

Seeing Christ on Patmos, Part 2

Revelation 1:9–20



Text and Outline

“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, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.

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.’”

- I. **The Effect of the Vision (1:17a)**
- II. **The Encouragement of the Vision (1:17b–18)**
- III. **The Exhortation of the Vision (1:19)**
- IV. **The Explanation of the Vision (1:20)**

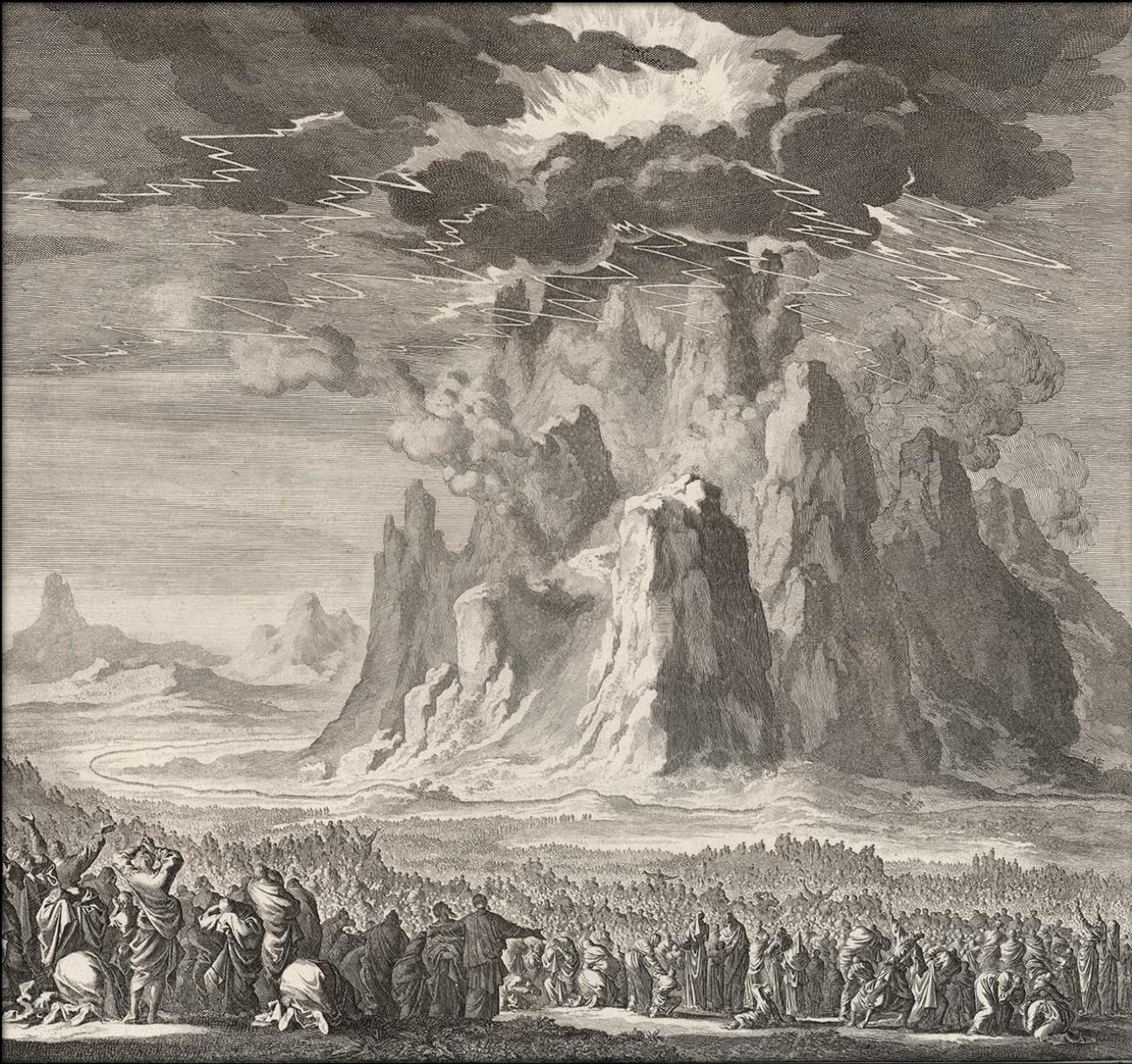
I. The Effect of the Vision (1:17a)

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.”

- John was overwhelmed by a real apprehension of the glorious Christ.
- **“I fell at His feet”** – in the presence of Deity, John became keenly aware that he was a *creature made from the dirt*.
- Contrary to the frivolity many today exhibit when claiming to have experienced “appearances” of God, the Bible describes *prostration* as the necessary response.
- See Gen 17:3; Josh 5:14–15; Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 9:8; 11:13; 43:3; 44:4; Dan 10:9, 15; Matt 17:5–6; Luke 5:8–9; Acts 9:3–4; 26:13–15; etc.

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man” (1:17a).

