

“He Walks Among Us”– Revelation 1:9-20

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March 13, 2016

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take your Bible and let's meet in Revelation 1...

It is great to have Caden Crawford with us this morning, leading our worship music. I know we as a staff are excited about the prospect of partnering with you in the days ahead and excited about what God has been doing among us in recent months. God is good.

Our text today is yet another demonstration of that and an example of how glorious and exalted the Risen Christ is. Last Sunday we saw in this chapter how Christ is presented as unquestionably worthy of our worship. Today we will see this same lesson reinforced in a new set of verses that record John's initial vision. So we will pick things up where we left off last Sunday. I'll begin reading in verse 9. This is God's Word...

“I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account 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 a trumpet ¹¹ saying, 'Write what you see in a book 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 to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ As 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.'” (Revelation 1:9-20)

What I just read is generally regarded as a commissioning scene. We have several examples of these in Scripture (most of which involve prophets) and each is unique, but usually they share some elements in common. It's not unusual for them to involve a heavenly vision, an immediate response of panic by the prophet, reassurance offered by some heavenly being, and additional instructions given.¹ We see all of these features in Revelation 1 and, not surprisingly, part of the instruction John is given involves writing down what God reveals, which was a common task given to Old Testament prophets.² Generally, when writing was involved, what is recorded has something to do with judgment and that will be no different in Revelation, which will describe, among other things, the judgment that comes on the world and those who compromise with the world.³ So those in the original audience, familiar with Scripture, would have understood that John will be playing the role of prophet and thus what he writes carries the weight of divine authority.⁴

This particular commissioning scene occurs on a Sunday, which is what is meant by “the Lord’s day” in verse 10.⁵ The early church may have continued to gather on the Sabbath (i.e., Saturday) they also seem to have gathered in the first day of the week, Sunday, very early to commemorate the day of Christ’s Resurrection. Eventually persecution led to Christians being barred from synagogues and that served to further reinforce the Sunday gatherings. So what we are doing today is something that our brothers and sisters have been doing since the very first generation of Christians.

On the particular Sunday in question, John says he was “*in the Spirit.*” This may simply mean that he was worshiping, but similar language is used frequently in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel and it usually precedes some visionary experience.⁶ If the connotations also include worship, it shouldn’t surprise us that, in the context of worship, God would speak. We should expect that. Maybe not through visions. But certainly through His Word, which should shape every dimension of our worship. Do you come with that expectation each time we gather? Maybe you should. Maybe you would listen more closely. Craig Keener is right, “we are apt to hear from God more clearly when it is his face and glory we are seeking.”⁷

It’s also worth noting, that John’s audience, in all likelihood, heard this Revelation for the first time in the context of corporate worship, when someone would have read it to them. “Corporate worship is not optional or superfluous”, writes Scott Duvall. “We are best able to hear from God, to receive an eternal perspective, and to experience a foretaste of heaven when we make Spirit-led worship a priority.”⁸ If you don’t like coming together with brothers and sisters in Christ, from every background, for the purpose of marveling at the Savior and rejoicing in the Gospel, why would you think that you’re going to like heaven? So stop playing lone-ranger Christian. That category doesn’t exist in the Bible. And instead heed God’s Word, which reminds us to “*consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*” (Heb. 10:24-25). Whenever you are able, you should gather with us. Neglecting is detrimental. And participation is edifying. If that was true for the people the writer of Hebrews addressed, then how much more for us who are even closer to “*the Day*” to which he referred?

Now back to this vision. It’s a pretty vivid vision that reveals Jesus and did you notice how John responds to this sensory overload? He collapses. Verse 17 says, “*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*”⁹ You would too, if you saw a vision of the glorified Jesus. I’m reminded of a statement made by Tim Skinner, one of the most influential African American preachers who died in the early 90s. He was commenting on those pictures we often see of Jesus. You know the type. Pale skin. Clean shaven. Product in his hair. Soft focus. You got it in your mind? Skinner said, “I don’t know who that guy is, but all I know is he wouldn’t last ten minutes in my neighborhood.” Did I mention Skinner was from Harlem? The Jesus John encounters in this vision is different. *This* Jesus would certainly last in any neighborhood. The real question is—will the neighborhood last ten seconds with this Jesus?¹⁰ This is an overwhelmingly terrifying scene. John just falls out.

