

Overview of the Revelation

Overview

1:9 is a useful introduction to the book, answering a number of questions we might ask.

Rev. 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.

Who wrote it? “John.” Understood by both Irenaeus (~130-202) and Justin Martyr (~100-165) to be the apostle. The strongest argument against this is the difference in his Greek (though we will see several key ideas in common).

Where was it written? Patmos, an island off the SW coast of modern Turkey (Figure 1, chart). (Or perhaps after returning from Patmos to Ephesus.)

When was it written? A time of persecution, when John was exiled because of his open witness to the Lord. The earliest testimony, from Irenaeus (130-202), is that it comes from the reign of Domitian, 81-96¹ (chart). Some have advocated an earlier date, Nero (54-68), under whom Paul was executed. Based on the ancient testimonies, we assume authorship during the time of Domitian. (This rules out the preterist interpretation, which sees the Olivet Discourse, an important source for the Revelation, as fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem.)

To whom was it written? 1:4, “the seven churches of Asia.” “Asia” here is the Roman province at the western end of Anatolia (modern Turkey).

Why was it written? “your brother, and companion in tribulation.” John is suffering tribulation. The Lord gives him an extended revelation about the conflict between the church and Satan, and he writes to encourage his brethren to stand fast.



Figure 1: The Roman Province of Asia, Patmos, and the Seven Churches

1 See Alford’s introduction

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The book develops the theme of John 16:33 (chart),

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the **world κόσμος G2889** ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have **overcome νικάω G3528** the **world**.

Three words in this verse deserve our attention.

κόσμος is a favorite word of John's, appearing 102/187x in the gospel and 1 John, though only 3x in the Revelation. But Paul uses it extensively as well (47x). It is not the same as "earth" γη G1091. "Earth" refers to the planet; "world," to the social and cultural system, currently dominated by Satan. One of the three instances in the Revelation looks forward to the end of this system:

Rev. 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this **world** are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

The other two remind us that though God permitted this system to come into being at a past time, he always made provision for a people that would be separate from that system. He prepared a redeemer to deliver them from their sin:

Rev. 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of **the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world**.

And he enrolled them in the book of life:

Rev. 17:8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not **written in the book of life from the foundation of the world**, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

The second key word, νικάω, is overwhelming in Rev (17/28), 6x in 1 John, only here in gospel: 24/28x in John's writings.

Rev. 3:21 To him that **overcometh** will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

It reminds us that in spite of the world's antagonism to the Lord, God's people can be victorious.

The third significant word is "tribulation" θλίψις G2347, the same word that John uses in 1:9. Many Christians use this term as a proper noun, "the Tribulation," and think of it as a time of divine judgment on the earth. This is misleading. It appears 45 times in the NT, and only three (Rom 2:9; 2 Thes 1:6; Rev 2:22) refer to divine judgment against men. Overwhelmingly, the term reflects the world's persecution of believers. Furthermore, only six occurrences (Matt 24:21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; Rev 2:22; 7:14) are end-time events. In the NT, "tribulation" describes what believers should expect from unbelievers.

Thus Paul and Barnabas made it the capstone of their teaching to the churches they founded on their first missionary journey:

Acts 14:21 they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much **tribulation** enter into the kingdom of God.

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This characteristic explains why the NT name for the age in which we live is not “age of grace,” or “church age,” but “this present evil age” (Gal 1:4). Believers in northern India, or North Korea, or China, or Russia, or Arab countries understand the reality of tribulation and the need to be prepared for it. We in the west have enjoyed relative freedom from persecution, but we must not be taken by surprise if it comes upon us as well.

1:1-8, Opening

We will develop our outline of the book as we work through it. 1:1-8 form an opening, with three internal sections that are echoed at the end of the book (Figure 2, Chart).

1:1-3, The Title

The first three verses alert us that the message we are about to read passes through a chain: God → Christ → Angel → John → seven churches.