- The experience was so overwhelming that John was *paralyzed in the dust* (made from dirt, to dirt he must return).
- How different was this vision from what John remembered from 60 years earlier, when he reclined on Jesus’ chest during the last supper (John 13:23), or when he jockeyed for favor (Matt 20:20–23).
- True apprehension of supernatural glory by a creature always brings about the sense of terror and ruin.
- Why? Man cannot see God and live (see Exodus 19:21; 33:19–20).



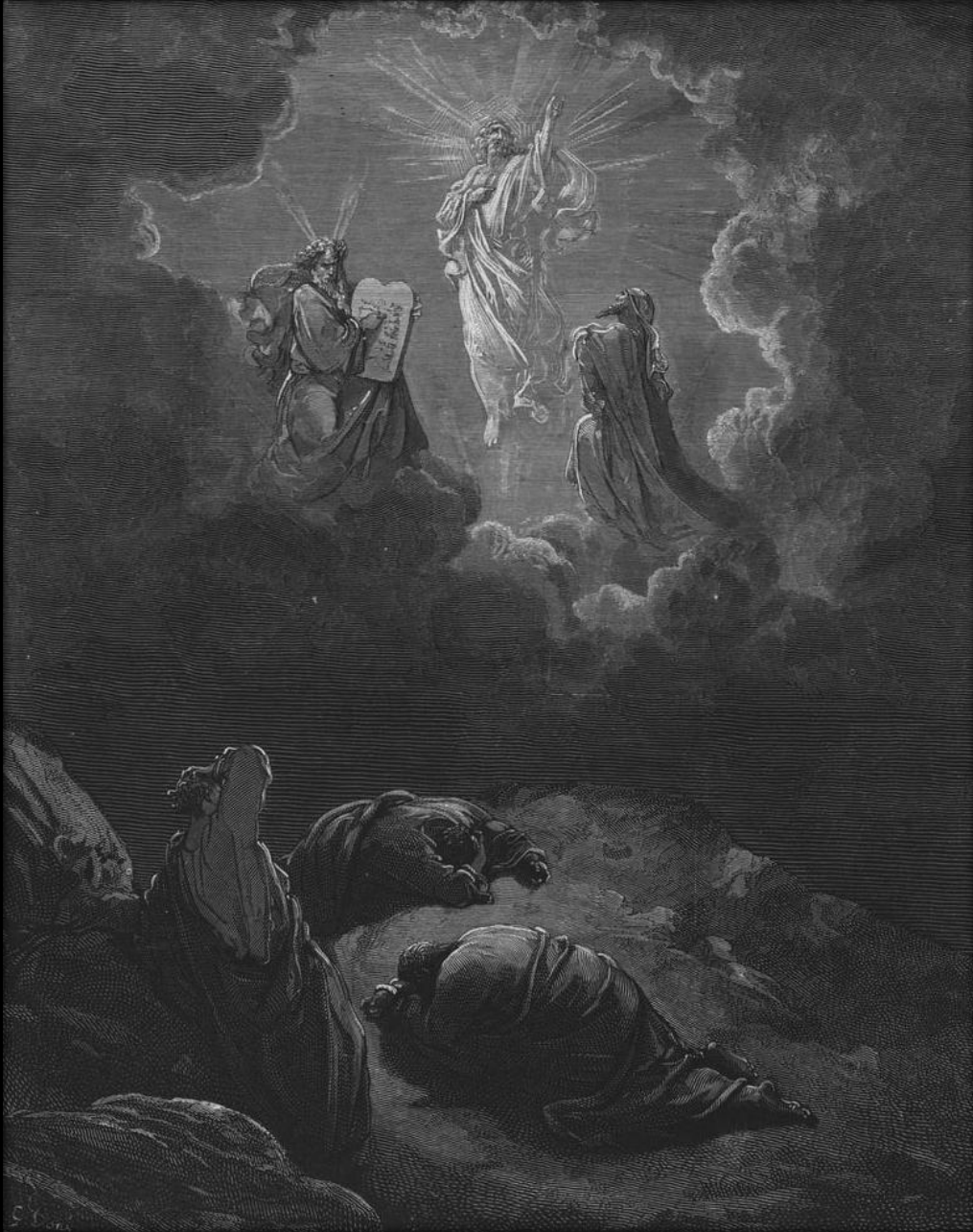
“All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.’”

—Exodus 20:18–19

II. The Encouragement of the Vision (1:17b–18)

“And He placed **His right hand** on me . . .” (1:17b).

- The only hope to avoid ruin in the presence of divine majesty is that such majesty responds with *mercy and grace*.
- “**His right hand**” – the hand of power and blessing.
- In a remarkable moment, Jesus extends His hand to *touch* John, giving him comfort and assurance.
- The language of v. 17 closely parallels two other texts—Daniel 10 and Matthew 17.



“While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’ When the disciples heard *this*, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. And Jesus came to *them* and touched them and said, ‘Get up, and do not be afraid.’”

—Matthew 17:5–7

“... saying, **‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades’** (1:17b–18).

- **“Do not be afraid”** – literally, “Stop fearing!” – the same command given in both Daniel 10 and Matthew 17, and in many other contexts.



