

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Probably the book in the Bible which causes most controversy among evangelicals is the Book of Revelation. It is purported to be the most complicated and difficult to understand. At the same time, though, the introduction to the Book of Revelation gives you this guarantee, **Rev. 1:3** Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. ... There is a blessing promised!

What *is* a blessing? In the Greek, it is the familiar word, **μακάριος**. In the Hebrew, the word is *barak*. The first time the word 'blessing' is used is in Genesis when on the fifth day, **Gen. 1:20** God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. **21** And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. **22** And *God blessed them*, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. ... And the second time the word *barak* is used is on the sixth day, after God had created the first man and the first woman, **28** And *God blessed them* ... How important it is to acknowledge the authenticity of these opening chapters of Scripture ... and in the same way, the concluding chapters of Scripture for All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16,17). ... From Genesis to Revelation, this is the infallible and inerrant Word of God.

So, what does the word 'blessing' mean? It is the fulness and the completeness of absolute joy. It refers to the privileges God has so graciously granted to His people. When He created Adam and Eve He blessed, - endowed, - them with His glory, - they were His glorious creation for they were created in the image of God, after God's own likeness (Gen. 1:26). Therefore, they were beautiful and perfect in His sight ... and that is the depth of meaning behind the word 'blessing'. When the Lord Jesus spoke the 'beatitudes' (Mt. 5:3-11), He accompanied the promises with great rewards, **Mt. 5:3** Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **4** Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. **5** Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. **6** Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. **7** Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. **8** Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. **9** Blessed are the

peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ... With each of these blessings came promises, and that is also what is promised in Rev. 1:3, Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein ... We cannot go wrong when we read the Book of Revelation for if we read it carefully and prayerfully, we are assured of a blessing! ... And when sections of it begin to become difficult to understand with our limited perceptions, even to simply read it and believe it is sufficient for the blessing.

From the very outset this book of Revelation, - more than any other book in the Bible, - reveals the glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. In many parts of Scripture God's glory is mentioned briefly ... perhaps a few words, or maybe a few verses ... but in the Book of Revelation, the whole Book is taken up with revealing His glory! ... For example, the writer to the Hebrews wrote concerning Jesus, **Heb. 1:3** ... the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power ... But, in the book of Revelation, that same theme is in every chapter and verse from the beginning to the end for this is **Rev. 1:1** The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: **2** Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

No book has been more misunderstood and misinterpreted and neglected than this book, and yet we are promised a blessing when we read it, - we *ought* to read and study it, for that reason alone ... and not only are we promised a blessing at the beginning of the book but we are also promised a blessing at the end of the book, **22:7** blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. ... By making this statement, the Holy Spirit is instructing us to read it carefully and prayerfully because it is for us today for John was clearly told, **22:10** Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: *for the time is at hand*. ... That's a repetition of Rev. 1:3, "the time is at hand".

Now, contrast those words, - Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, - with how Daniel was instructed at the end of his visions, **Dan. 12:1** And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

² And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. ⁴ *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end.* ... But here, in the Book of Revelation, the seals are being removed, and its truths are being revealed for the time is *[at last]* at hand.

That's how important this book is. Previously, it was a 'closed book' in the Old Testament, but now to the people of God, the 'closed book' is being opened ... and, **Rev. 1:3** Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.

Why do people say the Book of Revelation is difficult to understand? The simple answer is ... many people don't read it as it ought to be read. Some read it to make arguments. Some read it not expecting to understand it. Some *make* it complicated because they don't want to accept the straightforward meaning of the words ... However, I trust as we read it, and hear the words of this prophetic book ... we shall keep those things which are written therein ... and we shall read them to be obedient to the Lord and to receive His blessing *for the time is at hand* ... This book is speaking about the 'here and now', and that is how *urgent* its message is! It is for today!

It begins with a simple and plain declaration, **1:1** The Revelation of Jesus Christ ... that is what this book is all about! ... It is about nothing else but the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The Greek word for Revelation is ἀποκάλυψις, and this book is also known as The Apocalypse, for it is about the *unveiling* and the *uncovering* of the truth about Jesus which previously had been unknown ... **1:1** The Revelation of Jesus Christ! ... Its purpose is to reveal Him as He is today, in all His glory. To the early believers eagerly looking forward to Christ's return ... this is the welcome message of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. ... Where is He today, and what's He doing? What's He preparing to do? How will He do it and when will He do it? ... This book is all about The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Notice, though, to Whom this Revelation is initially given ... it is given to Jesus Christ, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto *him*. This book is first and foremost given to Jesus ... why? The Gospels show His *humiliation*, how He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: **8** ... *[and]* humbled himself (Phil. 2:7,8) ... whereas, in the Book of

Revelation we see His *glorification* ... Therefore, first and foremost, this revelation is given to Jesus to demonstrate how His *misery* gave way to His *majesty*. ... It is The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto *him*.

And the reason it was given to Him was to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass (v.1). This *apocalypse*, - this revelation, - was unveiled and uncovered firstly to Christ, and then through Him to His people to show them the time is at hand leading up to His return. ... The word for 'servant' is *δοῦλος*, a slave ... and that's basically what John was on this island of Patmos for he was a prisoner no better than a slave ... And the message was brought to John in these desperate times through an angel. In the Book of Revelation, angels are mentioned in no less than nineteen chapters out of twenty-two ... more than any other book in the Bible (chapters 1,2,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,). Only chapters four, six, and thirteen have no mention of angels.

But this was a particular angel God sent to communicate this Revelation of Jesus Christ to His servant (*δοῦλος*) John. John was a prisoner on the Aegean island of Patmos ... and it was from there he bore 1:2 record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. ... He witnessed to the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ. ... He had no intention of making this into a book over which people would argue ... or into a book which would frighten people from reading. The purpose was for believers to receive a blessing as they read and to understand how God was presenting His glorified Son, so the Redeemed would exalt Him in expectation of His coming again. ... The glimpse of His glory given to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, is now being extended to us all through this book.

John is writing to seven churches in Asia Minor, along the western coast of modern-day Turkey. They were actual congregations, primarily founded as a result of Paul's ministry, and John greets them, 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace [*χάρις*] be unto you, and peace [*shalom*], from him which is, and which was, and which is to come [*the eternity of God*]; and from the seven Spirits [*the Holy Spirit*] which are before his throne. ... The 'seven Spirits' refers to the Holy Spirit for Isaiah explains how the Holy Spirit has seven ministries, **Is. 11:2** And the *spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him*, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

And John continues with ... ⁵ And from Jesus Christ. In other words, this Book of the Revelation is sent with greetings from God the Father (v.1), God the Holy Spirit (v.4), and God the Son (v.5). ... It is a letter from the Trinity, the eternal Three-in-One, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come. ... You cannot get any more authority than this! ... ⁵ And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, ⁶ And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

And then we're promised, ⁷ Behold, he cometh, ... He is coming! ... This Jesus Christ Who is God is returning to this earth ... and the day will come when every eye shall *[future tense]* see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him! ... This is written in the Book to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass (v.1) ... and notice again how when He comes, He is coming 'with clouds'. ... That is not a reference to the weather forecast on the day when Jesus returns, instead, it's the clouds of glory Daniel speaks about, **Dan. 7:13** I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. ¹⁴ And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. ... The Lord Jesus, on that day, is coming in the clouds of glory!

