

# Revelation

*Part Eight  
The Gloried Savior  
(Revelation 1:13-20)*

*With Study Questions*

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## Preface

By all observable standards, John (the author of the Revelation) is in a miserable condition. Due to his faith in Christ and inclusion in Christ's kingdom, he, along with the churches to whom he is writing, is in **"the tribulation" (Revelation 1:9)**. He is writing from a rocky island off the coast of Asia Minor (now Turkey) call Patmos. It was designed for political prisoners-especially those who would not bow the knee to Caesar. The religious condition was dismal. Much of the Old Covenant church had been reduced to Synagogues of Satan and many of the true churches (as we shall see in the seven letters) were on the verge of collapse.

In the Spirit, John hears a voice telling him to write to those churches. He then has his first vision. In the midst of the lampstands (which are the churches) he sees an example of what it meant when Jesus said, in the Great Commission, **"I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b)**. We will now read what John saw.

**...and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. <sup>14</sup> His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; <sup>15</sup> His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; <sup>16</sup> He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. <sup>17</sup> And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. <sup>19</sup> Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. <sup>20</sup> 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 which you saw are the seven churches (Revelation 1:13-20).**

## Introduction

The author of Hebrews compares our lives to a race. His counsel regarding this race is that we lay aside things that are heavy or things which might trip us up. These are metaphors for sin and temptation. Then he exhorts us to do something else. We are to run this race, **"fixing our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2)**. He then lists attributes of Jesus we should seek to imitate. It would appear that fixing our eyes upon Jesus (at

least here) would have more to do with trusting in Jesus and imitating His behavior than forming an image of Him in our minds.

Yet it is very difficult for us, when thinking about Jesus, to avoid allowing our minds to drift through the tome of art dedicated to those who have imagined, then artfully rendered, what He must have looked like. We tend to gravitate toward images of Jesus that we think we need at any given season in our lives.

The most dominant images are the very tender, understanding, almost pacifistic Jesus who is sensitive to my failures, gently letting me know it will be okay. And there is certainly something to be said for that. Another dominant image is the crucified Christ—the Christ on the crucifix. I once read a paper where a historian argued that cultures which were dominated by this image were cultures where the church remained in a constant state of poverty and oppression. As if that image yielded that result. Either way, images can be very influential.

Time does not allow a deep study on how images of Christ (along with the Father and the Holy Spirit) are a violation of the Second Commandment (see my sermons on the Ten Commandments if interested). But it is worth noting that the passage above is the only passage in the New Testament where we see anything that resembles a description of Jesus.

I am not recommending here that we begin making images of Jesus with a sword coming out of His mouth. Notice the phrase, **“One like (*homoion*) the Son of Man”** giving us some distance or separation between the description and the Person. All this to say, as Pastor Joel Ellis observes, “while the person is Christ...the description is of His glory (reflected in symbolic features and garments), not His person.” Jesus is currently the same person as He was after His resurrection and at His ascension.

Hopefully, having cleared the air, what I am going to suggest is that John is writing about how he (actually God) wants his readers to think of Jesus, especially in light of the fiery furnace they were enduring. It is not the Jesus on the crucifix. It is not the docile, interpersonal, ‘there-there’ Jesus. It is a Jesus, who at the conclusion of John’s encounter, left him falling at **“His feet as dead.”** The same apostle who leaned on the bosom of Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13:23) had quite a different experience when beholding the glory of this vision!

## What John Saw

Sermon after sermon can be written on every single attribute which John sees in this vision (a near identical vision is given in Daniel 10:4-19). But we will go through them rapidly so as to stay on track with the bigger picture.

Remember, John sees this vision of Jesus in the **“midst of the seven lampstands”** which are the seven churches (Revelation 1:20). This should solidify in our minds and hearts the critical nature of the local, visible church. He is with His church in a very unique way. Jesus is **“clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest.”** As one raised in the Old Covenant, John would immediately recognize this as the full expression of the priesthood.

The vision is intense. But it opens with the description of the garments of an advocate. The priest approaches God on behalf of fallen men. We need one. If we have

Christ, we have one and stand in need of no other. How obvious this must have been to John.

Strikingly different is this Priest! Unlike all before Him, with **“His head and hair...like white wool, as what as snow”** He shares the characteristics of the Father, the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9). He is one of us, yet one with the Father. This pure whiteness denoting infinite wisdom, maturity, purity and goodness. He is the all-sufficient Priest.

**“His eyes like a flame of fire”** should begin to yield in our hearts His all-searching omniscience (all-knowing). Again and again the seven churches will be met with the phrase from Jesus **“I know your works.”** To be known so well is both fearful and comforting. What we won't tell our closest friends due to fear of being ostracized (being cast out), we will tell our counselor in our desire to be healed. We have no distant Savior. He searches us and knows us. He discerns our thoughts from afar (Psalm 139:1-3). We will be healed, or we will be judged.

**“Brass feet”** denotes magnificent strength as does the **“voice as the sound of many waters.”** I recall in high school going to The Wedge in Newport Beach to body surf. We were about a block away and I could hear/feel the pounding of the waves. I wondered what I was getting myself into. But these were mere eight to ten-foot waves. What John was experiencing made this a mere drip. Of course, the voice, unlike the feet, is saying something. It is not mindless power, like a golden calf. We will occasionally read in the Gospels that Jesus taught **“as one who had authority” (Matthew 7:29)**. Some managed to ignore Jesus, even with His authority. The Jesus of John's vision will not be ignored.

