

Lesson 7

Revelation 1:8

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.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and so the phrase “alpha and omega” denotes completeness. It is similar to our phrase “A to Z.” Nothing is left out. The same phrase is used again in verse 11 and also at the end of the book in 22:13. What does it mean that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega? It means that Jesus is all sufficient.

*2 Corinthians 1:19-20 — For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. **For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.***

The premillennialists believe that all of the Old Testament shadows, including the Old Law, will be revived someday. How can that view be squared with this verse? If Jesus is Alpha and Omega, that is if Jesus is all sufficient, what need could we ever have for the old shadows? The answer is none. They will never return. They served their purpose, and now that purpose has come.

This was also a message the first century Christians needed to hear. They already had everything they needed to be victorious over Rome and to overcome the Roman persecution — they had Jesus, Alpha and Omega!

In verse 8, Jesus also describes himself as the beginning and the end. That, of course, does not mean that Jesus had a beginning or will have an end. Jesus is God, which means he is without beginning or end. What it means is that Jesus is in control — he was there at the beginning; he will be there at the end; he will be there at all times between the beginning and the end.

Again, this was a message the early church needed to hear, and it is a message we need to hear as well. Jesus knows what is happening to his people, and he will always be with his people. As Paul tells us, “The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). We do not worship a distant God.

These descriptions are of God the Son, but we see similar descriptions elsewhere of God the Father.

Isaiah 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.

Also, in verse 4 the phrase “from him which is, and which was, and which is to come” was used to describe God the Father. Here in verse 8 that same phrase is used to describe God the Son.

Verse 8 also says that Jesus is the Almighty — that is, the one who has dominion over all things. Again, this is a common Old Testament title for God the Father, but here it describes God the Son.

The word “almighty” occurs ten times in the New Testament — once in Second Corinthians 6:18 where the Old Testament is quoted and nine times in Revelation. Even though no earthly empire had been able to withstand Rome, John is assuring the church (which one commentator described as “the panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ”) that Jesus — not any Roman — is the Almighty, and that they will be victorious.

Is this book relevant today? Absolutely! We all need to be reminded that Jesus is the true Almighty! Not the nations of this world, not the political leaders, not the armies, not the terrorists, not science, not medicine — but Jesus! If we place our trust in anyone else or anything else, then we are fools. There is but one eternal kingdom and but one eternal king! All other kingdoms will pass away.

Revelation 1:9-11

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. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 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.

The Greek word "tribulation" in verse 9 describes a pressing together (as of grapes) or a squeezing or a pinching. The people of God are told to expect tribulation. In John 16:33, Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Hailey: "Tribulation had been the lot of the church from its beginning, but it was now breaking upon the saints with an increasing intensity."

Roman officials could at their own discretion have a criminal executed, enslaved, or banished. The most common places of Roman banishment were the rocky Aegean islands off the coast of Asia, which included Patmos. As we have discussed, John may have been banished there by Domitian himself while his father Vespasian and brother Titus were away from Rome.

Patmos is a rocky and uninviting island located about seventy miles southwest of Ephesus. The island is about ten miles long and six miles across as its widest point. The sea almost pinches it off in one place, forming a harbor. John was surrounded by the sea, and it is interesting that the word "sea" is used 22 times in Revelation.

Banishment to Patmos for John may have involved hard labor at the quarries. Sir William Ramsay says that John's banishment would have been "preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, and work under the lash of the military overseer."

Notice in verse 9 that John did not refer to himself as an apostle or as a close friend of Jesus, but rather as a *brother* of those being persecuted and as one who shares in their tribulation. As Barclay says, John did not preach endurance from his easy chair. No one will ever listen to anyone who preaches heroic courage to others while he himself has sought a prudent safety, and John was nothing like that. Verse 9 tells us that John had been banished “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John had stood up for Jesus, and now he was suffering because of it.

The phrase “in the spirit” in verse 10 means under the influence of the Spirit. This book, as with all Scripture, is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. Each word is God breathed. That phrase “in the spirit” may also mean that John was in an attitude of worship — ready to worship God in spirit and in truth.

The reference to Sunday, the day of the week on which Jesus rose from the dead, as “the Lord’s day” in verse 10 is the first such reference now existing and occurs only here in the New Testament. We know from Acts 20:7 that Christians gathered together for worship on the first day of the week, and almost all commentators agree that the phrase refers to Sunday in verse 10. Why does the text call Sunday the Lord’s day?

One reason is certainly a good reminder for us — the first day of the week is the Lord’s day — it is not a day for us to do with as we please. It is not our day; it belongs to the Lord.

But there is another reason more particular to the initial readers of the book — Jesus was about to have his day with the Romans! Rome thought that it was in charge and that every day was Rome’s day — but Rome was wrong. The same Almighty Christ who rose from the dead was about to have his day — and his way — when it came to Rome! The great power of Rome was about to come up against an infinitely greater power — one that would sweep Rome away.