Rev 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ,—The title of the book in the KJV notwithstanding, this is not the Revelation of John, but the revelation of Jesus Christ.² The phrase can be understood in two ways: the revelation *about* Jesus Christ (objective genitive), or the revelation that Jesus Christ *revealed* (subjective genitive). Paul uses the subjective sense in describing how he gained his spiritual insight:

Gal. 1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the **revelation of Jesus Christ**.

But Peter twice uses the objective sense to describe the second coming of the Lord:

1Pet. 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the **appearing of Jesus Christ**:

1Pet. 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the **revelation of Jesus Christ**;

The rest of this verse emphasizes that John is revealing the message (subjective), but the climax of the entire book is his appearance from heaven to subdue his enemies and establish his rule over the earth (ch. 19-20). The ambiguity of the expression may well alert us that our Lord here is both the one revealing and the one revealed.³

which God gave unto him,—The revelation does not start with our Lord, but with his Father. The culmination of the book is his kingdom, something that he told his disciples was in the Father’s hands:

Mar 13:32 But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass—The conclusion echoes this theme (Table 2, chart). The expression has led some to suggest that the contents of this book

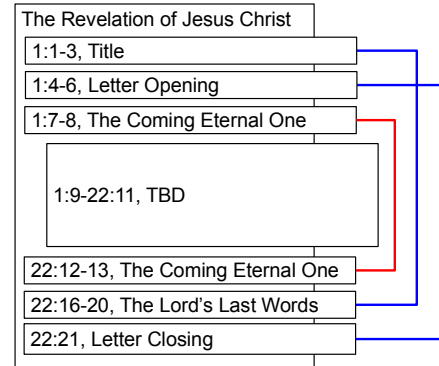


Figure 2: The Envelope of the Revelation

2 See note for the importance of this distinction on understanding this phrase.

3 Zerwick 1963, §§ 36-38, calls this the “general genitive.”

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were fulfilled soon after it was written. Those who adopt this position, called “preterism,” usually insist (contrary to strong early testimony from the church fathers) that the emperor of the persecution is Nero, and try to relate all of the prophecies to events between then and the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

ch. 1	ch. 22
1 things which must shortly come to pass	6 the things which must shortly be done. 7, 12, 20 behold, I come quickly 10 the time is at hand
1 and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:	16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.
2 the testimony of Jesus Christ	16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you 20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly
3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy ,	18 ... the words of the prophecy of this book,... 19 ... the words of the book of this prophecy ,
3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that ... keep those things which are written therein:	14 Blessed are they that do his commandments ,

Table 1: The Title and the Conclusion

The expression “shortly” ἐν τάχει can express suddenness, without necessarily implying the length of time until the event happens. Our Lord gives an example of this in the parable of the unjust judge, who finally vindicates the widow after her long pleading.

Lk 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he **bear long** with them? 8 I tell you that he will avenge them **speedily** ἐν τάχει.

The Lord “bear[s] long” with his people, and yet is said to “avenge them speedily.” The emphasis is on the suddenness and unexpectedness of the coming, not that it will occur within some short period of time.⁴ We cannot know the day or the hour when the Lord will return.⁵

and he sent and signified it by his angel—The message comes from the Father to the Lord Jesus, and then to an angel. The conclusion echoes the role of the angel in 22:16.

This angel appears in 17:1 and continues to instruct John through the end of the book. The fact that he only appears there suggests that those chapters really are the climax and point of the book, and everything else is in a sense background.

unto his servant δοῦλος John:—The next link in the chain is John. He describes himself with the same term that he uses for those to whom the message is finally addressed. He has come a long way from the day when his mother asked the Lord to give him and James a special place in the kingdom (Matt 20:21).

Mat 20:20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. 21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

The Lord responded,

⁴ In the LXX, the term is concentrated three times in Deut 28, vv. 20, 24 and 63 . The last shows that the reference is to the captivities, which were still 700 years in the future when Moses gave this warning.

⁵ See “The Rapture and the Tribulation” (<https://www.cyber-chapel.org/rapture.pdf>) for a distinction between this weak sense of imminency and the stronger sense, asserting that we cannot know any moment when the Lord might *not* appear. This strong sense is not supported by Scripture.

