

Revelation 1:9-20 Week 4

The Vision of the Glorified Son

Contents

I. Introduction.....	1
II. The Setting of the Vision.....	2
III. The Unfolding of the Vision.	3
IV. The Effects of the Vision.....	6

I. Introduction

a. Prayer

b. Read

c. By the close of the first century, Christianity had become a hated and despised religious sect in the Roman Empire.

d. Writing to Emperor Trajan (Tre-jen) early in the second century, Pliny (plen-e), the Roman governor of Bithynia (Ba-thin-e-a), scorned Christianity as a “depraved and extravagant superstition.”

i. Pliny went on to complain that “the contagion of this superstition [Christianity] has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well” (cited in Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents of the Christian Church [London: Oxford University Press, 1967], 4).

ii. The Roman historian Tacitus (tas-e-us), a contemporary of Pliny (plen-e), described Christians as “a class hated for their abominations” (cited in Bettenson, Documents, 2), while Suetonius, another contemporary of Pliny, dismissed them as “a set of men adhering to a novel and mischievous superstition” (cited in Bettenson, Documents, 2).

e. Apart from the natural hostility of fallen men to the truth of the gospel, Christians were hated for several more reasons.

i. Politically, the Romans viewed them as disloyal because they refused to acknowledge Caesar as the supreme authority.

ii. That disloyalty was confirmed in the eyes of the Roman officials by Christians’ refusal to offer the obligatory sacrifices of worship to the emperor.

iii. Also, many of their meetings were held privately at night, causing the Roman officials to accuse them of hatching antigovernment plots.

f. Religiously, Christians were denounced as atheists because they rejected the Roman pantheon of gods and because they worshiped an invisible God, not an idol.

i. Wild rumors, based on misunderstandings of Christian beliefs and practices, falsely accused them of cannibalism, incest, and other sexual perversions.

ii. Socially, Christians, most of whom were from the lower classes of society (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26), were despised by the Roman aristocracy.

iii. The Christian teaching that all people are equal (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11) threatened to undermine the hierarchical structure of Roman society and topple the elite from their privileged status.

iv. It also heightened the Roman aristocracy’s fear of a slave rebellion.

g. Christians did not openly oppose slavery, but the perception was that they undermined it by teaching that master and slave were equal in Christ (cf. Philem.).

h. Finally, Christians declined to participate in the worldly amusements that were so much a part of pagan society, avoiding festivals, the theater, and other pagan events.

i. Economically, Christians were seen as a threat by the numerous priests, craftsmen, and merchants who profited from idol worship.

i. The resulting hostility, first seen in the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23ff.), deepened as Christianity became more widespread.

ii. In his letter to Emperor Trajan (tre-jen) cited earlier, Pliny complained that the pagan temples had been deserted, and that those who sold sacrificial animals found few buyers.

j. In that superstitious age many Romans feared that natural disasters resulted from the neglect of the pagan gods. The third-century Christian apologist Tertullian(ter-toll-e-in) remarked sarcastically, “If the Tiber reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn’t move or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague, the cry is at once, ‘Christians to the lion!’” (cited in M. A. Smith, From Christ to Constantine [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973], 86).

k. During the first few decades after the death of Christ, the Roman government considered Christianity merely a sect of Judaism (cf. Acts 18:12–16).

l. Eventually, it was the hostility the Jews displayed against the Christians that led the Romans to recognize Christianity as a religion distinct from Judaism.

i. That identified Christians as worshipers of an illegal religion (Judaism was a religio licita, or legal religion).

ii. Yet there was no official persecution by the Roman authorities until the time of Nero.

