

## John is commanded to write of His Vision of Jesus

On the Island of Patmos.

*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, John... was on the island that is called Patmos:** The island of Patmos was a like an Alcatraz Island in the Roman Empire. It was used as a prison island and functioned as a jail without bars. The island was rich in marble and most of the prisoners were forced laborers in the marble quarries. Patmos was a rocky, desolate island about 10 miles long and 6 miles wide.

Barnes described Patmos as “Lonely, desolate, barren, uninhabited, seldom visited, it had all the requisites which could be desired for a place of punishment; and banishment to that place would accomplish all that a persecutor could wish in silencing the apostle, without putting him to death.” Yet this exile *didn't* silence the Apostle John.

**For the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ:** Most scholars assume that John was on Patmos because he was arrested and imprisoned in persecution by the Romans. This is probably the case, especially because John said that he is **your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ**. The ancient Christian historian Eusebius says John was imprisoned at Patmos under the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. (*Church History*, III.18, 20 – from the *Nicean and Post Nicean Fathers Series 2*, Volume 1, pages 148-149)

“According to Victorinus, John, though aged, was forced to labor in the mines located at Patmos. Early sources also indicated that about AD 96, at Domitian’s death, John was allowed to return to Ephesus when the Emperor Nerva was in power.” (Walvoord)

**John is commanded to write.**

*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.”*

**I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day:** To be “in the Spirit” seems to have more meaning than simply saying John walked “in the Spirit” as opposed to being “in the flesh” in the sense Paul meant

in Galatians 5:16. The idea isn't simply that John was *walking in the Spirit*, but that he received unique revelation from the Holy Spirit. This was a unique spiritual experience for John, what some might call an *out of body experience* – though of course, without the occult or spiritism such experiences are associated with today.

Walvoord defined "in the Spirit" like this: "Carried beyond normal sense into a state where God could reveal supernaturally the contents of this book."

There are four references to John being **in the Spirit** in the Book of Revelation. First at Patmos (Revelation 1:10), then in heaven (Revelation 4:2), then in the wilderness (Revelation 17:3), and finally on the mountain of God (Revelation 21:10).

**On the Lord's Day:** When is **the Lord's Day**? Among the pagans of the Roman Empire, the first day of each month was called "Emperors Day" in honour of the Roman Emperor. Christians proclaimed their allegiance to Jesus by honouring the first day of the *week* as their own **Lord's Day**.

This is *not* the same term used for *The Day of the Lord* in the Old Testament, nor is it the same idea. The Book of Revelation will deal with the idea of *The Day of the Lord*, but it doesn't do it here.

**I heard behind me a loud voice:** The loud voice John heard was clear and striking as the sound of a trumpet. The loud voice belongs to the **Alpha and Omega**, the **First and the Last**, who is the beginning and the end of all things. Since Jesus introduced Himself with these titles in Revelation 1:8, we know this was the of Jesus.

..... **as of a trumpet:** This was calculated to call in every wandering thought, to fix his attention, and solemnize his whole frame. (Clarke)

**The First and the Last** is a title that belongs to the Lord, Yahweh, the God of Israel (Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12). The title **Alpha and Omega** has the same *idea* as **First and the Last**. This is one of the New Testament passages where Jesus *clearly* claimed to be God.

**What you see, write in a book:** Here, John was commanded to write what he saw. He would be commanded to write eleven more times in the Book of Revelation. We get the sense that unless John was commanded to, he would have just kept it to himself.

**Send it to the seven churches which are in Asia:** John was commanded to write to seven churches in seven cities. Each of these churches is in the region of the Roman province of Asia. But these were

not the *only* cities with churches in this region. For example, there was a church in the city of Colosse (to which the Apostle Paul wrote the letter of *Colossians*), but the city of Colosse isn't included in this list of seven churches. Why were these specific seven churches chosen?

Seiss writes, "The churches of all time are comprehended in seven," and quotes many modern and ancient commentators that agree with this perspective. Poole states; "It is the opinion of very learned writers upon this book, that our Lord, by these *seven churches*, signifies all the churches of Christ to the end of the world; and by what he saith to them, designs to show what shall be the state of churches in all ages, and what their duty is."

It is also interesting that the Apostle Paul also wrote to seven churches: **Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Colosse, Philippi, and Thessalonika.**

### His vision of Jesus

#### Jesus in the midst of the lampstands.

*"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."*

**I turned to see the voice:** We can only imagine what went through John's mind as he turned. The voice he heard was probably not exactly the same sound as he remembered Jesus' voice to be (John described it *as of a trumpet*, Revelation 1:10). Yet he knew from the voice's self-description (*Alpha and Omega*) that it was Jesus. This was John's opportunity to see Jesus again, after knowing Him so well during the years of His earthly ministry.

