



I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book 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."

Revelation 1:9-11 ESV

Introduction

A man became marooned on a deserted island. Year after year, he waited to be rescued, but to no avail. One day, a sea-bearing vessel passed near the island, and its captain noticed the man, standing on the shore, waving a white cloth in hopes of rescue. The captain released a dingy to investigate. As an officer carefully edged a small boat toward the shoreline, the survivor signaled him closer. Pushing onto the sand, the officer noticed three huts behind the man and asked, "Are you the only one here, or are there others?"

The castaway looked over his shoulder. "Oh, the huts. They're all mine. You see, the first is my home. And the second one," he said, pointing, "That's my church."

"But what about the third hut?" asked the officer.

"That one?" he said frowning. "That's the church I used to attend."

Church hopping has become standard practice among some Christians today. Perhaps the predisposition to move from one congregation to another is based on a misinformed sense of what Church really means. We often think of it as a building or spiritual activity, missing key biblical perspective. To our Lord, the creator and guide of the Church, it is first and foremost a family, a people belonging to Him and to each other. For those who embrace Christ's perspective, weekly worship is not only about meeting one's needs but also about how one can bless the Lord and serve others, building them up to be their best for the Lord. We need to capture that perspective once again!

In Revelation 1, Christ's vision of the Church unfolds before us and can be summarized by the words: *Mandate*, *Messenger*, and *Message*.

The Mandate (Revelation 1:9-11)

God cares about the capital "C" Church — all who believe. He mandated John to communicate His love for the Church by putting it down on paper. John wrote to believers from his exile on Patmos, a ten-mile long volcanic island in the Aegean Sea. His letter would need to find its way across a forty-mile stretch of forbidding sea to the shores of Asia Minor (Western Turkey), where the seven churches resided. Persecution had arisen against God's people in the days of Nero and was full-blown during Diocletian's reign, the time most scholars believe John received his revelation. Banished from civilization for the crime of putting Jesus above Caesar, the ninety-year-old Apostle must have lived in austere conditions, surviving on meager rations, and laboring under the Roman whip. It was under such circumstances that he received from God the most extensive revelation about the future found in the entire Bible.

It was on the "Lord's day," meaning Sunday, that John received his mandate from God. He was likely alone in worship, experiencing the grace and joy that comes from being "in the Spirit," when he heard a voice "like a trumpet" (Revelation 1:10). The commandments on Sinai had been announced with a trumpet (Exodus 20:18). Christ's second coming will likewise be heralded by a trumpet blast (1 Thessalonians 4:16). And now, He who fulfills both the Old and New Covenant addressed John with an authority that must have rattled the beloved disciple to the bones.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Revelation 1:12-16 ESV

John was commanded, “write what you see...” (Revelation 1:11). The reminder to record what was seen and heard came to John, again and again, 12 times in all (1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9, 21:5). Imagine if this great apocalyptic vision had only been transmitted orally and not preserved on parchment. How could we trust, thousands of years later, that the vivid imagery and stark futuristic teachings were not drawn from the imagination of various sages, shaped and morphed through the ages?

John was commanded not only to record the vision but also to share it with the Church. The seven churches listed were in key locations around Asia Minor, all on ancient Rome’s circular postal route. As the letter would be circulated and read in each of these congregations, its contents could be relayed to their surrounding regions. Thus, the seven churches represented not only actual worshiping clusters of saints but also the Church at large. The number seven itself adds to the sense that this letter contained a message for all believers. (Seven represents perfection or completeness.)

The Messenger (Revelation 1:12-16)

As John turned to see who was speaking to him, he immediately saw “seven golden lampstands” (Revelation 1:12). These lampstands, based on the pattern of the ancient Jewish candelabra, or menorah, were each comprised of a central shaft and six branches, three on each side, topped by seven cups containing oil and wicks (Exodus 25:31-40). To the Hebrew, the number six represents humanity, and the number one bespeaks divinity or God. When God and His people are assembled, there is a seven-fold completeness, creating a fullness of light for the surrounding world. Lest any reader miss the clear and glorious truth of this imagery, the Lord reiterated at the end of the chapter that the lampstands represent churches (Revelation 1:20).

In the midst of the lampstands was “one like the son of man” (Revelation 1:13). This clear allusion to Daniel 7:13 reminds us that God’s plan to send Christ as the long-awaited Messiah was set in place and sealed in the courts of heaven long ago. Christ amidst the churches. What comfort John and fellow believers would find in the fact that Christ stood in the midst of the lampstands, fulfilling the promise He gave to be with us until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20b).

In the vision, Christ was “clothed with a long robe,” the robe of a priest. He had “a golden sash around his chest,” representing royalty. His hair was “white, like white wool” (Revelation 1:14; Daniel 7:9), a display of wisdom and glory. The particulars confirm this was none other than the “Ancient of Days” seen hundreds of years prior in a vision given to Daniel (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22). The Lord’s eyes glowed “like a flame of fire,” bespeaking our Lord’s prophetic searching gaze, expectant of purity and holiness in the lives of his followers.

His feet, “like burnished bronze,” remind us of the loving authority by which Christ oversees His Church. In ancient days, kings sat on elevated thrones. To approach a king was to be under his feet. But the King of John’s vision took no delight in forcing His authority over others. Thus, His feet were composed of bronze, an amalgamation of metals created through heat and pounding. Christ, who gave His life for us, was “refined in a furnace” of suffering (Revelation 1:15), thus earning the right to reign forever as King of Kings over those wooed by His love.

Christ spoke again with a voice that John likened to “the roar of many waters.” One can stand

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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.

