repeated use of seven makes it difficult to believe that the number is insignificant.
So perhaps we can hold both truths together.
Revelation is addressed specifically to **seven historical congregations**, while those seven churches also come to represent something broader about Christ's message to His Church.
That becomes especially compelling when each message concludes with words addressed beyond the individual congregation:
"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."
Plural.
The message to one church becomes something every church should hear.
And eventually something **we** should hear.

4. "Which Are in Asia"

This is not Asia in the modern continental sense.
John refers to the Roman province of **Asia**, located in the western portion of what is now Turkey.
That geographic reality matters.
Christianity in Revelation is not floating in some undefined prophetic landscape.
These believers lived under Roman rule.
They lived in cities shaped by commerce, politics, religious practices, social expectations, civic loyalties, and imperial power.
Their faith in Jesus Christ existed within that environment.
That is where Revelation becomes extraordinarily relevant.
The central question facing these churches is not merely:
What do you believe?
It is:
To whom do you belong when the surrounding culture asks for your allegiance?
There is our word from verse 1 again:
δοῦλος — doulos.
Servant.
One who belongs to another.
The churches belong to Christ.
Revelation will show them what that belonging requires.

5. “Grace Be Unto You, and Peace…”

Then John greets them:
“Grace be unto you, and peace”
The Greek words are:
χάρις — charis
grace
and:
εἰρήνη — eirēnē
peace.
This sounds wonderfully familiar from the New Testament letters.
But consider where those words appear.
These churches are about to hear about suffering.
Judgment.
Persecution.
Death.
Conflict.
Beasts.
Babylon.
And John begins:
Grace to you.
Peace to you.
That alone should challenge the idea that Revelation was intended primarily to terrify Christians.
God does not send this book to His frightened people and say:
Be more afraid.
He sends them **grace and peace**.
The visions may become frightening.
Their circumstances may become difficult.
Their faithfulness may become costly.
But God's disposition toward His people has already been declared.
Grace.
Peace.

6. Peace Does Not Mean the Absence of Trouble

That word **peace** deserves some thought.
John is not promising these Christians that their circumstances will suddenly become peaceful.
Some will suffer.
Some will be imprisoned.
Some will face death.
One faithful witness—Antipas—will shortly be named as having already been killed.
So the peace John offers cannot simply mean:

Nothing bad will happen to you.
It is a peace grounded in something deeper.
God reigns.
Christ has conquered death.
The future belongs to Him.
Evil has an end.
Death has an end.
God's people have a future.
That kind of peace can exist even when circumstances are anything but peaceful.

7. "From Him Which Is, and Which Was, and Which Is to Come…"

Now the greeting becomes extraordinary.
Grace and peace come:
"from him which is, and which was, and which is to come"
John's language deliberately draws attention to the eternal being of God.
We naturally speak of time as:
past → present → future.
John does something interesting.
He begins:
"which is"
Present.
Then:
"which was"
Past.
Then:
"which is to come"
Future.
God's **present reality** comes first.
Before the churches consider what was or worry about what will be:
God is.
That may be a sermon in three letters.
God is.
Rome is powerful.
God is.
The churches are struggling.
God is.
Some Christians are suffering.
God is.
The future appears uncertain.
God is.
Babylon will rise and fall.

God is.
Kings come and go.
God is.
The beast appears powerful.
God is.
History changes.
God is.

8. “Which Was…”

The God who **is,** is also the God who **was**.
The churches are not placing their trust in a newly arrived deity whose faithfulness has never been tested.
This is the God of Israel.
The God of Abraham.
Isaac.
Jacob.
Moses.
The prophets.
The God who delivered.
The God who judged.
The God who made covenant.
The God who remained faithful.
The God revealed throughout the story of Scripture.
Revelation is not introducing a different God.
The God who acts in Revelation is the God who has acted throughout the biblical story.
That is why the Old Testament will echo through almost every corner of this book.
John's visions are saturated with the language and imagery of Scripture.

9. “And Which Is to Come”

Then John looks forward.
God is the One:
“which is to come”
Notice that John could have written:
who will be.
Instead:
who is to come.
That gives the phrase movement.
God is not merely waiting passively somewhere in the future.
He **comes**.
Revelation's future is ultimately about the coming of God and the fulfillment of His purposes.
This gives Christian hope a profoundly personal center.

Our hope is not merely that circumstances eventually improve.
Our hope is that **God comes**.
And ultimately Revelation will end with precisely that longing:
"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

10. "And from the seven spirits…"

Then we encounter our first expression that may make us stop:
"the seven Spirits which are before his throne"
What are the seven spirits?
This phrase has generated several interpretations, but a strong reading understands it as symbolic language for the **fullness of the Holy Spirit**.
Again, seven frequently communicates fullness or completeness in Revelation.
Later, Revelation 4:5 will speak of:
"seven lamps of fire"
before the throne, identified as:
"the seven Spirits of God"
And Revelation 5:6 will connect the seven spirits with the Lamb.
Many interpreters also hear an echo of the Spirit's fullness described in Isaiah 11.
We should avoid pretending that the phrase is less mysterious than it is.
But we should equally avoid imagining seven separate Holy Spirits.
The imagery fits Revelation's symbolic language remarkably well:
the sevenfold fullness of the Spirit of God before the throne.

11. Something Trinitarian Is Happening

Now look at the greeting as it continues into verse 5.
Grace and peace come from:
Him who is and who was and who is to come
and from:
the seven spirits before His throne
and, as verse 5 will say:
"from Jesus Christ."
Father.
Spirit.
Son.
John's greeting has a profoundly **Trinitarian shape**.
And that means the grace and peace offered to these churches come from the fullness of God.
Before John tells the churches what Christ sees wrong with some of them, before warning them about what lies ahead, before the seals are opened or the trumpets sound—
God greets His people with:
Grace and peace.

12. “Before his throne”

And finally we encounter another word that will dominate Revelation:
throne.
We have barely begun, and John has already placed a throne before us.
That is enormously significant.
The question running beneath much of Revelation will be:
Who actually rules?
Rome had an answer.
The emperor sat upon a throne.
Earthly kings had answers.
Political systems had answers.
Military powers had answers.
The beast will certainly have an answer.
But Revelation repeatedly takes our eyes away from earthly claims to sovereignty and directs them toward:
the throne.
By the time we reach chapters 4 and 5, that throne will dominate John's vision.
Before John shows us chaos on earth, he will show us **order in heaven**.
Before judgments unfold, there is a throne.
Before the beast exercises authority, there is a throne.
Before Babylon rises, there is a throne.
And after Babylon falls—
there is still a throne.
Empires come and go.
The throne remains.

Pastoral Reflection

Imagine hearing these words as a Christian living within the Roman Empire.
Rome looks permanent.
Its armies seem unstoppable.
Its political authority reaches across the known world.
Its culture surrounds you.
Its economic systems affect your livelihood.
Its religious expectations can create pressure upon your faith.
And then someone stands in your congregation and reads:
“Grace be unto you, and peace…”
from the One:
“which is, and which was, and which is to come”
And from the Spirit before:
“his throne.”
John is quietly relocating the center of reality.
Rome may have a throne.

But Rome does not have **the throne**.
That distinction changes everything.
Perhaps Christians in every age need the same reminder.
The powers visible around us often appear permanent precisely because we see them every day.
Governments.
Institutions.
Economies.
Cultures.
Leaders.
Movements.
Nations.
They matter.
They affect human lives.
But Revelation pulls back the curtain and asks us to look beyond what appears permanent.
There is a throne that does not change occupants.

Something Worth Pondering

Verse 4 gives us three remarkably pastoral words:
χάρις — charis
Grace.
εἰρήνη — eirēnē
Peace.
And:
θρόνος — thronos
Throne.
Perhaps those three belong together more closely than we initially realize.
Why can frightened Christians have peace?
Because there is a throne.
Why can struggling Christians trust grace?
Because there is a throne.
Why can suffering Christians endure when earthly powers appear overwhelming?
Because there is a throne.
And who occupies that throne?
Not someone who has only recently arrived.
Not someone whose future is uncertain.
Not someone who may someday be overthrown.
But the One:
who is,
who was,
and who is to come.

We are only four verses into Revelation, and already John is teaching us how to see.

Ask Yourself This

When the circumstances around me feel uncertain and the powers of this world appear overwhelming, which reality most shapes the way I live—the things I can see around me, or the throne Revelation asks me to see beyond them?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:5

“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.
Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,”
— Revelation 1:5, KJV

Verse 4 began John's greeting with grace and peace from:
“him which is, and which was, and which is to come”
and:
“the seven Spirits which are before his throne”
Now the greeting reaches its magnificent conclusion:
“and from Jesus Christ.”
And John does not simply name Jesus.
He gives us three descriptions of Him:
the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.
Then almost as though John can no longer contain himself, the formal greeting becomes worship:
“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood…”
This is one of those verses where almost every phrase deserves to be slowed down and heard.
Because before Revelation shows us what Jesus **will do**, John tells us who Jesus **already is**.

1. “And from Jesus Christ…”

We noticed in verse 4 that John's greeting has a Trinitarian shape.
Grace and peace come from the eternal God,
from the sevenfold fullness of the Spirit,
and now:
from Jesus Christ.
This matters because Revelation will place Jesus at the very center of God's purposes.
He is not merely the messenger who delivers information about what God intends to do.
He is central to what God is doing.
Revelation began:
“The revelation of Jesus Christ.”
Now, only five verses later, John begins revealing Him.
And the first description is extraordinarily important.

2. “The faithful witness…”

The Greek expression is:
ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός — ho martys ho pistos
the faithful witness.
There is our word from verse 2 again.
John **testified**.
Now Jesus is identified as:
the witness.
But John adds something:
faithful.
The Greek word:
πιστός — pistos
means faithful, trustworthy, reliable, dependable.
Jesus did not merely bear witness.
He bore witness **faithfully**.
That faithfulness continued even when His testimony became costly.
Even when it led to rejection.
Even when it led to suffering.
Even when it led to the cross.
Jesus remained faithful.
That becomes enormously significant for the Christians receiving Revelation because some of them will soon be called to precisely the same kind of faithfulness.
In Revelation 2:10, Christ will tell the church at Smyrna:
“be thou faithful unto death”
That command does not come from One who remained safely removed from suffering.
It comes from:
the faithful witness.
Jesus asks His followers to walk a road He has already walked.

3. Witness and Martyr

Here the Greek becomes particularly meaningful.
The word translated **witness** is:
μάρτυς — martys
It is the word from which our English word **martyr** eventually developed.
Originally, *martys* meant a witness—someone who testified concerning what he knew to be true.
But as Christians increasingly faced death because they refused to abandon their testimony concerning Christ, the ideas of **witness** and **martyrdom** became inseparably connected.
Revelation stands directly within that world.
Jesus is the faithful **martys**.

Later Antipas will be described using remarkably similar language:
"my faithful martyr"
And Revelation will show us others who suffer because they refuse to abandon their testimony.
That creates a pattern we should notice:
JESUS BEARS FAITHFUL WITNESS
↓
JESUS SUFFERS AND DIES
↓
JESUS CONQUERS DEATH
↓
HIS PEOPLE BEAR FAITHFUL WITNESS
↓
SOME WILL SUFFER AND DIE
↓
THEY TOO WILL SHARE IN CHRIST'S VICTORY
That pattern lies close to the heart of Revelation.
The world may define victory as avoiding suffering.
Revelation will teach us to define victory as **remaining faithful**.

4. "The First Begotten of the Dead…"

Then John gives Jesus a second title:
"the first begotten of the dead"
The Greek word is:
πρωτότοκος — prōtotokos
firstborn.
This does not mean Jesus was merely the first person ever restored to life.
Scripture records others who were raised before the resurrection of Christ.
Something far greater is being said.
The language of **firstborn** carries ideas of priority, preeminence, inheritance, and supremacy.
Jesus did not merely return temporarily to mortal life.
He passed through death and emerged in resurrection life.
Death did not finally reclaim Him.
And therefore:
the grave no longer has the final word.
Think about what that means in a book where Christians may face death because of their faithfulness.
John introduces Jesus as:
the firstborn of the dead.
Before Revelation shows us martyrs, it shows us the resurrected Christ.
Before believers are asked to contemplate dying faithfully, they are reminded that Jesus has already gone through death and come out the other side.

Death remains terrible.
Revelation never asks us to pretend otherwise.
But death is no longer **ultimate**.
Someone has conquered it.

5. Firstborn Means There Are Others to Follow

There is also hope contained within the word **firstborn**.
Firstborn implies that Christ's resurrection is not an isolated event.
He is the beginning of something.
His resurrection anticipates the resurrection of those who belong to Him.
That changes the Christian understanding of death profoundly.
If Christ is merely someone who died courageously, then Christians may admire Him.
But if Christ is:
"the first begotten of the dead"
then Christians can **follow Him through death**.
The path does not end at the grave.
That is why Revelation can speak so boldly about faithful endurance.
The Church's ultimate hope does not rest upon its ability to avoid death.
It rests upon Christ's victory **over death**.

6. "And the Prince of the Kings of the Earth"

Then comes the third title.
Jesus Christ is:
"the prince of the kings of the earth"
The Greek word the KJV translates "prince" is:
ἄρχων — archōn
ruler, prince, one possessing authority.
Again, notice John's grammar.
He does not say:
Jesus will someday become ruler of the kings of the earth.
He says:
He is.
That would have sounded extraordinary within the Roman world.
There was an emperor.
There were governors.
There were client kings.
There were armies.
There were officials whose decisions could dramatically affect the lives of ordinary Christians.
Those powers were visible.
Jesus' rule was not always visible.
Revelation pulls back the curtain.
ἀποκάλυψις.

Look again.
The emperor is not ultimate.
The governor is not ultimate.
The king is not ultimate.
The empire is not ultimate.
Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth.
And that statement will become increasingly important as earthly powers begin making claims that properly belong to God.

7. Three Titles — An Entire Gospel

Look again at the three descriptions:
THE FAITHFUL WITNESS
Jesus was faithful even unto death.
↓
THE FIRSTBORN OF THE DEAD
God vindicated Him through resurrection.
↓
THE RULER OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH
The risen Christ reigns.
Witness.
Death.
Resurrection.
Reign.
John has compressed an enormous Christology into a few words.
And perhaps the sequence itself teaches us something about Revelation's understanding of victory.
Jesus conquers not by abandoning faithful witness when it becomes costly.
He conquers **through faithfulness**.
That will become crucial when we meet the Lamb in chapter 5.
The Lion conquers as:
a Lamb who was slain.
Revelation will repeatedly overturn our ordinary assumptions about what power looks like.

8. "Unto Him That Loved Us…"

And then something happens to John's sentence.
He has been giving a formal greeting.
Suddenly it becomes praise.
"Unto him that loved us…"
The Greek reading behind the KJV uses a past-tense participle:
ἀγαπήσαντι — agapēsanti
the One who loved us.
That past tense points us to an act of love in history.
Christ showed His love by giving Himself for us.

The **love that brought Him to the cross still shapes how He deals with His Church**.
John begins by reminding the churches what that love has already done.
Before Revelation shows Jesus with eyes like fire.
Before He confronts churches with their failures.
Before He judges evil.
Before He rides forth in victory.
John wants the churches to know:
He loves us.
That matters enormously.
Christ's correction of His churches does not come from indifference.
His warnings do not come from hostility toward them.
He loves His Church.
Indeed, when we reach Laodicea, Christ will explicitly say:
"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten"
The Christ who corrects is the Christ who loves.

9. "And Washed Us From Our Sins…"

Love has acted.
Jesus:
"washed us from our sins"
The KJV follows the reading **"washed." Another ancient Greek reading means "freed." The image here is cleansing through Christ's blood.**
Wash*ed* is extraordinarily powerful language.
Sin leaves us in need of cleansing.
Christ Himself provides that cleansing.
That language fits Revelation remarkably well.
This book will speak repeatedly about competing powers and allegiances.
Babylon enslaves.
The beast demands allegiance.
The dragon deceives.
But Jesus washes His people clean.
Revelation will return to this image when the multitude washes their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).
That is an important contrast.
The kingdoms of this world promise freedom while often producing bondage.
Christ cleanses His people and brings them out of that bondage.

10. "In His Own Blood"

And then John tells us the cost of that freedom:
"in his own blood"
The freedom Christ gives was not inexpensive.
It came through His self-giving death.
This is another theme that will become central to Revelation.

When we reach chapter 5, heaven will sing to the Lamb:
“thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”
The victory of Christ is inseparable from His sacrifice.
This is one of Revelation's great paradoxes:
The Lamb conquers by being slain.
The world understands power through domination.
Christ reveals power through sacrificial love.
The world conquers by shedding the blood of others.
Christ conquers by giving **His own blood**.
That difference will become one of the great contrasts between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms represented by the beasts.

Pastoral Reflection

Imagine hearing this verse in one of the seven churches.
Perhaps you feel politically powerless.
Jesus is:
the ruler of the kings of the earth.
Perhaps you are afraid of persecution or death.
Jesus is:
the firstborn of the dead.
Perhaps remaining faithful is becoming difficult.
Jesus is:
the faithful witness.
Perhaps your own sin has convinced you that God wants nothing more to do with you.
Jesus is:
the One who loves you and has freed you from your sins by His blood.
John has not yet shown us a single beast.
He has not opened a single seal.
No trumpet has sounded.
No bowl has been poured.
And already he has given the Church what it needs to face everything that follows.
Christ is faithful.
Christ is risen.
Christ reigns.
Christ loves us.
Christ has washed us from our sins.
Perhaps we should never read anything later in Revelation without remembering what John told us here.

Something Worth Pondering

We have encountered another word worth carrying with us:

πιστός — pistos
Faithful.
Revelation will ask God's people to endure.
It will ask them to resist compromise.
It will ask them to bear witness.
It will ask them to remain loyal to Christ when other powers demand allegiance.
But before Revelation asks us to be faithful, it shows us:
the faithful One.
That order matters.
Christian faithfulness does not begin with:
Try harder.
It begins with:
Look at Christ.
He was faithful.
He passed through death.
He rose.
He reigns.
He loves.
He frees.
And the Christian life becomes a response to what He has already done.
Perhaps that is why Revelation begins by revealing Jesus before it begins instructing His churches.
We need to know the One to whom we are being asked to remain faithful.

