

The Vision of the Son of God (Revelation 1:9-20)

Because the book of Revelation has as its theme the return of Jesus Christ in His glory—“the Lamb is Lord”—it’s essential that we gain a better perspective on the fullness of the Savior’s glory. Revelation 1:9-20 presents a visually stunning picture of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Unlike our Sunday School pictures that portray Him in His gentle humility, this passage reveals another aspect of Jesus’ identity. Jesus is our radiant God who delights to be among His redeemed people.

Don’t feel alone—Jesus is with us even when times are tough (1:9-11).

Because Jesus lives among His people we need never feel alone. The original recipients of the book of Revelation were enduring harsh persecution. They could take comfort in knowing that Jesus was with them.

Those who follow Jesus will suffer persecution (1:9).

John, the human author of Revelation, describes himself as our “brother.” Although he was an authoritative apostle he wanted to identify closely with all who suffer for the cause of Jesus Christ. In fact, he further describes himself as one who “shared together” in the persecution of God’s people. He shared in “the suffering and kingdom and endurance” in Jesus. Many people suffer persecution because of their faith in Jesus, a fact about which Jesus warned His followers (John 15:20). But true believers also share in the kingdom of Jesus, that is, we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom that will become an earthly kingdom when Jesus returns. Likewise, we share in the endurance that comes from our faith in Jesus, the strength He gives to all who suffer for Him.

John himself knew what it was to be persecuted. At the time that he received the visions of Revelation he was on a small, rocky island called Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor. The Romans had formed a penal colony on this island, putting enemies of the state to forced labor in its mines. John had been banished to Patmos because of his commitment to the “word of God” and the “testimony of Jesus.” In other words, John stood up for truth, the truth about Jesus as Lord. The Roman emperor, Domitian, demanded that everyone declare him to be the divine Lord, but Christians could not do so in good conscience. Therefore, many believers like John experienced harsh persecution because they remained faithful to Jesus Christ. In various places, in various times, and in various ways Christians will suffer persecution.

Those who follow Jesus will listen to His voice (1:10-11).

John states, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.” His spiritual state involved, apparently, a special interaction between the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) and his own human spirit by which he was able to receive the visions of Revelation. “The Lord’s Day” may refer to the eschatological “Day of the Lord,” but more likely refers to the day on which the Lord Jesus Christ came to be honored in the early church—Sunday, the day of resurrection. Although this

phrase isn't used in this way in the New Testament it did have this meaning in other early Christian writings.

On that particular day John heard a loud voice behind him, a voice that was best described as the sound of a trumpet. Trumpets introduce great announcements, and John was about to receive a great revelation from Jesus Christ. The voice instructed John to write in a scroll what he was about to see and to send this book to seven specific churches located in seven cities—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These cities roughly formed a circle in the Roman province of Asia, and the messengers from the seven churches would likely travel that circuit when presenting the book of Revelation. These seven churches would come to represent all churches, since their descriptions in chapters 2 and 3 apply readily to churches throughout the ages. John, of course, paid attention to the voice he heard just as Christians today should listen to the voice of the Lord as recorded in the Word of God. The fact that God spoke to John in the midst of persecution reminds us that we are never alone, even in difficult situations. Jesus is always with His people.

**Don't be mistaken—Jesus is
resplendent beyond compare (1:12-16).**

Too many Christians have a minimal understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ. We tend to think of Him only in His humility, as the gentle servant from Galilee. But there's more to Jesus, much more. He is, indeed, the humble Savior but He's also our radiant and divine Lord, resplendent in His appearance when viewed in His fullness. It's this revelation of Jesus that John now describes.

The Lord Jesus, the messianic Son of Man, is present among His people (1:12-13a).

Having heard a trumpet-like voice John naturally turned around to see who was speaking to Him. What he saw was an overwhelming vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, John saw "seven golden lampstands" which would hold seven oil lamps. The ancient Tabernacle had as one piece of its furnishings a single lampstand with seven branches to provide light inside the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:31-40; compare Zechariah 4:2). But John saw seven distinct golden lampstands, gold portraying value and lamps portraying the light of God's truth. Verse 20 tells us that these seven golden lampstands represented the seven churches of verse 11. Churches are valuable to Jesus and shed light in a dark world.

In the midst of the seven golden lampstands was "one like a son of man." Daniel 7:13-14 first uses this phrase referring to the coming messianic king who receives authority over the nations from God the Father. It came to be a title for the Messiah and was a favorite way in which Jesus described Himself during His earthly ministry (Matthew 8:20; 12:8; 16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31). Jesus is the Son of Man, the Messiah. John saw Jesus in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Jesus is present among His churches, among His people. Even where two or three are gathered, Jesus is in our midst (Matthew 18:20).

The Lord Jesus, the messianic Son of Man, is clothed in priestly dignity (1:13b).

Next, John took notice of Jesus' apparel. Jesus was "clothed to the feet," that is, He was wearing a full length robe. Such a robe was the attire of the ancient high priests (Exodus 28:2-4; 29:5; Zechariah 3:4—each of these passages uses the same Greek term in the Septuagint translation as Revelation 1:13). Jesus is our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14) who continually intercedes for His people. Jesus was also wearing a golden sash around His chest. Gold again speaks of value and, in the case of Jesus, deity. The position of this sash implies dignity (compare Revelation 15:6)—had it been around Jesus' waist it would have referred to work or warfare (compare Daniel 10:5; John 13:4; Ephesians 6:14). Jesus stands in the midst of His people as our dignified and intercessory High Priest.

The Lord Jesus, the messianic Son of Man, has the appearance of penetrating purity (1:14-15a).