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Mat 20:25 Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant **δοῦλος**: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

This is the title that John now takes for himself.

2 Who bare record μαρτυρέω G3140—This is the verb that corresponds to the noun “testimony” later in the verse. John says here that he bore testimony, and at the end of the book, so does the Lord Jesus, in 22:16, 20. The word means to report what one has seen and heard.⁶

of the word of God, and of the testimony μαρτυρία G3141 of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. —This phrase (“the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ”) is the reason that he was on Patmos (1:9), and the reason that many were slain (20:4).

The latter phrase is probably subjective genitive, the testimony that Jesus Christ bore, that is, the teaching that he delivered during his earthly ministry (see note). John wrote before there was a recognized New Testament, so “the word of God” probably summarizes the OT scripture and “the testimony of Jesus” the teachings of Christ that are the heart of the NT (cf. 1 Tim 6: 3). Four more times (1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4) the saints are said to “have” this revelation or to suffer because of it. Throughout the ages, it has been the duty of God’s people to align themselves with the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, whatever the cost.

Here, John describes “all things that he saw,” namely, in his vision, in the same terms. We have been told already that God has given this message to his Son, who conveys it to John. This book is both the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (who is repeatedly described as “testifying” throughout the book: 1:5; 3:14; 22:16, 18; 22:20). John, having received it first-hand, bears witness of it, and it forms a fitting capstone to the rest of the books that we gratefully receive as “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear—A letter addressed to a group was typically read aloud by one person, and heard by the others. John anticipates this setting, and advises us that we will be blessed if we hear the message that has passed from God to Jesus, to the angel, and then to him. This is the first of seven blessings (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

the words of this prophecy,—The conclusion (22:18, 19) also describes the book as a “prophecy,” classing it with the utterances of those who spoke for God in the OT, starting with Samuel. We usually associate prophecy with the future, but the biblical prophets exhorted their hearers, and that leads to the third part of the blessing:

and keep those things which are written therein:—Hearing alone is not enough. To receive the blessing, we must also obey the principles that the book presents to us. This principle is also repeated in the conclusion (22:14).

for the time is at hand.—Again, he reminds us of the imminent nature of his return.

1:4-6, The Letter Opening

The final link in the chain is for John to deliver the message to God’s servants. He does this by writing a letter to the churches among which he ministered. 1:4-6 form a standard opening to a

⁶ The noun and verb appear 115x in the NT: 64x in John’s gospel and epistles, 13x in the Revelation, total 77.

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letter, such as we might expect at the start of one of Paul’s epistles (Table 2, chart). Like the title, the letter opening anticipates the book’s close with a standard epistolary benediction (22:21).

1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia:—These are enumerated in 1:11. But they are not the only churches in Asia in the first century: Paul wrote to the Colossians, mentioning believers in both Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13), and Acts 20:6 describes a meeting of the church in Troas where Paul addressed the believers on his way home from his third missionary journey. Why does the Lord (1:11) select these seven? There are two suggestions.

First, the order in which the churches are named suggests that they lie along the route of a major road along which a messenger could have carried the book. Col 4:16 shows that churches receiving a letter were expected to share it with other nearby churches:

Col 4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

So the Lord’s purpose in addressing these churches is to ensure the rapid distribution of the book around this major circuit, from where it could then be circulated to other churches. Figure 1 shows Ramsay’s reconstruction of the secondary circuits by which letters delivered along the main route would be distributed to outlying districts.

Recall Paul’s sense that in the gospel, he had possession of something intended for others:

Rom 1:14 I am **debtor** both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.¹⁵ So, as much as in me is, I am ready to **preach the gospel** to you that are at Rome also.

Once we receive the word of God, we owe it to those around us.