That is what He Himself said in Mk. 14:62, and 13:26, and Mt. 24:30, and Lk 21:27, and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, *and coming in the clouds of heaven* ... Over sixty years before John was sent to the island of Patmos, he was one of the disciples there with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and he watched as Jesus was received up into the cloud (Acts 1:9) ... and as his eyes were transfixed on Christ's ascension, he saw and he heard the two men in white apparel say, ¹¹ this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. ... John, you have seen Him go up into Heaven in a cloud, and now John, in the Book of Revelation, you are being told He is coming again *out* of the clouds (Rev. 1:7). The bodily, visible return of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ to this earth ... the Christian's *blessed hope* (Titus 2:13).

And John is so excited ... Even so, Amen. He is calling for the Lord to come in the first few verses of the book, and he is even more excited at the end of the

book, **Rev. 22:20** He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. *Even so, come, Lord Jesus.* ... That was what the early Christians were hoping for, - the imminent return of the Saviour, - as Paul believed it would take place during his lifetime, **I Thess. 4:16** the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: **17** Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them *in the clouds*, to meet the Lord in the air.

Then, approaching the end of the opening introduction, God declares Himself, **8** I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. ... Again, the eternity of God. He has always been. Over two thousand years earlier, He asked Job, **Job 38:4** Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. **5** Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? **6** Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; **7** When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ... **Job 41:33** Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. **34** He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

This is the God Who gave the revelation to His Son to show unto His beloved Redeemed people things which must shortly come to pass ... and He promises us, as we come to this book, **3** Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. ... May we honour our God as we read and study His inspired Word, and enjoy the blessing He promises. Amen.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (Rev. 1:1-9)

A few days before He was crucified, the Lord Jesus told His disciples, **Mt. 24:44** be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. ... Consequently, throughout their lives they were waiting and watching. It is most probable John was the last remaining member of the Apostles, and the Lord had not yet returned. By now, John is an old man, and he has become a prisoner on the desolate island of Patmos for his unwavering faith in Jesus. He is not in despair though for he continues to rejoice in His Saviour. Even in such advanced years, he is trusting in the promises of Christ.

... Look around him ... what does he have ‘going for him’? His life on earth is almost over. He’s alone in the Aegean Sea for *daring* to uphold the name of Christ ... What has *he* to be happy about?! ... Well, here on this island he was blessed with the most wonderful experience, **Rev. 1:1** The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.

Do you sometimes feel you are ‘out on your own’ ... as if you have been abandoned by friends, and maybe even family ... Look here at John, and attend to this vision he is being given, and remember the promise of this book, **3** Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. ... This Book of the Revelation comes to you and me from the One Who is, Who was, and Who is to come (v.4). This book is from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is revealed to the Lord Jesus, and through Him to John and to the saints ... up to this present day.

It reveals the Lord Jesus in all His glory. No longer is He seen as the Victim humiliated on the cross, but in this book He is *honoured* as the Victor of the Church, **5** Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, **6** And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

The next great event in God’s calendar is when the heavens will open and Jesus will appear, **7** and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. ... With a great procession, He will come to the Mount of Olives and He will make His way across the valley to Jerusalem where the temple used to stand, and from there He will reign over this world for one thousand years! ... That is not a theory, or a dream, or a fantasy, but this is the blessed hope of every born-again believer waiting and watching for His Second Coming, with the prayer on their lips, **7** Even so, Amen.

In the Greek language there is only one word used for our two English words, Even so. The Greek word is *ναί*, and it simply means ‘yes’ ... so, picture old John expressing himself here ... his eyesight wasn’t good as it used to be, or his hearing, or many of his faculties ... but he confidently calls out, *Yes! Even so, come* Lord Jesus! ... As the old hymn says,

I'm waiting for Thee, Lord, Thy beauty to see, Lord;
I'm waiting for Thee - For Thy coming again.

Lord, I *know* You are coming for You have promised! ... And John is *still* as excited at the end of the book, **Rev. 22:20** He which testifieth these things [*the Lord Jesus*] saith, Surely [*vai, yes*] I come quickly [*without delay, soon*]. Amen. *Even so* (*vai*), *come*, Lord Jesus. ... He's an *enthusiastic* old man! ... But that's what the early Christians were hoping for, - the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. ... *Paul* believed it would happen during his lifetime, **I Thess. 4:16** the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: **17** Then *we* which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them *in the clouds*, to meet the Lord in the air. ... *Paul* died sometime between 64-68 AD, - thirty years before John was on the island of Patmos ... and Jesus had not returned yet, but John continued to watch and wait.

Then, approaching the end of this opening introduction, John hears a voice *booming*, **8** I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. ... The eternity of God. He has always been, for time relates nothing to His nature, **II Peter 3:8** one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Over two thousand years earlier, this same everlasting God asked the grieving Job, **Job 38:4** Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. **5** Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? **6** Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof? **7** When the morning stars [*angels*] sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ... **Job 41:33** Upon earth there is not his like ... **34** He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

The world can mock Him. They can deride and persecute His people. They can denigrate the Lord's Name ... but even on this island of despair, off the eastern coast of ancient Asia Minor, here we see the sovereign God in His essence and Christ in His unique relationship to His Father within the Trinity. ... You might wonder at why God would appear unto His servant in a place such as this, but you remember how this same John began His Gospel, **Jn. 1:5** And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. ... Not even the darkness of Patmos could extinguish the glorious Light of the Lord Jesus Christ ... and there is our encouragement for today, as Philip Bliss wrote,

No darkness have we who in Jesus abide;
 The Light of the world is Jesus!
 We walk in the light when we follow our Guide!
 The Light of the world is Jesus!

He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (v.8). Time has no bearing on Him, no restraints, no effect for He is God. He is the “true God, begotten, not created”. He is “God of God, Light of Light” ... and this Book of Revelation reveals to us the kind of a world to which He will return.

