

August 2, 2009

**John & Patmos**

v. 9

John identifies himself as John for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time here in 9 verses, but rather than play “the apostle card”, he refers to himself as ‘your brother & partner’. This obviously shows that he was well known to the recipients of the letter he was sending them – they would assume his apostolic authority based on who they knew him to be. He focuses on 3 aspects of the fellowship he shared with them; tribulation, the kingdom & perseverance.

He mentions tribulation first, probably because it was a frequent fellowship connection in those times, and is indispensable in understanding discipleship & sanctification as we become more like Christ. It is tribulation that shapes us, teaches us patience, develops our character, humbles us & draws us closer to God and one another by necessity. Cf. I Thess. 1:6; I Pet. 2:21; 4:13; II Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:10; I Pet. 1:5-9; James 1:2-3; etc.

He adds the kingdom & perseverance ( or endurance ) in this group to connect us to the tribulation we share. The fullness of the kingdom is not yet here, and there is a struggle that takes place in this life before we enter it; that is what perseverance is all about. Notice these verses – Acts 14:22; LK 13:24; I JN. 5:4-5; Rev. 21:7; Rom. 8:37; James 1:12. John writes to a series of churches who are awaiting the deliverance of Christ’s Kingdom but in the context of persecution & struggles as they wait for it. This focus on tribulation and persecution as the binder holding them together as brethren would be the light through which Jesus would reveal this vision to John. There is little question here that the kingdom being referred to is the Millennial Kingdom ( Rev. 20 ), spoken of by Christ, Paul, James, the OT prophets – LK. 12:32; 22:29; I Thess. 2:12; 1:5; James 2:5; etc. ①

**Patmos**

John is writing from a place he calls Patmos, an island and he says he is there ‘on account of the word of God & the testimony of Jesus’. This island of Patmos is a volcanic rock found in then Icarian Sea south of current day Turkey. It is only 10 x 5 miles across, is 40 miles west of Miletus ( cf. Acts 20:15,17 ) and is part of a group of 50 islands called “The Dodecanese. It is crescent shaped, with the horns facing eastward providing safe harbour for ships to anchor in. It was the last stopping over port for ships going from Ephesus to Rome. Because it was bleak & desolate, rocky & barren, it was selected by the Romans as a penal colony along with some of the other local islands.

Early Christian traditions say that John was banished to Patmos by Emperor Domitian ( AD 81-96 ) and was forced to work in the mines there for about 18

months, and when Domitian died in AD 96, John was released from Patmos. This helps give us a date for this letter of about AD 95.

What John says next assumes there was a general realization that Patmos was a penal colony, because he explains why he was there, and it is 2-fold:

- On account of the word of God
- For the testimony of Jesus

Surprisingly, there are a few interpretations offered as to what John meant by this. They are:

- John was sent to Patmos to receive the revelations that would result in this book. The wording in the Greek, however, is a strong argument against this view.
- John went there to evangelize the lost. But why leave population rich areas where the 7 churches are to go to a rock that held very few people?
- He was exiled here for preaching the gospel he had done elsewhere. This supports the wording, the context ( persecution, tribulation, perseverance, hardship ) and the historic facts.

So here we find John, by the grace of God, not martyred, but exiled to a penal colony and relating what God showed him on that desolate island.

## The Voice & the Mission

vv. 10-11

John says that he was “in the spirit on the Lord’s Day, and we are immediately forced to interpret what he means by both of those phrases. ②

### In the Spirit

This is one place where it is tough to tell what the writer means by “in the spirit”, and it must be interpreted by the context more than anything else. The same phrase in Rom. 8:9 clearly means “being in the Holy Spirit”, but the context here is very different. In the Revelation context, it seems to refer to an ecstatic condition into which God has placed John in order to present these visions to him. He is being brought into direct contact with the spiritual realm. He is not asleep, it is not a dream, but his senses are being magnified so he’ll have clarity in what he is being shown.

### The Lord’s Day

There are 3 ideas as to what this means. Two of them are arguable, one has very little support.

