

THE CONQUERING KING

A Vision of Christ

Revelation 1:9-20

9 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, 'Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.'

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. ¹⁴His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. ¹⁹Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. ²⁰As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Brief historical context:

Many modern readers see the Book of Revelation as a terrible future judgement and cosmic destruction, an apocalyptic genre that is too difficult to understand. But the Book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ who has in store for his creation a future of restoration — a time when suffering and tears will cease. The author is the elder John the Apostle once the young disciple of Jesus Christ. The first chapter show Jesus in a way John had never seen him before, that caused John to faint (fell as dead). The second and third chapters reveal the heart of Jesus for his Church and show that Jesus still has something to say to his Church. The seven letters are letters of great challenge and eternal hope. The Book of Revelation points toward the future and at the same time is very much concern with the world in which Christians live. The seven personal letters to the seven first century churches stood in stark contrast to their culture. Set within the historical context and culture of first century Asia Minor, Revelation had relevance and meaning for the first century Christians and the way they lived their lives in the world.

First Century Christians had to co-exist the best way they could within an anti-Christian Roman Empire. Nero (54-68 AD) blamed the great fire of Rome on the Christians (64 AD, 19th July — and, Christians fitted into the Domitian world less and less (81-96 AD).

It was Emperor Domitian who persecuted John and imprisoned him on the Island of Patmos, Greece — in the mist of the Aegean Sea.

In first century Asia Minor (Turkey), Christians had to navigate their lives around polytheism and Pantheism — they could follow Christ so long as they worshipped the Roman gods too, (such as Apollo). Asia Minor was an idolatrous culture!

The identity of Christians was constantly at risk, they were seen as 'outsiders', which often caused them their lives, economic pain (opportunity), and social isolation. Domitian persecution of Christians was a time when Christians greatly feared.

Jesus' Identity:

Jesus identified himself to John as 'The first and the last, the living one — the one who was dead and is now alive for ever and ever; the one who has the keys of Death and of Hades.'

Message:

John was exiled under Domitian rule on the Isle of Patmos (94 AD) where John received the revelation of Jesus Christ (**one like a 'Son of Man'**) — images of this heavenly figure is also seen in Daniel 7 & 10. The suffering Christians desperately needed to hear who Jesus is. John saw Jesus like he had never seen him before (in his earthly or resurrected life) — in the mist of the **seven lampstands** (seven churches).

Right hand — In the Bible, *right hand* is often a symbol of God's strength, power and might — perhaps suggesting that Jesus holds the power of the emperor in his hand with superior powers.

Seven stars — when Domitian infant son died he deified him (made him into a god), Domitian created a coin with the infant child sitting on the glob (world) with seven stars around his head — perhaps symbolising the godlike power of this child over the universe (world).

The image of Jesus that John saw holding the seven stars in his right hand is very important. John saw the eternal power and presence of Jesus — perhaps suggesting that the Christian God is greater than all other gods including the Emperors'. Jesus holds the power of Domitian in his hand. The seven stars in the vision are the seven angels (heavenly or earthly messengers/ministers) of the seven churches, perhaps suggesting that these angels (messengers/ministers) also have power over all the hostile powers of the Emperor.

Christ appears to John as the mighty conqueror perhaps suggesting that in the end Jesus wins. In the mist of Domitian hostility, this image of Jesus must have been very important for the suffering Christians.

Relevance:

There is an urgent need for the church today to see the exalted Jesus as never before, and to know his eternal presence and power in our own lives, the church and in the world.

Counter cultural reflection points:

- How do we engage the culture with the love of God without allowing the culture to erode our faith in God?
- Christians are called to aspire beyond what we see in this world!