Second, we should not overlook the clear symbolic use of the number “seven” throughout the book, to denote completeness. For example, the seven kings of Rev 17:10 cannot easily be aligned with any historical set of seven Roman emperors (Beckwith), but represent the complete set of emperors. So the Lord presents these seven churches as a vignette of all the churches. Though each of these seven has a focus, the book is sent to all seven of them, that they might learn from one another, and the principles we see in them are applicable to every church.

Grace be unto you, and peace,—This is the standard greeting in a Christian epistle, sometimes (1, 2 Tim, Titus, 2 John) supplemented with “mercy.” The two go together: “grace” is the divine quality that saves us, while “peace” is the result that we experience, peace with God.

	Colossians	Revelation
Sender	1:1 Paul ... and Timotheus	1:4 John
Recipients	1:2 to the saints ... which are at Colossae	to the seven churches which are in Asia
Greeting	Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ	Grace be unto you, and peace from God ... and from the seven Spirits ... and from Jesus Christ
Praise to God	1:3 We give thanks to God	1:5 Unto him that loved us ... be glory and dominion ...
Prayer for Readers	praying always for you	(lacking)
Body	ch. 1-4	ch. 1-22
Farewell	4:18 Grace be with you.	22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Table 2: The Revelation as an Epistle

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We must cling tightly to this greeting. A pervasive theme of the book is the persecution that unbelievers bring upon believers, which had become institutionalized at the national level during the time that John writes. Yet he greets his readers with the promise of “peace.” We are not assured of peaceful lives in our daily experience, but we have peace with God, and secure in his love, we can deal with the difficulties of life in the world.

The greeting identifies the One who gives us grace and peace: Father, Spirit, and Son.

from him God⁷ which is, and which was, and which is to come;—The Father is defined as the eternal one. The name by which he identified himself to Moses emphasizes his timeless character (chart). First he emphasizes himself as the One who always is:

Exo 3:13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? 14 And God said unto Moses, **I AM THAT I AM:** and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

Next, he reminds Moses of his past actions, the One who was:

15 And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **The LORD God of your fathers,** the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you:

Finally, he anticipates his future activity:

this is my name **for ever**, and this is my memorial **unto all generations**.

Isaiah explores this theme at length:

Isa 44:6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; **I am the first, and I am the last;** and beside me there is no God.

Isa 43:10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: **before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.**

The statement that God “is to come” echoes another OT theme, anticipating the Messiah:

Psa 50:3 **Our God shall come**, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

Isa 40:10 Behold, **the Lord GOD will come** with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;—In a parallel with references to the Father and the Son, we expect a reference to the Spirit (chart):

Matt 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father**, and of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Ghost**:

1 Cor 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same **Spirit**. 5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same **Lord**. 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same **God** which worketh all in all.

2Co 13:14 The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the communion of the **Holy Ghost**, be with you all.

⁷ Majority reading

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Eph 4:4 There is one body, and one **Spirit**, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
 5 One **Lord**, one faith, one baptism, 6 One **God and Father** of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The closest parallel is in the opening of 1 Peter, which even has the same order as our text:

1Pe 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, through sanctification of the **Spirit**, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of **Jesus Christ**:

In such a context, the reference must be to the Holy Spirit. We will see his activity frequently as we go through the book. But why “seven spirits”? A hint comes in John’s vision of the throne:

Rev. 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and **seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God** sent forth into all the earth.

That vision in turn draws from Zechariah’s vision of the self-fueling lampstand:

Zec 4:10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with **those seven [lamps]**; they are **the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth**.

Four hundred years earlier, David understood that God’s Spirit is the means by which he is omnipresent in the world:

Psa 139:7 Whither shall I go **from thy spirit**? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. ...

Let us put these clues together:

- The threefold greeting leads us to expect a reference to the Holy Spirit.
- The reference in Rev 5:6 emphasizes the Spirit’s omnipresence and omniscience in the world.
- “Seven” emphasizes the completeness and thoroughness of the Spirit’s work.

