

Alpha & Omega

Bible Studies in the Book of Revelation

Study #2: Revelation 1:9-20

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ABOUT “Alpha & Omega”

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

~ Revelation 1:8

Alpha & Omega is the second series of Bible Studies especially written so that you can do them alone at home, or with others in a group. They don't depend on a leader or someone affirming the right answer. The title of this series comes from the introduction of John's letter to God's people, preparing them for the persecution and difficulty the Church of Christ was about to face. But it gives them (and us) two views of this: the seen reality of what God's people experience, and the unseen reality of God's glorious and gracious rule in Christ over all these events. They suffered, and we will suffer, but Christ rules even over the suffering ... and he is returning soon with saving victory for his Church!

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION 1:9-20

The “seven churches in Asia” (Revelation 1:4) that John is writing to are identified in the second section of Revelation chapter 1. These are actual churches that were there when John wrote to them. The order in which they are listed indicates they would have formed a “circuit” for the circulation of the letter John is writing. It is likely each was a regional hub for surrounding churches. Seven are almost certainly selected to picture the perfection and completeness of Christ's church. As the letter unfolds, it becomes clear these real churches had common strengths and weaknesses that they shared with other churches throughout the period the letter covers (from Christ's birth to Christ's return), but there is nothing in the text to indicate they are not real churches or that their function in this book is to symbolically represent something other than churches!



SYMBOLISM IN REVELATION

In today's passage we meet the first of lots of symbols found in Revelation. We'll look at those as we meet them, but there are some basic rules for understanding the symbols of the book of Revelation: 1. Symbols represent something that *does not* look like the symbol. 2. Symbols in Revelation are usually *explained* where they are used. 3. Symbols *almost never* represent another symbol. 4. The symbols John uses are *consistent* with his Gospel and with the Old Testament symbols he knew, especially those in Ezekiel and Isaiah, which means *they have the same meaning* in both texts.

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GETTING STARTED

Please remember that this is God's Word. God used John to write God's words in God's way for us. So

1. Pray, asking God to give you his Spirit so that you will honour him, understand his word, and learn how to live better for Jesus.
 2. Read the passage listed above for this study. What is it mainly about?
 3. Now discuss/think about/answer the questions that follow.
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JOHN: SUFFERING FOR CHRIST ~ Revelation 1:9-11

1. **John does not assert his authority – how does he describe his relationship to those he writes to?**
 2. **Who were John's "brothers and companions is suffering?"**
 3. **In what way are the three things John shares with his brothers "ours in Jesus"?**
 - a. **The suffering** (which can be translated, "tribulation" as in Matthew 24:21) see 1 Peter 2:21
 - b. **The kingdom** see Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20; Revelation 1:6
 - c. **The Patient endurance** see Hebrews 12:1
 4. Patmos was a tiny island to which John appears to have been exiled: he does indeed "share" in tribulation! But he doesn't describe it as suffering. **What two things does John mention that were likely both the cause of his exile and the outcome of his exile?**
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SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

In the Spirit. This New Testament expression does not describe a mindless ecstatic experience, but the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer, whose mind and senses are fully engaged, to receive/ declare prophecy (eg Luke 2:26,27); or to consciously nurture holiness (eg Galatians 5:25); or to make wise decisions in life (eg Acts 20:22 cf Acts 19:21).
The Lord's Day. This is the only place in the Bible where this term is used. It could be used in Revelation to describe every day as the Lord's – for it is! But by making mention of it, he likely indicates Sunday, which had become the day Christians worshiped (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), giving a likely context for the vision he sees.

5. **What indicates John was conscious and using his senses and mind as he saw this vision?**
 6. v10 The voice that John hears sounds "like a trumpet." **Why is sounding "like a trumpet" significant?** (See Exodus 19:19; Isaiah 58:1; Matthew 24:20,21; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; & Hebrews 12:19.)
 7. **Looking at v10 with v19: What was John to write in the scroll?**
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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

John is to write what he sees on a scroll and send that single scroll to the seven listed churches in Asia. They were all to get exactly the same letter, even though parts (see chapters 2 & 3) are only addressed to individual churches. It is clear God intended each church to learn from what he said to the others: we can also learn from them.

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A VISION OF SEVEN GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS ~ Revelation 1:12-20

8. What, in verse 12, shows that John is in control of his mind and actions?
9. Verse 20 tells us what the seven golden lampstands of verse 12 symbolise. What do they represent?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Golden lampstands are an Old Testament symbol, especially in Exodus 35:31-40 where they shed their light into the place of worship, honouring God; and at the same time, illustrated God's giving light to Israel, and through Israel, to the world. (cf Zechariah 4:1-6; John 8:12; Matthew 5:14.) The churches were called to this two-fold task.

10. Who is speaking in v 18?
11. Is he the same as the one who is "like the Son of Man" in v13? How does the text make that clear?
12. The description, "like the son of man" is used by God in Daniel 7:13-14 and repeatedly in Ezekiel. Jesus regularly described himself as the "Son of Man." "Son of God," means truly God, and representing God (John 13:9-13). In the light of this **What two things are implied about Jesus by his title, "Son of Man?"**
13. Looking at Matthew 18:28-30, what is signified by Jesus being seen "among the lampstands?"
14. Without getting lost in the details, what is the impression of Jesus given in verses 13-16?
15. When John falls at Jesus' feet "as dead," Jesus gives him four reasons *not* to be afraid. What are they?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
16. What attribute of Jesus is symbolised by the sword coming from his mouth? (cf Hebrews 4:12)
17. Jesus holds "seven stars" in his hand. According to v20, what do those stars symbolise? What does that tell us about who John's message to the churches is coming from and how safe the churches are?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Some think that the angels, symbolised by stars, are the individual "pastors" of the churches. Three reasons this is unlikely: 1. In the more than 60 other times "angels" is used in Revelation, it refers to angels; 2. There were no individual "pastors" then, for churches were led by a two or more elders or pastors (the title is interchangeable). 3. God does not normally use symbols to symbolise symbols, but to symbolise what he says they symbolise!

18. In the light of this passage: What can you thank God for? What can you pray for others? What can you trust God for?
19. In the light of this passage, what changes do you need to make: In your faith? In your worship? In your attitude? In your life?