Fortunately for him, Jesus reaches down with his right hand and tells him “*Fear not*” and gives him some good reasons to cast aside all his angst. We will get to those reasons in a moment. But first take a look at how this whole section begins. Particularly, I want you to notice what John says belong to him, the seven churches he address, and, by extension, us just by virtue of all of us being in Christ. He rattles off three things in verse 9 that he says he is their “*partner in.*” Look at the verse. “*I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus...*” It’s actually written in a way that suggests that all three of these experiences go together.¹¹ The tribulation, the kingdom, and the patient endurance. Those were shared experiences between John and his audience and, if you are following Jesus, these are experiences that you will know firsthand as well.

That first one, the tribulation, is an interesting one. Some argue that it simply means hardship. Others wonder if it is a reference to the so-called Great Tribulation associated with the end times. If it's the latter, then this suggests that period of testing that prophets like Daniel referred to must be a period that began in John's own day and presumably has continued until the present day. I demonstrated a couple weeks ago how almost all the New Testament authors connect their own day with the end times. We also spent some time on how numbers are often used in symbolic (not literal) ways in apocalyptic literature (e.g., three-and-a-half years; 42 months; 1,260 days).

Thus the tribulation could span the entire church age (from the first century to our day to beyond), even if there is something of an escalation of tribulation at the very end. That view is certainly consistent with John's language here, but doesn't rest on it alone. Unfortunately, we don't have the time to explore all the relevant passages today. But that interpretation does resonate with me, I have to admit. This has a lot to do with the way I believe the seals, trumpets, and bowls of Revelation relate to Jesus' prophecy of the end. And it also has a lot to do with how John interacts with Old Testament prophecy in Revelation (especially from the book of Daniel). It's not the position I would adopt if it were up to me. What Christian would want the Church to go through the tribulation? But it's not up to me. And, if I'm being honest, it's hard for me to escape that conclusion in my own study thus far, for reasons that will have to wait for another day.¹² But it's like I tell you all the time, the biblical hope is not rapture *before* trouble, it's resurrection *after* it.

Still, even if you take John's reference to "*the tribulation*" as merely a description of general suffering, please notice that he says such tribulation belongs to you every bit as much as "*the kingdom*" does. And you don't "patiently endure" through the easy living of a sacrifice-free existence. No, "patient endurance" is ours too precisely because we are part of God's kingdom and we suffer for Christ's sake. We are partakers in all three experiences. That's our experience as Christ-followers. It's always been that way, even if the degree to which we suffer varies based on time and geography. This is why Paul encouraged Christians in his travels by reminding them that it is "*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). These things go together. They are part of our family inheritance.

Now those prosperity preachers you see on television aren't going to tell you that. Instead, they'll assure you that God wants you healthy and wealthy and prosperous, living your best life here and now, if you would just sow seeds of faith, usually through financial contributions. That's not of God. Jesus says, "*count the cost*" (Luke 14:28). Jesus says, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*" (Matt. 16:24). He says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:10). He says, "*Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you*" (John 15:20). And on and on we could go. It's not that the life of following Jesus is not filled with joy. It is! But that doesn't mean there's not hardship, persecution, and sacrificial labor. There is! As one writer put it, "Unlike the Roman Empire, which promised peace but delivered brutality and fear, the kingdom of God promises tribulation and delivers peace and confidence and eternal salvation to those who patiently endure."¹³ With John and these churches in Asia Minor, we are partners in "*the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus*" (Rev. 1:9). Jesus knew these things and, if we are in Him, we will too in some measure.¹⁴

For John that meant exile to an island called Patmos because he faithfully proclaimed "*the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*" (Rev. 1:9) and that was viewed by Rome as a political threat. He was being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel. For the seven churches it meant various things, which we will unpack in the weeks ahead, but they too were being persecuted for the sake of their Gospel witness. And it will mean various things for us as well, even if we are free from the harsher forms of persecution our brothers and sisters around the world experience on a daily basis. But the book of Revelation helps us to patiently endure through all costs and it does this by putting before us the glory of Christ.

That's exactly what our text this morning does. After expressing their mutual experience, John then conveys the vision that he received from the Lord. The details of that vision are coined in language that harkens back to the Old Testament and therein we find the key for making sense out of what John saw. In particular, he sees two things—the “*lampstands*” and “*one like a son of man*” walking among them.