... When the wise men from the east were searching for the young child Jesus, mistakenly, they went to the palace of King Herod. As we know, they did not find Him there. Instead, they had to continue to the insignificant little town of Bethlehem. ... Out in the Aegean Sea, John was neither in a palace, nor in some ornate church building ... instead, after over sixty years, he is about to meet the Lord again in a most desolate place, in the most unlikely place. ⁹ I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we might wonder why the Lord allows difficult things to happen to His people. How often though, in Scripture, we discover that is how He displays Himself in His great glory. We have examples of this when He appeared to Moses in the wilderness, to Job in His suffering and bereavement, to Daniel in the den of lions, to Jonah when he was in the belly of the great fish, and to many others. *Often*, God reveals Himself in His glory during times which would ordinarily bring fear and despair ... But there is no hopeless fear or debilitating despair in this first chapter of Revelation as John remembers it so clearly, ⁹ I John, - he cannot help but *emphasise* it ... *Me! Me John* ... just an ordinary man who is your brother in Christ, your companion in tribulation and persecution ... *me John* ... Notice, it was simply ‘John’ in verses one and four, but now, - he can hardly believe it, - for now it is I John, Εγὼ Ἰωάννης

It is almost as if he is in a state of shock ... and he uses the same surprised statement on other occasions too, for example. **Rev. 21:2** And *I John* saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven ... **22:8** And *I John* saw these things, and heard them. ... He can hardly believe what God has privileged him to witness!

Many years earlier he had written in his Gospel, **Jn. 1:14** And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. ... When he wrote those words, he could never have imagined what he would experience in later life! ... He witnessed and beheld the glory of Christ during that first time Jesus came to this earth, sixty years earlier ... but that was then, when His glory was veiled and shrouded. ... But now, this was about to be *more* than John had ever experienced during those three-and-a-half years with Jesus when he left his fishing nets and followed Him the length and breadth of the country! ... “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see” ... but here, in this vision of John on the island of Patmos, he was about to testify to the *glorified* Christ.

... Even the last time John saw Jesus was when he stood with the other disciples on the Mount of Olives, forty days after He had risen from the dead. And during those forty days, the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). ... Everything they needed to know, was taught to them during those forty days! What a Bible course *that* was!! ... And then after He had finished, Jesus was received up into the cloud, from out of their sight (Acts 1:9). ... No more Jesus! ... He was gone ... Only the memories ... That was the last time John saw Jesus! No wonder he is about to be shocked! No wonder, - in a few more verses he will have fallen at the Saviour’s feet as though dead, - it’s enough to *kill* an old man! ... But, he’s excited! “I John”, not “I, the apostle, the disciple, the man who was with Jesus, the writer of the Gospel and the three epistles, ... I John, who everyone has to look up to and revere” ... No, he did not say that, for in the presence of Jesus Christ, he was simply a brother and a companion in tribulation, and a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, along with all his other brothers and sisters in the faith ... No ‘airs and graces’, but simply a sinner graciously pardoned and privileged to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord!

... What will it be like when *you* see Jesus? Unlike John, you and I have never seen Him, - no picture from man’s imagination does Him justice ... What will it be like when we see Jesus? What will we notice first about Him? ... It won’t be the length of His hair, or the colour of His complexion, or how tall He is, but the very first we shall notice of Him will be *His glory!* ... **Heb. 1:3** the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,

Oft times the day seems long, our trials hard to bear,
 We’re tempted to complain, to murmur and despair;
 But Christ will soon appear to catch His Bride away ...
 It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,

Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ.

This persecuted old man, exiled, - banished, - to a forsaken island in the sea ... and yet, that is where the Saviour is waiting to meet him. ... That is often where He *does* meet His people, where they are at their loneliest and their lowest ... In this life, be assured of this, there is no place we can go where the Saviour is not willing to be with us. He promises you, **Heb. 13:5** I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. That is what He also promised the children of Israel, **Dt. 31:6** Be strong and of a good courage ... for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. ... And *God* was with John on the island of Patmos, for this old man, - who many had 'given up' on, - he is about to have a most special meeting, **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet ... And it is from there we shall continue our study on the next occasion. Amen.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (Rev. 1:10)

As an old man, well into his eighties (if not nineties), the apostle John was incarcerated on the remote prison island of Patmos ... a volcanic, barren, *rock* off the coast of ancient Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey. It's about forty miles west of Miletus ... part of a group of about fifty such rocky islands in the Aegean Sea. He was banished there for his faith by the Emperor Domitian in 95 AD, and church tradition claims he was released a year later when Domitian was murdered by some of his own court officials. (By the way ... Domitian was the younger brother of Titus who ransacked Jerusalem in 70 AD ... In 77 AD it was Domitian who sent one of his generals (Agricola), who tried unsuccessfully to conquer Caledonia. He also reckoned on conquering Ireland with a single legion [c. 5000 soldiers] and a few auxiliaries ... but it never happened!)

During the early centuries, Christians often suffered punishment by public martyrdom, such as being burned at the stake or thrown to wild animals. However, since John had a high profile, - an apostle who personally knew Jesus, - the authorities could not afford to potentially stir up strife by condemning him to a public execution so he was banished 'out of the way' to Patmos. ... Today, perched on the central hilltop, the island is dominated by the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. John the Divine where around forty monks live. Among its many relics is supposed to be the skull of Thomas the apostle. In a more remote part of the island is the cave where John is reputed to have received his visions

... Again, the Greek Orthodox maintain the cave as a grotto, and just outside it they have a stall where the priest will sell you souvenirs after you have paid to enter the grotto ... Altogether, the island is only about 7½-10 miles long and six miles at its widest.

What a forsaken place it was for such a faithful servant of God! ... John had previously been actively serving God as an elder and a teacher among the local churches in Asia Minor. Some of his more famous disciples were Polycarp, Papias and Ignatius. Of course, John was the disciple to whom Jesus commended His mother over sixty years earlier, **Jn. 19:26** When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! **27** Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. ... This was the fisherman from Galilee, whose father was Zebedee, whose mother was Salome (Mk. 15:40; Jn. 19:25) ... and Salome was the sister of the mother of Jesus which means John and Jesus were cousins. His brother James had been martyred over fifty years earlier, killed by Herod in 44 AD (Acts 12:2).

John had spent his adult life serving Jesus and now he is a prisoner sent to die on a desolate island! When convicts were deported to Patmos, it was expected they would die there. And John's old age would not have gained him any leniency from his duties for he would have been put to the same hard labour as every other prisoner. Sir William Ramsay was a famous Scottish archaeologist and New Testament scholar, - his publication *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* is a classic. He relates how John's banishment would have been "preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters [*chains*], scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on bare ground, a dark prison cave, and work under the lash of a military overseer". ... *The servants of God were hated!*

... And yet, this was the place, in the sovereign will of God, where His servant John would meet the Lord Jesus in all His Heavenly glory. ... The last time John saw Jesus was as He was ascending into the clouds from the Mount of Olives ... and he is about to see Him again after all those years.