- iii. Seeking to divert public suspicion that he had caused the great fire in Rome (July 19, A.D. 64), Nero blamed the Christians for it.
- iv. As a result, many Christians were executed at Rome (including, according to tradition, both Peter and Paul), but there was yet no empire-wide persecution.
- m. Three decades later, Emperor Domitian (doe-mission) instigated an official persecution of Christians.
- n. Little is known of the details, but it extended to the province of Asia (modern Turkey).
 - i. The apostle John had been banished to the island of Patmos, and at least one person, a pastor, had already been martyred (Rev. 2:13).
 - ii. The persecuted, beleaguered, discouraged believers in Asia Minor to whom John addressed the book of Revelation desperately needed encouragement.
 - iii. It had been years since Jesus ascended.
- o. Jerusalem had been destroyed and Israel ravaged.
 - i. The church was losing its first love, compromising, tolerating sin, becoming powerless, and distasteful to the Lord Himself (this is described in Revelation 2 and 3).
 - ii. The other apostles were dead, and John had been exiled. The whole picture looked very bleak.
 - iii. That is why the first vision John received from the inspiring Holy Spirit is of Christ's present ministry in the church.
- p. John's readers took comfort in the knowledge that Christ will one day return in glory and defeat His enemies.
- q. The description of those momentous events takes up most of the book of Revelation.
 - i. But the vision of Jesus Christ that begins the book does not describe Jesus in His future glory, but depicts Him in the present as the glorified Lord of the church.
 - ii. In spite of all the disappointments, the Lord had not abandoned His church or His promises.
 - iii. This powerful vision of Christ's present ministry to them must have provided great hope and comfort to the wondering and suffering churches to whom John wrote.
- r. Verses 9–20 provide the setting for the vision, unfold the vision itself, and relate its effects.

II. The Setting of the Vision.

- a. 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. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 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 (theigh-a-tie-ra) and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." (1:9–11)
- b. This is the third time in the first nine verses of this book that John referred to himself by name (cf. vv. 1, 4).
- c. This time, his amazement at receiving this vision caused him to add the demonstrative personal pronoun I.
 - i. John was astounded that, despite his utter unworthiness, he had the great privilege of receiving this monumental vision.
 - ii. John was an apostle, a member of the inner circle of the twelve along with Peter and James, and the human author of a gospel and three epistles.
 - iii. Yet he humbly identified himself simply as your brother.
 - iv. He did not write as one impressed with his authority as an apostle, commanding, exhorting, or defining doctrine, but as an eyewitness to the revelation of Jesus Christ that begins to unfold with this vision.
- d. John further humbly identified with his readers by describing himself as their partner, sharing with them first of all in tribulation. Like them, John was at that moment suffering severe persecution for the cause of Christ, having been exiled with other criminals.
 - i. He could thus identify with the suffering believers to whom he wrote.
 - ii. John was part of the same kingdom as his readers—the sphere of salvation; the redeemed community over which Jesus reigns as Lord and King (cf. v. 6).
 - iii. He shared a kinship with them as a fellow subject of Jesus Christ.
- e. Finally, John identified with his readers in the matter of perseverance.
 - i. Hupomonē (perseverance) literally means "to remain under." It speaks of patiently enduring difficulties without giving up.
- f. John further described these experiences as in Jesus. Suffering persecution for the cause of Christ, belonging to His kingdom, and patiently enduring trials are distinctly Christian experiences.
- g. When he received this vision, John was in exile on the island called Patmos.
 - i. Patmos is a barren, volcanic island in the Aegean Sea, at its extremities about ten miles long and five to six miles wide, located some forty miles offshore from Miletus (My-lee-tus) (a city in Asia Minor about thirty miles south of Ephesus; cf. Acts 20:15–17).
 - ii. According to the Roman historian Tacitus (ta-su-tus), exile to such islands was a common form of punishment in the first century.
 - iii. John was probably sent to Patmos as a criminal (as a Christian, he was a member of an illegal religious sect).
 - iv. If so, the conditions under which he lived would have been harsh.
 - v. Exhausting labor under the watchful eye (and ready whip) of a Roman overseer, insufficient food and clothing, and having to sleep on the bare ground would have taken their toll on a ninety-year-old man.