The meaning of the lampstands is easy to discern because verse 20 tells us that they represent the seven churches that are initially addressed in this letter. The background of the image is more subtle. I'm not sure what you have in mind when you hear the word “lampstand,” but you should think of those seven-pronged candelabras (or menorahs) that are connected with the Jewish tabernacle/temple (Exod. 25; 37; Num. 8). That piece of furniture was located in that part of the tabernacle/temple known as the Holy Place, before the very presence of God that rested in the Holy of Holies. The Jews understood that the light put off by the lampstand represented the presence of the Lord.

The key Old Testament text for understanding the lampstands in Revelation, however, is Zechariah 4. In that chapter the lampstand represents the temple and faithful Israel. The flames in that text seem to represent the power of God's Spirit that is given to Israel so that they will be empowered to rebuild the temple. The famous verse is “*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts*” (Zech. 4:6). John seems to see that same image in his vision, but this time it represents these various churches (and probably the universal church by extension). That's significant. This image that represents Israel is applied to the church. And these churches in Asia Minor are probably not entirely filled with Jewish Christians, but likely included many Gentiles (i.e., non-Israelites; e.g., Acts 19:10, 17).

So what does the image convey to the members of these churches? To the Gentile Christians it was probably a reminder that they too are a part of true “Israel of God” and have been “grafted in” to the people of God, to borrow the language of Galatians 6 and Romans 11.¹⁵ We should read the Old Testament as the story of our spiritual ancestors. And we should recognize the Jewishness of our faith.

But to these Jewish Christians it must have carried additional encouragement. Think about it. Imagine you were a first century Jew who was eagerly awaiting God to send the Messiah. Then one day you realize that He did and His name was Jesus. You begin to follow Jesus, God's Messiah/Christ. But it doesn't take long for you to realize that most of your Jewish contemporaries deny that Jesus was the true Messiah. So you have a split in Judaism and the dividing line is Jesus. Which side represents true Judaism? The side that recognized the true Messiah or the one that rejected the Jewish Messiah? Of course, it is those who follow Jesus. But in the midst of persecution from your local synagogue you may begin to doubt that you are really a part of true Judaism, true Israel (cf. Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

Then John's vision arrives to your church setting and a messenger reads the letter. You hear that Jesus Himself describes your church in the Jewish image and your courage is restored. You believe Jesus' assessment and not those of your persecutors, many of whom are Israelites, who have labeled you as forsaking the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You realize that you are actually on the path that this historical faith always been pointing. What an encouragement. Your persecutors are the apostates, not you. As Craig Keener writes, “John uses the ‘lampstand’ image to stress the Jewishness of faith in Jesus and the continuity of [the believer's] faith with the heritage of ancient Israel.”¹⁶

You also realize that, just like in Zechariah 4, God is, by His Spirit, constructing a new temple to dwell in, though this time it's not a building but the people of God, the Church. God's Spirit builds His Church. And just like Zechariah 4 teaches, we must draw strength from God's Spirit for the work that God has called us to engage in, which John has already described as a priestly work in verse 6. You are priests who offer service as part of God's temple (cf. Rev. 11:1-13). We discover later in Revelation that there are seven

flames (presumably the ones that light these lampstands) that represent the Holy Spirit (Rev. 4:5; cf. 1:4).¹⁷ And by the Spirit's activity in our midst we can give off light in a dark world as church (lampstands) are planted among the nations (cf. Phil. 2:15-16; Matt. 5:14-16; John 8:12).¹⁸ So all of this fits together when we read it through the lenses of Zechariah.

The key to understanding the "*one like a son of man*" (Rev. 1:13)¹⁹ who John sees is Daniel 7. We have looked at this passage before, so we won't belabor the parallels now. Suffice it to say, Daniel 7 involves a vision where the prophet sees "*one like a son of man*" is presented before the "*Ancient of Days*" and given the authority to rule over all people in an everlasting kingdom. This is fulfilled in Christ. Indeed, "Son of man" was Jesus favorite title for Himself.

The way Jesus is described in these verses would take us weeks to do justice to because there are so many Old Testament allusions present. Fortunately, the images are repeated and applied down the road so we can touch on them in greater detail in the days ahead as they resurface. Basically their function is to reinforce what we learned last week from verses 4 to 8. There we saw a description of who Jesus is and what He has done. In particular we noted that Jesus is divine and that He embodies those offices associated with the Messiah—prophet, priest, and king. The imagery in our text this morning communicates the same truth in different ways.

