

## Revelation of Jesus Christ Study 5

### Back to the Future 5

#### The Vision of the Glorified Son

*Rev 1:9-20*

*I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

**10** *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,*

**11** *saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."*

**12** *Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,*

**13** *and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.*

**14** *His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire;*

**15** *His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;*

**16** *He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*

**17** *And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.*

**18** *I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*

**19** *Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*

**20** *The mystery of the seven stars which 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 which you saw are the seven churches.*

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

Writing to Emperor Trajan early in the second century, Pliny, the Roman Governor of Bithynia, scorned Christianity as a ‘depraved and extravagant superstition. “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)

The Roman historian Tacitus, a contemporary of Pliny, 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)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Socially, Christians, most of whom were from the lower classes of society, *(1 Cor 1:26),*

*“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.”*

Were despised by the Roman aristocracy.

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

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

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

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.

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

The resulting hostility, first seen in the riot at Ephesus (*Acts 19:223*)

*And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen.*

*He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.*

*Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.*

*So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."*

*Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"*

*So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.*

Deepened as Christianity became more widespread.

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

In that superstitious age many Romans feared that natural disasters resulted from the neglect of the pagan gods.

The third century Christian apologist Tertullian 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"

What all of them to one lion!?! (cited in M.A.Smith, From Christ to Constantine [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity 1973],86)

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

*When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."*

*And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you.*

*But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters."*

*And he drove them from the judgment seat.*

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

Now that identified Christians as worshipers of an illegal religion (Judaism was the religio licita or legal religion)

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

He seeking to divert public suspicion that he had caused the great fire in Rome, Nero blamed the Christians for it.

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.

Three decades later, Emperor Domitian instigated an official persecution of Christians.

Little is known of the details, but it extended to the province of Asia (modern Turkey).

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*)

*I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells*

Now this is the setting,

The persecuted, beleaguered, discouraged believers in Asia Minor to whom John addressed the book of Revelation desperately needed encouragement.

It has been years since Jesus ascended. Jerusalem had been destroyed and Israel ravaged.

The Church was losing its first love, compromising, tolerating sin, becoming powerless, and distasteful to the Lord Himself. (This is described in *Rev 2 & 3*) which we will see later.

The other apostles were dead, and John had been exiled. The whole picture looked very bleak.

That is why the first vision John received from the inspiring Holy Spirit is of Christ's present ministry in the church.

John's readers took comfort in the knowledge that Christ will one day return in glory and defeat His enemies.

The description of those momentous events takes up most of the book of Revelation.

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.

In spite of all the disappointments, the Lord had not abandoned His Church or His promises.

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.

And the verses that we read when we started provide the setting for the vision, unfold the vision itself, and relate its effects

## **THE SETTING OF THE VISION**

*I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,*

*saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."*

*Rev 1:9-11 (NKJV)*

This is the third time in the first nine verses of this book that John referred to himself by name.

This time, his amazement at receiving this vision caused him to add the demonstrative personal pronoun I.

John was astounded that he had been given this vision, as he looked on himself as totally unworthy. And so he thought of this as a great privilege.

He identifies himself as their brother, and as a fellow partaker, and an eye witness of this great vision. He does not elevate himself in any way.

Like them John was undergoing persecution for his faith and was part of the same kingdom as those his hearing his account of what he saw.

And he knew the need for perseverance especially at this critical time of the Churches existence.

The word for perseverance (Hupomone) means "to remain under" it speaks of patiently enduring difficulties without giving up.

John also describes these experiences as in Jesus,

Suffering persecution for the cause of Christ, belonging to his kingdom, and patiently enduring trials are distinctively Christian experiences.

John was in exile on the island of Patmos

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 off shore from Miletus ( a city in Asia Minor, about 30 miles south of Ephesus.

According to the Roman Historian Tacitus, exile to such island was a common form of punishment in the first century.

And the vision came to John on Sunday. When by the work of the Spirit he was transported beyond the bounds of normal human apprehension, beyond human senses.

Sunday we believe because of the words here. The greek phrase is (te kuriake hemera) translated the Lord's day, and appears here only in the New Testament,

This is not the Day of the Lord, but this phrase had become a customary way of referring to Sunday because of Christ's resurrection on that day.

John gets his commission here ,

*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."*

## *Rev 1:10-11 (NKJV)*

It would be well to remember that this scene is reminiscent of the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai

It is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sovereign, powerful voice from heaven commanded John, to write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches and then He names the churches.

This is the first of twelve commands in the book of Revelation for John to write what he saw (*1:19; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14; 14:13;19:9; 21:5*) On one other occasion he was told not to write (*10:4*)

What he sees he is to write to the seven Churches that are located in Asia (*1:4*) (Modern Turkey)

They are listed in the order in which a messenger would travel to each one of them, upon arriving at Miletus they would go on to Ephesus nearest to Miletus, and then on to Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and then Laodicea.

## **THE UNFOLDING OF THE VISION**

*Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,*

*and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.*

*His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire;*

*His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;*

*He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. Rev 1:12-16 (NKJV)*

*The mystery of the seven stars which 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 which you saw are the seven churches Rev 1:20 (NKJV)*

Having described the circumstances in which he received it, John then related the vision itself.

Tis 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;

He empowers

He intercedes

He purifies

He speaks authoritatively to

He controls

He protects

He reflects His glory through His Church