

## Teaching for Troubled Times

Revelation 1:9-11

In verse 9 of our text, John introduced himself this way:

**“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.”**

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be used of the Lord to help write the Bible? On the face of it, this sounds like a tremendous privilege. One might even be tempted to be proud of such a privilege. After all, wouldn't it be a little tempting to sidle up to an eloquent preacher such as Apollos in Acts 18:24 just to brag a little? One might be tempted to say, *“Did you know that that Lord used me to write that?!”* If we can see that this would be a real temptation, then we get a little glimpse of our brother John the Apostle as he opens Revelation chapter 1. And he talks about trouble! What?! As he described the sparkling gem – the blessed Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ – John talked about trouble? Why?

To answer that question, we ought to think about the miseries of Moses agonizing through the Exodus from Egypt. He was insulted by insolent Israelites as he taught them what the Lord had taught him on Mt. Sinai. He wrote the first five books of the Bible under duress, even as they trudged through the wilderness due to their rebelliousness. He was Moses the meek, Moses the miserable: Moses, God's messenger. Or look at Joshua the triumphant who was troubled by the sin of Achan. Think of Samuel struggling with his people. Read about the continual stress in David's life and Asaph's life as they composed the psalms. Take time to think through the troubles faced by Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other writing prophets. Jeremiah's lament – the Book of Lamentations – alone illustrates this point. God used the miseries of His messengers to clearly communicate His message. But God delighted His servants with messages about His majesty, even as they endured horrific miseries.

Remember what the Apostle Paul wrote? **“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure”** (2 Corinthians 12:7). “Thorn” here translates the Greek word [*skolops*] which can mean a sharp stake or long thorn. And God used that thorn of Satan to keep His servant from exalting himself through the abundant revelations he received. Satan's sharp stake became a shepherd's staff in the hands of the Savior.

An unknown author wrote, *“When God wants to drill a man and thrill a man and skill a man,  
When God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part;  
When He yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed, Watch His methods, watch His ways!  
How He ruthlessly perfects whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him, and with mighty blows converts him.  
Into trial shapes of clay which only God understands;  
While his tortured heart is crying and he lifts beseeching hands!*

*How He bends but never breaks when his good He undertakes;  
How He uses whom He chooses, and which every purpose fuses him;  
By every act induces him to try His splendor out – God knows what He’s about.*

So it is not all that surprising to read John’s description of his miseries even as he exalts the majesty of Jesus Christ. This is his message to all the saints of God. Paul and Barnabas described their ministry among the churches as **“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”** (Acts 14:22).

With that in mind, let’s read Revelation 1:9-11 -- **“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. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 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.”**

John, the servant of Christ described the setting in which he received the Revelation of Christ. Then he went on to relate his mission: to carefully convey the statements of Christ. What can we learn about the way God prepares His servants to persevere in troubled times? Here are three important steps in the making of God’s man.

### **The Lord enables His Servant to go through troubling miseries. v. 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.”**

#### **God leads His man through trouble.**

John is identified as the servant of Christ (1:1), Christ’s witness (1:2), whom God used to write this letter (1:4). Here John identifies himself as **“your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ...”** John was their brother in Christ and their partner, being persecuted just like the members of the seven churches to whom he wrote.

The early church historian, Irenaeus, recorded that John was the pastor of the church at Ephesus, where he wrote the Gospel of John.<sup>i</sup> Irenaeus also recorded the name of the tyrant who sent John into exile: Domitian, the Roman Czar who used governmental power to persecute believers.<sup>ii</sup> He exiled John to the island of Patmos. This places the writing of the Revelation at about 96 A.D. Patmos is an island about 160 miles east/southeast of Athens, Greece. The island is about 7 miles long, north to south and it’s about 6 miles wide. If you use your imagination, the island looks like a sea horse, facing east. Looking at a map, you can see that he was familiar with the route by which his letter would be delivered. Beginning at Ephesus, moving northward to Smyrna, and Pergamos, the messenger would then head south/southeast to the remaining four churches.

Writing to these churches, John referred to himself as their brother and partner in trouble. He taught them in troubled times. He described their troubling miseries as **“tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.”** These three words appear after one definite article (the word “the”); in the

original language, this indicates that they are to be grouped together as one. This grouping consists of troubling miseries (present and future), the future millennium and the present, patient endurance to wait for that coming kingdom. As we studied during the "Wait for it" series the Scriptures emphasize waiting faithfully in patience and hope. The Apostle John introduced himself as the brother and companion of all who press ahead with patient endurance, trusting the Lord until He comes. What brought such tribulation into John's life? John told us it was **"for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."** John referred to Jesus as "The Word of God" in John 1:1-4. It was for Him – for the testimony of Jesus Christ – that John faced trouble.