Ask Yourself This

When faithfulness becomes difficult, am I trying merely to summon enough strength within myself to endure—or am I fixing my attention upon Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, who loves me and has freed me from my sins?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:6

“And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”
— Revelation 1:6, KJV

Verse 5 told us what Christ has done **for us**:
He loved us.
He washed us from our sins in His own blood.
Now verse 6 tells us something equally important.
Christ has cleansed us **from** sin.
He has also given us **a** calling.
He has:
“made us kings and priests unto God and his Father”
Salvation in Revelation is therefore more than rescue.
It is also **identity, belonging, vocation, and service**.
Christ does not simply release prisoners and send them away.
He creates a people.

1. “And Hath Made Us…”

The sentence continues directly from verse 5.
The One who loved us and washed us has also:
“made us…”
There is purpose here.
Christ's saving work creates something that did not previously exist.
A people once enslaved by sin have become:
kings.
Those who needed reconciliation have become:
priests.
And notice who performs the action.
We do not make ourselves kings.
We do not appoint ourselves priests.
Christ makes us these things.
Our identity begins with what Christ has done rather than with what we have achieved.
That distinction will become extremely important throughout Revelation because the world will offer God's people competing identities.
Rome will have ways of defining people.
Economic systems will have ways of defining them.
Social status will have ways of defining them.
The beast will eventually mark those who belong to him.
But before we encounter any of that, Revelation tells Christians:

Christ has already told you who you are.

2. "Kings…"

The Greek reading behind the KJV has the plural:

βασιλεῖς — basileis

kings. Another ancient reading has the singular "kingdom." Both draw our attention to the royal identity of Christ's people.

This is remarkable language to address to Christians who may have appeared politically insignificant.

They lived within a kingdom—or more precisely, an empire—that seemed to dominate their world.

Rome had armies.

Rome had wealth.

Rome had governors.

Rome had emperors.

Rome minted coins bearing the emperor's image.

Rome built monuments proclaiming its victories.

Rome could make its presence felt in nearly every aspect of public life.

And John writes to comparatively small Christian congregations scattered through Asia Minor and says:

Christ has made you kings.

From the world's perspective, that might have sounded almost absurd.

But Revelation is teaching them to see reality differently.

There is that great word again:

ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis.

The curtain is pulled back.

What appears small on earth may look very different from heaven.

3. Which Kingdom Defines You?

This introduces one of Revelation's great conflicts.

There are competing claims to rule.

There are competing kingdoms.

There are competing allegiances.

Eventually John will hear the declaration:

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ"

Revelation 11:15.

So when John says Christ has made **His people kings**, he is already preparing us for a major theme.

God's people live within earthly kingdoms.

They may be citizens of earthly nations.

They live under governments and laws.

But their deepest allegiance belongs somewhere else.

They belong to:

the kingdom of God.
And belonging to that kingdom may sometimes place them in tension with the values of the kingdoms around them.
That was true for John's churches.
It remains true for Christians in every age.

4. “Priests…”

Then John gives God's people another identity:
priests.
The Greek word is:
ἱερεῖς — hiereis
priests.
This language reaches deeply into the story of Israel.
At Sinai, God told Israel:
“ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation”
John's language unmistakably echoes that covenant identity.
That is significant.
The God who formed a people for Himself in Exodus is still forming a people for Himself in Revelation.
Once again, Revelation is not detached from the rest of Scripture.
Its roots reach backward everywhere.
Creation.
Exodus.
Sinai.
The tabernacle.
The prophets.
Daniel.
Ezekiel.
Isaiah.
Zechariah.
The Psalms.
Revelation gathers the language of Scripture and brings it toward its fulfillment in Christ.

5. What Does a Priest Do?

Priests are people set apart for the service of God.
They stand in relationship to His presence.
They worship.
They serve.
They represent God's holiness within the community.
And they participate in the worship offered to God.
John therefore tells ordinary Christians something extraordinary:
Your life has become priestly service.
That means Christian identity is not merely:

I have been forgiven.
It is also:
I now belong to God for His purposes.
There is a beautiful connection here with our recurring word:
δοῦλος — doulos
I belong to God.
Now Revelation adds:
ἱερεύς — hiereus
I serve God as part of His priestly people.
Belonging leads to service.

6. "Unto God and His Father…"

The KJV tells us to whom this priesthood belongs:
"priests unto God and his Father"
The priesthood is directed toward God.
Christian service is not ultimately about building our own importance.
It is not about creating our own kingdoms.
It is not about acquiring religious status.
It is service offered to:
"God and his Father"
And there is something wonderfully corrective about that.
Even Christian ministry can become distorted when service to God quietly becomes service to our own reputation, influence, institution, or ambition.
Priestly identity points in another direction.
Toward God.
The Christian belongs to God.
The Christian worships God.
The Christian serves God.
The Christian bears witness to God.
The Christian's life points beyond itself.

7. From Exodus to Revelation

We should stop for a moment and notice the Exodus-shaped movement running through verses 5–6.
Christ:
washed us from our sins
and:
made us kings and priests.
That sounds familiar.
Israel was delivered from slavery.
Then Israel was brought to Sinai and given a new identity:
"a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation"
Deliverance was followed by vocation.
God did not merely say:

You are no longer slaves in Egypt. Go wherever you please.
He said, in effect:
You are now My people.
Revelation presents salvation in a similarly rich way.
Christ frees us from bondage to sin.
Then He gives us an identity within His kingdom.
Freedom is not independence from God.
Christian freedom means being liberated so that we may finally become what we were created to be:
people who belong to God.

8. A Kingdom Without Earthly Grandeur

This would have been particularly important for Revelation's first readers.
They probably did not look much like royalty.
Some may have been poor.
Some may have faced social exclusion.
Some would soon be warned about suffering.
Some may have struggled economically because of their allegiance to Christ.
Yet John says:
You are a kingdom.
Likewise, most were not priests serving in impressive temples.
Yet John says:
You are priests.
This is another example of Revelation overturning appearances.
The world might look at these Christians and see people of little consequence.
Heaven sees:
a kingdom of priests.
That should make us careful about measuring the significance of the Church according to worldly standards.
Size.
Wealth.
Influence.
Political access.
Social prestige.
Buildings.
Budgets.
None of those determines whether the Church is truly significant.
The Church's significance comes from **whose Church it is**.

9. “To him be glory…”

At this point John once again moves from theology into worship.
He has been describing what Christ has done:
He loves us.
He washed us.

He made us a kingdom.
He made us priests.
And John's response is:
"to him be glory…"
The Greek word is:
δόξα — doxa
glory, honor, splendor.
John does not merely analyze Christ's work.
He worships.
That is going to happen repeatedly in Revelation.
Theology becomes doxology.
Truth produces worship.
John sees something about God—
and heaven erupts in praise.
John sees the Lamb—
and worship follows.
John sees salvation—
and worship follows.
John sees God's judgment—
and worship follows.
John sees God's victory—
and worship follows.
Revelation is filled with worship because Revelation is ultimately about **God**.
Perhaps that gives us another guardrail for our commentary:
If studying Revelation makes us fascinated but never leads us toward worship, we may be missing something essential about the book.

10. "And dominion…"

John adds:
"and dominion."
The Greek word is:
κράτος — kratos
might, power, strength, dominion.
That word is particularly significant in Revelation.
Because the book will contain many apparent demonstrations of power.
The dragon appears powerful.
The beast appears powerful.
Kings appear powerful.
Babylon appears powerful.
Military forces appear powerful.
Death itself appears powerful.
But John begins by declaring where true dominion belongs:
to Christ.

Again, Revelation gives us the answer before presenting the problem.
When the beast later appears terrifying, we should remember Revelation 1:6.
When Babylon appears wealthy and irresistible, remember Revelation 1:6.
When earthly kings gather their power, remember Revelation 1:6.
Dominion belongs to Christ.

11. "For Ever and Ever"

Then John extends that dominion beyond every earthly horizon:
"for ever and ever"
Empires do not last forever.
Rome did not.
Babylon did not.
Every human kingdom eventually discovers the limits of its power.
But Christ's glory and dominion do not expire.
That contrast will become one of Revelation's great themes.
Earthly power repeatedly presents itself as permanent.
Revelation repeatedly exposes it as temporary.
God's kingdom appears sometimes to be weak.
Revelation reveals it to be eternal.
Once again:
Look again.

12. "Amen"

And John concludes:
"Amen."
The word comes through Hebrew:
אָמֵן — amen
carrying the sense of certainty, truth, affirmation:
Truly.
So be it.
We use the word so frequently at the end of prayers that it can become almost automatic.
But here it carries weight.
Christ loves us.
Amen.
Christ washed us.
Amen.
Christ made us kings.
Amen.
Christ made us priests serving God.
Amen.
Glory belongs to Him.
Amen.
Dominion belongs to Him.

Amen.
Forever.
Amen.
John is not merely ending a sentence.
He is affirming a reality.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a subtle danger in thinking of salvation only in terms of what we have been saved **from**.
Saved from sin.
Saved from judgment.
Saved from death.
Those things are gloriously true.
But Revelation 1:6 asks us to go further.
What have we been saved for?
Christ has made us:
kings.
priests.
That means salvation gives us a calling.
We have been freed so that we can belong.
We have been forgiven so that we can serve.
We have been reconciled so that we can worship.
We have been brought into God's kingdom so that our lives may bear witness to another King.
Perhaps one of the great questions of Christian discipleship is not merely:
Am I saved?
But:
What am I doing with the life Christ has freed?

Something Worth Pondering

Our vocabulary is growing.
ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis
God unveils.
δοῦλος — doulos
I belong to God.
μάρτυς — martys
I bear witness.
τηρέω — tēreō
I keep what God has spoken.
And now:
βασιλεῖς — basileis
Christ gives His people a royal calling.
ἱερεύς — hiereus
I am called to priestly service.

Notice what is happening.
Revelation is not merely teaching us what will happen at the end of history.
Six verses into the book, it is already telling us **who we are right now**.
Servants.
Witnesses.
People who hear and keep.
Kings.
Priests.
Perhaps Revelation is not primarily asking:
"Can you predict the future?"
Perhaps it is asking something much closer to the heart:
"Do you know who you are—and will you live like it?"

Ask Yourself This

Christ has not only freed me **from** my sins; He has freed me **for** life in His kingdom and service to God. So what would change in the way I use my time, abilities, influence, relationships, and ordinary daily life if I truly understood myself as one who belongs to God's kingdom and has been called to serve in His presence?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:7

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.
Even so, Amen.”
— Revelation 1:7, KJV

Verse 6 ended in worship:
“to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”
Then John turns our eyes toward the horizon.
“Behold”
There is urgency in that word.
John does not merely tell us that Christ will come. He calls us to **see** it.
And in doing so, he brings together some of the deepest streams of Old Testament prophecy to announce one of Revelation's central promises:
The Jesus who was pierced, raised, and now reigns will come—and His coming will not remain hidden.

1. “Behold”

The Greek word is:
ἰδού — idou
Behold!
Look!
See!
Pay attention!
It is more than conversational decoration. It is a command to direct our attention toward something that must not be missed.
Revelation is going to ask us repeatedly to **look differently**.
The world looks at Rome and sees ultimate power.
John says:
Look.
The world looks at a slain Lamb and sees defeat.
John says:
Look.
The world sees suffering Christians and concludes that they have lost.
John says:
Look.
Revelation pulls back the curtain because ordinary sight does not always tell us the truth about reality.
And now John says:
Look! He is coming.

2. “He Cometh…”

The Greek verb is:
ἔρχεται — erchetai
He comes.
He is coming.
Notice the certainty.
John does not say:
Perhaps He will come.
Nor:
We hope He might come.
The announcement is presented as reality:
He is coming.
That promise will frame the entire book.
Here, near the beginning:
“Behold, he cometh…”
And near the very end, Jesus declares:
“Surely I come quickly.”
To which John responds:
“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”
So Revelation begins and ends with the coming Christ.
Everything between those declarations must therefore be read within that hope.
The seals are not the final word.
The trumpets are not the final word.
The dragon is not the final word.
The beasts are not the final word.
Babylon is not the final word.
Even death is not the final word.
Christ is coming.

3. “With Clouds…”

John does not invent this imagery.
He reaches deeply into the Old Testament, particularly Daniel 7.
Daniel sees:
“one like the Son of man”
coming:
“with the clouds of heaven.”
That figure approaches the Ancient One and receives:
dominion, glory, and kingship.
His dominion is everlasting.
His kingship will not be destroyed.
Now listen again to what John has just said about Jesus in Revelation 1:5–6:
“the prince of the kings of the earth”

and:
“to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever”
Then:
“Behold, he cometh with clouds”
Those connections are not accidental.
John is placing Jesus within Daniel's vision of divine kingship and everlasting dominion.
This is another reason we must read Revelation with the Old Testament close at hand.
John rarely stops to say:
Now I am quoting Daniel.
He assumes the language of Scripture will echo in the ears of his hearers.
Revelation's imagery grows from biblical soil.

4. Clouds Mean More Than Weather

In Scripture, clouds frequently accompany the manifestation of God's presence and glory.
God leads Israel with the cloud.
The cloud covers Sinai.
The glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle.
The cloud appears in connection with divine presence.
Jesus is associated with the cloud at His transfiguration and ascension.
So when John announces:
“he cometh with clouds”
we should not imagine John primarily giving us a meteorological detail.
This is **theophanic language**—language associated with the appearing and presence of God.
The One who comes is coming in glory.

5. “Every Eye Shall See Him…”

Now John expands the vision:
“every eye shall see him”
Christ's coming is not presented as a private event witnessed by a privileged few.
It is universal in scope.
Every eye.
The One who was once rejected and crucified publicly will not remain hidden forever.
The One whose followers may appear insignificant will be revealed for who He truly is.
That fits the very nature of this book:
ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis.
Unveiling.
Christ is being unveiled.

And ultimately, what faith presently confesses will become impossible to ignore.

6. Faith Sees Before Every Eye Sees

There may be a beautiful pastoral contrast here.
John's churches are being asked to recognize Christ's lordship **now**.
They cannot see Him with their physical eyes.
They see Rome.
They see temples.
They see officials.
They see wealth.
They see persecution.
They see their own small congregations.
Yet John tells them:
Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth.
Faith accepts that now.
But John says a day is coming when:
"every eye shall see him"
Perhaps faith is learning to live today according to the reality that everyone will eventually see.

7. "And They Also Which Pierced Him…"

Now John brings another Old Testament passage into the verse.
The language echoes Zechariah 12:10:
"they shall look upon me whom they have pierced"
John brings Daniel and Zechariah together.
From Daniel:
the coming with the clouds.
From Zechariah:
the pierced one and the mourning that follows.
And standing at the intersection is:
Jesus Christ.
That combination is theologically powerful.
The One coming in heavenly glory is the same One who was **pierced**.
The exalted Christ is the crucified Christ.
Revelation never leaves the cross behind.
Even when Jesus is revealed in overwhelming majesty, He remains identifiable as the One who gave Himself.
Later John will see:
"a Lamb as it had been slain"
Victory does not erase the wounds.
The wounds reveal something about the character of the Victor.

8. The Pierced One Is the Coming King

Consider the reversal.

Jesus stood before earthly rulers.
He was judged.
Mocked.
Beaten.
Crucified.
Pierced.
To anyone standing near the cross, the verdict of history might have seemed obvious:
Rome won.
Revelation says:
Look again.
The pierced One is:
the ruler of the kings of the earth.
The crucified One:
is coming with the clouds.
The One whom earthly authority condemned will ultimately reveal the limits of every earthly authority.
That is Revelation's great reversal.
What looked like defeat was not defeat.
What looked like weakness was not weakness.
What looked like the end was not the end.

9. "And All Kindreds of the Earth…"

The vision widens again.
Not merely Jerusalem.
Not merely Rome.
Not merely Asia Minor.
"all kindreds of the earth"
The coming of Christ has universal significance.
Revelation's horizon will continue expanding until it encompasses:
every tribe and language and people and nation.
The gospel is universal in scope.
Christ's kingdom is universal in scope.
Judgment is universal in scope.
And ultimately the worship of God will be pictured in universal terms.
The little churches of Asia Minor are participating in a story vastly larger than their circumstances suggest.
Perhaps they feel small.
John gives them a vision encompassing the earth.

10. "Shall Wail Because of Him"

The response is:
mourning.
The Greek verb is associated with mourning, lamentation, and grief.

Why do the nations mourn?
That question deserves some care.
The language comes from Zechariah, where looking upon the pierced one produces mourning. Within Revelation, however, Christ's appearing also brings judgment upon the powers and peoples who have opposed God.
So there may be more than one dimension to the mourning.
There is the recognition of the pierced One.
There is the exposure of human rebellion.
There is the realization that the kingdoms and powers that appeared permanent were not.
There is the unavoidable encounter with the One whom the world rejected.
What is clear is that Christ's coming demands a response.
No one simply shrugs.
Every eye sees.
The tribes mourn.
Reality has been unveiled.

11. The Coming of Christ Is Hope—and Judgment

This is important because Christians can sometimes speak about Christ's coming only as comforting.
For those who belong to Him, it certainly is hope.
Revelation ends with the Church praying:
"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."
But John's language also reminds us that the coming of Christ means **judgment**.
The same event that brings vindication to God's people exposes everything opposed to God's kingdom.
That is why Revelation's message contains both:
comfort
and:
warning.
To the suffering faithful:
Endure. Christ is coming.
To the compromising church:
Repent. Christ is coming.
To arrogant earthly powers:
Your dominion is temporary. Christ is coming.
To the world:
Look. Christ is coming.

12. "Even So"

John answers the announcement with these words:
"Even so"
John does not merely report the prophecy.

He affirms it.
There is something solemn in those words.
Yes.
Let God's purposes be fulfilled.
Let the true King be revealed.
Let evil be judged.
Let righteousness be vindicated.
Let creation finally see its Lord.
So it is to be.

13. "Amen."

And then, again:
Amen.
Verse 6 ended with Amen.
Verse 7 ends with Amen.
But there is an interesting feature here.
The Greek includes both:
ναί — nai
Yes.
and:
ἀμήν — amēn
Amen.
Two affirmations.
Yes. Amen.
It is as though John responds to his own announcement:
Christ is coming.
Yes.
Every eye will see Him.
Amen.
God's purposes will be accomplished.
Yes. Amen.
There is no hesitation.