5 And from Jesus Christ,—In terms of the structure of a letter (Table 2), this is the third element of a trinitarian greeting. John gives the Lord Jesus three titles, in chronological order (Table 3, chart, column 1), but these prepare for the next section of the letter, the praise to God (second column).

who is the faithful witness,—Throughout the OT, our Savior’s “goings forth were from of old,” witnessing the things of the Father to men, and his earthly ministry was also one of constantly bearing witness to the Father.

and the first begotten of the dead,—His earthly ministry culminated in his crucifixion and

	1:5a, Greeting: His Person	1:5b-6, Praise: His Work
Earthly ministry	the Faithful Witness: Mic 5:2 whose goings forth have been from of old	unto him that loved us: John 13:1 having loved his own which were in the world
Passion	the First Begotten of the Dead: Rom 4:25 delivered for our offenses, raised again for our justification	washed us from our sins in his own blood 1 John 1:7 the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.
Future victory	the Prince of the Kings of the earth: Rev. 11:15 The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.	hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: 1 Pet 2:9 a royal priesthood (cf. Rev 20:4)

Table 3: Praise to the Lord for his Person and Work

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resurrection. John, like Paul, emphasizes the importance of the resurrection, without which the value of his death is unproven.

Rom 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

and the prince of the kings of the earth.—The third stage is yet future. He is king in heaven now, but does not yet rule an earthly kingdom. This book will show us how

Rev. 11:15 The kingdoms of this **world** are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

After the greeting, the next element at the start of an epistle is praise to God. John focuses on three actions of the Lord Jesus, which align in time with the three titles.

Unto him that loved us,—We commonly associate our Lord’s love for us with his death on the cross, but John reminds us in the gospel that his love for his disciples permeated his entire life:

Joh 13:1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, **having loved his own which were in the world,** he loved them unto the end.

He loved them, and served them by washing their feet, leaving us an example in our relation to one another.

and washed us from our sins in his own blood,—The culmination of that love was his death in our place, to wash away our sins.

1 John 1:7 the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;—We are now “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), and that heavenly position will become concrete when he becomes “prince of the kings of the earth” (Rev 20:4, “they lived and reigned with Christ”).

to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.—Note that “be” is in italics. The clause can be read as a statement of fact, not just aspiration, and in a prayer of praise, probably should be this way.

It is not uncommon for a Bible writer to ascribe eternal glory and power to God. Consider, for example (chart):

Rom. 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! ... 36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: **to whom be glory for ever.** Amen.

Rom. 16:27 To God only wise, **be glory through Jesus Christ for ever.** Amen.

Eph. 3:21 Unto him **be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.** Amen.

Phil. 4:20 Now unto God and our Father **be glory for ever and ever.** Amen.

1Pet. 5:10 But the God of all grace, ... 11 **To him be glory and dominion κράτος for ever and ever.** Amen.⁸

8 1 Pet 4:11 is grammatically ambiguous. Though “Jesus Christ” is the nearer antecedent, it is subordinate to “that God may be glorified,” and the repetition of the root δόξα connects the final ascription with the God who is glorified; thus Alford.

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Jude 25 **To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory** and majesty, **dominion κράτος** and power, both now and **ever**. Amen.

All these are addressed to God or the Father, and not specifically to the Lord Jesus. Only one instance is clearly addressed to him:⁹

2Pet. 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **To him be glory both now and for ever**. Amen.

And even here, it is only glory, not dominion (κράτος G2904, “strength, power”), that is assigned to the Lord Jesus. (See Note for NT words for power.)

One explanation for this imbalance is that during his earthly ministry, our Lord withheld his glory. He ministered in humility and in weakness, not glory and power. Isaiah described him:

Isa 53:2 he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:

Only twice is his glory said to be revealed during this time: at his first miracle in Cana of Galilee,

Joh 2:11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

and on the mount of transfiguration,

2Pe 1:16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

But while he ministered in humiliation, he looked forward to being glorified after his resurrection and at his return:

Joh 17:1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; **glorify thy Son**, that thy Son also may glorify thee: ... 5 And now, O Father, **glorify thou me** ...