- It refers to the eschatological “day of the Lord”, referred to in the OT, so some see John being drawn to scenes of the last days.
- It took place on Easter Sunday – there is little support for this view.
- The simplest explanation is this: it was Sunday, the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week. This was the phrase by which Sunday came to be known as it was a memorial to Jesus’ resurrection day. It is possible that this is

the first time this phrase was recorded in history, because from this time on, in ancient literature, Sunday came to be called “the Lord’s Day.”

### The Voice

John’s visions begin in a similar way to the visions given to Ezekiel – Ezek. 3:12 – whereas Ezekiel heard the sound of an earthquake, John hears a voice sounding like a trumpet blast. Throughout Revelation, a loud sound or voice is indicative of an important or solemn announcement. This idea of a trumpet blast signifies that whoever hears it needs to submit to whatever the voice commands them to do – it cannot be ignored, and that is why it is described as a loud voice & clear like a trumpet.

The voice tells John to write what he sees – the 1<sup>st</sup> of 12x in Revelation that he is given this command – 1:19; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5. This sort of repetition is almost to be viewed as a warranty that what is being presented by the writer is authoritative. “What you see” is not limited to the first part of the book, but surely includes the entire book of Revelation.

### The Mission v. 11

“Write what you see in a book” = a scroll. The Greek word means papyrus, the least expensive writing medium in that day. Robert Thomas claims that this papyrus would have been about 15’ long<sup>i</sup>.

③

Once John has recorded what he will see, he is to send it to the 7 churches ( cf. 1:4 ) in Asia. These 7 were postal districts which would allow easy access to them with this letter & the word once delivered, would spread easily outward from those places. The order of the churches given in the letter was likely the route that the one delivering the letter would take.

Starting at Ephesus, and moving clockwise 40 miles N. to Smyrna; 40 more to Pergamum; another 45 miles to the SE from Pergamum to Thyatira; 30 miles S. from there to Sardis; 30 miles ESE to Philadelphia; then 40 more miles SE to Laodicea. These cities were situated on a circular road that connected the most populous and wealthy part of that province of West-Central Asia. Two of these cities were small ( Thyatira & Philadelphia ), and many better known cities were excluded ( Collossae, Hieropolis, Troas, Tralles ). It is thought that the 7 selected were selected as a result of their representative spiritual conditions.

### The Glorified Christ

vv. 12-16

John’s natural reaction to the voice from behind him is to turn around to see the source of the voice, and when he turns, the first thing he notices is 7 golden lampstands ( for portable, oil-filled lamps ). We are told in v. 20 that these 7 lampstands represent the 7 churches – symbolic of the light that local churches & believers are to give off – cf. MT. 5:14-16.

There is also a deep, richer OT symbolism working here in this vision. Because they are lampstands and are gold, they are tied to the 7 lamps in Zech. 4:2. Each of the lamps in Zechariah's account is fed oil by a pipe from a reservoir which leads to the 7 branched lampstand inside the first & outside the 2<sup>nd</sup> veil of the Tabernacle of Temple – cf. Ex. 25:31-40. These were also emblematic of the light God's people were to bear to the nations around them.

In v. 13, John next takes notice of “one like the son of man” in “the midst of the 7 lampstands”. With this observance, John begins a series of descriptive phrases to detail what he saw. The appearance of Christ here in this vision is meant to exalt His nature and to bring to the fore those attributes most relevant to the circumstances of the 7 churches who first received this book. The titles for Jesus here in vv. 13-16 are repeated in the introductory portions of 6 of the 7 letters, and one is used twice. Only the message to the church at Philadelphia does not mention one of these titles.

Notice where Jesus is seen by John. He is “in the midst of the 7 lampstands”, which represent the 7 churches. This tells us that Jesus did not leave the earth in Acts 1 and leave the church behind to fend for herself. He is still sovereign over what is taking place in the church, which is the message that is conveyed by this vision & will be elaborated upon when we read the 7 letters to the churches. He is there in the midst even when the church is involved in poor doctrine, has false leaders, weak faith, failure & compromise, man-centred thinking, imperfect worship, is fighting amongst herself.

④

He has universal, meticulous sovereignty over all things, and He is Lord of the Church, so whatever happens, we can take comfort in knowing that He is in the midst of it – cf. Matt. 18:20. He is still the head, the vine, the sure foundation, the Great Shepherd and the husband of the bride.

