

**"REVELATION MADE RELEVANT"**

*A verse by verse exposition of the Bible's most controversial book*

*Notes are Fr. Ward's personal observations*

#### IV. John's Vision of the Son of Man (Revelation 1:9-20)

*9 "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

**A. The Prophecy's Setting** - This is the third time that John introduces himself as the scribe of this divine revelation. Even though he is given the task to communicate God's Word to the seven churches in Asia Minor, he simply refers to himself as "*a brother and fellow partaker*" in the "*tribulation, kingdom and perseverance*" which are in Jesus. In other words, he is no different ontologically (in being) than his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are also going or will be going through persecution. As noted in our earlier studies, the follower of Jesus will be persecuted by this world. In fact, a core reality in the Christian's walk is that of suffering for doing what is right. Jesus said in **John 16:33** that *in the world we will have tribulation*. We will have trials that will test our character and commitment to Christ. John was in Patmos because of his faithfulness to *the word of God and the testimony of Jesus!* According to the third century Church historian Eusebius, John had been exiled to the island of Patmos by the Emperor Domitian during a state sponsored persecution of Christians. John was later freed by the Emperor Nerva after Domitian's death at the hands of his Praetorian Guard. Patmos, an island ten miles long and six miles wide is located about thirty-seven miles south of Miletus on Asia Minor (present day Turkey) and was a Roman Penal Colony. Ancient Roman historian Tacitus, wrote in his *Annals* that the Empire used many of the small islands scattered amidst the Mediterranean Seas as places to banish political and religious dissidents. John reminds us that if we are to be faithful to God's Word and our Lord Jesus Christ three things will be true – **1) we will have tribulation** **2) we will be part of God's kingdom** - not only suffering for it but experiencing its transformational power in this life and fully in the age to come and **3) perseverance** will not only be the evidence of Christ's transformational kingdom power living in us but it will be the necessary ingredient in seeing God's will and purposes fulfilled in our lives and in world history.

When John saw his first vision, He was "*in the Spirit on the Lord's day.*" Although confined to an island and possibly even a cave, John experiences the heavenly realities of God's Spirit. He really was not confined. Earthly chains and enclosures are merely physical limitations which cannot limit the fullness of God's Spirit which reigns in the heart. Although imprisoned in body John is free in the Spirit. He is enveloped by God's presence and is able to see the hidden spiritual realities that transcend the physical universe of time and space. He does so on *the Lord's Day* which is inevitably a reference to Sunday, the new Sabbath of the New Covenant (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). What a wonderful reminder that we have access to God's presence and power anywhere or at any time! How fitting that John sees his visions on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, the day of the Resurrection. Some believe it may even have been on Easter Sunday that John received His vision.

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**B. The Voice of the Lord** - It is while John is *"in the Spirit on the Lord's day"* that he hears a loud voice like that of a trumpet! Whose voice was it? Some believe it was the angel's. However, since the vision that John will see after he hears the voice (see v. 12 below) will be that of the Lord Jesus Christ, it would stand to reason that it was the voice of Jesus Himself. The voice tells John to *"write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches"* in Asia Minor – *to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.*" Here we have the order that John is to write down on a papyrus scroll what he sees and experiences personally. This is an eyewitness account guided by the angel of the Lord and Jesus, Himself! It will be sent first to Ephesus and then the rest of the churches in the order listed – for the individual cities of which the churches were in, were linked by a "highway."

As noted in the last study, the "seven churches" not only represent the churches under John's care, but they represent all churches, the entire Body of Christ. This message is for all believers until Christ's Return.

### C. The Vision of the Lord

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

Now we have the wonderful vision John saw of the Lord Jesus Christ. This vision is part of a larger vision that incorporates the messages to the seven churches that are being spoken to by Christ Himself. What John sees is awe-inspiring and his description of each detail of Christ's body conveys timeless truths about His inner reality. *"The seven golden lampstands"* are identified later in verse 20 as the seven churches. Recall that God commanded Moses to construct the *"seven-branched lampstand"* for the tabernacle. It represented Israel as a light to the nations. In **Mt. 5:14**, Jesus said that we are the *"light of the world."* The only way we can truly be His light is if we are letting His light shine through us! Hence, Jesus, the Son of Man, is in the middle of the lampstands. As noted in last study, we are again brought back to the prophecy of **Daniel 7:13-14**. Jesus, is the fulfillment of that prophecy! He is *"clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash."* Such imagery reminds us of the robes that were worn by the priests of the Old Covenant (**Ex. 28:4**). Their vestments reflected the authority God had given them as His priests to His people. Jesus is our High Priest (cf. Heb. 5 & 7) and has divine authority to minister in the Father's name. His head and hair are like white wool, thereby indicating divine wisdom (**Prov.16:31, 20:29; Col. 2:3**). In the ancient world, such white hair commanded respect and reflected wisdom. This imagery also parallels **Daniel 7:9** where we see a similar vision of the Ancient of Days (the Father). Christ's eyes were like a *"flame of fire"* or as some translate it, a *"blazing fire."* (c.f. **Dan. 10:6**) Such imagery reflects fierce judgment and penetrating scrutiny.

*"His feet were like burnished bronze..."* We find similar descriptions in **Ez. 1:13, 27; 8:2;** and **Dan. 10:6** that reflect the glory of God. We find these words again in **Rev. 2:18** which would add a

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further dimension – one of triumphal judgment – the trampling down of false teachers and unbelievers.