Pastoral Reflection

Christians have spent enormous energy trying to determine **when** Christ will come.
Revelation 1:7 seems far more interested in something else:
that He will come.
John gives us no calculation here.
No chart.
No date.
No formula.
He gives us a promise:
"Behold, he cometh"

Perhaps there is a pastoral wisdom in that.
Knowing the date would satisfy curiosity.
Knowing the promise produces **hope and faithfulness**.
The Church is not called to spend every generation anxiously trying to prove that it must be the final generation.
The Church is called to live every generation as though the returning Christ truly is Lord.
That changes the question.
Instead of:
"Can I determine when He is coming?"
perhaps Revelation asks:
"Am I living faithfully because I know He is coming?"

Something Worth Pondering

There is something extraordinary in the way John identifies the coming Christ.
He does not say merely:
The King is coming.
He reminds us that the King is:
the One who was pierced.
That means the final victory of God will forever bear witness to the character of the One who wins it.
The world's kingdoms frequently establish power by spilling the blood of others.
Jesus establishes His kingdom by giving **His own blood**.
The world says:
Conquer your enemies.
Jesus says:
Love your enemies.
The world displays power through domination.
Revelation ultimately shows us power through:
the Lamb who was slain.
And that Lamb is coming.
Perhaps that tells us something important about the kingdom we were told in verse 6 that we belong to.
If our King conquers through faithful witness and sacrificial love, then His kingdom cannot faithfully represent Him by adopting the very methods of the beast.
The identity of the coming King should shape the character of the people waiting for Him.

Ask Yourself This

If I truly believe that the pierced Jesus is the risen and reigning Lord who is coming again, does that belief merely affect what I think about the future—or does it change the way I live, bear witness, exercise power, love others, and remain faithful today?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:8

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”
— Revelation 1:8, KJV

The introduction to Revelation reaches its climax with a voice.
Not John's.
Not the angel's.
God speaks.
The first eight verses have taken us through an extraordinary movement.
God gives the revelation.
Jesus communicates it.
John bears witness.
The Church reads, hears, and keeps it.
Grace and peace are proclaimed.
Jesus is revealed as the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.
The Church discovers that it has been made a kingdom of priests.
Christ's coming is announced.
And now God places His own declaration over everything that follows:
“I am Alpha and Omega”
Before the visions begin, before the churches are addressed individually, before the throne room opens, before a single seal is broken, God tells us something we must remember through every chapter:
History begins with Him.
History ends with Him.
And everything between those two belongs ultimately to Him.

1. “I am…”

The declaration begins simply:
“I am.”
The Greek is:
ἐγώ εἰμι — egō eimi
I am.
Those words naturally resonate with the biblical revelation of God.
When Moses asks God's name at the burning bush, God answers:
“I AM THAT I AM”
John's language here is not an exact quotation of Exodus 3:14, but the theological resonance is difficult to miss.
God does not derive His existence from anything else.
He simply **is**.

Everything else in Revelation is contingent.
Kings rise.
Kings fall.
Empires appear.
Empires disappear.
Generations are born.
Generations die.
Cities flourish.
Cities collapse.
Even heaven and earth as we presently know them will pass away.
But God says:
“I am.”
That is the foundation beneath everything John is about to see.

2. “Alpha…”

God says:
“I am Alpha…”
Ἄλφα — Alpha
is the first letter of the Greek alphabet.
For John's original hearers, the meaning would have been immediately apparent.
God stands at the beginning.
But this is more than saying that God existed a very long time ago.
Revelation begins with the same God who begins the entire biblical story:
“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”
Before creation:
God.
Before humanity:
God.
Before Israel:
God.
Before Rome:
God.
Before the seven churches:
God.
Before history began unfolding:
God.
He is not one character who entered the story somewhere along the way.
The story exists because **He began it**.

3. “And Omega”

Then:
Ὦ — Omega
the final letter of the Greek alphabet.

God is not merely the source from which history begins.
He is also the One toward whom history moves.
This becomes essential for understanding Revelation.
Revelation is not ultimately a story about the world falling apart.
It is the story of God bringing creation toward its intended fulfillment.
That distinction matters enormously.
If Revelation is simply about catastrophe, then its dominant emotion should be fear.
But if Revelation is about God bringing His purposes to completion, then even judgment exists within a larger story moving toward:
restoration.
justice.
resurrection.
new creation.
the dwelling of God with humanity.
The Bible begins with God creating heaven and earth.
Revelation will end with:
"a new heaven and a new earth."
The Bible begins with a garden.
Revelation ends with a city containing the river of life and the tree of life.
The Bible begins with humanity dwelling in God's presence.
Revelation ends with:
"the tabernacle of God is with men"
Alpha.
Omega.
The One who begins the story is also the One who completes it.

4. God Has Not Lost Control of His Story

That would have been enormously comforting to John's churches.
Their circumstances could easily have suggested otherwise.
Rome appeared powerful.
Christians could suffer.
Faithfulness could become costly.
Evil sometimes seemed to prosper.
Justice sometimes seemed delayed.
Perhaps believers occasionally wondered the same thing God's people have wondered throughout history:
Where is God in all of this?
Revelation's answer begins here:
He is Alpha and Omega.
The story has not slipped from His hands.
That does not mean every event is good.
Revelation certainly does not minimize evil.

It names evil.
Exposes evil.
Judges evil.
But evil never becomes the author of history.
The dragon does not write the ending.
The beast does not write the ending.
Babylon does not write the ending.
Death does not write the ending.
The Omega does.

5. Everything Between Alpha and Omega

There is another implication worth considering.
If God is Alpha and Omega, then He is not merely present at the two endpoints.
He is Lord over everything **between** them.
Our lives happen between Alpha and Omega.
Our joys.
Our grief.
Our questions.
Our victories.
Our failures.
Our suffering.
Our faithfulness.
The moments we understand.
And the moments when we pray something very close to what we have said throughout our pastoral journey:
"I don't know why this happened."
Alpha and Omega reminds us that our inability to see the whole story does not mean there is no story.
We see a page.
God sees the whole book.
We see the present chapter.
God knows the ending.
And because the One who began the story is faithful, we can trust Him even when we cannot yet understand how the present chapter fits.

6. "Saith the Lord…"

The speaker identifies Himself:
"the Lord"
The KJV identifies the speaker as "the Lord." The title places the speaker above every earthly claim to rule.
The rest of the verse tells us why:
He is the Almighty, who is, and was, and is to come.
This is language of sovereignty.

Revelation will contain many who claim authority.
Kings.
Rulers.
The dragon.
The beasts.
Babylon.
The **Lord's declaration** establishes the ultimate hierarchy before any of those powers appear.
They may exercise authority.
God possesses **ultimate authority**.
They may act.
God reigns.
They may oppose His purposes.
They cannot finally defeat them.
That distinction will become indispensable when Revelation's visions become darker.

7. "Which Is…"

We heard this description in verse 4:
"which is, and which was, and which is to come"
Now God repeats it.
And once again:
"which is"
comes first.
That deserves attention.
God does not merely say:
I was.
Christian faith is not merely confidence in what God did long ago.
Nor does God merely say:
I will be.
Christian hope is not merely waiting for God to become relevant someday.
He says:
I am.
The God of Abraham is.
The God of Moses is.
The God of the prophets is.
The God revealed in Jesus Christ is.
The God who will make all things new is.
God is present.
That matters to suffering churches.
And it matters to suffering Christians.

8. "Which Was…"

God is also:

“which was”
His faithfulness has a history.
The Christians hearing Revelation could look backward through Scripture and remember.
Creation.
Covenant.
Exodus.
Deliverance.
The prophets.
God's patience.
God's judgment.
God's mercy.
God's promises.
And above all:
Jesus Christ.
The God asking them to trust Him in an uncertain future is the God who has already demonstrated His character in the past.
Biblical hope frequently works this way.
We remember what God **has done** so that we can trust what God **will do**.

9. “And Which Is to Come…”

Then once again:
“which is to come”
Not simply:
who will exist.
But:
who comes.
Revelation is moving somewhere.
History is moving somewhere.
God's purposes are moving toward fulfillment.
And verse 7 has just told us:
“Behold, he cometh with clouds”
So the introduction has created a powerful sense of movement.
The Church is not merely waiting for time to pass.
It is waiting for God's purposes to reach their appointed fulfillment.
Christian hope is not merely optimism that tomorrow might be better than today.
Christian hope rests upon **the character and promise of the God who comes.**

10.“The Almighty”

Then comes the final title:
“the Almighty.”
The Greek word is:

παντοκράτωρ — pantokratōr
It combines the ideas of:
πᾶς — pas
all
and:
κράτος — kratos
might, strength, dominion.
We encountered **kratos** in verse 6:
"to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever"
Now God is called:
Pantokratōr.
The One whose sovereign power encompasses all.
The Almighty.
This title will become characteristic of Revelation.
And again, its placement matters.
John tells us God is **Almighty before showing us anything that appears mighty.**
That is not accidental.

11. Remember This When the Beast Appears

Later, the beast will appear terrifying.
People will marvel at its power.
The question will be asked:
"Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?"
By then, the reader should already know the answer.
We were told in Revelation 1:8:
God is Pantokratōr.
Almighty.
So when Revelation later shows us impressive displays of evil, we should never confuse **permitted power** with **ultimate power**.
The dragon is not Almighty.
The beast is not Almighty.
Babylon is not Almighty.
The kings of the earth are not Almighty.
Only God is:
παντοκράτωρ — Pantokratōr.
Revelation tells us that before the conflict begins.

12. The Book Has Already Given Away the Ending

There is something almost humorous about Revelation from a literary standpoint.
We are only eight verses into a twenty-two-chapter book, and John has essentially given away the ending.

Jesus Christ is:
the faithful witness.
the firstborn of the dead.
the ruler of the kings of the earth.
He:
loves us.
washed us from our sins.
made us kings and priests.
He is:
coming.
And God is:
Alpha.
Omega.
Almighty.
So when the dragon appears later, we do not need to wonder:
Who wins?
When Babylon appears powerful, we do not need to wonder:
Who wins?
When death appears to triumph, we do not need to wonder:
Who wins?
John has already told us.
That changes the purpose of the rest of Revelation.
The great question is not merely:
Who will win?
We already know.
The great pastoral question becomes:
Will God's people remain faithful while they wait for the victory already promised?
And there, Brother Randy, I think we may have found one of the central questions for our entire journey through Revelation.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons in life when God feels much easier to identify as:
"which was"
We can look backward and see His faithfulness.
There may also be times when we can believe that He is:
"which is to come"
Someday God will make things right.
Sometimes the hardest confession is the one John puts first:
"which is"
God is here.
Now.
In this uncertainty.

In this suffering.
In this unanswered question.
In this waiting.
In this chapter whose ending I cannot yet see.
The Alpha has not abandoned the story halfway through.
The Omega has not forgotten how it ends.
And the Almighty has not surrendered His throne.
Faith sometimes means trusting the Author while we are still living somewhere in the middle of the book.

Something Worth Pondering

We began Revelation 1:1 with:
ἀποκάλυψις — apokalypsis
Unveiling.
Eight verses later, what has been unveiled?
Not a beast.
Not 666.
Not Armageddon.
Not Babylon.
Not the mark.
Not a prophetic timetable.
God.
And:
Jesus Christ.
Perhaps that is extraordinarily important.
Before Revelation tells us anything about the powers that oppose God, it tells us who **God is**.
Before showing us the beast, it shows us **Christ**.
Before showing us earthly thrones, it shows us **the throne**.
Before showing us apparent chaos, it declares:
Alpha and Omega.
Before showing us frightening power, it declares:
Pantokratōr — Almighty.
That establishes another guardrail for everything ahead:
Never interpret the frightening images of Revelation in a way that makes them larger than the God Revelation has already revealed.
The dragon may roar.
The beast may threaten.
Babylon may boast.
But Revelation 1:8 has already spoken:
"I am Alpha and Omega… the Almighty"

Ask Yourself This

When I find myself somewhere in the middle of a story I do not understand, surrounded by circumstances I cannot control and questions I cannot answer, can I trust that the God who is Alpha has not abandoned what He began—and that the God who is Omega already holds the ending?

A Commentary on the Revelation of John

Revelation 1:9–20 — A Vision of Christ

"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.
And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.
And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."
— Revelation 1:9–20, KJV

This passage changes everything.
The opening verses introduced the Revelation, pronounced its blessing, greeted the seven churches, and announced that Christ is coming. Now John tells us **where he was, why he was there, and what happened when the risen Christ appeared to him**.

What follows is not merely an introduction to another prophetic vision. It establishes the identity and authority of the One who stands at the center of the entire book.

The Movement of the Passage

There is a beautiful progression in these verses.

John begins not by elevating himself above his readers but by identifying himself with them: *"your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ."* He is on Patmos because of his faithfulness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Then, on the Lord's Day, the ordinary gives way to the extraordinary.

John hears a voice.

He turns.

He sees the lampstands.

And then he sees **Christ standing among them**.

The imagery becomes increasingly overwhelming: the long robe and golden sash, hair white as snow, eyes like fire, feet like burnished bronze, a voice like rushing waters, seven stars held in his hand, a sword proceeding from his mouth, and a face shining like the sun.

John's response is important.

He does not analyze what he sees.

He does not begin asking questions.

He **falls at Christ's feet as though dead**.

And then comes one of the most beautiful moments in Revelation.

The same Christ whose appearance has overwhelmed John reaches down and **places his right hand upon him**.

"Fear not"

That gesture tells us something essential about the Jesus of Revelation.

The Christ who possesses unimaginable glory is still the Christ who touches the frightened disciple.

The One who declares himself **"the first and the last"** is the same Lord who conquered death:

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore"

Therefore he holds *"the keys of hell and of death."*

Death does not hold the keys.

Hades does not hold the keys.

Christ does.

And that truth will matter enormously as Revelation unfolds.

1. Christ Among His Churches

Verse 20 interprets part of the vision for us. The seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the angels of those churches.

That means Christ is not observing his churches from some unimaginably distant throne.

He is walking among them.
He knows them.
He sees their faithfulness.
He sees their compromise.
He knows their suffering.
He knows where they have endured.
And he knows where they have wandered.
That prepares us directly for Chapters 2 and 3.
Before Christ speaks **to** the seven churches, John sees Christ **among** the seven churches.
That distinction is profoundly pastoral.

2. Endurance Before Explanation

And notice something that fits beautifully with the theological direction we established for this commentary.
John introduces himself as one who shares in three things:
persecution, kingdom, and endurance in Jesus.
There it is again—**endurance**.
Revelation has barely begun, and already John is telling suffering Christians that following Christ involves endurance. The book is not primarily being given so Christians can construct elaborate charts predicting events thousands of years later.
It is being given to help the people of God remain faithful **now**.
The churches are about to hear some difficult things. Some will be praised. Some will be corrected. Some will be warned severely.
But before any of that happens, John shows them **who is standing among them**.
The risen Christ.
The Living One.
The One who died and lives forever.
The One who holds the keys.
And when frightened believers encounter him, his first words are not:
"Figure everything out."
They are:
"Fear not"

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when faithfulness can make a person feel isolated.
John certainly had reason to understand that. He was on Patmos because of his testimony concerning Jesus. Yet exile had not placed John beyond the presence of Christ.
Patmos became the place where Christ was revealed.

That does not mean suffering is secretly pleasant or that every hardship should be romanticized. Revelation does not ask us to pretend persecution does not hurt.
Instead, it gives us something stronger:
Christ remains present in the midst of it.
The church may feel weak.
The world may appear powerful.
Death may seem final.
But Revelation begins by showing us that appearances do not tell the whole story.
Christ stands among his churches.
Christ holds his people.
Christ possesses the keys.
And Christ lives forever.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps one of the most important questions Revelation asks us is not:
"Can you understand every symbol?"
but rather:
"Can you remain faithful because you know who Jesus is?"
John fell before Christ overwhelmed by his glory.
Christ reached down and touched him.
That may be one of the finest pictures of Revelation itself:
The glory of Christ is great enough to bring us to our knees, and the grace of Christ is tender enough to raise us again.

Ask Yourself This:

When circumstances make Christ seem distant, do I judge his presence by what I can presently see—or do I trust the risen Lord who promises that even in suffering, he remains among his people?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:9

“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”
— Revelation 1:9, KJV

John now moves from the majestic declaration of Christ's coming to something intensely personal. For the first time since identifying himself in the opening verses, he tells his readers something about his own circumstances.
And the way he introduces himself is significant.
John could have appealed to his authority. He could have emphasized his unique calling or the extraordinary revelation he was about to receive. Instead, he calls himself simply **“your brother.”**
That is the language of fellowship.
John does not stand above the suffering churches to whom he writes. He stands **with them**.

1. “Your Brother”

There is humility in John's words.
Whatever authority he possesses, whatever vision he is about to receive, he remains a brother among brothers and sisters in Christ.
That becomes particularly meaningful because several of the churches addressed in Revelation were experiencing pressure because of their allegiance to Jesus. John does not write to them as an observer safely removed from their circumstances.
He knows something of their struggle himself.
He shares with them in three realities:
persecution, kingdom, and endurance.
Those three words belong together.

2. Persecution, Kingdom, and Endurance

John's ordering is fascinating because it captures something of the Christian life in the present age.
The **kingdom** of God has come in Jesus Christ, yet God's people still experience **persecution** in a world that has not fully submitted to that kingdom.
Therefore Christians require **endurance**.
John does not present suffering as evidence that God's kingdom has failed. Nor does he present belonging to the kingdom as a promise that believers will escape suffering.

Instead, he places persecution and kingdom side by side—and then adds endurance.
That is remarkably important for understanding Revelation.
The book will repeatedly confront its readers with competing kingdoms, competing allegiances, and the cost of remaining faithful to Christ. The question will not simply be whether Christians believe the right things.
The question will be whether they will **continue believing and living them when faithfulness becomes costly**.
That is endurance.
And notice where John locates it:
"patience of Jesus Christ"
Christian endurance is not mere stubbornness. It is not gritting one's teeth and refusing to surrender through sheer force of personality.
It is endurance rooted in union with Christ.
We endure because the One to whom we belong has already endured—and overcome.