It was the Lord's Day, - Sunday, - when John was 'in the Spirit' ... It would have been like every other day because Sunday was no different for the prisoners ... and their captors had no respect and no thought of the Lord's Day. That was the particular day, though, God chose to lift John from out of the misery and solitude and to bring him into a realm which extended beyond any normal human experience. He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day (v.10) ... He

was elevated to the glorious presence of God. ... Let's not hurry, but read the words again, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day ... You can almost see the expression on his face as he wrote ... *I* ... He could hardly believe it ... *I John* (v.9) ... I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day ... I was lifted out of despair and overwhelmed by the glorious presence of God.

Nearly sixty-five years earlier, he had been on a mountain with Peter and James and Jesus ... and suddenly Jesus was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light (Mt. 17:2). ... He would most definitely have remembered that occasion when he witnessed the glory of God ... **I Jn. 1:3** That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you ... and if ever there was a time he would love to witness it again, surely it was *now* on the island of Patmos! ... I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day ... He had many precious memories of being with Jesus ... and I'm sure as he was in the Spirit on [*this particular*] Lord's day he recalled those special times to which he referred in his Gospel when we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14).

We're not told how long he remained in the initial silence ... but what an encouragement this vision would also have been for *all* those who were suffering for their faith at that time and who would read this Book of the Revelation! ... Remember the initial promise, **3** Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy ... Notice how John had already said to his readers, many of whom knew all-too-well the harrowing experience of desperate servitude, **9** I John, who also am your *brother*, and *companion* in tribulation and then he followed it up by reminding them I'm also your brother and your companion *in the kingdom* ... of Jesus Christ ... He wasn't referring to a Kingdom in the future because this was in the present tense, - **9** I John, ... your companion ... *in the kingdom* ... the Kingdom over which Jesus Christ presently rules *today!* ... Even on the island of Patmos, Jesus reigns! Jesus is King today! There is, of course, a time coming when He will reign on earth during His Millennial Kingdom but He is, - at this moment, - *already* King in the spiritual Kingdom referred to in v.6, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. ...

And here is John, imprisoned on the island for his unshakeable faithfulness to the Lord ... He does not know it, but he is about to have his greatest experience of God ... The Lord is about to lift him *up* and lift him *out*, and into the spiritual realm for John continues, **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, *and heard behind me a great [μέγας] voice [φωνή], as of a trumpet* ... The Heavenly

megaphone! ... He could not have missed it!! ... What a sound to break through into his life! ... Whose voice was it? ... John knew immediately!

He would have remembered being in a graveyard in Bethany with Jesus and the disciples ... four days after a very close friend of Jesus had died. The Saviour had entered the cemetery, walked past the other graves, and stood outside the cave where the body of his friend was incarcerated. There He stood for a few moments and wept. He sorrowed outside the cave, with a huge stone covering its entrance (Jn. 11:38). He then instructed the men to take away the stone, and at that point He lifted His eyes towards Heaven and prayed. When He had completed His short prayer, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth (Jn. 11:33,34) ... John had heard the sound of the voice that day ... and here it is again, only many times more powerful, **Rev. 1:10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a *great* voice, as of a trumpet. Previously, the voice of the Lord Jesus came from the lips of One Who had taken upon Himself the form of a servant (Phil. 1:7) ... But on this occasion on the island of Patmos, this was not the voice of a servant, but a *Sovereign!* ... The glory He had laid aside to come into this world was His again for God had highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name (Phil. 2:9).

When the voice of the Lord Jesus *thundered*, the island of Patmos was no longer a prison for John, but a paradise ... In the Old Testament, prior to the giving of the Law and the Ten Commandments, the Hebrew people were gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, **Ex. 19:16** And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were *thunders* and ... the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud ... Later, the psalmist declared, **Ps. 18:13 13** The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice ... **29:3** The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth ... In the Book of Job, Elihu announced, **Job 37:4** he thundereth with the voice of his excellency ... **5** God thundereth marvellously with his voice. ... That's the sound of God! It cannot be mistaken with any other ...

And John heard it, - he could not *not* have heard it! ... He heard the voice behind him the same as Ezekiel did almost seven hundred years earlier when he wrote, **Ezek. 3:12** Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place ... John had a very similar experience for *he* heard it *behind* him too ... John wasn't facing towards the sound, - his attention was elsewhere ... but when he heard a great voice, as of a trumpet he had to turn himself. He was looking in the

opposite direction. ... How easy it is to be looking in the ‘wrong direction’ during times of trial! “Why me, Lord?” It’s easy to be looking *away*, as John was when the great voice sounded behind him. ... In that place of incarceration, John had not been expecting Jesus, - he had not been looking for Jesus ... but Jesus came looking for him! ... And it wasn’t a ‘still small voice’, but it was the voice as the sound of the great trumpet.

I’m going to resist referring to the great trumpet sound which will announce the second coming of the Lord Jesus to this earth ... but as we make our way through the Book of Revelation you will find the trumpet sounds in different forms in the majority of its chapters. This is the first mention of the trumpet sound though, **10** I ... heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet. ... The powerful, assertive, compelling voice of the risen, glorified Christ! ... And it is a *trumpet* sound, - it is singular. Old John did not need to hear a whole brass section in an orchestra for *one* of Heaven’s trumpets was sufficient ... one was mighty enough! ... One trumpet sound was all God required for old John to hear! It reminds us how God only gives us what we require. ... He is faithful, and He does not overload us with burdens too heavy for us to bare (I Cor. 10:13). ... John had enough to contend with ... but this was a great day in his life, when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind *[him]* a great voice, as of a trumpet.

Many old people are deaf ... but John heard the great voice. He would have been tired, weary, and exhausted ... but John heard the great voice. He could have been past having any hope ... but John heard the great voice. ... God’s people hear Him! God’s people are precious to Him. No trial can steal us from the love of God, **Rom. 8:38** neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, **39** Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ... Nor even a forsaken island in the Aegean Sea! ... Only a few years earlier John had written to the churches, **I Jn. 5:5** Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? ... **4:4** greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. ... He proved it before, and he is proving it again for he can see the hand of God even in his trials, **Rev. 1:9** I John ... was in the isle that is called Patmos, *for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*. ... That’s why God had him there! The Lord had a purpose for him being on the prison island of Patmos because *there* he would meet the glorified Christ.