*“His voice was like the sound of many waters.”* These words echo the majesty and awesome power of God. We find a similar description in **Ez. 1:24; 43:32** and in **Ps. 93:3-4**. Anyone who has ever been to Niagara Falls can appreciate this aspect of John’s vision. The Lord is an all powerful and majestic force that drowns out anything else in Creation. This imagery is again found in Rev. 14:2 and 19:6.

*“In His right hand He held seven stars.”* In the ancient world the right hand was a symbol of authority and power. The seven stars are later identified in verse 20 as “angels.” In the Old Testament (**Job 38:7**) and New Testament (**Rev. 9:1**) “stars” are used as a metaphor for angels. We will see the importance of these seven angels in verse 20. The fact that the angels are in Christ’s right hand demonstrates that He is not only greater than the angels but that they are under His authority but also are a means of His power!

*“out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword”* – a reference to the Word of God (c.f **Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17**) which highlights the power of Christ to transform evil hearts as well as to judge them – the sword cuts both ways! Unlike human swords, symbols of oppression and war, which are wielded by the hand and arm, Christ’s sword comes from His mouth. It embodies who He is as the living Word. He conquers the falsehood of the Nicolaitans at Pergamos in **Rev. 2:12, 16**; He strikes down the rebellious at His coming in **Rev. 19:15, 21**; and the faithful who follow Him all do so through the power of His Word (**Rev. 19:8, 14**)

*“His face was like the sun shining in its strength.”* There is no greater power, energy source, or light in our solar system than the sun. So too, Jesus’ face is like the sun. It reflects the divine radiance, power, and glory of Christ as the Son of God. C.S. Lewis wrote, *“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”* One could certainly interpose “Christianity” with Christ. Just as by the sun we can see and understand and live in our natural world, so by Christ we can see and understand the purpose and meaning of life and live life the way it should be lived – in His Spirit!

### D. John’s Response and Christ’s Words

*“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19”Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20“As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”*

It wasn’t the vision that was so overpowering; it was the presence of the Risen Lord! No one can stand before the Living God! We will be overwhelmed in every conceivable way. It happened to the prophets Ezekiel (Ez. 1:28) and Daniel (Dn. 8:17; 10:9). Some have experienced what is called being “slain the Spirit” where one is so overcome by the presence of the Holy Spirit that they cannot stand but fall to the ground, enveloped in the Spirit’s power and love. John may have been overwhelmed by Christ’s power and holiness, but Christ’s love shines through as He places His right

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hand on John and tells him *"Do not be afraid."* What comforting words! When we are in the Lord, when we are in the Spirit, there is no need to be afraid. As John wrote in his first letter, **I Jn. 4:18**, *"Perfect love casts out fear."*

Jesus then says the profound words, *"I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore..."* As the First and the Last, He is Creator, outside of time and space, and Lord of history. Recall last study when we looked at these same words in verse 8 and saw their correlation to **Is. 44:6** and **Is. 48:12**. As the living One, He is eternal and never changes. Such words reflect the truth that Jesus is not only God and One with the Father and the Spirit, but that He is also a person who intersected human history and the natural world – *"I was dead, and behold, am alive forevermore!"* Jesus lived, died, and rose again while He was on earth. The theology of the cross and of the atonement is at the heart of Revelation. It should not surprise us, for at the very beginning of the scroll we read, *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ."* Christ's mission was to come to earth to suffer and die for us, to pay the penalty of our sin, and to demonstrate the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He also came to give the hope of a new life and He did so through the resurrection from the dead. Jesus conquered death through His death. He gives us life through His resurrected life. There is no greater news or hope for all of mankind.

As the One who is the living One, who died and rose again, Jesus has the keys to death and *Hades*. In the ancient world, large keys were given to those who had authority and status in a community. Keys enable access to interior quarters and their contents. As the Son of God, Christ has been given authority by the Father over the living and the dead. It is only by His blood (his death) that we can enter Heaven's gates and God's throne room. *Hades* is the Greek term for the place where the spirits of the dead are kept. It is also used to translate the Hebrew word for grave. In the New Testament we find it used in reference to the departed dead (**Acts 2:27, 31**) but more specifically for the departed wicked (**Lk. 16:23; Rev. 20:13-14**). It should be noted that the believer does NOT go to *Hades*! The follower of Christ goes to *Paradeiso* or "Paradise" as when Jesus promised to the thief who repented while on the cross *"Today, you will be with me in paradise."* (**Lk. 23:43**).

John is then told by the Lord to *"write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things."* There is debate over what is meant by "the things" and the timing of these things. But one thing is clear, John is to record what he sees as eyewitness testimony! In addition, there is both a present and future reality to all of the visions which John will see and record. In other words, they are applicable for the present and pertain to the future. This continuity can be seen throughout Revelation.

Finally, we see why Revelation is to be studied and understood. At the end of the first chapter and the first vision, Christ identifies the realities that two symbols represent. He calls them a "mystery" in that what was formerly secret has now been revealed (uncovered/unveiled). So the seven stars are the seven angels of the churches and the seven lampstands are the churches themselves. So who are the seven angels? We will find in chapters 2 & 3, that the messages to each church are directed to the angels of that church. This would suggest that every church has an angel appointed to it and that the churches themselves are more than just a gathering of people or social institution but that they are a spiritual body that transcends time and space. As such they, like the angels, they are under the authority of Christ. Therefore, in the continuation of this first vision we will see how Christ personally addresses and challenges each of the seven churches in our next study.