Mat 24:30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power δύναμις and great glory. ... 25:31 When the Son of man shall come **in his glory**, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

Throughout the NT, we are exhorted to that future glory:

Tit 2:13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

Now John opens his epistle by ascribing both glory and power, not to the Father as in other NT epistles, but to the one “who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” He sees the time of which the Lord spoke on Olivet, the time of his glorious return, and frames his greeting accordingly.

⁹ See note for some ambiguous passages

1:7-8, The Summary

The opening ends with a summary of the entire book: the promise of the Lord's return with clouds, described near the end in ch. 19, and

drawing heavily on OT promises. These two verses again anticipate ch. 22 (Table 4, chart). but these correspondences are in chiastic order to those in the title and letter opening.

In 1:7, someone announces the coming of the Messiah, according to OT promise. 1:8 identifies the speaker as the Lord, fulfilling the Father's promise to the Son,

Psa. 110:1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

This is, after all, "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." So it begins with the Father's introduction of the returning Son.

7 Behold, he cometh with clouds;—John takes us back to a prophecy of Daniel (chart). After a vision of four beasts that represent the four great kingdoms from Babylon to the end, Daniel sees the heavenly court.

Dan 7:13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man **came with the clouds** of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

We will hear much in the coming chapters of world kingdoms and terrible beasts, but this promise takes us all the way forward to the return of the Lord Jesus to set up his kingdom.¹⁰

and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail κόπτω G2875 because of him. Even so, Amen.—Again, he takes us back to the OT, this time to Zechariah:

Zech 12:10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and **they shall look upon me whom they have pierced**, and they shall **mourn κόπτω** for him, as one **mourneth** for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (+3x in vv. 11-12)

But he goes beyond Zechariah. That prophet anticipated that Israel would mourn for the Messiah; John sees "all the kindred of the earth" joining in this repentance. He is not inventing this extension of the prediction, but following what he heard the Lord Jesus teach in the Olivet Discourse, again associating Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12:

ch. 1	ch. 22
7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; ... and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.	12 And, behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.
8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending ; saith the Lord	13 I [the one who comes quickly] am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end , the first and the last.

Table 4: The Coming Eternal One

¹⁰ Compare 14:14, concluding the interlude after the seventh trumpet, where one "like unto the Son of man" sits on "a white cloud" to reap the harvest of the righteous, while another angel gathers the wicked to judgment. Tentatively, I am aligning the ends of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, and if this is correct, the vision of ch. 14 corresponds with ch. 19-20.

Overview of Revelation

Matt 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days ... 30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and **then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn [extension of Zech 12:10-14]**, and they shall see the Son of man **coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory [Dan 7:13, 14]**.

Now the speaker identifies himself with the first of the three entities named as the source of Grace and Peace in 1:4-5.

8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending,—1:4 described “God” as the one who was, and is, and is to come, a title of eternity. Three other such titles appear throughout the book (Table 5, chart), and we now encounter one of them.¹¹

Ref	The One who is, and who was, and who is to come ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος	Alpha and Omega τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ	The First and the Last ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος	The Beginning and the Ending ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος	Who is in View?	Evidence
1:4	X				Father	“God”; Trinitarian greeting
1:8	X	X		(x)	Father	The eternal Lord, 1:4 Almighty = (LORD of Hosts)
1:11		(x)	(x)		Son	Stands in the midst of the candlesticks, 1:12
1:17			X		Son	Was dead, is alive, 1:18
2:8			X		Son	Writer to Smyrna
4:8	X				Father	Vision from Isaiah 6
21:6		X		X	Father	He that sat upon the throne (21:5); father (21:7)
22:13		X	X	X	Son	The one who comes quickly (22:12)

*Table 5: Titles of Divine Eternity in the Revelation. (x) indicates an occurrence of the title in the Textus Receptus (and thus the AV) but not in the Majority Text. **X** is the first occurrence.*

“Alpha” is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and “Omega” is the last. Thus listing these two together is an expression of totality. This is a Greek echo of an attested Hebrew expression for totality, “from Aleph to Tau” (Gill; Strack-Billerbeck), and may also reflect a common Christian graffiti, the SATOR-ROTAS word square (Beasley-Murray).

saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come,—Once again, we hear the title of the Father from 1:4, with one additional title:

the Almighty.—This Greek word is the dominant (119/181) LXX translation of צבאות H6635, “hosts, armies,” in the name “Jehovah of Hosts.” The speaker is the one Israel knows as Jehovah. Yet “who is to come” clearly anticipates the Messiah. The trajectory of the titles moves toward affirming the deity of the Lord Jesus; cf. the merger of characteristics in 1:13-16.