And what a compelling vision he is about to receive! ... How blessed we are to have this Book of the Revelation because through John's record we are given hope and confidence for present trials and also for the times ahead. ... In our next study, prepare by reading to the end of this chapter as we seek to concentrate on the One John saw standing among the seven golden candlesticks, those seven churches in ancient Asia Minor.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (Rev. 1:11-12)

We are on the island of Patmos and it is the Lord's Day, Sunday. Isn't it good when God's people honour the Lord's Day?! Even as a prisoner on a desolate island, John honoured it! It is understandable when the world doesn't, but it is the privilege of the Christian to keep Sunday special. ... Sunday was the day Jesus rose from the dead, and it was the day the New Testament believers met to celebrate His victory over sin, the cross, and the grave ... and that is why we meet here on a Sunday to continue, - in the words of Acts 2:42, - stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ... It is the day especially set aside for the worship of God. We worship Him *every* day, of course, but we have to be practical ... we have daily issues to deal with throughout the week but Sunday is the one day out of the seven which particularly belongs to the Lord and we are to be faithful, - with other believers, - in meeting with Him on the Lord's Day. ... How we worship Him on a Sunday is an indication of how much we give to Him the rest of the week.

John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and he recorded how he heard behind him a great voice, as of a trumpet (v.10). He then heard this great voice announce, **11** I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. ... He is instructed to write in a book what he is about to see. The word for 'book' is βιβλίον, from which we get 'bible' (Latin, *biblia*) ... and John is being told to write down on a parchment, - papyrus, - what he is about to witness. ...

Remember, he is an old man who has already written the Gospel and the three epistles ... Maybe the Lord should have chosen someone else to carry out this task for, after all, an old man's fingers aren't as agile as they used to be! The eyesight is not as good as it used to be either ... But, isn't it typical of the Lord

how He entrusts important assignments to people, *regardless* of their age! The Lord doesn't look for 'young' people or for 'old' people ... instead, He looks for *faithful* people ... the 'age-thing' is secondary!

And something else which is basic ... John is not told to write a commentary on what he is about to see, but he is told to simply tell it as he is given it. It was not John's place to try and explain the complexities of the visions ... but simply to write them down as he received them, - bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw (v.2) - pass them on so that ⁸ Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, - *that* was his remit ... to be God's messenger! ... The messenger does not compile the message, but the messenger delivers the message. When a preacher or a teacher diverts from that concept, what they deliver no longer has God as its source.

... And these seven churches ... when you look at them on a map you will see they follow a certain order. They begin in the west with Ephesus, and then a few miles northward to Smyrna, - both along the coastal region ... Another few miles northward to the inland city of Pergamum and then a short distance south-easterly to Thyatira and on to Sardis, Philadelphia and finally, Laodicea.

It is not surprising they follow a certain order for God is the God of order, and that is what Paul emphasised in his letter to the Corinthians, **I Cor. 14:40** Let all things be done decently and in order. ... These letters were being distributed in an orderly way ... That is how you can tell if something is of God or not ... Our God is the God of order and not the author of confusion for confusion *flusters* people and bewilders and disorients them ... So-called 'messengers' take the message, change it and that is why we have so much confusion in the churches ... They change the message to suit their audience ... but they have no right to change it ... and it is one of the signs preceding the coming of the Lord, when men and women are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (II Tim. 1:7). And we are warned, **II Tim. 3:5** ... from such turn away ... **Is. 8:20** To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. ... Where you find anyone preaching a message which is not faithfully grounded in God's Word, you can be sure it is not of God!

So, John is being told to write down in a book (parchment) what he sees, and to **11** ... send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and

unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. ... That is the order these letters were to be written. It wasn't 'up to' John how it should be done, - in the same way, in the ancient times, it wasn't up to Noah as to how the ark was to be made, or to Moses as to how the tabernacle was to be constructed, or to Solomon how the temple was to be built ... This was God's project and had to be done *His* way.

And John did not argue, nor give the Lord *his* suggestions. There would have been a time when he *would* have argued, as on that occasion when he and his brother James reckoned the Lord should call down judgment on the Samaritan village for not allowing Him to enter ... they petitioned Jesus, **Lk. 9:54** Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? Lord, that's what You should do, and You should do it now! ... That's how John *used* to think, but by the time he has been exiled to the island of Patmos the Lord has taught him many lessons ... and he has been a good learner for we see him now doing as the Lord instructed him.

And so, John is commissioned. He has been telling us a little about himself, and his circumstances, and how he has arrived at this place where God is about to reveal to him these prophecies ... and now comes the first vision. Up until now he has had his back to the Lord, - he has heard this great voice, as of a trumpet, *behind him*, - and he turned to see, - βλέπω, to look upon, - the voice that spoke with him (v.12). ...

How do you *see* a voice?! You *listen* to a voice, but you don't *see* it! What does John mean? ... Sixty years earlier the disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee with the Lord Jesus. He had been busy all day and was tired. He lay down, and fell asleep, **Mt. 8:24** And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. ... Rather than leave Him at peace, - rather than trust they would be safe since Jesus was in the boat with them, - they wakened Him in panic, Lord, save us: *we* perish (v.25). ... In other words, Lord, if you don't do something, You're going to perish with us! ... After a word of admonishment, **26** he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. ... At that point, they not only *heard* but they *saw* the power of His voice ... and John was there ... and he is once again *seeing* this power on the island of Patmos ... but many times more dynamic because this was the voice not of Jesus in human flesh, but this was the voice of the risen, glorified Son of God, **Rev. 1:8** I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty ... **11** I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last ... **17** ... I am the first and the last: **18** I am he that liveth,

and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. ... There's no mistaking Who John saw ... John saw *Jesus Christ!*

Where did he see Jesus? When John turned around, he saw Jesus standing in the midst of seven individual golden candlesticks. or more correctly, seven golden *lampstands*. ... In case you are wondering what the difference is ... A candlestick burns out and cannot be restored or renewed ... once it has burned out, there is nothing more to burn, it is finished. A lampstand, on the other hand, keeps burning because oil is continually poured into it. The illustration of the lampstands is taken from the tabernacle. ... In the wilderness of Sinai, you would enter the tabernacle through the entrance, - the only way in. ... Immediately in front of you was the Altar of Burnt Offering and then the Laver (where the water for ceremonial washing was standing). A little further was the next compartment into which the priests were allowed to enter, the Holy Place. On your right, - containing twelve loaves, - was the Table of Shewbread, made from acacia wood. Immediately in the centre was the Incense Altar, - just in front of the veil/curtain, behind which was the Holy of Holies ... and on your left-hand side was a single golden lampstand, - one of only two pieces of furniture in the Sanctuary made of solid gold (the other was the Mercy Seat).