A sounding trumpet often accompanies the voice or the appearance of God. A trumpet sounded in Exodus 19:16 when the Law was given, and 1 Corinthians 15:52 tells us that a trumpet will sound on the last great day when Jesus returns to claim his own and judge the world. Here what is heard is not a trumpet itself but rather a voice that sounds “as of a trumpet” — meaning it was loud and impossible to miss! The voice is the voice of Christ — a voice that John knew very well — and verse 11 tells us what Jesus said.

Once again, Jesus calls himself Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. Jesus has now said that twice within four verses. Again, that is a message of comfort and assurance that the persecuted flock needed to hear.

Next, John is told by Jesus to write down what he is seeing and to send it to seven specific congregations of the church in Asia. We don't know how John got the letter off of Patmos or how long it took him to do so — it is possible that the book was not circulated until quite some time after it was written, which, if true, would explain some of the extrinsic evidence about the book.

What about the order of the churches in verse 11? Many elaborate theories have been put forth to explain it. The simplest theory seems the most likely. The churches listed in verse 11 are arranged in the order that a traveler on foot would take if he started at Ephesus, the closest church to Patmos. There is about 30 to 45 miles between each of the listed congregations. (When we get to the **last** of the seven letters we will see another possible reason why that letter, in particular, was saved for last.)

Before we leave these verses, we should pause and notice something very important about verse 9 — something that the premillennialists should also pause to notice. Verse 9 says that John was a companion with them *in the kingdom*. **If the kingdom did not already exist at the time of this writing, then this claim by John makes no sense!** And yet how many commentaries on Revelation argue that the kingdom has not yet come even to this very day?

The eternal kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2, and John was a part of that eternal kingdom in Revelation 1, as were the other Christians who were suffering tribulation.

Revelation 1:12-16

12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; 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. 14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow;

and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. 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.

John turns to see who is speaking to him, and he first sees seven golden candlesticks or lampstands.

The golden lampstand (or menorah) is a familiar Old Testament image. Exodus 25:31-37 tells us that such a lamp was in the tabernacle. Such a lamp is also mentioned in the vision of Zechariah 4, which we studied in an earlier series of lessons:

***Zechariah 4:2** — And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof.*

There we saw that the lampstand denoted the church — the promised eternal kingdom of Christ that was established about 500 years after Zechariah's prophecy. The lampstand here also denotes the church — specifically, verse 20 will tell us that the seven lamps are the seven churches that are about to receive this book from John.

A lampstand is a beautiful image for the church. We are “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). “In the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” we “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). We are lamps, but Christ supplies the light. His wonderful light shines in this world through his church — unless we put our light under a bushel. Instead, we are told to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). We always need to make sure our lamp is burning bright!

Verses 13-16 show us a wonderful image of Jesus, our Lord and Savior and King, one of the most beautiful in the Bible. The first thing to notice is that Jesus in

verse 13 is “in the midst” of the seven candlesticks — that is, Jesus is in the midst of the seven churches suffering persecution. Jesus loves his people; Jesus cares for his people; Jesus stands with his people. This is a beautiful opening to this book of comfort for the people of God. Jesus is not watching from afar; he is standing in their midst.

The title “Son of Man” in verse 13 is a Messianic title from Daniel 7:13, which we previously studied. That title also appears over 93 times in the book of Ezekiel. That title is frequently used in the New Testament as a title for Christ, and seems to have been Jesus’ favorite way of referring to himself as the Messiah — it appears 84 times in the four gospel accounts.

The long robe and the golden girdle in verse 13 denote the clothing worn by the High Priest when he was officiating on behalf of the people. Hebrews 4:14 tells us that Jesus is our perfect High Priest. And we saw the perfect priesthood in the prophecies of Zechariah that we studied. The Jewish temple had been destroyed, but God’s people have a perfect High Priest officiating on their behalf.

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus’ head and hair were white like wool and white as snow. This description also comes from Daniel 7, but there it is not used to describe the Son of Man (God the Son) but rather is used in Daniel 7 to describe the Ancient of Days (God the Father).

Daniel 7:9 — I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

The inspired text is using Old Testament descriptions of God the Father to describe the risen Christ, something we have already seen in this chapter. The symbol of whiteness depicts the purity and sinlessness of Christ. In this book, we will frequently see Christ described as the Lamb of God. Here we see the lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19).

The whiteness is also a reminder that Jesus is a purifier of his people, and we will soon see that some of these seven congregations lacked purity.

Isaiah 1:18 — Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Some of these seven churches were about to receive a very tough message. They needed to know that although they had fallen short of the mark, they could still repent and be cleansed.