3. Patmos

John tells us that he was on **Patmos**, a small island in the Aegean Sea off the western coast of Asia Minor.
For John's original readers, Patmos would not have sounded like an exotic spiritual retreat.
John was there *"for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."*
The wording can be discussed—whether John had been formally exiled because of his preaching or was there under some other circumstance connected with his witness—but the central point is clear enough:
John's presence on Patmos was connected with his faithfulness to Christ.
His testimony had cost him something.
That matters because Revelation is not being written by someone offering abstract advice about suffering.
The man writing about endurance is himself **having to endure**.

4. "For the Word of God, and for the Testimony of Jesus Christ"

These two expressions will echo throughout Revelation.
John has been faithful to what God has revealed and to the testimony concerning Jesus Christ.
And that testimony has consequences.
There is something deeply pastoral here.
Faithfulness does not always lead immediately to easier circumstances.
Sometimes faithfulness leads to Patmos.
We should be careful not to romanticize that. Isolation is still isolation.
Persecution is still persecution. Suffering still hurts.
But Revelation introduces a remarkable reversal:

The place that looked like John's isolation became the place of Christ's revelation.
Patmos could separate John geographically from the churches.
It could not separate John from Christ.
And beginning with the very next verse, John will discover just how profoundly true that is.

5. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Revelation 1:9 quietly gives us a framework for reading much of the book:
Kingdom does not eliminate suffering.
Suffering calls for endurance.
Endurance is found in Jesus.
That guards us against reading Revelation merely as a timetable of future events.
John is writing to real Christians facing real pressures who need to know how to remain faithful to a real Lord.
Before Revelation shows us beasts, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, judgment, or the New Jerusalem, it gives us a brother named John standing on Patmos saying, in effect:
"I am enduring this with you."
That changes the tone of everything that follows.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when obedience to God seems to lead us in precisely the opposite direction from where we expected.
We may assume that faithfulness should open doors.
Sometimes it closes them.
We may assume obedience should make the road easier.
Sometimes it leads to Patmos.
But John teaches us not to confuse difficult circumstances with divine abandonment.
John was geographically isolated, but spiritually he was anything but abandoned.
Christ knew exactly where John was.
And Christ was about to meet him there.
That is an important word for anyone who has ever wondered whether faithfulness was worth its cost.
Patmos was not evidence that God had forgotten John.
It became the place where John saw Christ as he had never seen him before.

Something Worth Pondering

John calls himself a "companion in **tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ."**
We often want the kingdom without the persecution and the promise without the endurance.

John does not separate them so easily.
Christian hope does not mean pretending suffering is unreal.
It means knowing that suffering **does not have the final word**.
The kingdom belongs to Christ.
And because it does, endurance is never meaningless.

Ask Yourself This:

When faithfulness to Christ becomes costly, do I interpret the difficulty as evidence that God has abandoned me—or can I trust that even my own "Patmos" may become a place where Christ makes his presence known?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:10

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,”
— Revelation 1:10, KJV

John has told us **where** he was—Patmos—and **why** he was there—because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
Now he tells us what happened.
The lonely island becomes holy ground.

1. “I Was in the Spirit”

John says that he was **“in the Spirit.”**
This expression signals that what follows is more than ordinary observation. John is being brought by the Spirit into a state in which God will disclose what human eyes alone could never perceive.
Similar language appears again at important transitions in Revelation (4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Each time, John is enabled to see realities that lie beyond ordinary human perception.
That distinction is important.
John is not presenting Revelation as something he reasoned out.
He does not say:
“I studied the political situation and concluded what would happen.”
Nor does he claim to have constructed an elaborate theological theory.
He receives.
God reveals.
John witnesses.
And eventually John writes.
That gives us one of the fundamental movements of Revelation:
God reveals → John sees and hears → John testifies → the churches hear.

2. “On the Lord’s Day”

John says this occurred **“on the Lord’s day.”**
The expression is generally understood as referring to the day associated particularly with the Lord—the day Christians gathered in remembrance and celebration of Christ's resurrection, what we call Sunday.
There has been discussion over whether John could instead mean the eschatological **“Day of the Lord,”** the great day of divine judgment spoken of by the prophets. But the wording here differs from the usual biblical expression for “the Day of the Lord,” and the early Christian use of *the Lord's Day* strongly supports the Sunday understanding.
That gives the scene a particularly poignant quality.

John is separated from the churches.
Perhaps elsewhere Christians are gathering.
Scripture is being read.
Prayers are being offered.
Christ is being remembered.
But John is on Patmos.
He cannot gather with his brothers and sisters in the ordinary way.
Yet he is not separated from **the Lord of the church**.
The church may be beyond John's reach.
Christ is not.

3. Worship in Isolation

There is something pastorally beautiful here.
We sometimes associate worship so closely with a building, congregation, music, liturgy, or familiar routine that circumstances disrupting those things can leave us feeling spiritually displaced.
John has none of them mentioned here.
He has Patmos.
And yet on the Lord's Day, **the Spirit meets him there**.
That does not diminish the importance of Christian community. Revelation itself is addressed to churches and meant to be read among them.
But it reminds us that physical isolation cannot place a believer outside the reach of God.
Rome—or whatever circumstances brought John to Patmos—could control John's location.
It could not control **Christ's presence**.

4. “Heard Behind Me”

Then something happens.
John hears a voice **behind him**.
There is wonderful dramatic movement in the text.
John has not yet seen Christ.
First, he hears.
That means John must **turn**.
And verse 12 will make that physical movement explicit:
“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.”
Revelation begins John's great vision not with John searching heaven for answers, but with heaven interrupting John.
The initiative belongs entirely to God.

5. “A Great Voice, as of a Trumpet”

John describes what he heard as **“a great voice, as of a trumpet.”**
Notice his wording carefully.
John does not say the voice **was** a trumpet.
It was **like** a trumpet.

That little word *like* will become enormously important throughout Revelation.
John repeatedly reaches for comparison because he is trying to describe extraordinary realities using ordinary human language.
Something is *like* this.
Something appears *as though* that.
Something sounds *like* something John knows.
That should make us cautious interpreters.
John is communicating faithfully, but he is often communicating through **analogy, symbolism, and comparison**.
We should therefore resist the temptation to force every image into an excessively literal interpretation.
The trumpet-like voice communicates something unmistakable:
authority.
It is powerful.
Clear.
Commanding.
Impossible to ignore.
Throughout Scripture, trumpets can announce significant divine action, summon God's people, warn of danger, accompany revelation, and herald the presence or activity of God.
John hears a voice that demands attention.
Whatever tranquility Patmos possessed has just been shattered.

6. Before John Sees Christ, He Hears Him

There is another subtle point worth noticing.
John already knows Jesus.
He has testified concerning Jesus.
He has suffered because of Jesus.
Yet Revelation is about to deepen John's understanding of the Christ he already knows.
That is important for us.
Knowing Christ does not mean we have exhausted the mystery of Christ.
John is already a faithful disciple, yet he is about to encounter the risen Lord with such overwhelming majesty that, in verse 17, he will collapse at his feet.
The Jesus John knows is about to be revealed in dimensions of glory John cannot casually absorb.
And it begins with a voice.

7. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Verse 9 showed us John sharing **in the tribulation and patience of Jesus Christ.**
Verse 10 now shows John **"in the Spirit."**
Those expressions belong beautifully together.

John's circumstances have not changed.
He is still on Patmos.
He is still separated from the churches.
He is still there because of his testimony.
But something has changed in what John is permitted to perceive.
And that distinction may be one of the most important lessons in Revelation.
God does not first remove John from Patmos.
God reveals Christ to John on Patmos.
Sometimes we ask God to change our circumstances when God's first work is to change what we are able to see **within** those circumstances.
Revelation will eventually promise the complete renewal of creation.
Christian hope is not merely learning to tolerate suffering forever.
But before John sees the New Jerusalem, before he sees evil defeated, before he sees every tear wiped away—
he must first see **Jesus**.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when we may feel that meaningful worship requires circumstances we no longer possess.
John reminds us otherwise.
He had no sanctuary mentioned.
No choir.
No familiar congregation surrounding him.
Only Patmos.
Yet on the Lord's Day, the Spirit was present.
And then John heard the voice of Christ.
Perhaps that is one reason this verse follows verse 9 so beautifully.
Verse 9 tells us **where John was**.
Verse 10 tells us **who could still reach him there**.
No exile is distant enough.
No island remote enough.
No circumstance severe enough.
No loneliness deep enough.
Christ still knows how to speak.

Something Worth Pondering

John did not escape Patmos in order to encounter Christ.
Christ entered John's experience of Patmos.
That distinction matters.
We sometimes imagine God's presence primarily in terms of deliverance:
When God changes this situation, then I will know he is with me.
Revelation begins differently.
Before John's circumstances change at all, Christ makes his presence known.
Sometimes God's first answer is not:

“I will take you out of this place.”
It is:
“I am here with you in this place.”
And John is about to turn around and discover just how glorious that presence truly is.

Ask Yourself This

When I find myself in a place I would never have chosen, am I so focused on asking God to change my circumstances that I might fail to listen for what Christ wants to reveal to me within them?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:11

“Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.”
— Revelation 1:11, KJV

The voice John heard in verse 10 identifies itself in the KJV as “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last,” then gives John his commission.
And the first command is wonderfully simple:
Write.
John is not receiving this revelation merely for himself. What he sees must be recorded, preserved, and delivered to the churches.
That immediately tells us something essential about the nature of Revelation.
It is a **vision**, certainly.
It is **prophecy**.
But it is also a **message to the church**.

1. “What Thou Seest, Write in a Book”

John is instructed to write **what he sees**.
That phrase deserves attention because it defines John's role throughout the book.
John is a **witness**.
He will see extraordinary things—some beautiful, some terrifying, some difficult even to describe. His responsibility is not to improve them, domesticate them, or make them fit neatly into a system.
He is to testify faithfully to what he has been shown.
That is why Revelation so frequently contains expressions such as:
“I saw…”
“I heard…”
“Then I looked…”
John continually reminds us that he is reporting a revelation received rather than constructing a theological puzzle of his own invention.
And this gives us an important interpretive guardrail.
When John tells us something looked **“like”** something, we should allow him to use symbolic and visionary language. We should not immediately insist that every detail must correspond one-for-one with a modern object or event.
John's responsibility is to describe faithfully.
Ours is to listen carefully.

2. A Revelation Intended to Be Read

There is another important implication in the command to write.

Christian faith is not based merely upon private spiritual experiences.
John experiences the vision personally, but Christ commands that it become a **public testimony**.
The revelation moves outward:
Christ → John → written testimony → churches.
That movement began in Revelation 1:1 and now becomes concrete.
John must write.
Then someone must carry what he has written.
Then someone will read it aloud.
And congregations will hear it.
Remember the blessing from verse 3:
"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy…"
Now we understand how that will happen.
John's solitary encounter on Patmos is destined to become the church's shared word of encouragement, correction, warning, and hope.

3. "Send It Unto the Seven Churches"

Now the destination becomes specific.
John is to send the book to seven churches:
Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.
These were real Christian congregations in real cities of Roman Asia.
That historical reality is extremely important.
Before Revelation was ever *our* book, it was **their** book.
Before we ask what Revelation means for Christians in the twenty-first century, we should ask what its imagery and message could have communicated to Christians living in those seven cities near the end of the first century.
That protects us from one of the easiest mistakes to make with Revelation:
reading ourselves into every verse.
The book certainly speaks to us.
But it was not written first to us.

4. Why These Seven Churches?

There were more than seven Christian congregations in Asia Minor. The New Testament itself gives us evidence of others.
So why these seven?
Part of the answer is geographical. The cities form a recognizable route through the Roman province of Asia. A messenger carrying John's writing could move through these communities in a natural circuit.
But seven also carries obvious symbolic importance throughout Revelation.
Seven churches.
Seven spirits.
Seven lampstands.

Seven stars.
Later there will be seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls.
In biblical symbolism, seven frequently suggests **completeness or fullness**.
Therefore these are seven actual historical churches, but they can also function representatively.
Christ speaks to **these churches**, and through them Christ speaks to **the church**.
We do not have to choose between historical reality and theological symbolism.
Revelation frequently gives us both.

5. Seven Different Churches

The churches themselves are remarkably different.
Some are suffering.
Some are compromising.
Some appear alive but are spiritually dying.
Some have remained faithful despite having little apparent strength.
One has become terribly comfortable with itself.
Christ does not address them all identically.
That becomes important when we reach Chapters 2 and 3.
There is no generic letter beginning:
"Dear Church, here is what all of you are doing wrong."
Christ knows each congregation individually.
He knows its circumstances.
He knows its faithfulness.
He knows its failures.
He knows what it has endured.
And he knows what it needs to hear.
That should already tell us something about the image John is about to see.

6. Christ Is Already Among Them

John has not yet turned around.
That happens in verse 12.
But when he does, he will see seven golden lampstands. Verse 20 will explain that those lampstands represent the seven churches.
And where is Christ?
In their midst.
That makes the command of verse 11 much more than an ancient mailing list.
Christ knows these churches because **Christ walks among these churches**.
When he later tells Ephesus that he knows its works, he knows.
When he tells Smyrna that he knows its suffering, he knows.
When he exposes compromise in Pergamum and Thyatira, he knows.
When Sardis has a reputation for being alive while actually being dead, Christ sees beneath the reputation.

When Philadelphia has little power yet remains faithful, Christ notices.
And when Laodicea has deceived itself into believing that it needs nothing, Christ knows its true condition.
Nothing about his church escapes the Lord of the church.

7. The Theology Beneath the Verse

There is a profound movement occurring here.
John is isolated on Patmos.
Seven congregations are scattered across Asia.
Yet Christ binds them together through his word.
John's imprisonment cannot silence the testimony.
Distance cannot prevent the message from reaching the churches.
And imperial power cannot prevent Christ from speaking to his people.
That becomes especially significant in a book concerned with competing claims of authority.
Rome may believe that it controls the world.
But in Revelation 1:11, **Christ is issuing the orders.**
John writes because Christ commands it.
The churches receive the message because Christ sends it.
And soon we will discover that the One giving those commands possesses an authority vastly greater than anything Rome could imagine.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something wonderfully encouraging about the fact that Revelation was addressed to **churches** rather than merely to exceptional spiritual individuals.
These congregations were imperfect.
Some were seriously imperfect.
Yet Christ had not abandoned them.
He spoke to them.
He corrected them.
He encouraged them.
He warned them.
He called them back to faithfulness.
Sometimes correction itself is evidence of grace.
Christ could have remained silent.
Instead, he speaks.
And the reason he speaks is not simply to condemn his churches for their failures.
He intends to make them faithful.
That means the letters we will soon encounter should not merely become opportunities for us to point at ancient Christians and say:
“Look what they did wrong.”
They should become mirrors.

Ephesus may reveal something about us.
Smyrna may strengthen us.
Pergamum may warn us.
Thyatira may confront us.
Sardis may awaken us.
Philadelphia may encourage us.
Laodicea may disturb us.
The names are ancient.
The spiritual questions are not.

Something Worth Pondering

Christ tells John:
"What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches"
Nearly two thousand years later, we are still reading what John wrote.
Those original congregations eventually disappeared.
Empires rose and fell.
Cities changed names.
Buildings became ruins.
But the testimony entrusted to John continued its journey.
There is something quietly powerful about that.
Rome sent John to Patmos.
Christ turned Patmos into a pulpit.
What looked like an attempt to silence a witness became the setting from which one of Christianity's most enduring testimonies would emerge.
Human beings sometimes close doors.
God has an extraordinary ability to use the room we find ourselves locked inside.

Ask Yourself This:

When Christ speaks to his church through Scripture, do I primarily look for what his words say about everyone else—or am I willing to hear what he may be saying to me?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:12

“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;”
— Revelation 1:12, KJV

John has heard the voice.
Now he turns.
That simple movement—**“I turned”**—marks one of the great transitions in Revelation. Until this moment John has described his circumstances and what he heard. Beginning here, Revelation becomes profoundly visual.
And what John sees first is surprising.
He does not immediately say:
“I saw Christ.”
He sees **seven golden lampstands**.

1. “I Turned to See”

There is something wonderfully human about John's reaction.
A powerful voice like a trumpet has sounded behind him.
John turns toward it.
But notice the unusual wording: John turns **“to see the voice that spake with me.”**
Strictly speaking, voices are heard; people are seen. Yet Revelation will continually intermingle seeing and hearing. John hears something and then sees something that helps him understand what he has heard. At other times, what he hears and what he sees will seem to interpret one another.
Here the important point is straightforward:
John responds to the voice by turning toward its source.
The revelation is becoming an encounter.

2. “I Saw Seven Golden Candlesticks”

The first objects John sees are **seven golden candlesticks. These are lampstands**, the stands that held oil lamps.
For a reader familiar with Israel's Scriptures, lampstands naturally evoke the imagery of sacred worship.
The tabernacle contained the golden lampstand described in Exodus 25:31–40, and lampstand imagery appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, particularly in Zechariah 4.
But John's vision is not simply a reproduction of the lampstand from the tabernacle.
He sees **seven lampstands**.
And fortunately, we do not have to speculate about their meaning.
Christ himself will explain them in verse 20:

“the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches”
That is an important interpretive lesson for Revelation.
Sometimes the book explains its own symbolism.
When it does, we should allow **Revelation to interpret Revelation** before searching elsewhere for elaborate explanations.

3. Why Lampstands?

The symbolism is beautiful.
A lampstand does not create light.
It **bears** light.
That distinction matters.
The church is never the source of the light it carries.
Christ is.
The church's calling is therefore not to draw attention to itself but to hold forth faithfully the light entrusted to it.
Jesus had told his disciples:
“Ye are the light of the world.”
The church bears witness to Christ in a darkened world.
But Revelation will soon make clear that a lampstand can fail in that calling.
In the message to Ephesus, Christ warns:
“I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”
— Revelation 2:5
So being a lampstand is both a privilege and a responsibility.
A church does not exist merely for its own preservation.
It exists to bear the light of Christ.

4. Golden Lampstands

John specifically calls them **golden** lampstands.
Gold throughout Scripture is associated with value, beauty, and sacred things.
That makes Christ's later criticisms of the churches even more striking.
Some of these congregations have serious problems.
Some have tolerated false teaching.
Some have compromised.
One has become spiritually dead despite its reputation.
Another will be described as lukewarm.
Yet John sees **golden** lampstands.
Christ does not ignore their failures, but neither does he treat his churches as worthless.
They belong to him.
They are precious enough to correct.
That is an important pastoral balance.
The church must never imagine that belonging to Christ makes repentance unnecessary.