Let me give you just a few examples. The voice "*like a trumpet*" is reminiscent of what Moses heard at Mount Sinai when he met with God. The voice of Jesus is also described here as sounding like "*the roar of many waters*", which is almost certainly an allusion to Ezekiel 1:24 and 43:2 where God's arrival is described in the same terms (cf. Dan. 10:6).²⁰ The white hair of Jesus calls to mind the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-10.²¹ And surely "*the first and the last*" in verse 17 is equivalent to title "*Alpha and Omega*" applied to God the Father in verse 8.²² All of this is pointing to the divinity of Christ.

Most agree that the "*long robe*" and "*golden sash*" are probably meant to call to mind the attire of the High Priest (1:13; cf. Exod. 28:4; 39:29; Lev. 8:7). We also notice that Jesus is walking among these lampstands, typically associated with God's tabernacle/temple, which is precisely where we would expect to find a priest serving. The "*sharp two-edged sword*" probably alludes to His prophetic voice and His role as Judge. The face "*like the sun shining in full strength*" is an allusion to Judges 5:31 where the same is said of the victorious warrior.

That is our Lord and God. No wonder John doubled over like a fainting goat. But then Jesus reaches down, lays His right hand upon John, and speaks the only words you would want to hear in that moment: "*Fear not...*" (Rev. 1:17-18). Jesus grounds that command on three realities about Himself. I'll mention each today, but we are only going to focus on the third one in our remaining time.

First, He says, "*I am the first and the last*" (1:18). This has to do with God's sovereignty over human history and it's an encouraging truth when we remember it. We've discussed it in previous weeks, so I would recommend you review what was said about the "Alpha and Omega" in last week's sermon. The second batch of descriptions all have to do with the resurrection of Jesus. He says, "*I am...the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades* (1:18). We will circle back to the significance of these truths on Easter Sunday.

But notice that He is again described, third, as the One holding the "*seven stars*" in His right hand (1:16, 20). Verse 20 explains that these stars represent "*the angels of the seven churches.*" What exactly do these angels signify? Well, that's very debated. The word for "*angel*" simply means "messenger" and in many contexts the word was used for human, not spiritual, beings. So some have argued that these messengers

represent the elder/pastor/overseer of each church. Maybe the “senior pastor.” This is possible, but I think it is unlikely for at least two reasons.

First of all, in our context we are used to seeing churches with one single elder/pastor/overseer (especially in smaller churches), but this is not the norm in the New Testament. Earlier I quoted a verse from Acts where Paul is said to have taught churches that it is “*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*” The very next verse describes Paul appointing “*elders [plural] for them in every church*” (Acts 14:22-23). That was the biblical norm. Multiple pastors. A plurality of elders. Now, of course, not every church has that luxury because not every church will have people who meet the qualifications of biblical elders. But where such men are found, we should aspire to that plurality. That’s why I am thankful that our church has multiple pastors on staff and in the congregation. But the point I’m making at this juncture is that while it’s understandable that one messenger/angel per church may lead in our day to the logical jump that these are pastors, in their day I don’t think that would have been as natural an interpretation given the plurality of pastors in churches.

Second, and more decisively, the interpretation that takes these angels as the leaders in the churches is forcing an interpretation that’s inconsistent with the way the word is used in the book or the New Testament. Never in the New Testament are pastors referred to with this term. The term is almost always used of those spiritual being we think of as “angels.” I think that is the sense here as well. So, it seems, each of these churches (and presumably every church) has an angel(s) associated with them. These angels serve the churches evidently (perhaps as guardians) and represent them before God in heaven.²³ There is a lot of mystery caught up in this reality that we would only be speculating on if we push further.

In light of this, we can now see what is to me one of the most encouraging messages of this book and it has to do with Jesus’ relationship with His church. Where is Jesus in this vision? He is walking among the churches (i.e., the lampstands). And what does He hold in his hands? These angels that represent the churches (i.e., the stars). Let that resonate in your mind. What does that communicate about Jesus’ relationship with His churches? It teaches us that He is control of the churches. He sustains them. He cares for them. He is present with them. He walks among them. He holds them and their future in His hand, His right hand, the hand of power. What an encouraging thought!