¹¹ In the Majority Text of the Revelation, the second title is lacking in this verse. Instances of (x) in the Table show titles in the TR that are not in the MT.

Notes

1:1 Is “the apocalypse” an apocalypse?

The terms “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” are in vogue as describing a particular style of prophetic literature epitomized by 2 Esdras and 1 Baruch, and with echoes in Daniel 7-9 and Ezekiel, characterized by a vision of the future in which God rights the injustices that his people have suffered. The writer often reports visions in which a heavenly being guides him to this understanding.

These works do not describe themselves using the word. The word family does not occur at all in 2 Esdras or Daniel, or (in this sense) in Ezekiel. It is an academic term, capturing the result of a particular scholarly classification. So it is misleading to justify an interpretation of the Revelation dominated by the notion of “apocalyptic” based on 1:1. The book does have much in common with such literature, and relies heavily on Daniel and Ezekiel. But the term in 1:1 simply refers to a divine revelation (see Milligan’s note in his commentary on Thessalonians), and the only other instances of “revelation of Jesus Christ” in the NT have no reference to this class of literature. John calls his work “prophecy” (1:3; 22:18, 19), and we should so understand it.

If 1:1 meant to identify the book as an apocalypse, it would be named after the seer, “the apocalypse of John” (as indeed the KJV does).

1:2, 9 testimony of Jesus Christ

We commonly speak of our role in “witnessing for the Lord,” opening the possibility that the phrase here could be objective genitive. But the NT uses the word family for eyewitnesses: Acts 1:8, 22. And the contrast in 1 Tim 6:12, 13 between our Lord (who witnessed a good confession) and Timothy (who confessed a good confession) suggests that we should favor the subjective genitive.

The use of the word family μαρτυ* in the Revelation is consistent with a careful distinction.

John himself bears witness to the vision that he has recorded:

1:2 Who **bare record** of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, ~~and~~ even of all things that he saw.

Several verses speak of the testimony of the Lord Jesus, usually in parallel with the word of God, as something to be kept by his saints:

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

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**.

6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the **word of God**, and for the **testimony of the Lamb** which they held:

12:17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the **commandments of God**, and have the **testimony of Jesus Christ**.

Overview of Revelation

19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the **testimony of Jesus**: worship God: for the **testimony of Jesus** is the spirit of prophecy.

20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the **witness of Jesus**, and for the **word of God**, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Our Lord is described as the faithful witness, consistent with 1 Tim 6:13 and numerous references to his testimony in the fourth gospel:

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,

3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true **witness**, the beginning of the creation of God;

22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to **testify** unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

22:16 I Jesus ... 18 For I **testify** unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

22:20 He which **testifieth** these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Saints are said to bear witness. Consistent with Acts 1:8, 22, these may be people who had seen the risen Christ. 12:11 has the strongest claim to refer to all believers, though “their testimony” may be “the testimony of Jesus” which they are said to “have” in 12:17. 17:6 may be distinguishing saints from those who, like John, were eyewitnesses.