Revelation 1:17-20 ESV

next to the Niagara Falls and get the idea. The vision came with such force that it no doubt shook the disciple to the core. In the Lord's right hand, meaning his hand of dominance, He “held seven stars.” Later in the chapter, the Lord states clearly that these stars represent “the angels of the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). An angel is a messenger. The stars may then represent actual angels or the pastors who served over the congregations — or both. The clear point is this: God cares about each congregation and thus protects with His right hand its leaders and messengers, whether seen or unseen.

From the Lord's mouth was seen “a sharp two-edged sword.” The Greek word used here describes not the long and narrow fencer's blade, but rather a short, tongue-shaped dagger used for close fighting. Such imagery reminds us starkly how surely God's Word can pierce the very thoughts and intentions of the human heart (Hebrews 4:12-13). The Word must then be central to the life of any Christian congregation.

John finally gazed directly at the Lord's face and beheld a countenance that blazed with intensity and brilliance that rivaled the unshielded sun. Upon seeing the glorified Christ, John “fell at his feet as though dead” (Revelation 1:17). He was thus prostrate before the most formidable messenger in the universe, ready to hear the Lord's message as never before in his life.

The Message (Revelation 1:17-19)

In a terrified stupor, John lay before his glorified Lord. He may have recalled his earth-rending experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, where he had previously been allowed a glimpse of the Lord's divine glory. At that time, the disciples had fallen before Jesus, trembling (Matthew 17:6). Then too, Jesus placed a hand on them, helping them to arise, urging them not to fear. Now, some years later, John was lifted once again by the Lord's touch and by words of comfort: “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” (Revelation 1:17-18)

Jesus holds sway over death, and is alive always. We need not fear death or any force that opposes us in life. No amount of resistance by the world can stop us from receiving the mandate, respecting the messenger, and proclaiming the message of life in Him. This is a message that impacts time and eternity the past, present, and future. Thus, John was told to record “the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this” (Revelation 1:20). What he *had seen* is contained in chapter 1. The things *that are* comprise chapters 2-6. And *those that are to take place after this*, include the rest of the book. In this study, we will view the later chapters of the book through the thematic instruction provided in the first six. Regardless of how one outlines this great apocalypse, one cannot miss its central message: the Sovereign Lord will protect His Church.

Final Thought

The timeless message that Christ will protect His people was not meant to remain a mystery. That is why John's chapter one vision concludes with an explanation of the mystery “of the seven stars ... and the seven golden lampstands” (Revelation 1:20). Mysteries in the Bible are those secret things of God that we are meant to be understood in due time. Throughout the Bible, we see the glorious mystery of God's love for the Church. In other words, the love of God is immea-

surable, and it should not be hidden. Christians are to live by that love (Ephesians 5:31-32). Through this love the Church was born, it will be sustained, and it will be celebrated by God and his people forever (Revelation 19:6-10)!

Spending Time With God

This 12-week study series, *Revelation Made Relevant*, is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The Devotion questions are written for your personal study. The Discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The Digging Deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion: Personal Study

1. Is there anything from the commentary or teaching that especially challenged or encourage you? If so, what?

2. In Revelation 1:9, John lists three things he holds in common with other believers (tribulation, the kingdom, and patient endurance). Do you experience all three yourself to some measure? Should you? Explain.

3 a. What do you think John meant in verse 10 when he said he was "in the Spirit"?

b. Are there times when you are more in the Spirit than others? Explain.

4. John heard a "voice like a trumpet" (v. 10). Imagine what it might have sounded like and describe that voice in your own words. How might you have reacted to it?

5. If possible, describe a time when you had a powerful, maybe even life-changing, encounter with God. How did you know your experience was for real? How do you think John knew that his Revelation from God was real and not just a dream?



SERIES

REVELATION MADE RELEVANT

LESSON 3

Capital "C" Church | Revelation 1:9-20

6. Do you think John was a bit nervous about sending the entire story of his vision to believers around the land? Why or why not?

b. If so, what is the significance of this connection?

Discussion: Small Group Study

7. Is there a question or idea from the Personal Study Questions you'd like to discuss with the group? Which one?

10. Read the whole of Daniel 7, noting the description of the "Ancient of Days." Who do you think this represented? How does this correlate with Revelation 1:14?

8. Why do you think the Church figures so prominently in the initial vision of this final book in the Bible?

11. The book of Revelation is replete with correlations between Christ the Son of God and God his Father. While such associations cause imagery to clash and our minds to be conflicted, how does this connection between the Son and the Father fit with Christ's own words in John 10:30 and 14:9?

9 a. In Revelation 1:13, John sees "one like a son of man." Compare with Daniel 7:13-14. Do you believe in both cases this one represents Jesus Christ?

12. Considering overall the imagery described in Revelation 1 and in the commentary, which symbolic ideas about Christ are especially meaningful to you? Why?



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Digging Deeper: Further Study

13. Note John's response to his vision of the glorified Christ (Revelation 1:17). Compare with Daniel 8:18 & 27. When we see Christ in the next life, do you think we will be so overwhelmed (See also 1 John 3:1-3)?

Why or why not?

14 a. Apocalyptic literature, such as in the book of Revelation, was especially written for God's suffering people. Do you think that if we suffered more, as do many persecuted Christians in closed countries today, that we would appreciate Revelation more?

Why or why not?

15. This initial vision of the Lord is not the first time John will hear the words, "do not fear." Compare with 2:10. Which do you fear more: God or suffering?

16. How does true confidence in God's power and love help us face opposition?

Scripture for Meditation

"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living One. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades..."

Revelation 1:17b-18 ESV