But neither should a struggling congregation conclude that Christ has ceased to care for it simply because correction is needed.

5. Seven Separate Lampstands

There is another detail worth noticing.
John sees **seven lampstands**, corresponding to seven individual churches.
They are distinct congregations in distinct places with distinct circumstances.
This fits perfectly with what we observed in verse 11.
Christ does not treat the church merely as an abstraction.
Ephesus is Ephesus.
Smyrna is Smyrna.
Philadelphia is Philadelphia.
Each congregation will receive a message appropriate to its own spiritual condition.
And yet all seven belong together in John's vision.
There is diversity without separation from the larger body of Christ.
Different cities.
Different struggles.
Different strengths.
Different failures.
One Lord.

6. But Where Is Christ?

And now we come to the most important part of the verse.
John has not finished describing what he sees.
Verse 12 gives us the lampstands.
Verse 13 will tell us:
"in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man…"
That means the churches are not standing alone.
Christ is **among them**.
Before Christ evaluates the seven churches in Chapters 2 and 3, Revelation establishes his relationship to them.
He is not a distant administrator sending performance reports from heaven.
He walks among his people.
He knows them because **he is present with them**.
That gives tremendous weight to the repeated words we will soon hear:
"I know…"
Christ knows their works.
He knows their suffering.
He knows their poverty.
He knows their faithfulness.
He knows their compromise.
He knows their reputation.
He knows their weakness.

He knows their lukewarmness.
Nothing is hidden from the One who walks among the lampstands.

7. The Church Is Not the Center

There is also a subtle theological correction here.
John initially sees the lampstands.
But the lampstands are not ultimately what makes the vision glorious.
Christ is.
That distinction is important for every generation of Christians.
It is possible to become fascinated with the church—its programs, buildings, traditions, leadership, attendance, influence, or success—and gradually forget why the lampstand exists.
The lampstand matters because of the **light it bears**.
And the church matters because it belongs to **Christ**.
A church that becomes preoccupied with preserving itself rather than bearing witness to Jesus has begun confusing the lampstand with the light.

8. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Verse 12 gives us an image that will govern the next several chapters:
Christ's churches are his lampstands in the world.
They are distinct.
They are precious.
They are called to bear light.
They are accountable to Christ.
And—as the next verse will reveal—they exist in his presence.
That last truth changes everything.
The church does not summon Christ into its midst as though he were absent until we create the proper atmosphere.
The church belongs to the Christ who already walks among the lampstands.
Our task is to recognize his presence and remain faithful to him.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something comforting—and something unsettling—about Christ walking among his churches.
It is comforting because no faithful congregation is ever truly forgotten.
A church may be small.
It may possess little influence.
It may struggle financially.
It may exist in a place the world considers insignificant.
But if it belongs to Christ, he knows exactly where that lampstand stands.
Philadelphia will soon discover this.
But Christ's presence is also unsettling because appearances cannot deceive him.
A congregation may have an excellent reputation.

It may look successful.
It may appear vibrant.
People may praise it.
Christ sees deeper.
Sardis will discover that.
So the question is never merely:
"What do people think of our church?"
The more important question is:
"What does the One walking among the lampstands see?"

Something Worth Pondering

John turned toward the voice and saw the churches.
Then, among the churches, he saw Christ.
That order is worth remembering.
We sometimes look at the church and see only people.
Their strengths.
Their weaknesses.
Their disagreements.
Their mistakes.
Their personalities.
Their failures.
And if that is all we see, disappointment is almost inevitable.
John's vision asks us to look again.
Among the lampstands stands Christ.
The church is imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people.
But it is not abandoned.
The Lord of the church still walks among his people.
He corrects.
He encourages.
He warns.
He strengthens.
And he calls his lampstands to continue bearing his light.

Ask Yourself This:

When I look at the church, do I see only its human weaknesses and failures—or do I remember that Christ is still present among his lampstands, calling his people to bear his light faithfully?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:13

“And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.”
— Revelation 1:13, KJV

Now John sees the One whose voice caused him to turn.
And perhaps the most important words in the verse are not initially the description of Christ's clothing or even the magnificent title John uses.
They are these:
“in the midst of the seven candlesticks”
The risen Christ stands **among his churches**.

1. “In the Midst of the Seven Candlesticks”

Verse 12 introduced the seven golden lampstands, which verse 20 will identify as the seven churches.
Christ is not standing somewhere beyond them.
He is **in their midst**.
That is enormously important as we approach the letters of Chapters 2 and 3.
Christ will praise some churches.
He will rebuke others.
He will encourage the suffering.
He will expose compromise.
He will call the complacent to repentance.
But all of those words come from the One who is already **among them**.
His knowledge of the churches is not secondhand.
He does not depend upon reports from others.
Christ knows his church because Christ walks among his church.
That makes his presence both wonderfully comforting and profoundly challenging.
Nothing suffered in faithfulness escapes his notice.
And nothing hidden in compromise escapes it either.

2. “One Like Unto the Son of Man”

John describes the figure as:
“one like unto the Son of man”
This language reaches deeply into the book of Daniel.
In Daniel 7:13–14, Daniel sees *“one like th***e Son of man”** coming with the clouds of heaven and receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom from the Ancient of Days.
His dominion is everlasting.
His kingdom will not pass away.

John's wording deliberately evokes that vision.
This is not simply a human figure standing among seven lamps.
John is seeing the exalted Christ in the imagery of **divine authority and everlasting kingship**.
And for Christians living under the shadow of Rome, that declaration would have carried tremendous weight.
Caesar may claim authority.
Empires may appear permanent.
Governments may demand allegiance.
But Revelation begins by showing us another King.
His dominion does not expire.

3. Jesus and "Son of Man"

There is another important connection.
"Son of Man" was one of Jesus' characteristic ways of referring to himself in the Gospels.
Sometimes the expression emphasizes his earthly ministry and suffering. At other times it points unmistakably toward Daniel's glorious heavenly figure.
Jesus could speak of the Son of Man being rejected and killed.
But he could also speak of the Son of Man coming in glory.
Those themes now converge.
The Jesus who suffered is the Christ who reigns.
The One who was crucified is the One John now sees standing glorified among the lampstands.
Revelation never asks us to choose between the suffering Jesus and the victorious Christ.
They are the same Lord.
That will become one of the great theological themes of the entire book.
Victory comes through sacrificial faithfulness.
The Lion will be revealed as a Lamb who was slain.

4. "Clothed With a Garment Down to the Foot"

John next notices Christ's clothing:
"clothed with a garment down to the foot"
The imagery conveys dignity and authority. Long robes could be associated with persons of high standing and, within Israel's religious tradition, priestly service.
We should be cautious about forcing every element into one rigid identification. Revelation often gathers several biblical associations into a single image.
But the overall impression is unmistakable.
This is not the appearance of an ordinary laborer walking the roads of Galilee.
John is seeing Christ in **majesty**.

The earthly Jesus whom people could dismiss, mock, strike, and crucify is now revealed as he truly is.
That contrast is breathtaking.
Human beings once dressed Jesus in mock royal clothing to ridicule him.
John now sees him clothed in genuine glory.

5. “Girt About the Paps With a Golden Girdle”

The **golden girdle, a sash** worn across the chest, adds further dignity to the image.
Again, priestly associations are possible, particularly when the robe and sash are considered together. Revelation will repeatedly present Christ in ways that transcend a single category.
He is King.
He is Priest.
He is Judge.
He is Lamb.
He is Shepherd.
He is Lord.
Trying to reduce the imagery to only one of those roles can actually diminish what John is showing us.
The point is not merely to identify an ancient style of clothing.
John is attempting to communicate the **majesty and authority of the risen Christ**.
And the description has only begun.
In the next several verses, John's language will become increasingly overwhelming.
White hair.
Eyes like fire.
Feet like burnished bronze.
A voice like many waters.
Seven stars.
A two-edged sword.
A face shining like the sun.
John is reaching the limits of ordinary language.

6. Remember John's Use of “Like”

Once again, John says **“like.”**
He sees one **“like unto the Son of man.”**
This is important for how we read Revelation.
John repeatedly uses analogy because he is describing realities greater than the vocabulary available to him.
He does not invite us to construct a bizarre literal portrait by assembling every image mechanically.
If we tried, we would miss the point.

The imagery communicates **who Christ is**.
His eyes will communicate penetrating perception.
His voice will communicate overwhelming authority.
The sword will communicate the power of his word.
His radiant face will communicate divine glory.
Revelation is not asking:
"Can you draw this correctly?"
It is asking:
"Do you understand who stands before John?"

7. The Christ John Knew—and the Christ John Sees

There is something deeply moving about considering John's experience.
John knows Jesus.
He knows the teacher.
He knows the healer.
He knows the One who ate with disciples, walked dusty roads, touched the sick, welcomed sinners, suffered, died, and rose again.
But now John sees the risen Christ unveiled in glory.
It is the same Jesus.
But John is seeing more fully what had always been true.
That helps explain what happens in verse 17.
John will not greet him casually.
He will fall at his feet **"as dead."**
Familiarity with Jesus does not diminish his holiness.
That is an important corrective for Christian faith.
Jesus is our Savior.
Jesus calls his disciples friends.
Jesus welcomes us into relationship with God.
But Revelation refuses to allow intimacy with Christ to become **casualness about Christ**.
The Jesus who loves us is also the Lord of glory.
Grace does not make Christ less majestic.
Grace gives us access to the One who **is** majestic.

8. The Theology Beneath the Verse

There is a remarkable contrast in this verse.
Christ is infinitely exalted—
yet he stands **among the lampstands**.
Majesty has not produced distance.
That may be one of the most beautiful theological truths in this entire vision.
The glorified Christ has not forgotten his church.

The King of the everlasting kingdom has chosen to stand among ordinary congregations in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.
Some are strong.
Some are weak.
Some are suffering.
Some are compromised.
Some desperately need repentance.
Yet Christ is among them.
The glory described in verses 13–16 therefore does not remove Jesus from his people.
It tells us who is present with his people.

Pastoral Reflection

Sometimes we speak of Christ's presence so frequently that we risk forgetting the magnitude of what we are saying.
Christ is with his church.
But who is this Christ?
John wants us to know.
He is not merely a comforting religious memory.
He is not merely a historical teacher whose ideas continue to inspire people.
He is not a distant figure waiting passively at the edge of history.
He is the risen and reigning **Son of Man**.
And he walks among his churches.
That means the suffering church is not alone.
It also means the compromising church is not unnoticed.
His presence comforts the faithful and confronts the complacent.
The same truth does both.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps we sometimes make one of two mistakes with Jesus.
We emphasize his majesty so greatly that he seems impossibly distant.
Or we emphasize his nearness so casually that we forget his majesty.
Revelation 1:13 refuses both errors.
The glorious Son of Man stands among the lampstands.
He is exalted enough to rule an everlasting kingdom.
Yet near enough to walk among his people.
The Christ before whom John will soon fall is also the Christ who will reach down, place his hand upon John, and say:
“Fear not”
Majesty and tenderness are not opposites in Jesus.
They meet in the same person.

Ask Yourself This

Have I become so familiar with Jesus that I have forgotten his majesty—or can I hold together the astonishing truth that the glorious Son of Man who reigns forever is also the Christ who chooses to stand among his people?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:14

“His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;”
— Revelation 1:14, KJV

John continues describing the figure standing among the lampstands, and the imagery becomes even more striking.
The long robe and golden sash of verse 13 conveyed dignity and authority.
Now John's attention moves to Christ's **head, hair, and eyes**.
But there is something extraordinary happening beneath these descriptions.
John is not simply telling us what Jesus looked like.
He is drawing upon the language of **Daniel**, and in doing so he makes an astonishing statement about the identity of Christ.

1. “White Like Wool, as White as Snow”

John describes Christ's head and hair as:
“white like wool, as white as snow”
Our modern instinct might be to associate white hair primarily with old age.
But that would miss the biblical imagery John is invoking.
Daniel 7:9 describes the **Ancient of Days**:
“whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool”
That resemblance is difficult to overlook.
In Daniel's vision, these characteristics belong to the **Ancient of Days—God himself**.
Yet John now applies remarkably similar imagery to **Jesus**.
That is theologically enormous.
In verse 13, Christ appeared as **“one like unto the Son of man,”** recalling the figure in Daniel 7 who approaches the Ancient of Days and receives everlasting dominion.
Now, in verse 14, John describes the Son of Man using characteristics belonging to the Ancient of Days.
The imagery is beginning to overlap.
John is not confusing the Father and the Son. Revelation will distinguish them clearly.
But he is placing Jesus unmistakably **within the identity and glory of God**.
The Son of Man shares in divine majesty.

2. More Than an Image of Age

The whiteness therefore communicates far more than age.
It suggests **eternity, purity, wisdom, and divine majesty**.

The Christ standing among the churches is not merely one more ruler appearing for a season on the stage of history.
Human rulers come and go.
Empires rise and fall.
Generations appear and disappear.
But Christ belongs to eternity.
That matters tremendously in Revelation because the churches live under an empire that presents itself as powerful, stable, and nearly irresistible.
John's vision quietly puts Rome in perspective.
Rome may appear ancient and powerful to John's readers.
Christ stands beyond Rome.
He was before it.
He will remain after it.

3. “His Eyes Were as a Flame of Fire”

Then John's imagery changes.
Christ's eyes are:
“as a flame of fire”
Here John uses **“as” to make the comparison.**
He is not asking us to imagine literal flames emerging from Jesus' eye sockets. The image communicates something about Christ's ability to **see**.
Nothing escapes those eyes.
Fire illuminates.
Fire exposes.
Fire tests.
Fire can purify.
And fire can judge.
Christ sees beneath appearances.
That becomes critically important when he begins addressing the seven churches.
People see reputations.
Christ sees reality.
People may see an active church.
Christ may see spiritual death.
People may see prosperity.
Christ may see poverty.
People may see weakness.
Christ may see extraordinary faithfulness.
The eyes like fire penetrate everything we use to hide the true condition of our hearts.

4. Christ Sees His Church Clearly

This prepares us particularly for the messages of Chapters 2 and 3.
Again and again Christ will say:

“I know…”
“I know thy works”
“I know thy works, and tribulation”
“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest”
“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience”
Those statements are not generic expressions.
They come from the One whose **eyes are like a flame of fire**.
Christ does not evaluate his churches according to reputation, attendance figures, impressive buildings, financial resources, public influence, or what neighboring congregations think of them.
He sees what **is**.
That is both frightening and comforting.

5. Frightening—and Comforting

It is frightening because we cannot deceive Christ.
We may deceive others.
We may even deceive ourselves.
We can learn religious language.
We can maintain appearances.
We can become skilled at looking faithful.
But nothing remains hidden beneath the gaze of Christ.
Yet those fiery eyes are also profoundly comforting.
Because if Christ sees every hidden failure, he also sees every **hidden act of faithfulness**.
He sees the prayer nobody else heard.
He sees the sacrifice nobody noticed.
He sees the person who remained faithful when doing so cost something.
He sees the quiet servant whose name will never appear on a church sign.
He sees the believer struggling simply to endure another day.
The world may overlook such faithfulness.
Christ does not.
The same eyes that expose hypocrisy also recognize faithfulness.

6. The Connection to Daniel Continues

Daniel provides another background for John's description.
In Daniel 10:6, the heavenly figure Daniel encounters has eyes **“as lamps of fire.”**
John's imagery therefore draws from a rich collection of Old Testament visions associated with divine and heavenly majesty.
This is characteristic of Revelation.
John rarely stops to say:
“Here is the Old Testament passage I am quoting.”
Instead, the language of Israel's Scriptures permeates his vision.
Revelation almost seems to **think in the language of the Old Testament**.

That is one reason understanding Revelation requires us to look backward before we rush forward.
Its imagery is rooted far more deeply in **Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Exodus, Zechariah, and the Psalms** than in modern headlines.
That is an interpretive principle worth keeping throughout our journey.

7. The Eyes of the Shepherd and Judge

There is another balance we should preserve.
These fiery eyes belong to the same Jesus who will shortly place his hand upon John and say:
"Fear not"
We should not turn Christ's penetrating vision into an image of a suspicious deity searching eagerly for reasons to condemn.
Christ sees perfectly because Christ **knows perfectly**.
He knows what must be confronted.
He knows what must be corrected.
But he also knows what must be encouraged.
He sees the whole person.
And because his judgment is perfect, it is never distorted by incomplete information.
Human judgment often is.
We see fragments.
We make assumptions.
We misunderstand motives.
Christ does not.
The One who sees everything is also the One who loves perfectly.

8. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Verse 14 gives us two complementary pictures of Christ.
His white hair points toward **eternal divine wisdom and majesty**.
His fiery eyes point toward **perfect knowledge and penetrating judgment**.
Together they tell the churches:
The One who walks among you knows exactly what he is doing, and he knows exactly who you are.
Nothing surprises him.
Nothing escapes him.
Nothing needs to be explained to him before he understands.
That is why Christ is qualified to evaluate his churches.
And eventually, that same perfect vision will be directed toward the powers and injustices of the world.
The oppressed may wonder whether God sees.
Revelation's answer is unmistakable.
He sees.

Pastoral Reflection

We often spend enormous energy managing how other people see us.
We want to appear competent.
Faithful.
Strong.
Successful.
Spiritually mature.
Sometimes churches do the same thing.
But Revelation gently strips away the illusion that reputation is ultimate.
Christ sees beyond reputation.
That could make us afraid—unless we remember whose eyes these are.
They belong to the One who gave himself for us.
The goal of Christ's searching gaze is not merely exposure.
It is **truth**.
And truth is where repentance, healing, and genuine transformation begin.
We do not need to hide from the eyes of Christ.
We need to allow ourselves to be **seen by Christ**.
Because the One who sees what needs to change is also the One capable of changing it.

Something Worth Pondering

There is an interesting contrast between how we often pray and what this verse tells us.
We sometimes pray:
"Lord, do you see what is happening?"
Revelation answers:
Yes.
He sees the suffering of his people.
He sees injustice.
He sees compromise.
He sees faithfulness.
He sees the things hidden from everyone else.
His eyes are like fire.
The more difficult question may therefore be not whether **Christ sees the world clearly**, but whether we are willing to let Christ see **us** clearly.
And perhaps even more importantly:
Are we willing to see ourselves as he sees us?