- vi. It was on that bleak, barren island, under those brutal conditions, that John received the most extensive revelation of the future ever given.
- h. John's only crime was faithfulness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
- i. John suffered exile for his faithful, unequivocal, uncompromising preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- j. John received his vision while he was in the Spirit; his experience transcended the bounds of normal human apprehension.
 - i. In that state, God supernaturally revealed things to him. Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14), Peter (Acts 10:9ff.), and Paul (Acts 22:17–21; 2 Cor. 12:1ff.) had similar experiences.
- k. John received his vision on the Lord's day.
 - i. While some argue that this refers to the time of eschatological judgment called the Day of the Lord, it is best understood as a reference to Sunday.
 - ii. The Greek phrase translated the Lord's day (tē kuriakē hēmera) is different from the one translated "the Day of the Lord" (tē hēmerē tou kuriou, or hēmerē kuriou; cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10) and appears only here in the New Testament.
 - iii. Further, the vision John received had nothing to do with the eschatological Day of the Lord; it was a vision of Christ's present ministry in the church.
 - iv. Finally, in the second century the phrase kuriakē hēmera was widely used to refer to Sunday (cf. R. J. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 221ff.).
 - v. The phrase the Lord's day became the customary way of referring to Sunday because Christ's resurrection took place on a Sunday.
- l. John received his commission to record the vision in dramatic fashion: I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira (theigh-a-tie-ra) and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."
 - i. The loud voice (cf. Ezek. 3:12) was that of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. vv. 12–13, 17–18), sounding to John in its piercing, commanding clarity like the sound of a trumpet.
 - ii. Throughout the book of Revelation, a loud voice or sound indicates the solemnity of what is about to be revealed (cf. 5:2, 12; 6:10; 7:2, 10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12, 15; 12:10; 14:2, 15, 18; 16:1, 17; 19:1, 17; 21:3).
 - iii. The scene is reminiscent of the giving of the Law at Sinai: "So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled" (Ex. 19:16).
- m. The sovereign, powerful voice from heaven commanded John, "Write in a book (or scroll) what you see."
 - i. This is the first of twelve commands in the book of Revelation for John to write what he saw (cf. v. 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5); on one other occasion he was forbidden to write (10:4).
- n. After writing the vision, John was to send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira (theigh-a-tie-ra) and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.
 - i. These cities were located in the Roman province of Asia (modern Turkey).
 - ii. These seven churches were chosen because they were located in the key cities of the seven postal districts into which Asia was divided.
 - iii. They were thus the central points for disseminating information.
- o. The seven cities appear in the order that a messenger, traveling on the great circular road that linked them, would visit them.
- p. After landing at Miletus (my-lee-tus), the messenger or messengers bearing the book of Revelation would have traveled north to Ephesus (the city nearest to Miletus), then in a clockwise circle to Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.
- q. Copies of Revelation would have been distributed to each church.

III. The Unfolding of the Vision.

- a. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 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.¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 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.... 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. (1:12–16, 20)
- b. Having described the circumstances in which he received it, John then related the vision itself.
 - i. This revealing and richly instructive look at the present work of the glorified Son of God discloses seven aspects of the Lord Jesus Christ's constant ministry to His church:
 - ii. He empowers, intercedes for, purifies, speaks authoritatively to, controls, protects, and reflects His glory through His church.
- c. Christ empowers his church.
 - i. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man ... the seven lampstands are the seven churches. (1:12–13a, 20b)
 - ii. At the outset of the vision John had his back to the voice, so he turned to see the voice that was speaking with him.

- iii. As he did so, he first saw seven golden lampstands, identified in verse 20 as the seven churches.
- iv. These were like the common portable oil lamps placed on lampstands that were used to light rooms at night.
- v. They symbolize churches as the lights of the world (Phil. 2:15).
- vi. They are golden because gold was the most precious metal.
- vii. The church is to God the most beautiful and valuable entity on earth—so valuable that Jesus was willing to purchase it with His own blood (Acts 20:28).
- viii. Seven is the number of completeness (cf. Ex. 25:31–40; Zech. 4:2); thus, the seven churches symbolize the churches in general.
- ix. These were actual churches in real places, but are symbolic of the kinds of churches that exist through all of church history.
- x. In the middle of the lampstands John saw one like a son of man (cf. Dan. 7:13)—the glorified Lord of the church moving among His churches.
- xi. Jesus promised His continued presence with His church. In Matthew 28:20 He said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- xii. Matthew 18:20 promises Christ’s presence during the difficult work of confronting sin in the church. On the night before His death, Jesus promised His disciples, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (John 14:18, 23).
- xiii. Hebrews 13:5 records His promise, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.”
- xiv. Christians do not worship a well-meaning martyr, a dead heroic religious leader.

