

“His Face Was Like the Sun, Shining in Its Strength” Revelation 1:16–20

In this current pandemic we are experiencing isolation from one another on a worldwide scale unique in this new millennium.

God understands isolation. He has been present throughout every pandemic and epidemic in history. He understands our isolation today. God is with us wherever we are. His Spirit is in each of His people today. He unifies us across the distance that isolates us!

God understands the suffering, distress and tribulation that cause and accompany worldwide isolation.

How do we know God understands? He tells us – and – He shows us He knows and understands.

God’s servant John, the beloved disciple and Apostle of Jesus, was isolated himself on the beautiful little gem of an island called Patmos. It is small, only about 34 square kilometres of beautiful hills and vistas overlooking the aquamarine blue waters of the Aegean sea, about 100km as the crow flies from Ephesus the Roman capital of the province of Asia in John’s day.

In His isolation, John identified with His brothers and sisters in Christ as a “fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus” (Revelation 1:9).

John and His brothers and sisters in Jesus needed encouragement in their tribulations and isolation from one another. They needed to know where all this was going. They needed to see beyond the confines of their present isolation to where God was leading them.

God gave John a vision of where He and His churches, the assemblies of Christ, are going. The vision God gave John is for all of His churches, those assembled in Jesus as we are today. We need a vision of where we are going with God in Jesus and we have one.

Scripture Reading

Introduction

As John was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day he heard “a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches.’”

This is the vision John saw in Revelation 1:12 to 16 which we read together now:

Revelation 1:12–16

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a Son of Man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

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Now let's read and see and hear John's vision in its immediate context of all of Revelation chapter 1. God gives us many things to see and hear in Revelation. As we read this chapter together for the context of John's vision, let's look and listen for words that describe seeing and hearing Jesus and God's Word.

Revelation 1:1-20

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to *show* to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a Son of Man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20 As for 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 are the seven churches.

These are amazing, awesome sights and sounds and truths from God!

Revelation 1:16–20 Verse by Verse

Let’s look and listen closely to what John saw and heard and what God revealed to him. We will go verse by verse if you want to follow along in your Bibles.

In verse 8 John heard our Lord God say “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” God speaks the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, equal to our A and Z, to show He is the first and last, the always present almighty ONE in His world and our lives. This is the essence of YHWH (*Yaweh*, LORD) in the First Covenant Hebrew: the existing One Who is and has always been and always will be.

In verse 10, John heard Jesus behind him speaking “in a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet!” Trumpets makes sounds that are brilliantly bright, metallic, crisp, loud, heroic, royal and majestic, very suitable for God. John will hear Jesus’ voice like a trumpet again in Revelation 4.

God had Israel make silver trumpets to call His people together for worship and leadership, to announce feasts, to lead them out of their camps, as alarms to warn them of danger, and to lead them to victory in battle (Numbers 10), “that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies” (Numbers 10:9).

Later in Revelation seven angels will appear with seven trumpets to signal God’s actions upon the earth. At the sound of the seventh angel’s trumpet “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). Jesus will descend and we will all be raised with new resurrection bodies to live with God forever, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

In verse Revelation 1:12 John says, “Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me...” Hearing Jesus’ voice behind him like a loud trumpet must have been a big surprise for John similar to Mary hearing Jesus’ voice at the empty tomb and turning to see him as John records in His gospel (John 20:11–18).

John had heard Jesus’ voice many times on earth. John also heard the voice of God His Father when Jesus was transfigured before him, Peter and James. Now He is hearing the voice of His risen Lord in a whole new wonderful way! John heard Jesus now he wanted to see His voice!

John writes down the first thing he sees, “And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands!” In John’s life as an Israelite, there was one lampstand of importance above all others, the golden Menorah in the tabernacle and temple which held seven lamps to light the area in front of it where the priests of God served. Now he sees seven separate lampstands also of gold, a most precious metal, indicating their value to God.

In verse 13 John writes, “and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a Son of Man.” Son of Man occurs over 80 times in the Gospels. Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man who “came to serve rather than be served,” that He will suffer “and give His life as a ransom for many,” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:35), “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30; Daniel 7:13; cf. Mark 13:26).

In the second part of verse 13 John sees Jesus is “clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.” Literally he writes that Jesus is “clothed to the feet.” Labourers wore shorter garments and belts at the waist. The length of Jesus’ garments are those of royalty and priesthood as is the golden sash up across His chest.