At first, John didn't see Jesus. Instead he **saw seven golden lampstands**. These were not candlesticks, they were not menorahs, but they were free standing oil lamp stands. The lamps were set **on** these lampstands.



There were **seven** separate **lampstands**. This is an image that *reminds* us of the *golden lampstand* that stood in the tabernacle and the temple ([Exodus 25:31-37](#)).

Yet this is different. The Old Covenant lampstand was *one lampstand* with *seven lamps* on it.

Here in the New Covenant, we see **seven lampstands**. “In the Jewish tabernacle there was one golden candlestick, and seven lamps, to give light... John here seeth seven. God had but one church of the Jews, but many among the Gentiles.” (Poole)



The Jewish Menorah

For different occasions there were 7 arms, 8 arms and at Hannukah there were 9 arms. They did not hold candles for light, **they were the light** by means of burning olive oil which represented Ruach ha’Kodesh (the Holy Spirit)

The light doesn’t come from the lampstands. The light comes from the oil lamps themselves. The stands merely make the light more visible. Therefore, the lampstands are a good picture of the church. **We don’t produce the light, we simply display it.**

**And in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man:** Jesus was there in the midst of these lampstands, as the **Son of Man**, a figure of glory looking back to **Daniel 7:13-14**. Though the title **Son of Man** sounds like a humble title, in light of the Daniel passage, it is not humble at all.



**Clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band:**

The clothing of Jesus indicates that He is a person of great dignity and authority. Long garments were only worn by those who didn’t have to work much, so they were a picture of great status and authority.

The **golden band** around **the chest** is reflective of the garments of the high priest (Exodus 29:5).

Exodus 39:1-5 says that there were golden threads in the band that went around the chest of the high priest of Israel. Jesus' **band** has more than a few golden threads. It is all gold! How much greater is the eternal, heavenly priesthood of Jesus!

### Key Learning Point

One of the duties of the Old Testament priests was to tend the golden lampstand in the tabernacle. Every day they had to fill the oil, clean the soot, and trim the wicks. They had to closely inspect and care for the lamps so they would burn continually before the Lord. Here is Jesus, our High Priest, in the **midst of the seven lampstands**, carefully inspecting and caring for the lamps, helping them to always burn brightly before the Lord.

### John describes Jesus

**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.**

**His head and hair were white like wool:** The **white** hair speaks of old age, and is therefore in that culture connected with the idea of great wisdom and timelessness. The phrase "**white as snow**" also emphasizes the idea of purity (Isaiah 1:18). The white hair and head also connect Jesus with the Ancient of Days in **Daniel 7:9**. "The term of *Ancient of Days* belongs to God the Father, yet it also applies to Christ, who is equal with the Father as to his Divine nature." (Poole)

"This was not only an emblem of in *antiquity*, but it was evidence of his *glory*; for the *whiteness* of splendour of his head and hair doubtless proceeded from the *rays of light* and *glory* which encircled his head, and darted from it in all directions." (Clarke)

**His eyes like a flame of fire:** **Fire** is often associated with judgment in the Scriptures (Matthew 5:22, 2 Peter 3:7). Jesus' eyes displayed the **fire** of searching, penetrating judgment.

**His feet were like fine brass:** Since **fire** is connected with judgment, these **feet like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace** speak of someone who has been through the fires of judgment and has come forth with a refined purity. Jesus has been through the “Refiner’s Fire.” Brass is a metal connected with judgment and sacrifice. Israel’s altar of sacrifice was made of brass (Exodus 27:1-6), and it was called the “brazen altar.” Brass is also a strong metal, the strongest known in the ancient world. Therefore **feet... like fine brass** are “An emblem of his *stability and permanence*, brass being considered the most durable of all metallic substances or compounds.” (Clarke)

**His voice as the sound of many waters:** A metaphor meaning that Jesus’ voice had the power and majesty of a mighty waterfall.

**He had in His right hand seven stars:** The **seven stars** speak of the leaders or representatives of the *seven churches* mentioned in Revelation 1:11&1.20. The **stars** are securely in the hand of Jesus.

**Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword:** This is a heavy **sword** (the ancient Greek word *rhomphaia*), used to kill and destroy. Sometimes the New Testament speaks of a smaller, more tactical sword known in the ancient Greek language as the *machaira*. Hebrews 4:12 uses the term for this smaller, more precise sword. The idea of it coming **out of His mouth** is *not* that Jesus carries a sword in His teeth. The idea is that this **sword** is His word. His weapon – and ours also – is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

It must be noted that John didn’t necessarily *see* a sword coming out of Jesus’ mouth. “He heard him speak; he felt the penetrating power of his words; and they were *as if* a sharp sword proceeded from his mouth.”

It is a **sharp two-edged sword**: “There is no handling this weapon without cutting yourself, for it has no back to it, it is all edge. The Word of Christ, somehow or other, is all edge.” (Spurgeon)

**His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength:** The glory of Jesus is so great, so brilliant, that it is hard to even look upon Him. Jesus has the same glory as in His transfiguration, when *His face shone like the sun* (Matthew 17:2).

