

# The Revelation of Jesus Christ: a study for fellowship groups

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## **Part 1: Jesus Christ is the eternal God (Rev 1:4-20)** published 10/09/2003

*Read Rev 1:4-8*

It is of fundamental importance to the Christian faith to understand that Jesus Christ is God, one of the trinity that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are many places in the Bible which attest to this and it is important to us to know at least some of them. When Moses met God at the burning bush and asked God's name, God introduced himself to Moses as "I AM" (Exodus 3:14). When Jesus was approached by the armed guard which came to arrest him and asked who they were looking for, he said "I AM he" making the same statement as made to Moses, and the soldiers fell to the ground (John 18:6).

Verses 4,5 do not tell us that the message comes from two people, the one who is, was and is to come, and also from Jesus Christ ... the whole statement is about Jesus. He is the eternal I AM because he is God. The only reading of "him who is, and who was, and who is to come" that makes any sense is that it speaks of Jesus not in the eternal sense, but from the point of view of his involvement in human history, in the present, the past and the future. It is all about Jesus. In the present sense of human history he is the 'faithful witness'. In the past sense, he was the 'firstborn from the dead' in his resurrection. And in the future sense, he is to be the 'ruler of the kings of the earth'. He chooses not to take up that role until his return in judgment. These are three things that we need to learn right from the start about Jesus Christ in relation to human history.

Now there are three things to learn about what Jesus does for us as his people:

- o He loves us. Love comes first with Jesus. He doesn't love us when he's got us sorted out. He loves us just as he finds us ... warts and all. If we are ever to be effective agents for him in the world, we'll need to love in that way too – not to those who are considered to deserve it, but to everyone!
- o He has loosed us from the bondage that we've been under, in that he has freed us from our sins in his blood.
- o He has lifted us up onto a new plateau to serve him as priests in his kingdom

Now we have a picture of the returning Christ. John says three things about this return: it will be a literal return ('clouds' may actually refer to those departed Christians that Jesus will bring with him); it will be seen by all, including those who have rejected him; it will result in great mourning among the peoples of the world (v.7)

*(The following section is important but not everybody will want to work all through the material)*

In this section Jesus says something about being God. At first sight it seems to be mainly about his return: 'Look, he is coming ... and every eye will see him' (1:7). This accords with other parts of scripture (eg Phil 2:10). But the statement is about Jesus being God himself. *Read Zechariah 12:10*. Read it again and see how difficult a verse this was for Jews to understand. It is God speaking (Zech 12:1). How can people look on 'me, the one they have pierced'. Not literally, certainly. But having 'pierced' God and then been brought to their senses, what are they doing mourning for 'him' rather than 'me'? But all of Zechariah's story is about Jesus (Zech 9:9;11:10-14; 14:4) and here he shows that Jesus is God by referring to him as the 'me' who is speaking, then as 'him' who has been

‘pierced’, and as a ‘firstborn son’. The expression ‘the one’ is a two letter word in Hebrew comprising *Aleph* and *Tau* the first and last letters of the alphabet, in effect ‘the A to Z’ as we might say. Returning to the Revelation passage we have first this quotation about the “A to Z” in Hebrew, then the “Alpha and Omega” of v.8 in the New Testament Greek. Again *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the “A to Z”. And John links Zechariah’s “A to Z” in Hebrew to his own “A to Z” in Greek with the expression in v.7: ‘so shall it be! Amen!’. Actually Amen means ‘so shall it be!’ but it is the Greek, and amen is the Hebrew. What all of this shows is that the God of the Old Testament who spoke prophetically to Zechariah and who was to be wounded when in the personage of a firstborn son, is none other than the Jesus of the New Testament. He is really God!

*Read Rev 1:9-20*

John tells his readers about his imprisonment. The revelation which he received was while he was ‘in the Spirit’ on the Lord’s Day (what we call Sunday). This first revelation was to be recorded and distributed to the churches.

**Q** To what extent, if any at all, are we in a better frame of mind to hear from God, or to receive a picture, on a Sunday, than on other days of the week?

**Q** How can we ensure that when God wants to communicate with us, we are ‘in the spirit’ to receive from him?

John hears a voice ...not a quiet whisper (like Elijah who did not find God’s voice in a powerful wind, or an earthquake, or a fire, but in a gentle whisper – 1 Kings 19:12), but a loud voice like a trumpet. John looks to see where it is coming from, and he is first confronted with seven lampstands. What are these? They are the churches (1:20). But that isn’t where the voice comes from. It comes from one ‘like the son of man’. He is the one referred to in 1:7, Jesus, and the whole quotation comes from Daniel 7:13. It is the lampstands which illuminate the Son of Man ...or it should be! It is the job of the church to show Christ to those looking for him, or looking to find where the voice they hear is coming from!

John sees a most wonderful picture of Jesus in his glory. Don’t search this chapter to find out what colour hair Jesus has! The language is the picture language of apocalyptic writing. In the poetic writing of the Song of Solomon, his hair is black! What is important is what the features teach us. The features in this passage become active in the ministry to the churches that follow in the next two chapters. Notice that the eyes of Jesus aren’t there to take in light but to give light out. The seven stars are the lights of the seven churches seen in the heavenly perspective: the same lights as sit on the lampstands to give out light in the worldly perspective. Each church has a message and a messenger, an ‘angel’ as referred to in the following chapters; it has also a lampstand which is its visible structure (not the building! It’s the church in its organisational sense) and on it a light which is its testimony. When there is no more testimony there is no real need for a lampstand, which is why we shall find the need for the lampstand to remain being brought into question. There are times to stop as well as to start; for churches to close their doors as well as to open; one testimony comes to an end while another is planted. There’s nothing unnatural in this. Often there are good reasons why this should happen. Sometimes, it should never have happened, of course!

**Q** Do we ensure that people hear God’s voice in a loud and unmistakeable way and shed light on the one they are or should be looking for?

**Next time: Part 2: The Overcomers – Rev 2:1-3:22**