In verse 14 John sees “His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow...” In Daniel’s vision of God, the Ancient of Days he wrote that,

“His vesture was like white snow,
And the hair of His head like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9).

Jesus’ hair is striking and pure like His Father’s.

“And His eyes were like a flame of fire.” Jesus’ eyes are intense. He said “the eye is lamp of the body” (Matthew 6:22; Luke 11:34). He sees everything that is in a person as John wrote in his Gospel, “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24–25). He searches the depths of our souls. Solomon wrote,

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
Watching the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

Nothing is excluded from His view.

In verse 15 John sees “His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace.” Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin made since ca. 4500 BC that will not rust and is harder than copper alone. Burnishing polishes it and makes it shine. Israel came into the Promised Land in the late Bronze Age. The conquest lasted into the early Iron Age. God led them to victory because of His might and the bronze and then iron which made weapons stronger and sharper.

John writes that “His voice was like the sound of many waters.” This is John’s second simile for Jesus’ voice. It is loud, bright and majestic like a trumpet and deep and mighty like many waters. The dynamic sounds of waterfalls, rivers and ocean waves crashing against shoreline rocks remind us of the awesome creative power of God and His mighty voice.

Finally, in verse 16 John shows us three more images of Jesus’ power, “In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.”

In God’s Word the right hand is a place of blessing and power. Jesus sat down at the right hand of God. Jesus will tell John more about the seven stars following His vision.

“Out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.” John’s choice of the word for sword here is the long sharp broad sword used in intense battle in war that pierces and cuts on both sides. This is a much bigger sword than the shorter close combat sword or dagger used for the Word of God in Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12.

“His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” John had seen Jesus in a similar light at His transfiguration, “And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light” (Matthew 17:2).

The sun is an awesome wonder of a star that lights up and heats our whole world and is the source of almost all energy in our food supply through photosynthesis. Regarding its shining strength, the temperature of the sun at its outer shining photosphere is about 5,500°C (9,900°F) and at its core about 15,700,000°C (28,000,000°F). Compared to a hundred watt light bulb, the sun’s brightness, its luminosity, is 3.8 x 10 to the 26th power watts. Jesus’ face is shining *like* the brightness of about four trillion trillion 100 watt lights!!! God is light (1 John 1:5). He lives in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). His glory is brilliant, magnificent, light.

Further Reflections on the Significance of John’s Vision of Jesus in 1:12–16

In His vision John used seven similes to describe Jesus as he saw Him. John’s vision, his similes and Jesus’ words to John help his readers to know and interpret Jesus’ identity, His past, His victorious eternal reign and His apocalypse, the Book of Revelation moving forward to chapters 2 to 22.

John gives us a complete overall vision of Jesus. First he saw Jesus among the golden lamp stands and recognized Him as the Son of Man. Then he saw His overall appearance, His long robe to His feet and golden sash across His chest, then His head, hair, eyes, feet, right hand, mouth, and finally His whole face. In the midst of His vision he heard Jesus’ mighty voice.

The first things John sees in verse 12 are the “seven golden lampstands.” Jesus tells John in verse 20 these lampstands are the seven churches, the assemblies of His people. The fact they are golden indicates they are of great value to God. Jesus purchased them at the highest cost ever paid for anything, His own blood (Acts 20:28; Revelation 5:9).

Whereas the Menorah held oil lamps, the light which the assemblies of Jesus people hold forth is Jesus Himself who through John’s Gospel said “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5). As the Menorah lit the tabernacle and temple where the priests served, Jesus lights the way to heaven upon which we walk and serve with Him.

In verse 13 in the middle of the lampstands, John saw Jesus, the Son of Man. In chapter 2 verse 1 we learn that Jesus “walks among the seven golden lampstands.” He is present among His people wherever they are assembled.

Jesus is Lord over His churches. They stand independent of one another but are united in Jesus and His Spirit. Each lampstand has its own place in which to work and hold up the Light of the World. Jesus knows each one intimately and speaks to each of his churches in words they need to hear. In chapter 2 verse 5, for example, He cautions

those assembled in Ephesus to repent and return to their first love and do the deeds they did at first or He will remove their lampstand from its place. Jesus cares enough about His people to confront, comfort, warn and reward them. His presence with His churches through their tribulations gives them guidance, hope and a way out and forward.