“What do you see in Christ’s right hand? Seven stars; yet how insignificant they appear when you get a sight of *his face!* They are stars, and there are seven of them; but who can see seven stars, or, for the matter of that, seventy thousand stars, when the sun shineth in his strength? How sweet it is, when the Lord himself is so present in a congregation that the preacher, whoever he may be, is altogether forgotten! I pray you, dear friends, when you go to a place of worship, always try to see

the Lord's face rather than the stars in his hand; look at the sun, and you will forget the stars."  
(Spurgeon)

Everything in this vision speaks of strength, majesty, authority and righteousness. We should consider the fact that this is the only detailed physical description of Jesus given to us in the Bible. The only other description that comes close is in Isaiah 53:2: *He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

#### **John's reaction and Jesus' assurance**

*"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. 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"*

**When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead:** John was overwhelmed by this awesome vision, even though he was an apostle who knew Jesus during His earthly ministry. Even the three years John spent with Jesus did not really prepare him to see Jesus in His heavenly glory. At this moment, John knew what a miracle it was that Jesus could shield His glory and authority while He walked this earth.

"Blessed position! Does the death alarm you? We are never so much alive as when we are dead at his feet." (Spurgeon)

**He laid His right hand on me:** First, Jesus comforted John with a compassionate touch. Perhaps the *touch* of Jesus felt more familiar than His *appearance*. Then Jesus gave John a command: "Do not be afraid." John didn't need to be afraid because He was in the presence of Jesus, and Jesus clearly identifies Himself to John with three titles.

**The First and the Last,** the God of all eternity, Lord of eternity past and eternity future. Linked to the Tetragrammaton name of God ..... YHWH (I AM, the ever present God)

**Who lives, and was dead, and is alive forevermore.** He has the credentials of resurrection, and lives to never die again. The victory that Jesus won over sin and death was a permanent victory. He didn't rise from the dead just to die again.

**The keys of Hades and of Death.** Some imagine that the devil is somehow the "lord of Hell." Some imagine that the devil has authority or power to determine life or death. Clearly, they are wrong, for

only *Jesus* holds **the keys of Hades and of Death**. We can trust that Jesus never lets the devil borrow **the keys**.

### **Another command to write and an explanation.**

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

**Write the things:** This second command to write gives us a structure to understand the Book of Revelation. John is commanded to **write** regarding the past, present, and future (looking from John’s perspective), and here are the things John is commanded to write:

**The things which you have seen:** This means that Jesus wanted John to write the things he had just **seen** in his vision of the glorious, heavenly Jesus.

**The things which are:** This means that Jesus wanted John to write about the things of his present day, the things regarding the *seven churches which are in Asia*.

**The things which will take place after this:** This means that Jesus wanted John to write about the things that would happen after the things regarding the *seven churches*, the things of the last days. In John’s subsequent writing he gives us an outline that helps us to piece together and understand the book of Revelation which is arranged in this three-part structure.

- **The things which you have seen:** Revelation chapter 1.
- **The things which are:** Revelation chapters 2 and 3.
- **The things which will take place after this:** Revelation chapters 4 through 22.

**The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches:** Jesus kindly interprets His own images. The **stars** in His hand represent **the angels of the seven churches**. The **lampstands** represent the **seven churches** themselves.

Jesus holds these **angels** in His hand. Some commentators understand these **angels** to be the pastors of these seven churches. This idea is based on a literal understanding of the ancient Greek word translated angel, *aggelos*. That word literally means “messenger,” and certainly pastors are “messengers” to churches. Others think the **angels** might be “guardian angels” over each congregation.



Bible commentator Adam Clarke believes the **angel** of each church was its pastor. "*Angel of the Church* here answers exactly to that officer of the synagogue among the Jews called... the messenger of the Church, whose business it was to *read, pray, and teach* in the synagogue."

It is more important to notice *where* the **angels** are: they are at the **right hand** of Jesus. This is a place of safety and strength. Even the problem churches that will be described in chapters 2 & 3 are in the **right hand** of Jesus.

This was a spectacular vision, and many people wish they could have a vision such as John had, but we *can* know the very same Jesus John saw. We can know His purity, His eternal wisdom, His searching judgment, His victory, His authority and His majesty. Each of these aspects of His nature are ours to know intimately.

When we think of John's spectacular vision, we should remember where John was: imprisoned on Patmos. Jesus is often known most intimately in the midst of suffering and trials. Both John and Stephen ([Acts 7:54-60](#)) saw Jesus most clearly and gloriously in the context of suffering for the cause of Jesus.

"The wrath of the wicked does but bring saints the nearer to the choice favours of God." (Seiss)