Ask Yourself This:

If Christ's eyes penetrate beyond my reputation, explanations, and outward appearance, am I willing to let him show me what is truly within me—and trust that the One who sees me completely is also the One who calls me toward faithfulness?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:15

“And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.”
— Revelation 1:15, KJV

John's description of the risen Christ continues downward from the head and eyes of verse 14 to his **feet**, and then outward to the sound of his **voice**.
Once again, John is struggling to describe transcendent glory through images his readers can understand.
Christ's feet are like metal glowing from the furnace.
His voice is like the roar of many waters.
The picture is one of **strength, purity, stability, and overwhelming authority**.

1. “His Feet Like Unto Fine Brass”

The precise Greek term John uses for the metal here is unusual and difficult to identify with certainty. It may describe some particularly brilliant or highly refined bronze-like metal.
That uncertainty is worth acknowledging rather than pretending we know more than we do.
But John's larger point is quite clear.
The KJV calls it “fine brass” and pictures it as though it bu**rned in a furnace**.
Imagine bronze brought to an intense heat until it glows.
The image conveys brilliance, purity, and strength.
John is not giving us information from which to manufacture a physical portrait of Jesus.
He is revealing something about **who Jesus is**.

2. Feet That Stand Firm

In biblical imagery, feet can signify strength, stability, conquest, and authority.
That becomes especially meaningful when we remember the circumstances of John's readers.
Their world might have seemed extraordinarily unstable.
Rome appeared powerful.
Christians could face social pressure, economic consequences, hostility, and—in some circumstances—persecution because of their allegiance to Christ.
Human power could feel immovable.
Yet John sees Christ standing with feet like **refined bronze**.
The message is subtle but powerful:
Christ stands firm.

Empires may shake.
Political powers may change.
Cultures may turn against the church.
Circumstances may become uncertain.
But the One standing among the lampstands is not unstable.
His footing is secure.

3. “As If They Burned in a Furnace”

The furnace imagery also suggests something that has endured intense testing and emerged pure.
Fire in Scripture frequently carries associations with testing, purification, holiness, and judgment.
That fits naturally with the Christ John is seeing.
The eyes like fire of verse 14 discern everything.
The feet like refined bronze of verse 15 communicate strength and purity.
Christ is therefore qualified not merely to observe the churches but to **judge them rightly**.
His judgment is not impulsive.
It is not corrupted.
It is not based upon incomplete information.
The One who judges is himself perfectly holy.
That distinction matters.
Human beings can become very enthusiastic about judgment when we imagine ourselves holding the gavel.
Revelation places judgment where it belongs:
in the hands of Christ.

4. A Connection With Daniel

Again, Daniel provides important background.
Daniel 10:6 describes a heavenly figure whose:
“his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass”
John's description clearly belongs to that same world of biblical imagery.
And again, this reminds us of an important principle for reading Revelation:
Before looking around at our contemporary world to interpret John's symbols, we should first look backward into Scripture.
John's imagination is saturated with the Old Testament.
Daniel.
Ezekiel.
Isaiah.
Exodus.
Zechariah.
The Psalms.
Revelation does not suddenly appear disconnected from everything God had revealed before it.

It gathers those earlier biblical images together and shows their fulfillment centered upon **Christ**.

5. “His Voice as the Sound of Many Waters”

Then John moves from sight back to sound.
Christ's voice is:
“as the sound of many waters”
Anyone who has stood near a powerful waterfall, ocean surf, or rushing river understands something of John's comparison.
There comes a point when water is no longer merely something you hear.
You almost **feel** it.
It fills the environment.
It overwhelms competing sounds.
Conversation becomes difficult because the roar dominates everything around it.
That is the image John chooses for the voice of Christ.
Not a whisper easily lost in the noise.
Not one voice competing with countless others.
Many waters.

6. The Voice of God

This description also has profound Old Testament roots.
Ezekiel describes the glory of the God of Israel approaching with a sound:
“like a noise of many waters.”
— Ezekiel 43:2
Once again, language associated with the glory of **God** is being applied to the risen **Christ**.
We saw this in verse 14 when imagery belonging to Daniel's Ancient of Days appeared in John's description of Jesus.
Now we see it again.
John is steadily revealing the extraordinary identity of the One standing among the lampstands.
This is not merely a messenger from God.
The risen Jesus participates in the **majesty, authority, and glory of God**.

7. A Voice That Cannot Be Silenced

There is also a beautiful irony in John's circumstances.
Why is John on Patmos?
Because of:
“the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”
Human authority has apparently attempted to restrict the witness.
And what happens?
John hears a voice like **many waters**.
That is almost poetic.
Human beings may attempt to silence the testimony of Christ.

Then Christ speaks.
And his voice sounds like an ocean.
You cannot silence the sea.

8. Competing Voices

This becomes especially important as Revelation unfolds because the book will contain many voices.
Imperial voices.
Deceptive voices.
Accusing voices.
Voices demanding allegiance.
Voices promising security.
Voices threatening those who refuse to conform.
The churches must decide **which voice they will obey**.
That problem has not disappeared.
Our world is filled with voices competing for our allegiance.
Culture speaks.
Politics speaks.
Money speaks.
Fear speaks.
Ambition speaks.
Social approval speaks.
Our own desires speak.
Sometimes they speak very loudly.
Revelation asks the church to hear something louder still:
the voice of Christ.

9. Strength Without Violence

There is something else worth noticing about the imagery so far.
Christ is overwhelmingly powerful.
But John has not described Christ frantically proving his power.
Christ simply **is** powerful.
He stands.
He sees.
He speaks.
There is a quiet sovereignty in that.
Human power often needs to advertise itself.
It builds monuments.
Demands titles.
Stages displays.
Threatens opponents.
Christ needs none of that.
His feet are like refined bronze.
His voice is like many waters.

He does not need to prove that he is Lord.
Revelation will reveal that he already is.

10. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Verse 15 brings two important truths together.
Christ possesses **unshakable strength**.
And Christ possesses **unanswerable authority**.
His feet stand firm.
His voice overwhelms.
For suffering Christians, that would have been deeply encouraging.
The empire surrounding them might seem stronger than the little congregations gathering in those seven cities.
By every ordinary measurement, Rome had more power.
More soldiers.
More wealth.
More political influence.
More public prestige.
But John is being shown reality from heaven's perspective.
The church's security does not ultimately depend upon how powerful the church appears.
It depends upon **who stands among the lampstands**.

Pastoral Reflection

We often judge strength by what we can see.
A large institution appears strong.
A wealthy person appears secure.
A powerful government appears permanent.
A struggling congregation may appear insignificant.
A suffering Christian may feel powerless.
Revelation reverses the perspective.
The question is not:
"How strong do we appear?"
The question is:
"Who stands among us?"
The churches of Asia Minor could not compete with Rome on Rome's terms.
They did not need to.
Their calling was not to become more powerful than Rome.
Their calling was to remain **faithful to Christ**.
And the Christ to whom they belonged stood with feet like burnished bronze and spoke with a voice like many waters.
Their apparent weakness did not diminish **his strength**.
Neither does ours.

Something Worth Pondering

John is standing on a small island surrounded by water.

Perhaps that makes the imagery even more evocative.
Day after day, John would have known the sound of the sea.
Waves striking rock.
Water moving relentlessly around Patmos.
Then he hears Christ.
And the best comparison he can find is:
many waters.
There may be times when the voices around us seem deafening.
Fear can be loud.
Grief can be loud.
Anger can be loud.
The world can be extraordinarily loud.
But Revelation asks us to remember:
None of those voices is the final voice.
Eventually every competing voice falls silent before the voice of the One who is Lord.
The challenge for the Christian is learning to recognize and obey that voice **now**.

Ask Yourself This

When fear, culture, ambition, and the pressures around me compete for my allegiance, which voice carries the greatest authority in my life—and am I still listening for the voice of Christ above all the others?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:16

“And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.”
— Revelation 1:16, KJV

John's description of the risen Christ now reaches its breathtaking climax.
He has seen the white hair, the eyes like fire, the feet like burnished bronze, and heard the voice like many waters. Now three final images appear:
Seven stars in his right hand.
A sharp, two-edged sword from his mouth.
A face shining like the sun.
Each image reveals something about Christ's relationship to his church and his authority over all things.
And together they prepare us for John's response in the next verse.
He falls at Christ's feet **as though dead**.

1. “He Had in His Right Hand Seven Stars”

The first image is one Revelation itself will interpret for us.
Verse 20 tells us:
“the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.”
The precise identity of these “angels” will require some care when we reach verse 20. The Greek word *angelos* can mean **messenger**, and interpreters have debated whether these represent heavenly beings associated with the churches, human messengers, or the churches viewed through their heavenly representatives.
We need not settle that question prematurely.
For verse 16, something more fundamental is clear.
The stars are in Christ's hand.
And not just any hand.
His **right hand**.

2. The Right Hand

Throughout Scripture, the right hand commonly symbolizes **power, authority, protection, and favor**.
The image therefore communicates Christ's sovereign relationship to the seven churches represented in this vision.
He does not merely know where they are.
He **holds** them.
That becomes especially meaningful when we remember what some of these congregations are facing.
Smyrna will experience suffering.

Philadelphia has “a little strength.”
Other churches are surrounded by pressures toward compromise.
From the world's perspective, these Christian communities may seem vulnerable.
From John's perspective, something else is true:
They are held in the hand of Christ.
Their circumstances may be uncertain.
Christ's grasp is not.

3. Stars and Imperial Claims

There may also be a subtle challenge here to the imagery of earthly power.
Stars could be associated in the ancient world with heavenly authority and sometimes with rulers. Imperial culture surrounded people with symbols proclaiming Rome's greatness and Caesar's exalted status.
Revelation repeatedly takes the language and imagery of ultimate authority and redirects it where it belongs.
Christ holds the stars.
Caesar does not control heaven.
Rome does not control history.
Christ does.
That distinction will become increasingly important as Revelation unfolds.

4. “Out of His Mouth Went a Sharp Twoedged Sword”

Now the imagery becomes startling.
A sword comes from Christ's **mouth**.
If we attempted to interpret Revelation as though every image were intended as a literal physical description, this would become grotesque.
But John has already taught us how to read his vision.
The symbolism communicates reality.
The location of the sword tells us what it represents.
It comes from Christ's **mouth**.
His weapon is his **word**.
This is not Christ swinging a conventional sword in his hand.
He speaks.
And his word carries irresistible authority.

5. The Word That Penetrates

The image naturally recalls biblical passages describing God's word as sharp and penetrating.
Isaiah describes the servant of the Lord saying:
“And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword”
— Isaiah 49:2
Hebrews later describes the word of God as:

“sharper than any two-edged sword.”
— Hebrews 4:12
The image communicates the ability of God's word to **expose, distinguish, judge, and penetrate**.
Christ does not need human weapons to establish his authority.
His word is enough.
That is a theme Revelation will return to dramatically.
In Revelation 19, when Christ appears as the victorious rider, the sword again comes **from his mouth**.
John wants us to notice where it comes from.
Christ conquers through the authoritative word he speaks.

6. A Word That Judges the Church Too

We should also resist the temptation to direct the sword only toward “the bad people out there.”
The first recipients of Christ's searching word are **his churches**.
In Revelation 2:16, Christ warns the church at Pergamum that if it does not repent, he will come and make war against those promoting compromise:
“with the sword of my mouth”
That is sobering.
Before Revelation confronts Babylon, beasts, kings, and hostile powers, Christ confronts **his own people**.
Judgment begins with truth.
The same Christ whose eyes see through appearances possesses a word capable of cutting through excuses.
That makes Scripture more than something we study merely to accumulate information.
Sometimes the Word must be allowed to **study us**.

7. Truth Is Christ's Weapon

There is something particularly important here for understanding the kind of victory Revelation portrays.
Christ's decisive weapon comes from his **mouth**.
Not his fist.
Not an army's arsenal.
His mouth.
His word.
His truth.
That should make Christians cautious whenever we imagine that the kingdom of Christ advances by adopting the coercive methods of worldly kingdoms.
The Lamb conquers differently.
Revelation certainly contains judgment, and we must not soften that reality.
But the imagery here makes something clear:

Christ's authority is exercised through truth that cannot ultimately be resisted or falsified.
Lies may flourish for a season.
Propaganda may persuade.
Falsehood may appear powerful.
But truth belongs to Christ.
And truth eventually exposes everything.

8. “His Countenance Was as the Sun”

Then John looks at Christ's face.
And ordinary language nearly gives way.
His face was:
“as the sun shineth in his strength”
John does not merely say that Christ was bright.
He reaches for perhaps the most brilliant object visible in ordinary human experience.
The midday sun.
Try looking directly at it and instinctively you turn away.
John says Christ's face was **like that**.
The imagery communicates overwhelming **glory**.

9. The Transfiguration

For readers of the Gospels, the description naturally recalls the Transfiguration.
There Jesus' face:
“his face did shine as the sun.”
— Matthew 17:2
For a brief moment during Jesus' earthly ministry, Peter, James, and John were permitted to glimpse something extraordinary about him.
Now on Patmos, John encounters that glory again—but no longer as a momentary unveiling during Jesus' earthly ministry.
The crucified and risen Christ now stands before him in unveiled majesty.
The man once mocked, beaten, and crucified is radiant with divine glory.
Human beings once looked upon Jesus and saw someone they believed they could destroy.
John looks upon him now and can scarcely remain standing.

10. The Glory of God

The imagery also reaches deeper into Scripture.
Light and radiant glory are repeatedly associated with God's presence.
The Psalms describe God as clothed with light.
The prophets struggle to describe the brilliance surrounding divine appearances.
Moses' own face reflected glory after being in God's presence.
But Christ is not simply described here as someone reflecting borrowed glory.

John presents him as radiating glory with the brilliance of the sun itself.
Once again, Revelation is steadily answering the question:
Who is Jesus?
Not merely a prophet.
Not merely a teacher.
Not merely a martyr whose followers kept his memory alive.
He is the risen Lord who shares in the glory of God.

11. Notice the Progression

John's description has built steadily from verse 13:
The robe and golden sash — **majesty and authority.**
White hair — **eternal wisdom and divine glory.**
Eyes like fire — **penetrating knowledge.**
Feet like refined bronze — **strength and purity.**
Voice like many waters — **overwhelming authority.**
Seven stars in his hand — **sovereign care and rule.**
Sword from his mouth — **the irresistible power of his word.**
Face like the sun — **unveiled glory.**
John has run out of ordinary categories.
And that explains verse 17.
"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."
John's collapse is not an overreaction.
It is the appropriate human response to suddenly encountering a dimension of Christ's glory that had previously remained veiled.

12. The Jesus John Already Knew

And this is what makes the scene particularly powerful.
John is not encountering a stranger.
He knows Jesus.
That should stop us for a moment.
Familiarity with Christ did not make John casual in the presence of Christ's glory.
Perhaps there is a warning there for Christians who have heard the name Jesus so often that it becomes ordinary.
We sing about him.
Talk about him.
Read about him.
Pray in his name.
Teach about him.
And familiarity can quietly reduce wonder.
Revelation restores it.
The Jesus whom John knew intimately is still capable of leaving John **speechless on the ground**.

13. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Verse 16 brings together three dimensions of Christ's authority.

He holds.

He speaks.

He shines.

He holds his church securely.

He speaks a word that exposes and judges truthfully.

He shines with divine glory.

And notice what Christ does **not** appear anxious about.

He is not worried about Rome.

He is not scrambling to preserve his authority.

He is not wondering whether history will turn out according to God's purposes.

Revelation's Christ possesses no insecurity.

He already reigns.

That is crucial for understanding everything that follows.

The great conflict of Revelation is real.

Suffering is real.

Evil is real.

Martyrdom is real.

Judgment is real.

But the outcome is never presented as though God and evil are two roughly equal powers struggling to see who will finally win.

John begins the book by showing us the victorious Christ.

Before we ever meet the dragon—

we meet Jesus.

Before we meet the beast—

we meet Jesus.

Before Babylon appears—

we meet Jesus.

And before Revelation shows us the frightening things that will challenge the faith of God's people, it shows us **who holds them in his hand**.

That ordering is not accidental.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when the forces opposing faithfulness appear enormous.

Our instinct is often to stare at the problem.

Revelation teaches us to look first at **Christ**.

Not because the problems are imaginary.

John certainly does not pretend suffering is imaginary.

But problems look different when seen beside the One whose face shines like the sun.

The churches needed that perspective.

So do we.
Sometimes we ask:
“Can I hold on?”
Revelation 1:16 quietly changes the question:
“Who is holding you?”
The stars are in **his hand**.
That does not promise Christians exemption from hardship. Revelation will make that abundantly clear.
It promises something better.
Hardship cannot remove Christ's people from Christ's sovereign care.

Something Worth Pondering

There is a remarkable combination in this verse.
The same Christ who holds the stars also carries the sword of truth.
He is both **protector and judge**.
We sometimes prefer one without the other.
We want a Christ who holds us but never confronts us.
Or we imagine a Christ who judges but forget that he also holds his people securely.
Revelation refuses to divide him.
His love does not compromise truth.
His truth does not eliminate love.
And his glory overwhelms both our attempts to domesticate him and our fears that he might somehow be insufficient for what lies ahead.
John sees his face shining like the sun.
And now John can do only one thing.
Fall before him.
But what Christ does next may reveal his heart even more beautifully than everything John has just seen.
The hand holding the seven stars is about to reach down and **touch a frightened disciple**.

Ask Yourself This:

When the powers and problems around me seem overwhelming, am I looking primarily at what frightens me—or at the Christ who holds his people, speaks the final word of truth, and shines with a glory no darkness can overcome?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:17

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:”
— Revelation 1:17, KJV

John has reached the limit of what he can bear.
He has seen the risen Christ standing among the lampstands: robed in majesty, his hair white as snow, his eyes like fire, his feet like refined bronze, his voice like many waters, the seven stars in his hand, the sword proceeding from his mouth, and his face shining like the sun at full strength.
Now John tells us what happened when he finally comprehended something of the glory before him.
He **collapsed**.
But then something extraordinary happens.
Christ **touches him**.
And perhaps nowhere in this opening vision do the majesty and tenderness of Jesus come together more beautifully.