- 1. The living Christ indwells His church to lead and empower it.
- 2. Believers personally and collectively have the inestimable privilege of drawing on that power through continual communion with Him.

- xv. Paul wrote of the Lord’s Supper, “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).
- xvi. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in His church empowers it, enabling believers to say triumphantly with the apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

d. Christ intercedes for his church.

- i. ...clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. (1:13b)
- ii. The first thing John noted was that Christ was clothed in a robe reaching to the feet (cf. Isa. 6:1).
- iii. Such robes were worn by royalty (e.g., the kings of Midian, Judg. 8:26; Jonathan, 1 Sam. 18:4; Saul, 1 Sam. 24:4; Ahab and Jehoshaphat, 1 Kings 22:10; and Esther, Est. 5:1;) and prophets (cf. 1 Sam. 28:14).
- iv. But the word translated robe was used most frequently (in six of its seven occurrences) in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to describe the robe worn by the high priest.
- v. While Christ is biblically presented as prophet and king, and His majesty and dignity emphasized, the robe here pictures Christ in His role as the Great High Priest of His people.
- vi. That He was girded across His chest with a golden sash reinforces that interpretation, since the high priest in the Old Testament wore such a sash (cf. Ex. 28:4; Lev. 16:4).
- vii. The book of Hebrews says much about Christ’s role as our Great High Priest.
- viii. In 2:17–18 the writer of Hebrews notes, “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”
- ix. In Hebrews 3:1 he refers to Christ as the “High Priest of our confession,” while in Hebrews 4:14 he reminds believers that “we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.”
- x. His offering was infinitely superior to that of any human high priest: “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11–12).
- xi. As our High Priest, Christ once offered the perfect and complete sacrifice for our sins and permanently, faithfully intercedes for us (Rom. 8:33–34).

- 1. He has an unequalled capacity to sympathize with us in all our dangers, sorrows, trials, and temptations: since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. ... We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 2:18; 4:15).

- xii. The knowledge that their High Priest was moving sympathetically in their midst to care for and protect His own provided great comfort and hope to the persecuted churches.

e. Christ purifies his church.

- i. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, (1:14–15a)
- ii. Having described Christ’s clothing in verse 13, John described His person in verses 14 and 15.
- iii. The first few features depict Christ’s work of chastening and purifying His church.