In verse 14, Jesus has eyes as a flame of fire — Jesus sees all and knows all. He sees and knows everything about his own people, and he sees and knows everything about the enemies of his people. No one can hide from Jesus.

Hebrews 4:13 — Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Perfect eyes are required for perfect judgment, and Christ's eyes are perfect. He sees everything.

The voice of Christ is described in verse 15 as the sound of many waters. God is described the same way in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 43:2 — And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.

Remember that as John was seeing this and writing this he could likely hear the roar of the Aegean Sea. This voice in verse 15 was much louder.

Verse 15 tells us that Christ had feet like unto fine brass or bronze. What does that mean? To see what the feet of brass depict, we should do what we will often be doing to understand the symbols in this book — we should see how the same symbol was used in the Old Testament.

In Micah, feet of bronze were used to depict the power to trample.

Micah 4:13 — Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.

In Daniel 10:6 and Ezekiel 1:7, feet of bronze were used to denote the speed and the strength of those sent by God to do his will on the earth. The message is clear — don't get in their way! The message to Rome is the same — prepare to be trampled!

Verse 16 shows a sharp two-edged sword coming from the mouth of Christ. That figure is a common symbol for judgment. In Isaiah 11:4, God smites the earth with the rod of his mouth.

Hebrews 4:12 — For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And John 12:48 tells us that we are judged by the words of Christ.

Verse 16 describes the countenance of Christ as the sun shining in his strength. That description reminds us of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Matthew 17:1-2 — And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

John had seen something like this before! There, as here, we see the glory and the divinity and the power of Christ.

Verse 16 tells us that Jesus held seven stars in his right hand. That symbol is explained in verse 20, which we will consider next.

Revelation 1:17-20

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: 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. 19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; 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.

How did John react to his vision of the risen Christ? Verse 17 tells us: “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.”

The Bible has many similar accounts from those who come face to face with the power and glory of God.

***Ezekiel 1:28** — This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.*

***Ezekiel 3:23** — Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face.*

***Ezekiel 43:3** — And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face.*

***Luke 5:8** — When Simon Peter saw it [the miracle of Jesus' filling their nets with fish], he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

***John 18:5-6** — They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.*

***Isaiah 6:5** — Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*

Do you think it's possible that we have lost some of that awe when it comes to Christ? Is it possible that Jesus has become *too* familiar to us? Remember who it is who is penning these verses. If anyone could have claimed a special familiarity with Jesus, it was John, his cousin and the apostle whom Jesus loved (John 13:23). And yet look at the relationship we see here between John and Christ.

Is Jesus our friend? Absolutely. We will never have a better friend than Jesus. Is Jesus the eternal Almighty God who created and upholds the entire universe and who is the very image of the invisible God whose face appears as the sun shining with full strength? Absolutely! And let's remember that the next time we are tempted to plaster Jesus' name on a t-shirt or a bumper sticker. And let's remember that the next time we hear someone take his name in vain.

The command "fear not" in verse 17 is generally the first thing heard after God appears to his own people! Recall, for example:

*Genesis 26:24 — And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: **fear not**, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.*

And Jesus does more than that here — he lays his right hand on John. John knew and loved Jesus, and Jesus knew and loved John. Jesus does not want John to be afraid — but Jesus is most definitely **not** saying that to Rome. Rome should be terrified!

One of the most beautiful pictures in the entire book is here in verse 17. John has fainted dead away at the sight of Christ, and how does Jesus respond? He kneels down, places his right hand on John, and tells him not to fear. That was also a message to the seven churches, and it is also a message to all Christians. Jesus is on our side, and he is **not** a distant monarch. **Jesus upholds the entire universe, and yet he notices sparrows.** A wonderful savior is Jesus our Lord!

In the next few verses, Jesus describes himself.

In verse 17, Jesus tells us that he is the first and the last. This is similar to the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, which we have already seen in verse 8, and once again, what we see here are Old Testament descriptions of God being applied to the risen Christ.

Isaiah 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.*

Isaiah 48:12 — *Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last.*

Jesus will have the last word when it comes to Rome! In fact, Jesus will have the last word when it comes to everyone!

In verse 18, Jesus tell us that he is the living one — “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.” Again, many Old Testament descriptions of God come to mind.

Joshua 3:10 — *And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you.*

Psalms 42:2 — *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*

Hosea 1:10 — *and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.*

Jeremiah 10:10 — *But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.*

But wrapped in these Old Testament descriptions of God, we have something new in verse 18 — Jesus tells us that he was dead. We see here not only the living God, but we see the living God who “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

This is a reminder to any of the persecuted Christians who might have wondered whether Jesus still loved the church. Jesus died for the church, which is his body! Revelation 5:9 will remind them of the same thing: “thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.” “We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).