From Jesus' apparel, John's attention moves to Jesus' appearance. Purity and judgment are themes in this description of Jesus. The Son of Man's "head and hair" were "white as wool" and "white like snow." The color white in this context refers to holiness or purity (Isaiah 1:18). In addition, Daniel 7:9 describes God the Father, the "Ancient of Days," as having hair that is "white like wool." Like God the Father, God the Son is "ancient," eternal in being as well as holy in character.

Jesus' eyes were like "blazing fire" and His feet were like "glowing bronze" (compare Revelation 2:18; 19:12). Fire often refers to judgment, and the fact that Jesus' eyes were like blazing fire reminds us that His penetrating glance convicts our hearts of our deepest sins. Bronze also refers to judgment. The place of sacrifice at the ancient Temple was an altar of bronze, a place where sin was judged (Exodus 27:1-2). The fact that Jesus' feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace speaks to His firm stance on absolute justice. Interestingly, an angelic messenger described in Daniel 10:5-6 had a nearly identical appearance. Jesus is, of course, superior to angels (Hebrews 1:4), but His angelic messengers reflect aspects of His glory. Jesus in His glory has the appearance of penetrating purity.

The Lord Jesus, the messianic Son of Man, possesses preeminent power (1:15b-16).

When John first heard the voice it was like a trumpet blast. Now John compares the voice of Jesus to the sound of "many waters," a description ascribed to God the Father in Ezekiel 43:2. Like a roaring waterfall, Jesus' words reveal impressive power. Next we read that Jesus held seven stars in His right hand, the hand that implies power or authority (compare Revelation 2:1; 3:1). Verse 20 reveals that these seven stars are the seven messengers of the churches. Jesus has authority over the churches and their messengers. It's also comforting to remember that Jesus protectively holds His people in His hand (John 10:28). Coming from the mouth of Jesus was a "sharp double-edged sword" (compare Revelation 2:12, 16; 19:15). Such a sword speaks of precise, comprehensive, powerful judgment (compare Hebrews 4:12). By His spoken word Jesus will judge sin. Finally, John describes the face of Jesus in His glory. His face "shines as the sun in its power." John would have witnessed a glimpse of this glory at Jesus' transfiguration, where Jesus' face "shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2). Now John sees Jesus' face radiating with the full power of His glory. Some would see this as the comforting warmth of Jesus' presence (Numbers 6:25), but John's response of abject fear rules this out. Jesus'

appearance at every level was one of frightening purity, power, and majesty. Jesus is resplendent in appearance, righteous in judgment, and regal in power.

**Don't be afraid—Jesus is supreme
over death, life, and all eternity (1:17-20).**

If we were to see Jesus in His glory His appearance would strike fear in our hearts. But Jesus reassures His people that we share with Him in His victory over sin and death. He is alive. He is the author and giver of life. Our eternity is secure in His hands.

We need not fear because Jesus is alive, victorious over death (1:17-18).

When John turned and saw Jesus in such brilliant glory he “fell as his feet as though dead.” John and the other disciples had a similar experience when they witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:6). Apart from His divine grace, it’s impossible to stand in the presence of our glorified Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus granted such grace to John, extending His right hand (apparently temporarily releasing the stars from that hand) and touched John. He assured John that there was no need to fear. While fear is the natural response to the glory of Jesus, peace is the natural response to His grace.

Jesus then described Himself as “the first and the last,” comparable to being the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8; 22:13). Jesus is eternal God. Jesus also described Himself as “the living one,” referring to His self-existence as God. This living one “came to be dead” as our sacrifice on the cross. However, “Behold,” Jesus declared, “I am alive forever and ever!” Jesus is the living one by virtue of His divine self-existence and He is alive again by virtue of His resurrection from the dead. He is victorious over death (1 Corinthians 15:25, 54-56). In fact, Jesus holds “the keys of death and Hades.” He has authority over death, determining the time and means by which we will pass from this earthly existence. He also has authority over Hades, the place of the unseen, the final destination specifically of those who reject Him (compare Revelation 20:14).

We need not fear because Jesus knows the past, present, and future (1:19).

Verse 19 serves as a simple outline for the book of Revelation, a key verse that captures the flow of the book. Jesus instructed John to write what he had seen, what was taking place in the present time, and what would take place in the future. The past revelation included chapter 1, the present includes chapters 2-3 (the descriptions of the churches), and the future encompasses chapters 4-22 of Revelation. Jesus knows the past, the present, and the future. Because He knows the end from the beginning we need not fear what lies ahead but can trust Him with every aspect of our lives and our eternity.

We need not fear because Jesus understands the mysteries of His eternal plan (1:20).

At this point Jesus prepares to transition from this revelation of His glory to His message to the seven churches. He does so by interpreting two mysteries, the mystery of the seven stars

and the mystery of the seven lampstands. A mystery in biblical terms refers to a previously undisclosed truth that's now made known by divine revelation.

The seven stars in Jesus' right hand "are the angels of the seven churches." The word "angel," of course, means "messenger" and can refer to human messengers or supernatural angelic messengers. Most often in Revelation it refers to angelic messengers. However, in reference to the seven churches it seems best to view these messengers as human representatives of each of the seven churches, people who would deliver John's writings to the churches. These may have been officials from each church or merely couriers assigned to the churches. They certainly would have been reputable individuals who could be entrusted with such a spectacular mission of carrying John's message to the churches.

Jesus then revealed the mystery of the seven lampstands as representing the seven churches (compare verse 11). Jesus, in the midst of His churches, has a message to share that will help each church fulfill its purpose of shining the light of the gospel into our dark world. Because Jesus is supreme over death, life, and eternity the good news about His saving work is worth sharing with everyone near and far. After all, Jesus is our radiant God who delights to be among His redeemed people.