

First Vision: The Seven Churches  
of Asia - 1:9-3:22

Vision of the Risen and Ascended Christ vs. 9-20

Verse 9

John personally addresses his readers. He relates to his audience by identifying himself as a brother, and also as a participator (not a mere observer) as John used here a term *sugkoinōnes* - a partner with the strengthening prefix *sun*.) What was it that John co-shared with his readers? John writes *The Revelation* during a time of intense persecution of the Church. John states that he was a co-sharer "in the tribulation" of his readers. The term *thlipsei* means an affliction i.e., persecution.

Note: See Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church*; also appendix of this commentary on *Persecutions and the Early Church*.

But John also shared the glories of the King of Glory, and the precious promises for all those who continue till the end. Being in Christ enables one to endure (*hupomonē* - endurance or patience) even banishment. John declares that he "was (*egenomēn* - 2nd aor. mid. indicative) on the Island of Patmos." The use of the past tense suggests that John was not there when he wrote *The Revelation*. The middle voice form of the verb implies that he banished himself. It might be that John, like the other apostles (Acts 4:14-22), was requested to modify his message, that is, if he wanted to continue to preach in public. As a faithful ambassador, John declined such conditions for preaching; and thus banished himself to Patmos. John was on Patmos (an Island about 28 miles south, southwest of Samos) "for the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus." This translation is not strong enough. Literally, John wrote that he was on the Island because or on account (*dia* with the accusative has casual force) of the Word and testimony of Jesus. This situation was similar to Paul's when he declares (1 Cor. 4:10) that - "We are fools for Christ's sake." Literally, Paul said we are morons because of Christ (also *dia* with the acc. case). Christ is thus *the cause* of the world's attitude that they were fools. This is also the theme of Fyodor Dostoevski's *The Idiot*. Our English word idiot is from the Greek word meaning isolated one or one who can not live in a social context i.e., to be alone.

## Verse 10

John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (*tē kuriakē hēmera*). The phrase "on the Lord's Day" appears only here in the N.T. scriptures. This is not the eschatological phrase - "the day of the Lord" (II Thess. 2:2). The standard N.T. phrase for the first day of the week is *mia tōn sabbatōn*.

Note: See Acts 20:7; Matt. 28:1 - *eis mian sabbatōn* - toward one of the sabbaths. See the Appendix after this chapter - *The Lord's Day and Sabbath Controversy Revisited!*

The term translated Lord is *kuriakē* (imperial), and it is the same term found in I Corinthians 11:20 (*kuriakon* - concerning The Lord's Supper). John had prepared himself (mid voice - aor) to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and suddenly the holy silence was broken with the unexpected entrance of the voice of God. His voice was as the assembling tones of a war trumpet (*salpiggos* - war trumpet).

## Verse 11

The voice spoke directly and specifically to John, and commanded him to write (*grapson* - 1st aor. imperative the things that he was to see) in a scroll (*Biblion* - scroll rather than book). The use of the term book in our translation is an anachronism, because what we call a book was much later in developing than the New Testament period. The revelatory visions which were vouched safe to John and as he was commanded write so also he was commanded to send (*pempson* - 1st aor. imperative - active) the revealed information to the seven churches. (Note location of each city on the map.)

Note: Five of the seven cities were mentioned by Tacitus, *Annals*, 4. 53-56, p. 176-177; Modern Library edition, New York, 1942 - there was a debate over which of these cities was to be honored with the to-be erected Temple in commemoration of Tiberius.

## Verse 12

John turned to see who the speaker was (or source of the voice) who had entered conversation with him (*met emou* - means a conversation and not merely one person addressing a listener). After he had finished the act of turning, he was in a single act seven golden lampstands - the imagery is taken from the lampstand of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:31).

*Verse 13*

John declares that he saw one standing among (*en mesō* - in the middle) of the lampstands, and this royal person was like (*homion* - one like) the son of man (no definite article, but still the title of Christ and not merely a man) - See Daniel 7:13. This is one of the beautiful messianic titles used by the Lord Himself.