Skilful craftsmen using hammers beat one talent or just less than 5½ stone (34.19 kg) of solid gold into a beautiful lampstand along with all the utensils to be used with it (Ex. 25:31,39). They beat and beat the gold to form the beautiful design. ... Such intricate work this involved ... There were three main parts to the lampstand, - the base, the shaft, and the seven branches ... one branch in the middle, and three on one side and three on the other side. Each of the seven branches ended in a cup made in the form of an open almond flower. At the top, the opened petals of the flower held an oil lamp. The branches and the central shaft were skilfully decorated with that same open-almond blossom design with three on each branch and four on the centre shaft. The decoration was so exquisite and detailed that God commanded only the most highly skilled craftsmen anointed by the Holy Spirit should make it. No measurements are given as to its exact size. The seven oil lamps resting in the flower petals were like small bowls. A flax or linen wick was placed in the lamp and the fire was never to go out (Lev. 24:2).

The single lampstand was always placed facing the south (Ex. 26:35). Since there were no windows in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, this was the only light ... but it reflected off the golden walls giving a golden glow so the

priests could perform their duties. ... The golden lampstand was a beautiful, ornate work of art!

Here, though, in the opening vision of the Book of Revelation, there is not *one* lampstand ... but *seven*! The light in the tabernacle was confined ... but in this opening chapter, the Light of the world has *no* restrictions ... and He is shining on His Church, and in turn, each of the individual churches had their own lights to shine in the dark cities where they were placed. ... Again, John could remember back to over sixty years earlier when Jesus said to His disciples, **Mt. 5:14** Ye are the light of the world. ... **16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

And that was the purpose for these seven churches in Asia Minor, - they were to be as 'lights' shining the Gospel ... And standing majestically in the midst of those seven individual lampstands, - which v. 20 confirms are the seven churches, - is the Lord Jesus, **Rev. 1:13** And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. **14** His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; **15** And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. **16** And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

What are we being shown here? John's opening vision is about the ministry of the Lord Jesus in the centre of the churches. And the voice John heard among the seven lampstands was no less than the voice of the risen glorified Christ ... the One Who would shortly address each of the churches individually. ... Some of the lights in those churches were burning brightly, some were flickering, and some were in danger of being extinguished. ... Each of those lampstands were golden, precious and beautiful. The cost they represented was an inestimable amount ... for each of them was purchased with the precious blood of Christ.

And why are there *seven* lampstands? There are seven because seven is the number of completeness, which is symbolic of the *complete* Redeemed Church of God ... and that is the reason Jesus is standing among them. It is His Church, of which He is the Head ... He is among them for they belong to Him. ... But before we begin to read and study the seven letters, we are about to be shown how the glorified Christ was working among the early Church *then* during the time of John, and how He has been working in the Church over these last two

thousand years, and what He is presently doing among His Church today. ...
And that is where we shall begin our next study.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (Rev. 1:12-16)

Let's begin our study by turning to Exodus chapter twenty-four. Moses has been given the Ten Commandments and the Law on Mount Sinai. The Lord then instructed him to bring Aaron and his two sons (Nadab and Abihu), and seventy of the elders to worship (Ex. 24:1,2). After having sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings (v.5-8), **Ex. 24:9** Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: **10** And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

Then we leap through the centuries to the Jewish captivity in Babylon where Ezekiel is shown in a vision ... **Ezek. 1:26** And above the firmament that was over their heads [*i.e. the heavenly creatures*] was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. **27** And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. **28** As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

Now, let's read from the seventh chapter of Daniel where the prophet records, **Dan. 7:9** I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. **10** A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him ... **13** I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. **14** And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Moses was in the wilderness, and Ezekiel and Daniel were in Babylon. No comforts, no luxuries, and surrounded by hardship and adversity ... That is also how it was for the apostle John on the island of Patmos. They are an example of how Satan would try to convince you God has *abandoned* you ... How easy it would have been for Moses, and Ezekiel, and Daniel, and John to have given up ... and yet, in these the places of seclusion and isolation, that is where they experienced the majesty of God's glory. ... God has promised He will never leave you nor forsake you ... and often, it is when life is at its most harrowing, you feel His presence the closest.

John is on the island of Patmos. He heard a voice *booming* behind him, **Rev. 1:11** Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. Next, he wrote, **12** And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; **13** And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man ... This is the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is similar to what Daniel saw in Dan. 7:13. ... Here, in John's opening vision, the Lord Jesus is standing in the midst of the lampstands, - signifying His Church, - and He is honouring one of the last promises He had made prior to ascending into Heaven, **Mt. 28:20** lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. ... And here now, He has come to encourage and challenge the believers in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

This is the living, exalted, glorified Lord. He is the ever-present Saviour, the constant Companion, the faithful Lord of His Church. ... He is there with them, and He is fulfilling the role, - as we shall see shortly, - of the High Priest.

And as He stands in the midst of the seven churches of Asia Minor, John reverently and affectionately describes Him as one like unto the Son of man (v.13). ... That's a title the Lord Jesus used of Himself eighty-one times in the Gospels. In fact, John regularly referred to Him using the exact same title, for example, to Nathanael, **Jn. 1:51** Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon *the Son of man* ... to Nicodemus, **Jn. 3:13** And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even *the Son of man* which is in heaven. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must *the Son of man* be lifted up ... to His disciples, **Jn. 12:23** The hour is come, that *the Son of man* should be glorified. ... This was a title for Jesus John knew well ... and it was Jesus, - as the Son of Man, - John recognised *immediately* on the island of Patmos. He was fully aware of Whose presence he was in! ... *Jesus* had come to meet him on this prison-island!

And John saw Jesus clothed with a garment down to the foot. The word for the garment (ποδήρης) is the word used in the Septuagint for the full-length robe of the high priest (Ex. 28:4) ... Jesus was standing among the seven churches as the High Priest, and draped over His robe, - around His chest, - was a golden girdle, - a sash, like the priests in the Old Testament wore, Ex. 28,29,39, Lev. 16.

The writer to the Hebrews wrote, **Heb. 4:14** Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God ... The last time John saw Jesus was on the Mount of Olives when he watched Him ascending into Heaven but now John sees Him among the lampstands. ... In the Old Testament the high priest interceded on behalf of his people before God, - he as a man mediated between his fellowmen and God. This vision of John's is different though because in John's vision the Lord Jesus is mediating and interceding *for God* as He brings *God's* seven messages to the churches. ... The high priest in the Old Testament spoke on behalf of the people to God, whereas Christ, the High Priest among the lampstands, was coming to speak on behalf of God to the churches.