It’s even more encouraging when you realize that five out of the seven churches that are addressed in this letter have serious issues and need major correction. Yet even still, because of the finished work of Christ, He is present with them. He walks with them. He holds and cares for them. That’s such an encouraging thought, isn’t it? It is to me. And here’s why... I lead one of those churches. I’m a broken leader who falls short on a daily basis with the flock at my house and the flock of this church. And we as a church are flawed church. We have not arrived, corporately or individually, at where we should aspire as Christ-followers. But you know what? Christ is with us. He loves. He holds us firm in His hand. He walks among us. I wish I could express how much hope this thought gives me!

But this also serves as a reminder to us. If Jesus Himself gives this much care to the church and is that involved in the local church, then we should too. If He is present with us, then we should not neglect the community we have as a local church because in it we can experience the presence of God Himself. You need this more than you realize. And you realize it most when you face difficult times.

We have time remaining for only one illustration of this. It comes from a book called *Where Is God When It Hurts*, by Philip Yancey. Towards the end of the book, Yancey shares a letter that he once received from a woman whose husband died from ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease), after several years of painful struggle. She recounts how God worked in her life through her church when she was widowed. Listen to part of her testimony...

“Ever since the first symptoms of ALS appeared over eight years ago, you have surrounded us with love and support. You have cheered us with innumerable notes and letters and cards, some hilarious, some profound, some just warm and caring, but all greatly valued. You visited and you phoned, often from faraway places....Many of you prepared and brought marvelous food which nourished our spirits as well as our bodies. You shopped and ran errands for us and repaired our broken and out-of-order things while yours waited. You swept and shoveled our walks, brought our mail, dumped our trash. It was possible for us to be a part of our church services because you recorded them. And you brought gifts of love, too many to count, to brighten our hours. You “doctored”...and even repaired a tooth right here in our home. You did ingenious things that made life easier for both of us, like the ‘coughing jacket’ and signal switch that Norm was able to use until the last few days of his life. You shared Scripture verses with us and some of you made it your ministry to pray for those who came to our home regularly to give respiratory treatments. You made him feel like he was still a vital part of the music industry and of the church music ministry. And how you prayed!!! Day after day, month after month, even year after year! Those prayers buoyed us up, lifted us through particularly hard places, gave us strength that would have been humanly impossible to have, and helped us to reach out on our own for God’s resources. Someday we’ll understand why Norm’s perfect healing did not take place here. But we do know that he was with us much longer and in much better condition than is the norm for an ALS victim. Love is not a strong enough word to tell you how we feel about you!”²⁴

Many of you in this place could pen similar letter, could you not? What is that? What is she describing? She is describing a people, a church, filled with the presence and Spirit of God, serving a family so that she experienced the presence of the Lord in the midst of her suffering. As Yancey describes, “They became the presence of God for her. Because of their loving concern, she was not tormented by doubts over whether God loved her. She could sense his love in the human touch of Christ’s body, her local church.”²⁵ That’s exactly right. They embodied God’s presence. And Jesus walked among her and her family.

Do you see church? We need each other. I need you. And we all need Jesus most of all. God is present among us and one of the ways we experience the presence of our Lord is through the community that He walks among and hold in His hand. This is a thought I look forward to exploring more with you in the days ahead.

Let’s pray...

¹ Cf. Isa. 6:1-7; Jer. 1:11-14; Ezek. 2:9-3:11; Dan. 8:3-27; 10:2-12:3; 12:5-13; Zech. 4:1-3; 5:1-11; 6:1-8.

² E.g., Exod. 17:14; Isa. 30:8 [LXX]; Jer. 36:2.

³ As Gregory Beale also notes: “The reader steeped in the OT would perhaps also discern that all such commissions [to write] in the prophets were commands to write testaments of judgment against Israel (so also Jer. 37:2; cf. also Exod. 34:27; Isa 8:1; Jer. 36:2; Hab. 2:2). Therefore, at this early point in the book there is already a hint that one of its major concerns is judgment (as we shall see, judgment against both the world and those in the church who compromise with the world; see chs. 2-3).” Gregory K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 46.

⁴ Hamilton is certainly not alone in arguing that “What Jesus tells John to write in 1:19 is ‘the things that you have seen’ (1:9-20), ‘those that are,’ which probably refers to the present state of the churches that Jesus will describe and address in chapters 2, 3, ‘and those that are to take place after this,’ which probably refers to the events John records in chapters 4-22. Revelation 1:19, then, serves as a preview of the overarching structure of the book of Revelation” (James M. Hamilton Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* [Preaching the Word; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012], 51). However, as tempting as that nice and neat arrangement may be to adopt, it seems to me it is not so nice and neat. In the pages that await there seems to be a more rich hybrid of past, present, and future events. Therefore, I take verse 19 as a simple summary of the content of the whole book, as opposed to an outline.