Jesus clothed to His feet with a golden sash highlights His royalty and high priesthood. He is King of Kings, Lord of Lords (19:16), perfect perfect Lamb of God (5:6; 6:9; 7:17; 14:10; 15:3; 19:9; 21:23; 22:1, 3) and High Priest over His people who are His kingdom of priests (1:6).

We learn in John's vision of Jesus in chapter 19:3 that His robe is dipped in blood. As high priest Aaron's garments were sanctified by the sprinkling of blood.

The Golden sash across His chest occupies a similar position to the high priest's breastplate and ephod. Golden sashes were also used as wallets for valuables. In 3:18 Jesus advises His people assembled in Laodicea "to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich."

In verse 14 Jesus' "head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow" identifying Him with His Father the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9. He is God, pure, holy, majestic and infinite in knowledge and power. In verses 7:13 and 14 Daniel writes this of Him,

"I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.

14 And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed."

"His eyes were like a flame of fire." In 19:12 John says they "are a flame of fire." He moves from a simile to a metaphor to emphasize the power of Jesus' all seeing and all knowing vision. We noted Jesus knows all that is in a person. In 2:18 Jesus says to Thyatira, "all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts."

Jesus' feet like burnished bronze and voice thundering like the sound of many waters reflect His power and authority over all the realms of His Creation. He delegates some of His authority to the over-comers in the church in Thyatira in 2:26, "He who

overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.”

Verse 1:16 says of Jesus, “In His right hand He held seven stars.” In 3:1 Jesus’ opening words to Sardis are, “He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this...” In 2:1 Jesus begins speaking to those assembled in Ephesus, “The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this...” Interestingly, John uses a stronger word for hold here than in 1:16.

As background to this image of the seven stars and Jesus’ tight grip on them, many believe that Domitian was Roman emperor when John received the Revelation. Domitian was a persecutor of Christians who suffered the loss of His own son at a young age. As a tribute to His son Domitian minted a gold coin showing His son on a throne with seven stars round about His head symbolizing his dead son’s supposed control over the destiny of the universe. Some suggest that John is boldly refuting this claim of Domitian and affirming that Jesus is The ONE with authority over the universe He created and over His churches.

We noted that the sword of Jesus’ mouth is a long broad sword bigger than the sword for the metaphor of the sword of the Spirit in Ephesians 6:17 and the living and active Word of God in Hebrews 4:12. It may be that the latter speak of God’s living Word and its intricate internal work of convicting and convincing souls of the truth of the gospel and sanctifying us. In Revelation, the time has come for God’s final judgment of the nations and so the reference to a battle sword. Either way, Jesus is the living eternal and incarnate Word of God (19:11–13–16).

In identifying Himself to Pergamum, Jesus begins, “The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this...” He concludes by saying in 2:16, “Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them (those who hold to the false teachings of the Nicolaitans) with the sword of My mouth.” In 19:15 we see that, “From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations.” There are comforts in these strong words. God wins in the end. Jesus will be victorious over the nations and all those threatening the eternal welfare of His churches He purchased with His blood.

Jesus’ victorious face is “shining like the sun in its strength,” He is the light of the World whose face we want every one to see shining from out lampstands. His victory and ours comes from the gospel of His death, burial and resurrection for our justification and the forgiveness of our sins. God’s grace “has been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Conclusion

What do we learn from John's glorious vision?

Jesus walks among us, He's here with us today and everyday.

Regardless of how far apart or isolated we are, we are never alone. He is always with us and in us by His Spirit.

We are His lampstands to hold up His light to His world.

Jesus unites all of His autonomous churches in His Spirit and living and active Word.

Jesus is the Son of Man, King and Lord of our lives.

Jesus has all authority and power over the nations and history of God's world.

Jesus Is God, One with His Father the Ancient of Days (cf. John 10:30; 14:7–10ff).

God's awesome revelation of His Son convicts, encourages and guides us.

Jesus knows every soul completely.

Through His Word and Spirit He speaks to all of us revealing exactly what we need to know and do to please God.

God wants us to listen to His voice always.

When you see gold, think of how valuable you are to Him.

When you see someone with brilliant white hair, think of Jesus and His unity with His Father.

When you see a fire, think of Jesus' all knowing eyes.

When you hear a waterfall or a trumpet, think of Jesus' mighty voice speaking to you.

When you look up at the stars think of Jesus' powerful right hand and the angels of all those assembled in Him.

When you see the sun up in the sky shining in its strength like four trillion trillion 100 watt lights, think of the SON and look to His face "like the sun shining in its strength.

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