

Journey Through Revelation

LESSON 2 . . . When Life Is Tough (Revelation 1:4-20)

NOTES

John now addresses the recipients of this letter: *the seven churches which are in Asia* (1:4a). These are the seven literal churches mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. *Revelation* is addressed to them, so it could be read and passed on by people traveling the main Roman road clockwise around *Asia*, which is now western Turkey. Coming from Patmos, the letter first arrives in the port city of Ephesus (see map on page 10).

There were other churches in *Asia* at the time, such as Troas (Acts 20:5) and Colossae (Col. 1:2). Why did the Lord direct John to write to these particular churches? Probably because the condition of these seven churches represents all types of churches throughout the church age. They also represent seven kinds of Christians—one of which is much like you. Also, the number seven signifies completeness. These churches were enduring severe persecution; therefore, in this passage, we discover what to do **when life is tough**. First . . .

Remember the Trinity (1:4b-8).

John writes to his readers, *Grace be unto you, and peace* (1:4b). Only after experiencing God's saving *grace* can we know His *peace*. In John 14:27a-c, what does Jesus tell His disciples the night before He is crucified?

John continues: *from him which is, and which was, and which is to come* (1:4c). This refers to the first person of the Trinity—God the Father, the eternal God who transcends time.

The seven Spirits which are before his throne (1:4d) refers to the Holy Spirit. There is only one Holy Spirit, but the number seven depicts His completeness. The *seven Spirits* probably refers to seven titles given to the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2. He is first called *the spirit of the LORD*. Then, in this verse, He is called *the spirit of* six other things. What are they?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____

The Hebrew word translated *fear* (YIR'Â, year-ah) refers to reverential awe. Next, John writes: *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness* (1:5a). All three persons of the Trinity are included in the greeting. Jesus

is called *the faithful witness* because not only does He always speak the truth, but also He *is the truth* (Jn 14:6). Jesus is also *the first begotten of the dead* (1:5b). He is not the first person to be raised from the dead. The first recorded resurrection is Elijah's raising the widow's son (1 Kgs. 17:17-23). However, Jesus is the first to be raised and never die again (Rom. 6:9). The word translated *first begotten* also refers to priority and preeminence (Col. 1:18).

Next, John writes, Jesus is *the prince of the kings of the earth* (1:5c). What will happen one day *at the name of Jesus* (Philippians 2:10-11a)?

Jesus also *loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood* (1:5d) through His death on the cross. He did this to make *us kings and priests unto God and his Father* (1:6a-b). A priest has direct access to God and is chosen to serve God and share His Word. Because of this privilege, John writes: *to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen* (1:6c).

Jesus is coming *with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him* (1:7a-b). Even the dead will see Him. The high priest Caiaphas, who had Jesus condemned to death, is now dead and in Hades. However, what does Jesus tell him in Matthew 26:64c-d?



This refers to the Second Coming, in contrast to the Rapture of the church. At the Second Coming, *all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him* (1:7c). Unbelievers who have refused to repent (9:21) will mourn because they are facing the divine judgment later described in this book.



Next, the Lord declares: *I am Alpha and Omega* (1:8a). *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means God is the beginning and the end of all things. He further describes Himself: *which is, and which was, and which is to come* (1:8c), the eternal God. He is also *the Almighty* (1:8d). He is all powerful; therefore, no one can resist Him.

When life is tough, remember the Trinity, each of whom is on your side and . . .

Reflect on Christ's power (1:9-16).

John tells his suffering readers he is their *brother, and companion in tribulation* (1:9a). We have already discussed the persecution by Domitian and

John's exile to the island of Patmos. John is sharing in their suffering. John also shares with them in *the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ* (1:9b). He next tells his readers he was exiled to *the isle that is called Patmos* for declaring *the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ* (1:9c-d). John is suffering because he is faithfully preaching the Gospel.

John receives the visions in the book of Revelation when he is *in the Spirit on the Lord's day*, or Sunday. On that day, John hears *a great voice, as of a trumpet* (1:10), which is the voice of the Lord Jesus. He tells John to write what he sees in a book, or scroll, *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* (1:11).

When John turns to see the One speaking to him, he sees *seven golden candlesticks* (1:12), which represent the seven churches (1:20). Standing in the middle of them is *one like unto the Son of man* (1:13a). We know Jesus is present in His churches because of what promise in Matthew 18:20?

Jesus is referring to the time during which He will be present with us through His Holy Spirit, not in His body (Jn 16:17). Jesus refers to Himself as the *Son of man* more than eighty times in the gospels. It refers to the necessity of Him becoming a man who will suffer and die (Mk 10:45; 8:31; 9:31).

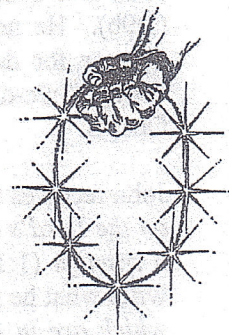
John sees Jesus *clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle* (1:13b). This identifies Him as the High Priest (Ex 28:4; 39:2-4, 41). Today, He is our *merciful and faithful high priest* (Heb. 2:17). *His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow* (1:14a-b). This represents wisdom and purity. *His eyes were as a flame of fire* (1:14c), which reveals the all-penetrating, all-knowing intelligence of Jesus. His eyes can penetrate the very depths of a person's thoughts and heart. Therefore, what does Jesus declare in Matthew 10:26b-c?

His feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace (1:15a-b). Feet of brass represents strength and stability. This describes an all powerful Victor. The phrase *burned in a furnace* denotes His red-hot, glowing feet symbolize judgment.

His voice was as the sound of many waters (1:15c). Like the roar of Niagara Falls, His voice will drown out all other sounds. *And he had in his right hand seven stars* (1:16a), which are the *angels*, or pastors, of the churches (1:20). Being held in His *right hand* could symbolize their divine calling.

Out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword (1:16b), which is the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). *His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength* (1:16c). Jesus is described the same way at His transfiguration (Mt 17:2).

Life is often tough, and when it is, **remember the Trinity and reflect on Christ's power.** When you do these two things, the third will happen naturally . . .



Repel fear (1:17-20).

Seeing the glorified Christ causes John to fall at Jesus' feet as if he is dead. Jesus lays His right hand on John and says, *Fear not* (1:17). For those who know Christ, there is no need to be afraid because He says, *I am the first and the last* (1:17). In other words, "I started everything and I will end it all." Christ explains He is the One *that liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore* (1:18a-b). Then, what does our Lord say (1:18c)?

Holding the *keys* refers to Christ's access and authority. The dead will remain dead until His key opens the door of death. The word translated *hell* (HADES, ha'-dees) is the equivalent of the Hebrew term "sheol" (she'-ole). It is the intermediate state of those who die without Christ and are awaiting judgment. It is "hell's waiting room" until the degree of eternal punishment in hell (GEHENNA, geh-en'-nah) is pronounced at the Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15).

Jesus tells John to write what he sees now and what he sees that will happen later (1:19). Jesus explains: *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches* (1:20c). The word translated *angels* (ANGELOS, ang'-el-os) means messengers and probably refers to pastors. The *seven candlesticks* are *the seven churches* (1:20d). Both the churches and their leaders are symbolized as light bearers. That's because what statement of Jesus should be true of all churches and every believer (Matthew 5:14a)?

When life is tough, remember the Trinity and reflect on Christ's power; then, you can repel fear.