⁵ This same phrase, the “Lord’s day,” is used in the Didache (14.1) to refer to the day when Christians gathered to break bread (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; John 20:19, 26). Craig Keener also notes that even the Romans recognized that Christians were gathering on a set day (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96). Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 83-84. Cf. Ignatius, *Magn.* 9.1.

⁶ E.g., Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5; cf. 1 Kings 18:12; Joel 2:28. This serves as another indication that John is to be reckoned a prophet here. James M. Hamilton Jr. explains, “There are four places in Revelation where John records that he was ‘in the Spirit’—here in 1:10, in 4:2, in 17:3, and in 21:10. Each marks the beginning of a significant movement in John’s visionary experience. Here in 1:10 John is about to see the risen Christ. In 4:2 John sees the heavenly court. In 17:3 John is carried away in the Spirit at the beginning of his vision of the fall of the harlot Babylon, and in 21:10 John is carried away in the Spirit to see the descent of the bride of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem.” Hamilton, 44. The visionary and worship connotations are not mutually exclusive. Keener writes, “because John was already in the Spirit when the vision began, perhaps, ‘in the Spirit’ begins here not with a visionary state, as in 4:2 and 21:10, but initially in worship that led to a visionary state. Such an interpretation helps explain John’s mention of ‘the Lord’s Day,’ likely used for corporate worship. . . Given the usual sense of ‘in the Spirit’ among John’s contemporaries, ‘worship in the Spirit’ (cf. John 4:24; Phil. 3:3) undoubtedly meant Spirit-guided and Spirit-empowered worship.” Keener, 84. Cf. David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (New Foundations Theological Library; Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 90.

⁷ Keener, 91.

⁸ J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation* (TTCS; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 34. “The church on earth is never closer to heaven than when we are offering God and the Lamb the glory they deserve; it is then that we experience ‘in the Spirit’ a foretaste of heaven (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:5).” Keener, 92.

⁹ His response is reminiscent of other prophets (e.g., Isa. 6:5; Ezek 1:28; Dan. 8:17; 10:9-11).

¹⁰ I learned of this from a sermon by Timothy Keller called, “The First and the Last,” which he preached on June 29, 2008, to Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, NY.

¹¹ See Beale, 45.

¹² For more on this, see Eckhard Schnabel, *40 Questions about the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 77-84.

¹³ Hamilton, 43-44.

¹⁴ I like the way Michael Wilcock makes this point: “The tribulation and kingship and endurance which Jesus knows, John knows also, and if we are truly his companions we shall share the same experience. *En Patmō* [“in Patmos”] we suffer; but *en Pneumati* [“in the Spirit”] we reign. The practical result at which Revelation aims is to make us see the first in light of the second.” Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation* (BST; Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1975), 42. F. F. Bruce is also worth quoting: “[John’s] placing of ‘the kingdom’ between ‘the tribulation’ and ‘the patient endurance’ underlines a recurrent New Testament theme—that the patient endurance of tribulation is the way into the kingdom of God. If, then, John encourages his friends in the churches of Asia to stand firm, he is not cheering them on from the sidelines; he is involved with the same struggle.” F. F. Bruce, *The Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 85.

¹⁵ As Greg Beale explains, “true Israel is no longer limited to a nation, but encompasses all peoples.” Beale 48.

¹⁶ Keener, 89.

¹⁷ Beale, 47-48.

¹⁸ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 17.

¹⁹ One has to wonder how similar this vision was to the encounter John had with the transfigured Christ in Mark 9:2ff.

²⁰ Cf. 4 Ezra 6:17.

²¹ Cf. 1 Enoch 46:1; 71:10.

²² For more on the divinity of the Son of Man see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* WBC 52A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 90-92.

²³ Perhaps the lampstands represent a church’s earthly existence and the stars their heavenly existence. “The churches are addressed through their representative angels, apparently in order to remind the believers that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly and that their real home is not with the unbelieving “earth-dwellers. . .” Beale, 50.

²⁴ Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 251.

²⁵ Ibid.