Note: See B. B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory*, reprinted Zondervan Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, N.D. - chpt. *The Witness of the Apocalypse*, pp. 286-297 (brilliant Calvinist - Bible believer of a past generation); for student grounded in the Word and able to evaluate the brilliant scholarship of one who does not hold a high view of the scriptures as revelation, see Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1956, chp. 10, *The Son of Man* - pp. 346-450 - also excellent contemporary bibliography; see also *Special Study* in this commentary on *The Titles for Christ in The Revelation*. The Interpreters Bible, contains the popularized negative critical attitude toward the scriptures. (Abindgon Press, 1954, Nashville, Tenn. Martin Rist and Lynn H. Hough authored the material on the Revelation. See page 375, volume 12, chp. 11:13 for a denial that Daniel's "Son of Man" concept is messianic. See the counter claim made by Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, Eerdmans, 1949, p. 154.

The remaining imagery of this verse is kingly or priestly in origin (See Daniel 10:5; Isaiah 6:1). With great flowing picturesque language, John describes our marvelous messiah. The garments which clothe Him reaches from head to foot - (*podēvē* - from pous - foot, and aor - to fasten). This is a robe of honor, and symbolizes a person of the highest standing. The next beautiful imagery is conveyed by the phrase (*perizōsmenon* - *mastos*) and speaks of the priestly garment. The priest was bound at the breasts with a golden girdle. There is no question but that this symbolism is priestly, and that it applies to our messiah, who is prophet, priest, and king. This golden girdle was used as a symbol of righteousness, and power, etc., in the O.T. (Isaiah 11:5, etc., in Ephesians 6:14 - The Christian's girdle is truth).

*Verse 14*

This verse continues the description of the one "like unto the son of man" (Daniel 10:6). As John continues to describe Daniel's Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9) he uses terms suggesting the pre-existing Christ (as John 1:1 asserts). The symbols of purity dance upon the stage of the great drama. The ancient of Days is set upon the stage of the human drama of sin and

salvation. John's next phrase was used over 700 years before the postman of Patmos sent heaven's message unto the Churches of Asia. Daniel said "His eyes were lamps of fire (Dan. 10:6). The imagery above probably relates to the eternality and purity of "the Son of Man."

*Verse 15*

The source of the imagery is still Daniel. The meaning of the term translated "burnished brass" (*chalkolibanō*) is not known for certain, but this fits the imagery very well. For the next imagery John reaches back into the Spirit inspired scroll of Ezekiel 1:24, 43:2, etc. Here the "voice as of many waters" flows to God's Patmos bound penman from the prophet beyond the Chebar (Ezekiel).

*Verse 16*

The one "like unto the Son of Man" hold seven stars in His right hand, "and out of his mouth proceedeth a two-edged sword." The imagery of the "two edged sword" is the Word of God (see Heb. 4:12; Rev. 19:15).

Note: For many O.T. examples of the symbol of the sharp sword see William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* Vol. I, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1962 impression, p. 63 - some excellent material in Barclay's works, but does not always show a high regard for the Bible as God's Word).

John takes us by the hand and leads us into the light of God's presence when he states "that his countenance shines (*phainei* - pres. tense - keeps on shining - see John 1:5) in the power of it." The 1901 text erroneously translates the present tense (*phainei*) "his countenance was (?) as the sun shineth in his strength." The use of this English past tense implies that the countenance used to shine but does not anymore. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Truly, Jesus is "the light that keeps on lighting every man that comes into the World" - John 1:9. Thanks be to God - Light shall prevail over darkness!

*Verse 17*

The effect of seeing one "like unto the Son of Man" was so awe-inspiring that John "fell (*epesa* - 1st aor. ind.) at his feet as one dead." The one who held "the seven stars in his right hand" now stretches it forth in a touch of mercy as "he placed his right hand on me saying: fear not (*mē phobou* - pres. mid.

imperative - the ability to obey the command was in the subject - thus the use of the middle voice literally stop being afraid!) The 1901 A.V. faultily translates the phrase "I was dead" (*egenomen* - 2nd aor. mid. act.) means rather that "I became dead" of my own free act (this is the significance of the middle voice). Christ was the only prey that death held no claim to, but for our redemption he "became obedient unto death" - Phil. 2:8. Through the glorious resurrection of Christ, the victim became victor "and behold (*idou* - look here) I am alive (literally living from present participle *zōn*) for evermore and, I have the keys of death and of hades." Christ is here asserting that He alone controls the realm of death and the realm of the unseen.

Note: See appendix on *Death* immediately following chap 2 for some brief thoughts: and see the *Special Study* in this commentary on the *Biblical Doctrines in The Revelation* for brief study on the Greek term *hades*. This English word is made by transcribing directly from the Greek word; it is not a translation of the term.