1. “When I Saw Him”

John's response begins simply:
“When I saw him…”
That matters.
John does not fall because someone tells him that Christ is glorious.
He falls because he **sees** him.
Throughout verses 12–16, John has struggled to translate the experience into human language.
Like the Son of Man.
Like white wool.
Like a flame of fire.
Like burnished bronze.
Like many waters.
Like the sun shining at full force.
Again and again, John reaches for comparison because ordinary words are inadequate.
Now description gives way to response.
John can say no more about what Christ looks like because the sight of him has overwhelmed the one doing the looking.

2. “I Fell at His Feet”

John falls **at Christ's feet**.
This is not casual admiration.
It is not merely astonishment.

John has encountered holiness and glory on a scale that overwhelms human strength.
There are important Old Testament parallels.
When Ezekiel encountered the glory of God, he fell on his face.
When Daniel encountered the heavenly figure of his vision, his strength left him and he fell into a deep state of helplessness.
John now responds similarly before the glorified Christ.
That reinforces what the entire vision has been telling us.
The Jesus standing before John participates in the **glory and majesty of God**.

3. "As Dead"

John says he fell:
"as dead"
That is an extraordinary statement when we remember who John is.
This is not someone who has never encountered Jesus before.
John knows him.
He has followed him.
He has heard him teach.
He knows his compassion.
He knows his love.
He knows the risen Lord.
And yet when Christ's glory is unveiled before him, John falls as though dead.
That should correct any tendency to make Jesus merely comfortable.
Christian faith certainly teaches us to approach Christ with confidence because of grace.
But confidence is not the same thing as casualness.
Jesus is our Savior and friend.
He is also **Lord**.
Revelation restores the sense of awe that familiarity can sometimes erode.

4. Christ Reaches Out to John

"And he laid his right hand upon me…"
John lies before Christ as though dead.
The risen Christ puts His hand on John.
The scene changes immediately.
The overwhelming Christ does not stand over John and demand that he compose himself.
He reaches down.
He touches him.
Think about that for a moment.
The hand John has just told us holds the **seven stars**—
touches **John**.
The hand that symbolizes authority and sovereign power becomes the hand of reassurance.

That is magnificent.

5. “He Laid His Right Hand Upon Me”

The detail of the **right hand** connects directly with verse 16.
John had just seen:
“And he had in his right hand seven stars…”
Now that same right hand rests upon a frightened disciple.
Majesty and tenderness meet in a single gesture.
Christ is powerful enough to hold the churches.
Yet he is personal enough to touch one overwhelmed man lying at his feet.
This tells us something profound about divine power.
We often imagine power as the ability to dominate.
Christ reveals power differently.
His glory can bring John to the ground.
His grace can raise John again.
The hand that rules is also the hand that reassures.

6. The Jesus Who Still Touches

There is also continuity here with the Jesus of the Gospels.
Jesus touched lepers whom others avoided.
He touched the sick.
He took children into his arms.
He reached toward people others considered untouchable.
The Jesus John sees on Patmos is now radiant with unimaginable glory.
But he has not become someone else.
He still reaches out.
The risen, exalted Lord remains the compassionate Christ.
That is important theology.
Glorification has not diminished the character of Jesus revealed in his earthly ministry.
The hands are glorious now.
But they are still the hands of Jesus.

7. “Fear Not”

Then Christ speaks.
And his first words to the terrified John are:
“Fear not”
That command echoes throughout Scripture whenever human beings encounter the presence or activity of God.
Fear is understandable.
But fear will not have the final word.
Notice also that Jesus does not say:
“There is nothing frightening here.”
There plainly is.
John has just collapsed.

Christ does not dismiss John's reaction.
Instead, he gives John a reason **not to remain afraid**.
And the reason is not that John's circumstances are safe.
The reason is **who Christ is**.
"I am the first and the last"
That distinction is crucial.
Biblical reassurance is rarely:
"Do not be afraid because nothing difficult will happen."
Revelation certainly cannot promise that. John's readers will encounter suffering, opposition, and even death.
Instead:
"Do not be afraid because of who holds history."

8. "I Am the First and the Last"

This declaration is enormous.
In Isaiah, God uses remarkably similar language of himself.
In Isaiah 44:6:
"I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God."
And Isaiah 48:12 declares:
"I am he; I am the first, I also am the last."
Now Jesus says:
"I am the first and the last"
Once again, Revelation places Jesus within language belonging to the identity and sovereignty of God.
The theological claim is unmistakable.
Christ does not merely occupy an important place somewhere inside history.
Christ encompasses history.
He stands at its beginning.
He stands at its completion.
Everything between those points ultimately lies within his sovereignty.

9. Rome Is Not First—and Rome Will Not Be Last

Imagine hearing this as a Christian living under Roman power.
Rome presented itself as enduring.
Imperial propaganda celebrated its strength, victories, rulers, and supposed permanence.
To ordinary Christians living in small congregations scattered throughout Asia Minor, Rome could look like the defining reality of their world.
Revelation says otherwise.
Rome is neither first nor last.
Christ is.
Empires arrive somewhere in the middle.
They rise.
They boast.

They dominate.
And eventually they disappear.
Christ remains.
That is not merely a historical observation.
It is theological hope.
Every human power that presents itself as ultimate eventually encounters the One who actually is.

10. The Answer to Fear Is Christ

Notice how Jesus deals with John's fear.
He does not begin by explaining the vision.
He begins by revealing **himself**.
That is a pattern worth remembering throughout Revelation.
We often approach this book asking:
What does this symbol mean?
When will this happen?
Who does this figure represent?
What sequence of events is being described?
Those questions can have legitimate places.
But Revelation's first answer to fear is not a timetable.
It is a person.
"I am the first and the last"
Before John needs to understand everything that will happen, John needs to know **who Jesus is**.
And perhaps so do we.

11. Something Else Is Happening Here

Remember what we have said about the purpose of Revelation.
This book is being given to Christians who need to **endure**.
John himself introduced that theme in verse 9:
"in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ"
Now we see where endurance comes from.
It does not come from knowing every detail of the future.
It comes from knowing the One who **holds the future**.
That is a very different kind of confidence.
John can endure Patmos not because John understands everything.
John can endure because **Christ is the First and the Last**.

12. The Theology Beneath the Verse

This verse gives us one of the most beautiful paradoxes in Revelation.
Christ is glorious enough that John falls before him as though dead.
Yet Christ is compassionate enough to reach down and touch him.
Transcendence and tenderness.
Majesty and mercy.

Holiness and compassion.
Sovereignty and intimacy.
We sometimes separate these characteristics.
Revelation refuses to.
The Christ whose face shines like the sun is the Christ whose hand rests upon John's shoulder.
The Lord before whom John cannot stand is the Lord who tells John:
"Fear not"
And that means Christian reverence and Christian assurance belong together.
We bow because he is Lord.
We need not flee because **this Lord loves us**.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when fear makes us feel as though we cannot stand.
Fear about the future.
Fear about illness.
Fear about loss.
Fear about the world.
Fear about circumstances we cannot control.
Fear about whether our faith will be strong enough for what lies ahead.
Revelation does not answer those fears by promising that nothing painful will happen.
John himself is already on Patmos.
Instead, Christ redirects John's attention.
"I am the first and the last"
In other words:
Before your problem existed, **I was**.
While your problem exists, **I am**.
When your problem has passed into history, **I will still be**.
That is the foundation of endurance.
We do not have to know everything that tomorrow contains if we know **who already stands at tomorrow's end**.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps the most remarkable image in this verse is not John falling.
It is **Jesus reaching down**.
John sees Christ's glory and falls as though dead.
Christ sees John lying there and touches him.
The hand holding the stars has not forgotten the individual disciple.
That tells us something beautiful about the scale of Christ's care.
He can hold the church universal—
and still touch **one frightened person**.
He can govern history—
and still notice **John on Patmos**.

He can be the First and the Last—
and still say personally:
“Fear not”
And perhaps that is exactly the Christ a suffering church needs to see.
Not a smaller Christ who seems less frightening.
A **greater Christ whose greatness makes fear unnecessary**.

Ask Yourself This:

When fear leaves me feeling overwhelmed, do I measure Christ by the size of what frightens me, or do I remember that the One who holds all things in his hand is near enough to place that hand upon me and say, “Fear not”?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:18

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”
— Revelation 1:18, KJV

Verse 17 ended with one of the great declarations of Christ's identity:
“I am the first and the last”
Verse 18 continues the sentence.
And now Jesus tells John **why he need not be afraid**.
John lies before the risen Christ as though dead.
Christ places his right hand upon him and says, in effect:
John, you are looking at the One who has already gone through death—and death could not hold me.
This is the heart of Christian hope.

1. “I Am He That Liveth”

Jesus calls himself:
“I am he that liveth”
Throughout the Old Testament, God is repeatedly described as **the living God**. Unlike idols made by human hands, Israel's God lives, acts, speaks, judges, saves, and reigns.
Now the risen Christ takes that language upon himself.
Once again, John is doing something remarkable in this opening vision. Titles and characteristics associated with God are being applied directly to Jesus.
He is the First and the Last.
He is the Living One.
Christ does not merely **possess** life.
Life belongs to his very identity.
And yet the next words create an astonishing paradox.

2. “Was Dead”

The Living One says:
“was dead”
Those words deserve to be allowed their full weight.
Christianity does not claim that Jesus somehow avoided death.
He died.
The crucifixion was not an illusion.
The incarnation did not protect Jesus from the reality of human mortality.
The Living One entered death.
That gives Revelation's theology of victory a very particular shape.
Jesus did not conquer death by avoiding it.
He conquered death by passing through it.

That distinction will become crucial throughout the book.
Revelation's understanding of victory is deeply shaped by the cross.
Faithfulness may lead through suffering.
It may even lead through death.
But death does not get the final word.
Jesus himself is the proof.

3. The Scandal in Four Words

There is almost an entire Christian creed hidden inside:
"was dead"
The eternal Son entered human existence.
He suffered.
He was crucified.
He died.
He was buried.
The One whom John now sees with a face shining like the sun once hung lifeless upon a Roman cross.
That contrast is staggering.
Rome knew how to kill people.
Crucifixion was one of its most brutal instruments of domination, humiliation, and terror.
The empire could say:
"We have the power of death."
Revelation answers:
Not ultimately.
Rome killed Jesus.
And Jesus stands before John **alive**.

4. "And, Behold"

Then comes a tiny but powerful word:
"behold"
Look, John.
Look at me.
You fell before me as though dead.
But I actually **was dead**.
And now—
look.
Revelation is built around seeing reality from God's perspective.
The world saw a crucified man and concluded:
Defeated.
God raised him from the dead and declared:
Victorious.
That reversal becomes one of Revelation's central interpretive keys.
What appears defeated on earth may look very different from heaven.

A faithful martyr may appear to have lost.
Revelation will say:
Look again.
The Lamb appears slain—
and reigns.

5. "I Am Alive for Evermore"

Jesus does not merely say:
"I came back to life."
He says:
"I am alive for evermore"
This is not resuscitation.
Others in Scripture were restored to earthly life—Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, the widow's son—but they eventually faced ordinary human death again.
Christ's resurrection is different.
Death has no further claim upon him.
Paul expresses the same truth in Romans 6:9:
"Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."
Jesus has entered resurrection life permanently.
Forever and ever.
And that is why Christian hope is not merely optimism.
It rests upon an event:
Christ has risen.

6. Why This Matters to John's Churches

Imagine hearing these words in Smyrna.
That church will soon be told:
"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"
That command would sound terrifying if spoken by someone who had never experienced death.
But the One commanding endurance says:
"was dead"
Christ never asks his people to travel a road he himself refused to walk.
And then he adds:
"I am alive for evermore"
Therefore Christian martyrdom is not ultimate defeat.
The believer's hope does not depend upon avoiding death.
It depends upon belonging to the One who has **defeated death**.
That does not make death painless.
It does not make grief unreal.
Revelation never asks us to pretend otherwise.
It tells us something stronger:
Death is real—but death is not Lord.

7. “And Have the Keys”

Now Jesus gives John another image:
“and have the keys”
Keys symbolize authority.
The person possessing the keys controls access.
The person holding the keys determines what opens and what closes.
And Christ says:
I have them.
Notice the wording.
He does not say:
“I know where the keys are.”
He does not say:
“God may someday give me the keys.”
He says:
“and have the keys.”
The victory has already been accomplished.

8. “The Keys of Hell and of Death”

Christ tells John what He holds:
“the keys of hell and of death.”
The verse names two related realities.
Death is the power or reality of dying.
The KJV’s “hell” here translates hadēs, the Greek term for the realm of the dead.
Revelation 20:14 distinguishes that realm from the lake of fire. In the KJV,
“death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.”
That tells us something significant.
Death and Hades are not Christ's eternal rivals.
They themselves will be destroyed.
And Christ already possesses their keys.

9. Death Does Not Hold the Keys

This may be one of the most pastorally powerful images in Revelation.
We often experience death as though it has ultimate authority.
Death seems to decide.
Death interrupts lives.
Death separates families.
Death ends plans.
Death appears to close doors no human being can reopen.
From our perspective, death can look like the great jailer of humanity.
Revelation gives us another picture.
Death does not carry the keys to its own prison.
Christ does.
That changes everything.

The grave is not sovereign.
Hades is not sovereign.
Death is not sovereign.
Jesus is.

10. The Cross Has Reversed the Meaning of Death

There is a profound irony here.
The powers of Jesus' world used death as their ultimate weapon.
What can an empire threaten after death?
If imprisonment does not compel obedience, threaten death.
If social exclusion does not work, threaten death.
If economic pressure fails, threaten death.
Death is the final weapon of coercive power.
But what happens when people belong to the One who says:
"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore"?
The empire's ultimate weapon has been robbed of its ultimate authority.
That does not mean Christians become eager for death.
Christianity is not a religion of death.
It is precisely the opposite.
It is faith in **the Living One**.
But Christians no longer need to treat physical survival as the highest possible good.
Faithfulness to Christ becomes greater even than preserving one's life.
That is why Revelation can call believers to endurance.

11. This Is the Foundation of Revelation's Hope

Before John is shown seals—
before trumpets—
before beasts—
before Babylon—
before bowls of judgment—
before Armageddon—
before the final judgment—
before the New Jerusalem—
Christ establishes the one truth John must never forget:
I am alive.
Everything else in Revelation must be read through that declaration.
If we begin with the beasts, Revelation becomes frightening.
If we begin with speculation, Revelation becomes confusing.
If we begin with political predictions, Revelation becomes endlessly manipulable.
But John begins where Christian faith begins:

Jesus Christ died.
Jesus Christ lives.
Jesus Christ reigns.
And therefore the church can endure.

12. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Notice the progression from verses 17–18:
“Fear not”
Why?
“I am the first and the last”
And?
“I am he that liveth”
What about death?
“was dead”
But now?
“I am alive for evermore”
And who controls death now?
“and have the keys”
That is not merely a collection of titles.
It is an argument against fear.
Christ does not tell John to stop being afraid through an act of willpower.
He gives John theological reasons why fear no longer needs to rule him.
Christ existed before the threat.
Christ has already endured the threat.
Christ defeated the threat.
Christ now possesses authority over the threat.
Therefore:
“Fear not”

Pastoral Reflection

Eventually every human being confronts the reality that there are things we cannot control.
And death is the greatest reminder of that limitation.
Medicine can postpone it.
Technology can delay it.
Wealth can sometimes purchase better care.
Healthy living may reduce risks.
But none of us possesses the keys.
That realization can be frightening.
Revelation does not tell us that we need to find the keys.
It tells us **who already has them**.
The Christian's hope therefore does not rest upon our ability to control mortality.
It rests upon our relationship with the One who has already conquered it.

For the Christian, death remains an enemy.
Paul calls it **"the last enemy."**
But an enemy can be real and still be **defeated**.
That is Revelation's claim.
Death still appears in the story.
Death still causes grief.
Death still wounds.
But death no longer determines the ending.
Christ does.

Something Worth Pondering

John has fallen before Jesus **"as dead."**
Jesus responds by talking about **death**.
That seems wonderfully deliberate.
John lies helpless at Christ's feet.
And Jesus essentially says:
John, I know something about death.
"was dead"
But then:
"Behold"
Look at the One speaking to you.
Death had me.
Death lost me.
And now **I hold its keys**.
Perhaps that is why Revelation can be such a powerful book for people who are suffering.
It does not offer the shallow reassurance that everything will always turn out comfortably.
Sometimes it will not.
Some of the believers receiving this book will suffer terribly.
Some will die.
Revelation offers something far greater than comfortable circumstances.
It offers a **living Christ standing on the other side of death**.
And he says:
"Fear not"

Ask Yourself This:

When I face the things I cannot control—even the reality of death itself—do I live as though death holds the final authority, or can I entrust myself to the Living One who died, lives forever, and holds even the keys of Death and Hades?

Closer Look — Revelation 1:19

“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;”
— Revelation 1:19, KJV

After the breathtaking declaration of verse 18, Christ returns John to his assignment.
John has fallen before the risen Lord.
Christ has touched him.
Christ has told him not to fear.
Christ has declared himself the First and the Last, the Living One who was dead and now lives forever, holding the keys of Death and Hades.
And then comes a remarkably practical command:
“Write”
John has been given a vision, but the vision is not merely for John.
It must become **testimony**.

1. “Write”

This is not the first time John has received this instruction.
In verse 11, the voice told him:
“What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches…”
Now the command is repeated.
That repetition tells us something important about the nature of Revelation.
John is not being invited to have a private mystical experience and then spend the rest of his life quietly reflecting upon it.
He has been commissioned.
What God reveals to John is intended for the church.
John sees.
John hears.
John writes.
The churches read and hear.
And, according to Revelation 1:3, they are called to **keep** what has been written.
That gives us the movement of Revelation:
Revelation → Witness → Scripture → Hearing → Faithfulness.
The goal is not merely knowledge.
The goal is a faithful response.

2. John Is a Witness Before He Is an Interpreter

There is something important in the wording:
“Write the things which thou hast seen”
John's fundamental responsibility is to **testify**.