Before John goes on with the garments and appearance of Jesus, he almost parenthetically calls us to notice what He has in His right hand. He holds **“seven stars”** which we are told are **“angels” (Revelation 1:20)**. This may be because they are both messengers and light-bearers. For a variety of reasons, we can't enter into now, it is generally held that these angels are the pastors of the churches. The word **“angel”** *angelo* simply means messenger.

The source of the message these messengers are to bring are found in the next portion of the vision, **“out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.”** The **“sword”** is the word of God (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17). And the angels/messengers (bringer of the evangel-Gospel) are commissioned to deliver that word by one whose **“countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.”** All of this conveying the absolute wisdom, power and authority of the faithfully preached, biblically based word of God.

It is not lost on me that I, as a pastor, get to be the angel in this drama. Some might chide me. Isn't it convenient that you get to be the angel!! Some who know me well might observe, “I know Pastor Paul and believe me, he is no angel.” Of course, this would all be an equivocation regarding the word, angel, which in its basic form, simply means messenger. At the same time, I, and all pastors, should fearfully execute their task. The pulpit should not be overly casual. Nor should it be a place for a pastor to merely offer some cultural outlook. One should take a deep breath before offering opinions on God. And it should ever come from the sword, the word of God.

I visited a church in Italy that had a painting of angels in the upper corners behind the pulpit looking towards it with a book and quill in hand, as if to record every

word that came from the pastor's mouth. I then remember coming upon a quotation regarding the importance of the pastoral/preaching ministry:

**His throne is the pulpit; he stands in Christ's stead; his message is the word of God; around him are immortal souls; the Savior, unseen, is beside him; the Holy Spirit broods over the congregation; angels gaze upon the scene, and heaven and hell await the issue. What associations, and what vast responsibility!**

### **John's Response and Christ's Comfort**

We now see John's response. The same apostle who heard, and recorded, Jesus saying, **"No longer do I call you slaves...but I have called you friends" (John 15:15) "fell at His feet as dead."** We should never enjoy the intimacy and immanence (personal, close experience) of God at the expense of the glory and transcendence of God. We pray **"Our Father"** (intimacy) followed by **"in heaven"** (glory).

I'm guessing most of us have never been so afraid of anything, that we would fall as dead! There are things we have a little bit of fear about and we are comforted with a little bit of a solution. If I'm afraid I have a cold, I am comforted with some chicken soup. But John had no answer for this level of fear. Truly did Newton write, "twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear that hour I first believed." I pray that grace has found its way into the souls of us all.

Jesus **"laid His right hand (designating power and authority) on [John], saying...Do not be afraid."** These are no mere empty words. So often we might say to each other, "things will be fine" when we simply cannot offer such a statement with genuine credibility. But Jesus can. And He explains why He can. He is **"the First and the Last."** This is an undeniable reference to His deity (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12; Revelation 1:8; 21:6). Jesus is truly God.

But the Christians comfort is not built entirely upon the notion that there is a true God in heaven. It is that the true God prepared a body for His Son that He might conquer death on our behalf. Jesus lives, but **"was dead, and behold [He] is alive forevermore."** Our most formidable and inevitable enemy **"Hades and...death,"** that is, death and the place of the dead, is something, someplace, to which Jesus holds the keys. It is the same Jesus who taught,

**And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).**

The basis, the foundation, of Jesus' words of comfort are that He was dead and now lives. And He will live forevermore! We have already stated many times that the theme of Revelation is *The Triumph of Christ (or Christianity) Over All Opposition (or Evil)*. Every ounce of that victory over every ounce of that evil is contingent upon, dependent upon, the Resurrection!

## Conclusion

The chapter ends (some think these verses may belong as an introduction to chapter two), with John giving us an outline of the entire book. John is to write what he has already seen, which is the vision we have just encountered. He is then to write **“the things which are.”** The things which are would be what is happening in the seven churches (chapters two and three). Finally, part three of the outline is the remainder of Revelation.

Let it not escape our notice that there is a ministerial target in the Revelation. It is the church and how they are taught—the **“lampstands”** and the **“angels”** or messengers/pastors. Though Christ is the head of all things, the church is His body and it is to the church, primarily, that He is given.

**And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22, 23).**

We often wonder why certain cultures take turns for the worse or for the better. I am firmly convinced it is due to what is, or is not, happening in the pulpit and the churches.

The image of Christ, as of late prevailing, looks nothing like the vision John has calling his readers to worship and trust. The truth of God’s word is often compromised or supplanted altogether. And the aim of heralding the glory of the Christ of whom we just read has become outdated and archaic. These seven churches will continually be reminded of the attributes we read of in chapter one as they are called to stay the course and persevere to the end. We should take heed.

## Questions for Study

1. What was John’s condition when writing Revelation (page 2)?
2. What does it mean to fix your eyes upon Jesus? What are the dangers associated with having a false image of Jesus (page 3)?

3. Where is Jesus in John's vision? Why is this important (page 3)?
4. What do we learn by the clothing worn by the glorified Christ (pages 3, 4)?
5. What is the significance of the white head and hair, eyes like a flame of fire, brass feet and voice as the sound of many waters (page 4)?
6. Who are the stars and what are they commissioned to do (pages 4, 5)?
7. How does John respond to the vision? How does Jesus respond to John (page 5)?
8. What is the foundation of Jesus' words of comfort (page 6)?
9. Who is the ministerial target in Revelation and why (page 6)?