#### Verse 19

John is again commanded to write (*grapson* - aor. imperative). He was to respond to this command by instantaneous obedience (the significance of the aor. imperative). What was he to write? He was to record instantly "the things which thou sawest (*eides* - 2nd aor. ind. act) and the things which are (*eisin* - present) and the things which shall come to pass hereafter." The 1901 translation is wrong in translating this last verb as future. The form of the verb (*genesthai* - and aor. inf. plus *mellei* - about) literally means "are about to come to pass;" therefore, the phrase should read - "the things which are about to occur or come to pass." The "hereafter" translates "*meta tauta*" and would more clearly be translated "after these things." What things? The things which are about to occur after the things which are. This verse probably relates the division of the book. It is about things which were, are, and shall be!

#### Verse 20

The mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands is about to be unveiled. Christ identifies the "seven stars as the angles of the seven churches: and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." The word mystery (*mustērion*) as it is used in the N.T. is always related to the fact of

revelation, though this word has a long pre-biblical history. The implication of secrecy, as in the Mystery Religions, or the Dead Sea Community, is absent from the N.T. usage.

Note: For those unacquainted with this term and its special problems see B. F. Westcott's *St. Paul's Epistle to The Ephesians*, Eerdmans reprinted - 1950, pp. 180-81; there will be a *Special Study* on the Greek term *musterion* in this commentary. Further bibliographical information will be given there.

Who are "the angels of the seven churches"? No final, categorical answer can be given to this question, but we can declare that they are not to be identified as Vincent, Trench, *et al.* do. The word angel is a Greek word that also means messenger, with no supernatural connotation as with angel. Archbishop R. C. Trench maintained that these angels were the bishops of the seven churches. From a purely biblical standpoint this is an impossible claim because the N.T. is very clear about the polity of the Church. There is always a plurality of Elders (Bishops) in every congregation. The single bishop, or monarchical episcopate was most certainly a post-biblical development. There is no explanation which is fully satisfactory regarding the identification of the messengers of the seven churches, but whatever conclusion one draws, if honest, he must reckon with Swete's position. He states that "the Apocalypse uses *aggelos* some sixty times, excluding those in which it is followed by *tēs ekklēsiōs* or *tōn ekklesiōn*, and always in the technical sense of a superhuman being employed in the service of God or of Satan. There is therefore a strong presumption that the *aggeloi tōn ekklēsiōn* are angels in the sense which the word bears elsewhere throughout the book." (Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, Eerdmans reprint 1951, p. 22.)

The lampstands specifically and clearly identified as the Churches of Asia, and is a vital part of the imagery of chps. 2 and 3. Christ walks in the midst of the congregations and demands repentance, or else He will come and remove their lampstands.

#### Review Questions

vs. 9-20

1. Was John personally involved in the great persecution of the body of Christ - vs. 9?
2. Is there a difference between the Lord's Day and the Sabbath - vs. 10?

3. Who commanded John to write and send the scroll to the seven churches - vs. 11?
4. According to vs. 12 - Was John merely a listener to the voice, or was he also engaged in the conversation?
5. What O.T. prophet is the source of the term "the Son of Man" - vs. 13?
6. What two characteristics of the Son of Man does the imagery of vs. 13 probably reveal?
7. To what does the imagery of the two-edged sword refer - vs. 16?
8. In vs. 17 John is commanded to do what?
9. What credentials of Christ were revealed in vs. 18?
10. What was John commanded to record in vs. 19?
11. Is it possible, from a biblical standpoint, that the angles mentioned in vs. 20 are the ruling bishops of each of the seven churches of Asia?

### *Special Study*

#### The Lord's Day - Sabbath Controversy Revisited

Why does confusion persist about the Lord's Day? How is it possible to confuse the Sabbath Day and the Lord's Day? In this scope we shall provide a background and bibliography for further, more detailed study.

#### The Sabbath Day in Historical Perspective

The brilliant Catholic director of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem and editor of the *Revue Biblique*, Roland de Vaux, O.P., has placed all concerned with the Sabbath issue in his debt. (He is also an example of the R.C. Churches attitude toward her first-rate scholars who take some negative critical attitudes toward the scripture but never an extreme position). His classic work, *The Sociology of Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1961, pp. 475) provides us with the most recent research on this persistent but quite unnecessary confusion between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

The Hebrew word *shabbath* is not translated into English - rather it is transcribed into our English word Sabbath. In the Hebrew O.T. this word is used only in the context of the O.T.