And He's moving among them, knowing what is going on in each place for nothing escapes His attention and He is preparing to address them individually. In His High Priestly role, He is there on behalf of His Father, **13** And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

And next John notices, **14** His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow ... The Old Testament high priest would have worn a mitre on *his* head ... but this High Priest among the lampstands was wearing no mitre, **14** His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow [*glorious*]. ... Remember, that's also how the Ancient of Days was described in Daniel's vision, **Dan. 7:9** ... and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool ... This is Jesus Christ ... and He is the eternal and everlasting God ... He is as white as snow ... like the pure wool. ... He is perfect. He is sinless. He is holy.

... **Rev. 1:14** and his eyes were as a flame of fire ... That is also how Daniel described Him, **Dan. 10:5** Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: **6** His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and *his eyes as lamps of fire* ... their penetrating power ... and that

is the gaze which was *burning* into John as he beheld the Lord. ... This same gaze will also be mentioned in the letter to the church at Thyatira, **Rev. 2:18** These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire ... He examines the most hidden recesses, as Job declared, **Job 34:21** For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings ... and Solomon too, **Prov. 15:3** The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

... **Rev. 1:15** And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace ... These were the feet washed with the tears of a sinful woman, the same feet she then wiped them with her hair ... and kissed, and anointed them with the ointment from out of the box of alabaster perfume (Lk. 7:37,38) ... These were the feet which were mangled and disfigured on the cross, - John saw them for he was at Calvary. ... But the feet of Jesus he sees now are like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace. ... His feet were glowing, polished ... Remember in the Old Testament, when Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego were cast into Nebuchadnezzar's burning fiery furnace, **Dan. 3:24** Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. **25** He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and *the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*

... **Rev. 1:15** ... and his voice as the sound of many waters. ... This is again from the Old Testament, from the prophecy of Ezekiel, **Ezek. 43:2** And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and *his voice was like a noise of many waters* ... Some of us have stood by the Niagara Falls and heard it roaring ... but compared with the voice John heard on the island of Patmos, the Niagara Falls is a whisper! ... This old man, - even if he had been deaf, he would have heard the voice of the Lord as the sound of many waters. ... And to stand by the Niagara Falls is to experience such a *volume* of power ... but what must it have been like for John to have heard the majestic sound of the glorified Christ! ... The last time he heard Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, saying to His disciples, **Acts 1:8** ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth ... That was the last time he had heard the voice of Jesus ... and now he is hearing it again as the sound of many waters.

Rev. 1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars ... Verse twenty explains the seven stars represent the seven churches ... so, in the right hand of the glorified Lord Jesus, He is holding the seven churches ... *in His one hand!* That is a measure of His power and authority, His dominion and control. These churches are *His* churches, answerable to *Him* and He has them in His hand ... John also saw how out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword, - ... a 'two-edged sword' cutting from right to left and left to right ... a fearsome weapon ... it is the symbol of Christ's judgment and that is how Rev. 19:15 also explains it, And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations. ... In Rev. 19, it is referring to the future judgment of the nations, but here in chapter one, it is God's judgment concerning the churches for, as Peter reminds us, **I Peter 4:17** judgment must begin at the house of God ... and that is what we shall see that when we study the seven churches.

Then John expresses what he sees when he looks into the face of Jesus, **Rev. 1:16** and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. Over sixty years earlier, John had seen this same face, - the face of the Saviour on the cross, so marred more than any man (Is. 52:14). ... This was the face the Jewish officials slapped (Jn. 18:22) ... and the Roman soldiers also (Jn. 19:3). This was the face encrusted with the blood that had trickled down from where the cruel crown of thorns had pierced ... This was the face smudged and smeared by dirt ... John saw it for he had been there at the cross ... *and now* he sees that face again, his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. ... The beaming, beautiful, glorified face of Jesus! ... As the Bride in the Song of Solomon describes Him, **Songs 5:6** he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved.

At first John saw the lampstands, and then he turned and he noticed how the Son of man was dressed. But the image of the lampstands and the dress faded when he looked upon the glorified Lord Jesus Christ ... His head, and His hair, and His eyes ... His feet, and His voice, His right hand, and His mouth, and His face ... the beautiful face of Jesus shining in its Heavenly glory ... A few years earlier he had written in one of his epistles, **I Jn. 3:2** we know that, when he shall appear ... we shall see him as he is. ... John could *never* have imagined how wonderful that experience would be, as the hymn says ...

What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see,
And I look upon His face, the One Who saved me by His grace.

This is too marvellous a scene to rush through, - we would be doing the Lord a disservice if we did not pay due attention to what He is showing us ... We are almost at the conclusion of this first chapter of the Book of Revelation, but there

is one more scene ... with a 'twist' ... and we shall return to it in our next study, the Lord willing.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (Rev. 1:17-20)

John the apostle, - the writer of the Gospel and the three epistles, - has been exiled to the island of Patmos by one of the cruellest enemies of Christianity, the Roman Emperor Diocletian. It is the year 96 AD. He is an old man, - in his late-eighties or early nineties. In the eyes of the world he is facing a very bleak future (... what he has left of it). It is the Lord's Day, - the first day of the week when God's people would have been meeting and praying for him. But this was an extraordinary Lord's Day for John because in a vision he received he heard behind him a great voice, like a trumpet blowing ... and he turned around to see Someone, - the Alpha and Omega, - standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Each of the individual lampstands represented the seven churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Walking among these churches John clearly saw one like unto the Son of man. This was the Lord Jesus, **Rev. 1:13** clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. **14** His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; **15** And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. **16** And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

What John saw absolutely overpowered him! He lost all his strength, he wrote, **17** And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. ... He collapsed. The blood rushed from his face and he turned as pale as a corpse, as he fell on his face to the ground ... It looked like he was *gone ... dead!*

Something similar happened to the prophet Daniel, **Dan. 10:8** I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. **9** Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.

Ezekiel experienced it too, **Ezek. 1:28** As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. ... **3:23** Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face. ... **9:8** And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord GOD! ... **43:3** And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face ... **44:4** Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD: and I fell upon my face.

These are examples of the *fear* in these visions when the glory of God was revealed to His servants ... Why, though, was there a lack of such fear when Jesus was on earth and met multitudes of people? Generally, they didn't fall to the ground. There was the lack of fear because when the people looked at Jesus, all they saw was a man. ... His glory was veiled by His human flesh. The glory which He shared with the Father before the world was (Jn. 17:5) had been temporarily set aside while He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7).