- iv. The New Testament clearly sets forth the holy standard that Christ has established for His church.
 - 1. "Therefore you are to be perfect," Jesus commanded, "as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).
 - 2. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul wrote, "I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin."
 - 3. He reminded the Ephesians that "Christ ... loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25–27).
 - 4. In Colossians 1:22 Paul explained that Christ "has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."
 - 5. Peter reminds believers that God expects them to "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy' " (1 Pet. 1:15–16).
- v. To maintain that divine standard, Christ will discipline His church (Matt. 18:15–17; John 15:2; Heb. 12:5ff.)—even to the point of taking the lives of some impenitent, sinning Christians (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor. 11:28–30).
- vi. Even Peter, who well understood the power of temptation, warned, "It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).
- vii. John's description of Christ's head and ... hair as white like white wool, like snow is an obvious reference to Daniel 7:9, where similar language describes the Ancient of Days (God the Father).
- viii. The parallel descriptions affirm Christ's deity; He possesses the same attribute of holy knowledge and wisdom as the Father.
- ix. White translates leukos, which has the connotation of "bright," "blazing," or "brilliant." It symbolizes Christ's eternal, glorious, holy truthfulness.
- x. Continuing his description of the glorified Christ, John noted that His eyes were like a flame of fire (cf. 2:18; 19:12).
 - 1. His searching, revealing, infallible gaze penetrates to the very depths of His church, revealing to Him with piercing clarity the reality of everything there is to know.
 - 2. Jesus declared, "There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (Matt. 10:26).
 - 3. In the words of the author of Hebrews, "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).
 - 4. The omniscient Lord of the church will not fail to recognize and deal with sin in His church.
- xi. That Christ's feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, continues the obvious sequence by making a clear reference to judgment on sinners in the church.
 - 1. Kings in ancient times sat on elevated thrones, so those being judged would always be beneath the king's feet.
 - 2. The feet of a king thus came to symbolize his authority.
 - 3. The red-hot, glowing feet of the Lord Jesus Christ picture Him moving through His church to exercise His chastening authority, ready to deal out remedial pain, if need be, to sinning Christians.
- xii. It is the Lord's love for His redeemed sinners that pursues their holiness.
- f. Christ speaks authoritatively to his church.
 - i. ...and His voice was like the roar of many waters. (1:15b)
 - ii. When Christ spoke again it was no longer with the trumpet like sound of verse 10.
 - iii. To John, His voice now was like the roar of many waters (cf. 14:2; 19:6), like the familiar mighty roar of the surf crashing on the rocky shores of Patmos in a storm.
 - iv. The voice of the eternal God was similarly described in Ezekiel 43:2—yet another parallel affirming Christ's deity.
 - v. This is the voice of sovereign power, the voice of supreme authority, the very voice that will one day command the dead to come forth from the graves (John 5:28–29).
 - vi. When Christ speaks, the church must listen. At the Transfiguration God said, "This is My beloved Son, ... listen to Him!" (Matt. 17:5).
 - vii. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways," wrote the author of Hebrews, "in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1–2).
 - viii. Christ speaks to His church directly through the Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures.
- g. Christ controls his church.
 - i. In His right hand He held seven stars ... the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, (1:16a, 20a)
 - ii. As the head of His church (Eph. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18), and the ruler of the "kingdom of [God's] beloved Son" (Col. 1:13), Christ exercises authority in His church.
 - iii. In John's vision, Christ is holding in His right hand the seven stars (cf. 2:1; 3:1), identified in verse 20 as the angels of the seven churches, which symbolized those authorities.
 - iv. That He held them in His right hand does not picture safety and protection, but control.
 - v. Angeloi (angels) is the common New Testament word for angels, leading some interpreters reasonably to conclude that angels are in view in this passage.
 - vi. But the New Testament nowhere teaches that angels are involved in the leadership of the church.

- vii. Angels do not sin and thus have no need to repent, as the messengers, along with the congregations they represented, are exhorted to do (cf. 2:4–5, 14, 20; 3:1–3, 15, 17, 19).
- viii. Dr. Robert L. Thomas notes a further difficulty with this view: “It presumes that Christ is sending a message to heavenly beings through John, an earthly agent, so that it may reach earthly churches through angelic representatives” (Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1992], 117).
- ix. Therefore, angeloi is better rendered “messengers,” as in Luke 7:24; 9:52; and James 2:25.
- x. Some suggest that these messengers were representatives from each of the seven churches who came to visit John on Patmos and take the book of Revelation back with them.
- xi. But since Christ is said to hold them in His right hand, they were more likely leading elders and pastors (though not the sole leaders, since the New Testament teaches a plurality of elders), one from each of the seven churches.
- xii. These seven men demonstrate the function of spiritual leaders in the church.
 - 1. They are to be instruments through which Christ, the head of the church, mediates His rule.
 - 2. That is why the standards for leadership in the New Testament are so high. To be assigned as an intermediary through which the Lord Jesus Christ controls His church is to be called to a sobering responsibility (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9 for the qualifications for such men).

h. Christ protects his church

- i. ...from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; (1:16b)
- ii. The Lord Jesus Christ’s presence also provides protection for His church.
- iii. The sharp two-edged sword that came ... out of His mouth is used to defend the church against external threats (cf. 19:15, 21).
- iv. But here it speaks primarily of judgment against enemies from within the church (cf. 2:12, 16; Acts 20:30).
- v. Those who attack Christ’s church, those who would sow lies, create discord, or otherwise harm His people, will be personally dealt with by the Lord of the church. His word is potent (cf. Heb. 4:12–13), and will be used against the enemies of His people (cf. 2 Thess. 2:8), so that all the power of the forces of darkness, including death itself (the “gates of Hades”; Matt. 16:18), will be unable to prevent the Lord Jesus Christ from building His church.

i. Christ reflects his glory through his church.