In Ephesians 5 – He dies for the church; In Eph. 7 – He lives for the church; in I JN 2 – He defends the church; in Rev. 19 – He fights for the church; in Rom. 8 – He glorifies the church; all results of His declaration in Matt. 16:18 – “I will build My church.”<sup>ii</sup>

### **One Like the Son of Man**

The sight of Jesus calls to John's mind the title Jesus most often used of Himself in the gospels some 65 years in the past from this point. It is a Messianic title and is referred to in Daniel 7:13. It is related here to the context of Revelation 2 main ways:

- It is related to Jesus' role as judge ( cf. JN. 5:22,27; Acts 17:31 )
- It was used only by the early church when the suffering of believers & Christ's suffering were being discussed – as happens in this book.

One of the most dramatic uses of this title for Himself is found in Luke 22:66-71. These men understood what He meant when He called Himself this, because

they related it to Daniel's prophecy and asked Him point blank, "Are you then the Son of God?" His answer sealed His fate.

### **Dressed in a Long Robe**

Some take this description to signify Christ's High Priestly office, according to what is seen in Ex. 28:4 & Zech. 3:4; while others see this as a symbol of rank or dignity as befitted the OT prophets – Ezek. 9:2-3,11; Dan. 10:5.

Robert Thomas<sup>iii</sup> is convinced that this description parallels best the account in Ezekiel 9 because the one in that passage clothed in a similar way is putting a mark on some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem before it is destroyed. Those so marked will be spared from the destruction. The setting of impending judgment in Ezekiel 9 fits the context of Revelation which will follow. In this way, Jesus is seen as extending mercy to exempt certain people from the wrath about to be poured out on the world just as the man in Ezekiel 9 and 6 of his companions do in that passage. Christ does act in mercy in Rev. 7:2-3; 9:4, but does not act in a priestly role anywhere else in Revelation, but He is certainly shown to be the One with supreme authority over the scope, duration, intensity and targets of the Divine Judgments. That is not the role of a priest.

### **A Golden Sash Around His Chest**

Once again, this portrait could be conveying 3 meanings.

- This is the dress of a High Priest – cf. Ex. 28:4; 29:5; 39:29 – but the absence of any reference to Jesus as High Priest in Revelation makes this highly unlikely. ⑤
- The divine messenger in Dan. 10:5 is clothed in the same way as described here, so this could be a reference to that.
- This is a reference to the description of the angels of the 7 last plagues – Rev. 15:6.

The best interpretation combines the last 2 options. John was reminded of the vision of Dan. 10:5 when he first observed this, and as the visions unfolded, he realized that this was also a foreshadow of the judgment that the 7 angels would inflict in Rev. 15:6 – the bowl judgments. Again, Christ's role as High Priest is not really part of the context here.

### **The Hairs of His Head Were White Like Wool, as White as Snow**

Now John directs our attention away from Jesus' dress to His actual person, and the reference is unmistakably now to Daniel 7:9 where this describes the Father, but John now is referring to Jesus Christ. The white hair symbolizes purity & great wisdom, and also can be a symbol of eternal pre-existence. In Daniel 9, the One so pictured is called "The Ancient of Days" ( and note Micah 5:2 ), so there is an element of Christ's longevity in view here too.

### **His Eyes Were Like a Flame of Fire**

We are again taken back to Dan. 10:6 and this description of Christ is repeated in Rev. 2:18 & 19:12. It relates to His fierceness against His enemies as well as penetrating vision along with supernatural intelligence and righteous wrath. These are the eyes of the risen, glorified Christ, not the eyes of the One who wept at Lazarus' tomb in JN. 11:35, or the One who wept over the fact that the leaders of Jerusalem had rejected His call to come to Him – LK. 19:41-44; and cf. Hab. 1:13; Heb. 4:13.

### **His Feet Were Like Burnished Bronze, Refined in a Furnace**

Feet in the NT sometimes refer to movement ( LK. 1:79; Acts 5:9; Rom. 3:15 ), and that is applicable here as He is moving among the churches ( symbolically ). However, the meaning of the Greek word here translated as 'bronze' is uncertain. A similar term is used in Dan. 10:6 & Ezek. 1:13,27; but the point that John is making is that the feet glow or gleam brightly and so his emphasis seems to be on the purity & heat of the metal.