He is not commanded to invent.
He is not asked to construct an elaborate theological system from his imagination.
He is told to record what has been revealed.
That helps explain why Revelation sometimes feels so unusual.
John reports extraordinary images because extraordinary images are what he has been shown.
At times he understands their meaning.
At times an angel explains them.
At times Revelation itself interprets its symbols.
And at other times John simply tells us what he saw.
That should encourage some humility on our part.
If John sometimes leaves an image unexplained, perhaps we should be cautious about claiming absolute certainty where John himself does not provide it.

3. "The Things Which Thou Hast Seen"

The first phrase naturally includes the vision John has just experienced.
He has seen the glorified Christ standing among the seven golden lampstands.
That vision is not merely an introduction before the "important" prophetic material begins.
It is the theological foundation for everything that follows.
Before John sees what happens—
he sees **who Christ is**.
That order matters enormously.
We are sometimes tempted to rush through Revelation 1 so we can reach the seals, trumpets, beasts, Babylon, Armageddon, millennium, and New Jerusalem.
But Revelation refuses to begin with events.
It begins with **Jesus**.
That is because the meaning of everything that follows depends upon the identity of the One who stands at the center of the vision.

4. "The Things Which Are"

Then Christ says John must write:
"the things which are"
This reminds us again that Revelation addresses a **present reality**.
The seven churches are not imaginary congregations.
Ephesus exists.
Smyrna exists.
Pergamum exists.
Thyatira exists.
Sardis exists.
Philadelphia exists.

Laodicea exists.
They have real strengths.
Real weaknesses.
Real suffering.
Real compromises.
Real temptations.
Real opportunities for faithfulness.
Revelation is not written only to satisfy curiosity about some distant future.
It speaks directly into the circumstances of Christians living **when John writes**.
That point is essential for interpreting the book responsibly.

5. Before Revelation Was About Us, It Was for Them

We have already touched on this principle, but verse 19 gives us another reason to emphasize it.
Revelation had to make sense to its **first hearers**.
Imagine Christians gathering in one of those seven churches.
Someone stands before the congregation and reads John's Revelation aloud, exactly as 1:3 anticipates.
Those believers are not sitting there with twenty-first-century newspapers, modern technology, or thousands of years of subsequent history.
They hear the book from within **their world**.
Roman power.
Imperial claims.
Economic pressures.
Pagan religious practices.
Local hostility.
Competing allegiances.
The temptation to compromise.
The challenge of enduring faithfully.
Therefore, before asking:
"What does this mean in our time?"
we should first ask:
"What would this have communicated to them?"
Only then are we in a sound position to ask how the same theological truth speaks to us.
That simple discipline can protect us from a great deal of speculation.

6. "The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter"

Revelation also looks forward.
Christ tells John to record:
"the things which shall be hereafter"

So we should not make the opposite mistake and reduce Revelation entirely to first-century circumstances.
The book has a genuine **future orientation**.
God is revealing where history is going.
Evil will not endure forever.
Human empires will not endure forever.
Death will not endure forever.
The suffering of God's people will not endure forever.
Judgment will come.
Christ will triumph.
Creation will be renewed.
God will dwell with his people.
Revelation therefore speaks about:
what John has seen,
what presently is,
and what is yet to come.
Past, present, and future all stand beneath the sovereignty of Christ.

7. Is Revelation 1:19 an Outline of the Book?

This verse has sometimes been treated as a precise three-part outline of Revelation:
"the things which thou hast seen" — Chapter 1
"the things which are" — Chapters 2–3
"the things which shall be hereafter" — Chapters 4–22
There is certainly an attractive logic to that reading.
The KJV also uses **"hereafter"** in Revelation 4:1 as John is summoned into the heavenly throne room.
So the connection should not simply be dismissed.
But we should be careful about turning verse 19 into a rigid chronological key that solves the structure of the entire book.
Revelation does not always move through events as though John were recording a simple straight-line timeline.
The visions sometimes appear to revisit realities from different perspectives, intensify earlier themes, or move between earthly and heavenly viewpoints.
So verse 19 certainly gives us a broad orientation.
But it probably should not be forced into becoming a mechanical chart.
That would ask the verse to do more than it clearly claims to do.

8. Revelation Is About History—but More Than a Timeline

This distinction will become increasingly important.
Revelation certainly teaches that history is moving toward God's appointed conclusion.
Christian hope is not merely an endless repetition of the same cycle.

There is a destination.
Christ will triumph.
Evil will be judged.
Death will be destroyed.
Creation will be renewed.
But knowing that history has a destination is different from possessing a detailed calendar of every step along the way.
John's purpose is not simply to allow Christians to calculate **when** everything will happen.
His purpose is to teach Christians **how to live faithfully until it does**.
That brings us back to one of our central themes:
endurance.

9. Prophecy Is Intended to Produce Faithfulness

This is where modern approaches to Revelation can sometimes become unbalanced.
People can become fascinated with identifying dates, nations, political leaders, military alliances, technologies, or contemporary events.
But Revelation's first readers were not given the book so they could win arguments about prophecy.
They were given it so they could remain **faithful to Jesus**.
The churches are repeatedly called to:
repent,
listen,
remain faithful,
resist compromise,
bear witness,
and endure.
That means the proper question after reading Revelation is not merely:
"Do I understand what happens next?"
It is:
"Am I becoming more faithful to Christ because I have heard this?"
If our interpretation produces fascination without faithfulness, we may have missed John's purpose.

10. The One Giving the Command Controls the Future

There is also a beautiful connection with the previous verse.
Who tells John to write about what will happen?
The One who has just said:
"I am the first and the last"
That matters.
The future is not being revealed by someone standing outside history making an educated prediction.

It is being revealed by the One who declares himself sovereign over history.
And the One speaking about the future also says:
“and have the keys of hell and of death”
Therefore Revelation's future is not fundamentally uncertain.
From our perspective, tomorrow is unknown.
From Christ's perspective, history is not out of control.
That does not mean every event is easy to understand.
It means the final outcome is secure.

11. John Writes From Patmos

We should also remember where John receives this command.
He is still on **Patmos**.
His circumstances have not changed.
Christ has not yet removed him from the island.
Rome still appears powerful.
The churches still face their difficulties.
But John now sees those circumstances differently.
That is one of the profound things revelation does.
Sometimes God changes our circumstances.
Sometimes God changes our understanding of the circumstances before anything around us changes.
John's Patmos remains Patmos.
But after seeing Christ, **Patmos can no longer mean the same thing**.
He now knows who stands among the churches.
He knows who holds the stars.
He knows who possesses the keys.
And therefore he can write about present suffering and future events from the standpoint of **hope rather than fear**.

12. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Revelation 1:19 places all of history beneath Christ's authority.
“The things which thou hast seen” reminds us that God has acted and revealed himself.
“The things which are” reminds us that Christ is present with his church now.
“The things which shall be hereafter” reminds us that the future belongs to God.
Christian faith therefore lives at the intersection of memory, presence, and hope.
We remember what God has done.
We remain faithful in the circumstances in which we presently live.
And we trust what God will ultimately accomplish.
Or more simply:

Christ was faithful yesterday.
Christ is Lord today.
Christ holds tomorrow.
That is a theology capable of producing endurance.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us would like to know more about the future than God chooses to tell us.
We want certainty.
What will happen?
When will it happen?
How will things turn out?
Sometimes our desire to understand the future is really a desire to **control** it.
Revelation offers something better than control.
It offers **confidence in Christ**.
John will be shown extraordinary things about what lies ahead.
But before any of that, he is shown Jesus.
Perhaps there is wisdom in that order.
We do not need complete knowledge of tomorrow in order to live faithfully today.
We need to know the One who already stands over **yesterday, today, and tomorrow**.
And once we know that, our task becomes much clearer.
We may not know everything that is coming.
But we know how we are called to live until it comes:
faithfully.

Something Worth Pondering

Jesus does not tell John:
"Figure out what you have seen."
He says:
"Write the things which thou hast seen"
There is humility in that distinction.
John is a witness before he is an analyst.
Perhaps readers of Revelation need some of that same humility.
There will be places where we can speak confidently because Scripture explains itself.
There will be places where historical context illuminates the imagery.
There will be places where Old Testament backgrounds make John's meaning much clearer.
And there may also be places where we must simply say:
"This is what John saw, and we should be careful not to claim more than the text gives us."
That is not weakness.

That is respect for Scripture.
Our task is not to make Revelation say everything we are curious about.
Our task is to hear what Revelation actually says—and then **live accordingly**.

Ask Yourself This:

Am I seeking knowledge of the future because I want greater control over what may happen, or is knowing that Christ holds the past, present, and future enough to help me live faithfully today?

A Closer Look — Revelation 1:20

“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”
— Revelation 1:20, KJV

With verse 20, the opening vision comes to a close.
And appropriately, Christ himself provides the interpretation of two of the symbols John has seen.
John does not have to guess.
The reader does not have to construct an elaborate theory.
Jesus tells us:
The seven lampstands are the seven churches.
And:
The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.
This verse therefore does more than explain two symbols.
It gives us an important lesson in **how Revelation should be read**.
Whenever Revelation interprets its own imagery, we should allow the text to lead us.

1. “The Mystery…”

Jesus calls these things a:
“mystery.”
In modern English, *mystery* often means a puzzle that clever people must solve.
That can be misleading when reading Scripture.
The biblical idea of mystery frequently refers to something that was hidden but has now been **revealed by God**.
The emphasis is not upon human ingenuity.
It is upon divine disclosure.
That is particularly appropriate in a book called **Revelation**.
John is not being handed a collection of riddles and told:
“Good luck figuring these out.”
He is being shown realities that could not otherwise be seen.
Revelation is fundamentally about **unveiling**, not obscuring.
That does not mean every symbol will be easy to understand.
Clearly they will not.
But it should caution us against approaching the book as though its purpose were deliberately to conceal truth behind an impossible prophetic code.
The purpose is to **reveal Jesus Christ and God's purposes to his people**.

2. “The Seven Stars Which Thou Sawest in My Right Hand”

John first saw the seven stars in verse 16:
“And he had in his right hand seven stars…”
Now Christ explains:
“the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.”
This immediately raises another question.
Who exactly are these **“angels”?**
The Greek word is *angeloi*, the plural of *angelos*, meaning **messenger**.
It can refer to heavenly angels, but the word itself can also describe a messenger more generally.
And here interpreters have reached different conclusions.

3. Who Are the Angels of the Churches?

Several possibilities have been proposed.
Some understand them as **heavenly angelic beings** associated with each congregation.
Others have suggested that they are **human messengers**—perhaps representatives who would carry John's Revelation to the churches.
Still others understand them as symbolic or heavenly representatives of the churches themselves.
There have also been attempts to identify them with church leaders, something roughly resembling pastors or bishops, though the text itself does not explicitly say that.
We should resist the temptation to pretend the question is more settled than it is.
There are thoughtful arguments for several interpretations.
The letters themselves make the matter particularly interesting because each is addressed:
“Unto the angel of the church…”
Yet the content clearly concerns the congregation.
The angel and the church are therefore closely connected in some way.

4. We Can Be Certain About Something More Important

Although the precise identity of the angels is debated, the primary theological point of the image is much clearer.
Where are the stars?
In Christ's right hand.
That is what John was shown.
Whatever the exact nature of the “angels of the seven churches,” they are under **Christ's authority**.
They belong to him.

They are held by him.
The uncertainty surrounding one detail should not cause us to overlook the clarity of the larger picture.
And that is another useful principle when studying Revelation:
Do not allow what is uncertain to obscure what is clear.
We may debate precisely who the angels are.
We need not debate who **holds them**.
Christ does.

5. "The Seven Candlesticks Which Thou Sawest Are the Seven Churches"

The second interpretation is completely explicit:
"the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches"
That takes us back to verse 12, when John turned toward the voice and first saw seven golden lampstands.
Then verse 13 gave us the most important detail:
Christ stood:
"in the midst of the seven candlesticks"
Now we know exactly what those lampstands represent.
The churches.
So the vision is not primarily of Christ far away in heaven looking down upon struggling congregations from a distance.
He is **among them**.
That may be the most important image to carry with us into Chapters 2 and 3.

6. Christ Walks Among Real Churches

These are not idealized churches.
We are about to discover that very quickly.
Some are faithful.
Some are suffering.
Some are compromised.
Some are spiritually asleep.
Some tolerate destructive teaching.
One has a reputation for being alive but is actually dead.
Another possesses little power but remains faithful.
Another is so complacent that Christ describes it as lukewarm.
Yet where is Jesus?
Among the lampstands.
That means Christ's presence among his churches is not dependent upon their perfection.
If it were, there would be very few lampstands.
Instead, Christ remains among them to encourage, correct, warn, strengthen, and call them to repentance.
That is grace.

7. But Grace Does Not Mean Indifference

There is also a warning contained within the lampstand image.
When Christ addresses Ephesus in Chapter 2, he warns:
“repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”
So being a lampstand is both a **privilege and a responsibility**.
The church exists to bear witness to Christ.
As we said earlier, a lampstand does not manufacture light.
It **bears** light.
Christ is the light.
The church's calling is to hold that light where the world can see it.
If a church ceases to fulfill that purpose, it has misunderstood why the lampstand exists.
The institution itself is never the ultimate goal.
Faithful witness to Christ is.

8. Golden Lampstands

We should not overlook that John calls them:
“golden candlesticks”
Some of these churches have serious problems.
Yet Christ depicts them with an image associated with something precious and sacred.
That tells us something about how Christ regards his church.
He loves the church enough to correct it.
Modern readers sometimes assume that criticism of a church must mean rejection of the church.
Revelation presents another possibility.
Sometimes correction is evidence that Christ has **not abandoned the church**.
He speaks because the church matters to him.
He calls it to repentance because he desires restoration.
His rebukes in Chapters 2 and 3 are not the angry complaints of an outsider.
They come from the Lord who **walks among the lampstands**.

9. Seven Churches—and the Church

There is also the significance of the number **seven**.
These are seven actual congregations in Roman Asia.
We should never lose their historical reality.
But seven carries strong associations of completeness and fullness throughout Revelation.
That suggests these seven churches can also function representatively.
What Christ says to them reaches beyond them.
This is reinforced by the repeated conclusion to each message:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Notice the plural.
A message addressed to one church becomes something **all the churches should hear**.
And because Revelation itself was intended to be heard and kept by God's people, these messages continue to speak to the church across generations.
Not because Ephesus secretly means one later historical era or Laodicea necessarily represents another.
But because the spiritual conditions found in these seven churches are conditions that can appear in **any church in any age**.

10. Ephesus Can Be Us

That makes Chapters 2 and 3 much more uncomfortable—and much more useful.
We can lose our first love.
We can suffer like Smyrna.
We can compromise like Pergamum.
We can tolerate what should not be tolerated like Thyatira.
We can have Sardis's reputation for life while being spiritually dead.
We can feel weak yet remain faithful like Philadelphia.
We can become comfortable and self-satisfied like Laodicea.
The seven churches become mirrors.
And Christ walks among every one of them.

11. A Guide for Reading What Comes Next

Verse 20 gives us a valuable interpretive principle just before Revelation becomes even more symbolically complex.
Let Revelation interpret Revelation whenever possible.
John sees lampstands.
Before searching modern history for lampstands, keep reading.
Verse 20 tells us what they mean.
John sees stars.
Keep reading.
Christ explains them.
This principle will not solve every difficulty in Revelation, but it will protect us from many unnecessary ones.
Our first question should not be:
"What modern thing does this remind me of?"
It should be:
"How does Revelation itself use this image?"
Then:
"Where does this imagery appear elsewhere in Scripture?"
Then:
"What would this imagery have communicated to John's original readers?"

Only after doing that should we ask:
“How does this truth speak to us today?”
That order will serve us well throughout the entire book.

12. The Theology Beneath the Verse

Verse 20 brings the entire opening vision into focus.
Christ holds the stars.
Christ stands among the lampstands.
In other words:
Christ has authority over his church.
Christ is present with his church.
Christ knows his church.
Christ protects his church.
Christ judges his church.
Christ speaks to his church.
The church belongs to **Christ**.
That sounds obvious, but it has enormous implications.
A congregation does not ultimately belong to its pastor.
It does not belong to its denomination.
It does not belong to its largest contributors.
It does not belong to its founding families.
It does not belong to its governing board.
It does not even belong to the congregation in the sense of being theirs to reshape however they please.
The church belongs to Jesus Christ.
He stands among the lampstands.
And therefore his opinion of the church matters more than anyone else's.
That is precisely what Chapters 2 and 3 are going to demonstrate.

Pastoral Reflection

Churches often measure themselves by visible standards.
Attendance.
Budgets.
Programs.
Buildings.
Influence.
Reputation.
Those things may tell us something.
But Revelation asks a much deeper question:
What does Christ see when he walks among the lampstands?
A church can appear successful and be spiritually unhealthy.
A church can appear weak and receive Christ's praise.
Sardis will teach us the first lesson.
Philadelphia will teach us the second.

That should cause every congregation to approach these letters with humility.
The question is not merely:
“What kind of church are they?”
The question is:
“What kind of church are we?”
And perhaps even more personally:
“What kind of disciple am I?”

Something Worth Pondering

John began this vision by turning around to discover who was speaking.
He saw lampstands.
Then he saw Christ **among them**.
Perhaps there is something profoundly important in that order.
When we look at the church, we often see the lampstands first.
The people.
The personalities.
The disagreements.
The failures.
The traditions.
The committees.
The programs.
The imperfections.
And if we look only at those things, we may become discouraged.
John teaches us to look again.
There is Someone among the lampstands.
The church has survived for two thousand years not because Christians have always been wise, faithful, courageous, or even particularly agreeable.
Church history quickly destroys that illusion.
The deeper reason is that Christ has never surrendered his church.
He corrects it.
He disciplines it.
He restores it.
He calls it back.
And he continues to walk among the lampstands.
That is both our comfort and our accountability.

Ask Yourself This:

When I look at the church—with all its beauty, weakness, faithfulness, and failure—do I see only the imperfect lampstands, or do I remember that the risen Christ still stands among them, calling his people to bear his light faithfully?

And with that, John's opening vision is complete.
Before Christ tells Ephesus that it has abandoned its first love, before he encourages suffering Smyrna, before he confronts compromise in Pergamum and Thyatira, before he awakens Sardis, strengthens Philadelphia, or challenges lukewarm Laodicea, John has shown us the truth that must govern everything we are about to hear:
The churches belong to Christ.
He knows them.
He holds them.
He walks among them.
And now—
he is going to speak to them.