- i. ...and His face was like the sun shining in full strength. (1:16c)
- ii. John’s vision of the glorified Lord of the church culminated in this description of the radiant glory evident on His face, which John could only describe as like the sun shining in its strength.
- iii. John borrowed that phrase from Judges 5:31, where it describes those who love the Lord (cf. Matt. 13:43).
- iv. The glory of God through the Lord Jesus Christ shines in and through His church, reflecting His glory to the world (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). And the result is that He is glorified (Eph. 3:21).

IV. The Effects of the Vision.

a. 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, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. (1:17–19)

b. The overwhelming vision John witnessed dramatically altered him.

c. Initially, his response was devastating fear, which the Lord removed by assurance and then by giving John a sense of duty.

d. FEAR.

- i. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead (1:17a)
- ii. In a manner similar to his experience with the glory of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration more than six decades earlier (cf. Matt. 17:6), John was again overwhelmed with terror at the manifestation of Christ’s glory and fell at His feet like a dead man.
- iii. Such fear was standard for those few who experienced such unusual heavenly visions.
- iv. When an angel appeared to him, Daniel reported that “no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. ... and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground” (Dan. 10:8–9; cf. 8:17).
- v. Overwhelmed by the vision of God that he saw in the temple, Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:5).
- vi. Ezekiel saw several visions of the Lord’s glory and his response was always the same: he fell on his face (Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; 9:8; 43:3; 44:4).
- vii. After the Angel of the Lord appeared to them and announced the birth of Samson, “Manoah [Samson’s father] said to his wife, ‘We shall surely die, for we have seen God’ ” (Judg. 13:22).
- viii. Job had a similar reaction after God spoke to him: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).
- ix. On his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, Saul of Tarsus (better known as the apostle Paul) “saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me” (Acts 26:13).
- x. In response, Saul and his companions fell prostrate in the road (v. 14).

- xi. After witnessing the terrifying calamities that follow the opening of the sixth seal, unbelievers during the Tribulation will cry out in terror “to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’ ” (Rev. 6:16–17).
- xii. In stark contrast to the silly, frivolous, false, and boastful claims of many in our own day who claim to have seen God, the reaction of those in Scripture who genuinely saw God was inevitably one of fear.
- xiii. Those brought face-to-face with the blazing, holy glory of the Lord Jesus Christ are terrified, realizing their sinful unworthiness to be in His holy presence.
- xiv. Summarizing the proper response to God’s holiness and majesty, the writer of Hebrews exhorts believers to “offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28–29).

e. Assurance.