We could look upon John as one of **"the great cloud of witnesses"** who glorified the Lord (Hebrews 12:1) with those described in Hebrews chapter 11. There the exhortation is **"... let us run with patience the race that is set before us."** In our own troubled times, it's important to remember how these saints of old gave witness to the glory of God. For the first believers who received this Book of the Revelation, those were perilous times in the Roman Empire. Polycarp, the pastor at Smyrna was burned at the stake. Ignatius, the pastor at Antioch, was the first Christian to be taken to Rome and flung to the lions as entertainment in the Roman Colosseum.

But John emphasized that this was the **"tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ."** Our Lord, the Author and Finisher of our faith, endured the cross, thinking little of the shame, as He died on that cross for our sins (Hebrews 12:2). Three days later, when he rose again from the dead, He showed more than five hundred eyewitnesses that He was physically alive (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). When you trust Christ, you take up your own cross daily (Luke 9:23). Like John, you become a partaker in trials and troubles as you patiently wait for the coming of the kingdom of God. This is why John refers himself as a brother and companion to all Gospel-believing people. The seven churches of the Revelation desperately needed this teaching, and we need it even more desperately today. Paul taught Timothy, **"...all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"** (2 Timothy 3:12). And today, we are the beneficiaries of The Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to help us endure such troubles patiently. This is teaching for troubled times.

### **God leads His man through loneliness.**

Some have speculated that John was sent to work in the mines of Patmos. Others have insisted that he was sent to be alone – away from any who could hear his Gospel message. But, in any case, we know that John was sent away from the fellowship of believers. Like Paul who was placed in prison, John was exiled to Patmos. But Satan's sharp stake became a shepherd's staff in the hands of the Savior. Remember that John had encouraged believers with their remarkable fellowship even in, or especially in, troubled times. **"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full"** (1 John 1:3-4). Yes, we may endure trouble and loneliness, but it's important to remember that our fellowship is with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ! The church historian, Clement of Alexandria, recorded that John returned from the isle of Patmos after the Roman tyrant's death.<sup>iii</sup>

### **The Lord delights His Servant with His triumphant majesty. vs. 10**

**I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last...**

How does the Lord take His man through such miseries? This is teaching for troubled times.

**God delights His man with His Spirit:** (John was "in the Spirit"). Here this undoubtedly refers to the moving of the Spirit of God to write the inspired Scriptures. Nevertheless, every believer can partake of the filling of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and the Spirit guides us to worship the Lord's majesty in the midst of our misery. **God delights His man with His day:** (the Lord's Day is a reference to Sunday,<sup>iv</sup> the day of the Lord's bodily resurrection from the dead). It is instructive that, even in exile, John made a special point of mentioning the Lord's Day as he worshipped the Lord. The early churches met several times each week, but kept a special emphasis on meeting on Sunday. You too can find great delight in the Lord by honoring Him on the first day of the week. God delights His man with His words and His presence ("**and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last...**"). John, the "**disciple whom Jesus loved**" (John 20:2) was thrilled to hear the voice of His Lord. The Lord's voice, like a trumpet call announcing the entrance of Christ's Majesty, did not leave John as a victim of his miseries. Truly, the Lord delights His servant with His triumphant majesty. The Lord said, "**I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last...**". This is "the Alpha and Omega" who introduced Himself in verse 8. This is Jesus, who walked upon the waves to be with His troubled disciples who were tossed to and fro in the storm. John, in his time of trouble, was greeted by the risen majestic Lord, whose voice was like a trumpet. This is a marvelous illustration of how the Lord shows His servants His majesty in the midst of their miseries.

### **The Lord sends His Servant to take on his God-given mission. v. 11**

**"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."**

Jesus charged John to write this majestic vision in a book. He instructed John to send this Book of the Revelation to these seven churches. It has been pointed out that seven (7) is the number of perfection. We believe that these seven churches represent all of Christ's churches throughout all ages. As we shall see, persecuted churches, like Smyrna, are struggling in the world today. And churches such as Ephesus and Philadelphia – with all their advantages and all of their problems – are still alive and well on earth nearly 2,000 years after this letter was written. On this occasion, John's mission was to write the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. What mission has God given to you? How does the Lord want you to show the glory of Jesus Christ to others? Will you patiently endure until He comes? May God grant that we would be filled with the message of His majesty in the midst of all our miseries.

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<sup>i</sup> See Irenaeus of Lyons, Book III. Accessed at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus.html>

<sup>ii</sup> See Irenaeus, Book V. 30.3 accessed at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus.html>

<sup>iii</sup> See Clement of Alexandria, XLII. Accessed at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement.html>

<sup>iv</sup> See 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Sunday was the day for the special corporate meetings of the church. Paul alluded to these special meetings in 1 Corinthians 5:4, 11:18, 20