2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein **Antipas was my faithful martyr**, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

11:3 And I will give power unto **my two witnesses**, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

11:7 And when they shall have finished **their testimony**, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of **their testimony**; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

17:6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

The heavenly sanctuary is “the temple of the testimony,” perhaps as the repository of God’s law, often called his “testimonies” in the OT:

Rev. 15:5 And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

Overview of Revelation

Conclusions:

- “the testimony of Jesus” is best understood as subjective genitive, the revelation that our Lord as the Son of God has given based on his personal knowledge.
- Together with “the word of God,” which for John would primarily be the OT, it makes up the body of God’s revelation.
- We are to “hold” or “have” this body of truth. While the Revelation uses the ὁμολ* word family only of our Lord’s confession of his saints before the Father (parallel with Matt 10:32), this response on our part is consistent with Timothy’s “confession” of the same truth to which our Lord bore eye-witness in the parallel of 1 Tim 6:12, 13.

	Gospels & Acts	Epistles	Revelation	Row Res
δυναμις	-4.5	5.5	-21.5	4.5
κρατος	-2	2	17	-55
εξουσια	11	-11	0	0
ισχυς	0	0	18	-56
Col Res	1	-1	-47	79

Table 6: Residuals from Median Polish

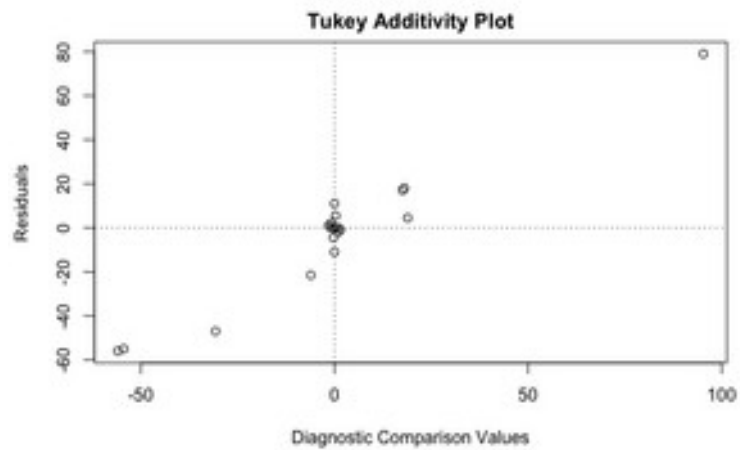


Figure 3: Additivity Plot for Words for Strength

Words for Power

Table 7 shows the distribution of δύναμις, κράτος, ἐξουσία, and ἰσχύς in the NT. δύναμις, and ἐξουσία are the most common, and thus likely to be more generic in meaning, while κράτος and ἰσχύς are much rarer.

A median polish (Table 6) can help remove the overall effects of word and type of literature.

Clearly, κράτος and ἰσχύς dominate the Revelation, δύναμις the epistles, and ἐξουσία the gospels. But the data are not simply additive; Figure 3 is the Tukey plot. If the data were additive, there would be no trend to the plot of residuals against row * column / overall, but there is a clear positive slope. More needs to be done.

	Gospels & Acts	Epistles	Revelation	Total
δυναμις	48	60	12	120
κρατος	2	8	2	12
εξουσια	51	31	21	103
ισχυς	3	5	2	10
Total	104	104	37	245
Total words in book	84888	45492	9903	

Table 7: Words for Power in the NT

Table 8 shows the MT-LXX mapping for these words. In the LXX, δύναμις and ἰσχύς dominate and so are more likely to be generic. The LXX uses ἐξουσία for rule and government, δύναμις for the instruments of power (armies), and ἰσχύς and κράτος for the more abstract idea of strength and power itself.

Who receives glory?

Most attributions of glory in the NT are to the Father, but these are ambiguous:

	צבא	חיל	המון	עז	חזק	חזקה	כח	משל etc	שלט*	Total
δυναμις	131	148	4	20	0	0	7	0	0	563
κρατος	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	1	0	47
εξουσια	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	10	66
ισχυς	0	27	7	28	1	0	98	0		326
Total	486	245	86	102	291	9	126	103	41	

Table 8: LXX use of power words

Gal. 1:3 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: 5 **To whom be glory for ever and ever.** Amen.

2Tim. 4:18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: **to whom be glory for ever and ever.** Amen.

Heb. 13:20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; **to whom be glory for ever and ever.** Amen.