His eternal glory was mainly hidden, but when His glory was revealed, the one seeing it fell upon their face. ... What, though, if they fell *backwards*? Obviously, that's the opposite direction ... Instead of falling on their faces in recognition of His glory, some fell backwards, like the soldiers and chief priests and Pharisees who came into the Garden of Gethsemane, with Judas Iscariot, ... and Jesus saw them coming and He asked them, **Jn. 18:4** Whom seek ye? **5** They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, *I am* he. ... **6** As soon then as he had said unto them, *I am* he, *they went backward, and fell to the ground.* ... They hated Him ... they loathed and detested Him, for He had again announced Himself as *I AM* ... That's the same as He had said previously, **Jn. 8:58** Before Abraham was, *I am* ... and on that occasion they were going to stone Him to death! ... They were intent on not missing out another opportunity and when the time came, a few hours later, and they brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, and Pilate gave them the choice, **Jn. 18:39** ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? **40** Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber. ... This

was the crowd, when they arrested Jesus, ... they refused to acknowledge Him as the *I Am!* ... **Lk. 19:14** We will not have this *man* to reign over us.

They did not, - and *would* not, - recognise Jesus, and they fell on their backs, rather than on their faces ... But here is an old man and he had seen the risen glorified Jesus. The apostle John was lying on the ground as dead, white as a ghost, as if there was no life in him ... Many years earlier, he had sat beside Jesus at the Last Supper, he was a member of the inner circle of disciples with Peter and James, he stood at the cross, to him Jesus committed His mother Mary ... and he is lying with his face in the dirt, as though dead! How did this happen?

Of course, John had seen Jesus often ... ever since childhood because his mother and the mother of Jesus were sisters, which means Jesus and John were cousins. John knew Jesus all his life ... and yet, during all those early years His Godhood had been shrouded ... and all people saw was the human Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son, like when the townspeople said, **Jn. 6:42** Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? ... They could not see His Heavenly glory because it was hidden from them, **Jn. 1:10** He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. **11** He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ... John, - along with Peter and James, - had a *brief* glimpse of His transcendent glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, **Mt. 17:5** While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them [**Mk. 9:3** *And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them ...* **Lk. 9:29** *And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering:* and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. **6** And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. **7** And *Jesus came and touched them*, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. **8** And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. [**Lk. 9:32** *But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.*]

Yes, John *had* seen Jesus ... many times during those years of growing up, and also the fleeting glance of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration ... but this was even *more* astounding ... what he experienced ... when he saw Christ standing among the seven golden lampstands on the island of Patmos

... No wonder, he fell at the feet of Jesus as though dead! ... He was intensely conscious of his own unworthiness. Previously, in one of his epistles, he

marvelled at this, **I Jn. 3:1** Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us ... Totally undeserving!

... “Who am I, Lord?” ... It’s like when Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in the temple and he called out, **Is. 6:5** Woe is me! ... for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. ... John MacArthur makes a good point, “The Church will never be holy until preachers begin to preach the glory of God. Because until people see God for Who He is, they’ll never understand their own sinfulness and be driven to holiness”.

... And John is lying at the feet of Jesus as though dead, and then Jesus in all His majestic glory stooped down, and John remembers, he laid his right hand upon me (v.17) [*cf. Mt. 17:7, on the Mount of Transfiguration*]. ... He touched John ... and John even remembers Jesus touched him with His *right* hand ... That is the same hand in which He held the seven stars, - His *right* hand ... The seven stars are the seven angels [*messengers*] of the seven churches (v.20) ... in other words, Jesus was holding unto them all, - the churches *and* John ... and John would have remembered how Jesus said over sixty years earlier, **Jn. 10:28** I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, *neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

... And as the right hand of authority and safety touched John, Jesus comforted him, *Fear not; I am* the first and the last: **18** *I am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, *I am* alive for evermore ... You last saw Me ascending from the Mount of Olives into Heaven, but you needn’t rely on past experiences for *I AM is with you now* ... That is the personal Name for God, *I AM* ... and John would have remembered the special significances when he heard Jesus say those two words on many occasions, *I am* the bread of life (Jn. 6:35), *I am* the light of the world (Jn. 8:12), *I am* the door of the sheep (Jn. 10:7), *I am* the good shepherd (Jn. 10:11), *I am* the resurrection and the life (Jn. 11:25), *I am* the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6), *I am* the vine (Jn. 15:5) ... And John, don’t be afraid for I AM is here with you ... **Rev. 1:17** Fear not; *I am* the first and the last [*Is. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12*]: I, Jesus Christ, am *God*, fully God, completely God, God in all His eternal glory ... and He is with John, in the midst of the seven churches.

18 I am he that liveth, and was dead ... God cannot die for He is eternal and immortal ... and yet, Jesus died. Yes, He did, but He is alive for He rose again, - death could not hold Him, as Peter explains, **I Peter 3:18** For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God,

being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [*made alive*] by the Spirit ... The humanity of Jesus died on the cross, but eternally, God never dies, **Hab. 1:12** Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One?. ... And then the Lord Jesus encouraged John, behold, I am alive for evermore ... I died once and that was sufficient for my Father's plan. ... Death is the consequence of and punishment for our sin but when Jesus died, He took and He bore our punishment ... and then He arose from the dead the conquering Victor.

And John, - said Jesus, - you can feel the touch of My hand, you can hear the sound of My voice ... You can see My glory for I'm here with you ... the eternal, living God Who was, Who is, and Who is to come (v.4). I'm honouring My promise to never leave you nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5). ... I'm with you in your old age, I'm with you on a prison island, I'm with you when you have been taken from your loved ones ... I am with you now and for always.

Amen; and have the keys of hell [*Hades ... Old Testament Sheol*] and of death. ... I am holding the keys, and that means I have the authority to open and shut the doors. ... John, the emperor condemned you to this prison island, but long before he ever existed, I determined a special task for you ... and that is why you are here. I'm watching over you, as I watch over all my children, and I make sure that ultimately all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

On a prison island, the Lord was with him, "In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there". ... Jesus reached down to John with words of comfort, confidence, and reassurance ... The touch of the Master. ... When God is for us, who can be against us?! (Rom. 8:31).

And John is to write all this down in a parchment (v.19), - this is a repeat of what he has already been told in v.11 ... He is going to be busy, so get up off the ground ... Can you see the old man getting himself up?! ... And get cleaned, and start writing ... Back to work, John! ... In or around ninety years of age, and the Lord continues to have him working! ... You have already written the Gospel, and the three letters ... You have been busy for me throughout your life, and I have yet more for you to do!

Old man or not, captive on a prison island ... and he's not finished yet! ... **19** Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter ... Write what you have seen already ... and

then write to these seven churches, and I'll tell you what else you are to write concerning the future. ... I think this is a strong hint there is no retirement in the Lord's work ... not until He calls us home!

... And now John, ²⁰ The mystery [*μυστήριον*] of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches [*ἄγγελος, the messengers carrying forth the messages from God*]: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. ... And it is to them we shall progress in our next study.