- i. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (1:17b–18)
- ii. As He had done so long ago at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:7), Jesus placed His right hand on John and comforted him.
- iii. This is a touch of comfort and reassurance.
 - 1. There is comfort for Christians overwhelmed by the glory and majesty of Christ in the assurance of His gracious love and merciful forgiveness.
 - 2. Jesus’ comforting words, “Do not be afraid,” (lit. “Stop being afraid”) reveal His compassionate assurance of the terrified apostle. Similar words of comfort are God’s response throughout Scripture to those overwhelmed by His majestic presence (e.g., Gen. 15:1; 26:24; Judg. 6:23; Matt. 14:27; 17:7; 28:10).
- iv. The comfort Jesus offered was based on who He is and the authority He possesses.
- v. First, He identified Himself as I am (egō eimi)—the covenant name of God (cf. Ex. 3:14).
 - 1. It was that name with which He had comforted the terrified disciples who saw Him walking on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 14:27).
 - 2. Jesus took that name for Himself in John 8:58—a direct claim to deity that was not lost on His opponents (v. 59).
- vi. Jesus next identified Himself as the first and the last (cf. 2:8; 22:13), a title used of God in the Old Testament (Isa. 44:6; 48:12; cf. 41:4).
 - 1. When all false gods have come and gone, only He remains.
 - 2. He existed before them and will continue to exist eternally, long after they have been forgotten.
 - 3. Jesus’ application of that title to Himself is another powerful proof of His deity.
- vii. The third title of deity Jesus claimed is that of the living One (cf. John 1:4; 14:6).
 - 1. That also is a title used throughout Scripture to describe God (e.g., Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26; Ps. 84:2; Hos. 1:10; Matt. 16:16; 26:63; Acts 14:15; Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 3:3; 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; 4:10; Heb. 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; Rev. 7:2).
 - 2. God is the eternal, uncaused, self-existent One. In John 5:26 Jesus said to His Jewish opponents, “Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself,” thus claiming full equality with God the Father.
- viii. The One whose presence struck fear into John’s heart, the I Am, the first and the last, the living One, the One whose death freed him from his sins (Rev. 1:5) is the very One who comforted and reassured John. In the words of the apostle Paul, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31).
- ix. Christ’s seemingly paradoxical declaration I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore provides further grounds for assurance.
 - 1. The Greek text literally reads, “I became dead.” The living One, the eternal, self-existent God who could never die, became man and died.
 - 2. As Peter explains in 1 Peter 3:18, Christ was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.” In His humanness He died without ceasing to live as God.
- x. Behold introduces a statement of amazement and wonder:
 - 1. I am alive forevermore. Christ lives forever in a union of glorified humanity and deity, “according to the power of an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16).
 - 2. “Christ, having been raised from the dead,” wrote Paul, “is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him” (Rom. 6:9).
 - 3. That truth provides comfort and assurance, because Jesus “is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).
 - 4. In spite of his sinfulness in the presence of the glorious Lord of heaven, John had nothing to fear because that same Lord had paid by His death the penalty for John’s sins (and those of all who believe in Him) and risen to be his eternal advocate.
- xi. As the eternal I Am, the first and the last, the living One, Jesus holds the keys of death and of Hades.
 - 1. Those terms are essentially synonymous, with death being the condition and Hades the place.
 - 2. Hades is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament term Sheol and refers to the place of the dead.
 - 3. Keys denote access and authority. Jesus Christ has the authority to decide who dies and who lives;

4. He controls life and death. And John, like all the redeemed, had nothing to fear, since Christ had already delivered him from death and Hades by His own death.

xii. Knowing that Christ has authority over death provides assurance, since believers need no longer fear it. Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies. ... because I live, you will live also." (John 11:25; 14:19).

xiii. To die, Paul noted, is "to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8; cf. Phil. 1:23).

xiv. Jesus conquered Satan and took the keys of death away from him: "Through death [Christ rendered] powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and ... free[d] those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Heb. 2:14–15).

xv. The knowledge that Christ "loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (Rev. 1:5) provides the assurance that is the balance to the reverential fear that His glory and majesty evoke.

f. Duty.

i. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. (1:19)

ii. The astounding vision John saw inspired in him a healthy tension between fear and assurance.

iii. But to that was added a reminder of his duty.

iv. Christ's earlier command to write is now expanded, as John is told to record three features.

1. First, the things which you have seen, the vision John had just seen and recorded in verses 10–16.

2. Next, the things which are, a reference to the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, which describe the present state of the church.

3. Finally, John was to write the things which will take place after these things, the prophetic revelations of future events unfolded in chapters 4–22.

v. This threefold command provides an outline for the book of Revelation, encompassing (from John's perspective) the past, present, and future.

g. Like John, all Christians have a duty to pass on the truths they learn from the visions recorded in this book.

h. Those visions may at first be startling, disturbing, or fascinating.

i. But they, like all Scripture, are "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

j. As believers study the glory of Christ reflected in the book of Revelation, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [will be] transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18)¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., Revelation 1–11, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 52.