The idea attached to the Greek word seems to indicate that the metal is still molten – glowing hot and in & these instances ( Daniel & Ezekiel ) the mention of them refer to the appearance of God's glory, which adds to the purity angle of fiery judgment. The total impact of this symbolism is to depict Christ as moving about among His churches to bring purity by rendering judgment to purge out sin.

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### **His Voice Was Like the Roar of Many Waters**

This wording suggests a powerful force that cannot be ignored – cf. Ps. 93:4; Isa. 17:13. Christ's voice is described here in the exact same terms as God's coming in glory in Ezek. 43:2, as God returns to the Temple in Jerusalem. In Rev. 1:10 John described this same voice as like a trumpet, but in 1:10, John is recalling the force of the voice which got his attention, and introduced the One speaking. Now, he describes the divine authority behind the commission to write the book of visions.

### **In His Right Hand He Held the 7 Stars**

This is the only one of the 10 features of this description of Christ in Rev. 1:12-16 that does not draw directly from the OT, although its' imagery of the stars certainly appears at times in the OT. This description is related just to the Revelation John is about to be given and is mentioned again in 2:1 & 3:1. In this first mention, though, a stronger word for 'hold' is used = 'held fast', not just 'held'.

Two ideas are put forward for the symbolism here:

- Christ's absolute authority and complete control over the 7 stars ( which according to 1:20 are the angels of the 7 churches )

- Like JN. 10:28, being held fast in Christ’s right hand implies safekeeping and this is from the pen of the same John as he talked about the Good Shepherd. The right hand is customarily the position of favour and protection, and these churches were going through persecution and needed that.

It is more likely that in the context of Revelation that the former is the best interpretation – that Christ’s authority & control is being depicted. The stars represent the churches in a way that identifies them with the churches so that Christ’s authority and control is seen to be over both.

### **From His Mouth Came a Sharp, Two-Edged Sword**

See also Rev. 2:12,16; 19:15. The OT source of this imagery is found in Isa. 11:4, but NT passages like Eph. 6:17 & Heb. 4:12 also point to the importance of this ‘sword’. Being double-edged describes it as having greater sharpness and the type of sword is the Roman “*rhomphaia*” ( only found elsewhere in the NT in LK. 2:35 ), which was oddly enough, shaped like a tongue, and was the deadliest weapon in the arsenal of the Roman soldier.

Obviously, this is symbolic, since Christ does not have a literal sword coming out of His mouth – cf. Rev. 19:15; II Thess. 2:8. It is symbolic of His judicial authority – His truth, His word – and combines the power of a warrior who defeats His enemies in battle as well as His pronouncement of judgment on them<sup>iv</sup> – cf. JN. 12:48.

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### **His Face Was Like the Sun Shining in Full Strength**

My immediate thoughts about this reference to His great glory draw me back to Matt. 17:2, where on the Mount of Transfiguration, Christ is transfigured before Peter, James & John & they are allowed to glimpse His true glory. Now, John becomes the only Apostle to see that same glory a second time while still alive. This final description forms a climax of John’s view of Christ in all His glory, demonstrating his overwhelming blessing at being given the grace to see this vision.

This vision of the risen and glorified Christ is just a glimpse of the character traits that will be revealed in full measure as the Book of Revelation unfolds, as Christ judges, comforts, controls events, enforces His standards on His churches and exudes full authority over nature, evil, angelic host both evil and holy, and over history itself.

Next lesson – Rev. 1:17-20 – John’s Reaction & the Commission

<sup>i</sup> Robert Thomas; Revelation 1-7; Moody; p. 93

<sup>ii</sup> Art Azurdia III – from his sermon on Rev. 1:12-16 – MP3 audio file @ the 35:00 to 40:00 minute mark.

Accessed on website – [www.spiritempoweredpreaching.org](http://www.spiritempoweredpreaching.org)

<sup>iii</sup> IBID; pg. 100

<sup>iv</sup> IBID, pg. 104