- **Matthew 14:27** – “When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

“ . . . saying, ‘Do not be afraid; **I am** the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades’ (1:17b–18).

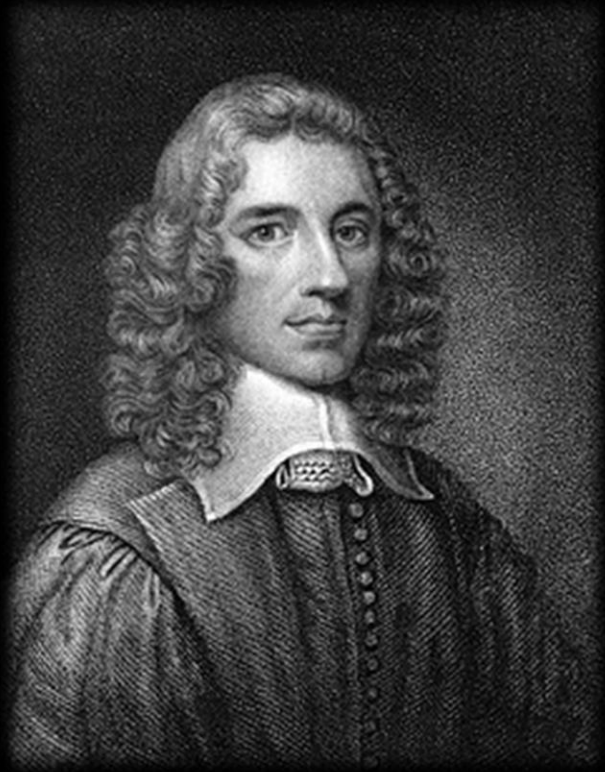
- “I am” – to bring reassurance to John, Jesus proceeds to describe who it is that has appeared to him (as in Matt 14:27).
- **Exodus 3:4–5** – “When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. . . . God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’”

“ . . . saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades’ (1:17b–18).

- To comfort John in his despair, Jesus give several self-descriptions—all connected to *life*, and all comforting only to objects of *mercy*.

1) “The first and the last” – emphasizes Jesus’ *eternality*.

- Echoes the Father’s self-description as “the Alpha and Omega” (1:8).
- Echoes Yahweh’s self-descriptions in Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12–13 as “the first and last.”
- Reminiscent of Jesus’ assertion of eternality in John 8:58.



“Creatures are in a perpetual flux; something is acquired or something lost every day. A man is the same in regard of existence when he is a man, as he was when he was a child; but there is a new succession of quantities and qualities in him. Every day he acquires something till he comes to his maturity; every day he loseth something till he comes to his end. A man is not the same at night that he was in the morning; something is expired, and something is added; every day there is a change in his

age, a change in his substance, a change in his accidents. But God hath his whole being in one and the same point, or moment of eternity. He receives nothing as an addition to what he was before; he loseth nothing of what he was before; he is always the same excellency and perfection in the same infiniteness as ever.” —Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 283–84

“... saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (1:17b–18).

2) “The living One” – emphasizes Jesus’ *aseity*.

- Not a reference to His *resurrection*, as that will be described later.
- A reference instead to His “ever-abiding life” that is “unrestricted as to time” and “the constant character and essence” of His existence.
- The title is commonly used to describe God in the OT and NT (e.g., Deut 32:40; Psalm 42:2; 84:2; Dan 12:7; Matt 16:16; Acts 14:15; 2 Cor 3:3; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Tim 3:15; 4:10; Heb 3:12; 9:12; 10:31; etc.).

“In theology, endless mistakes result from supposing that the conditions, bounds, and limits of our own finite existence apply to God. The doctrine of his aseity stands as a bulwark against such mistakes. In our life of faith, we easily impoverish ourselves by embracing an idea of God that is too limited and small, and again the doctrine of God’s aseity stands as a bulwark to stop this happening. It is vital for spiritual health to believe that God is great . . . and grasping the truth of his aseity is the first step on the road to doing this.”

—J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 26–27



“ . . . saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and **I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore,** and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (1:17b–18).

3) “I was dead . . . I am alive forevermore” – emphasizes Jesus’ *victory over death*.

- Now Jesus refers to His *humanity*.
- Literally, “**I became dead**” – a reference to the historical moment of His human death.
- “**but behold**” – the phrase serves as an exclamatory contrast.
- “**I am alive forevermore**” – emphasizes the permanence of His human, resurrected life.

“For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”



—1 Corinthians 15:53–57

“ . . . saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades’ (1:17b–18).

4) “I have the keys of death and Hades” – emphasizes Jesus’ *authority to judge* (a particular emphasis of the rest of the book).

- “Keys” emphasize *authority*; only they can open and shut; they control entry and exit.
- “Death” – the destiny of the body; “Hades” – the destiny of the soul—a reminder of the *curse* (Gen 3:19).
- Christ was seen holding the “stars” in His hand, now He holds these “keys” to the great enemy of man.



“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”


—Revelation 20:11–15

- Jesus' victory over death through His resurrection from the dead established Him as *the authority* to judge the world.



“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

—Acts 17:30–31



“How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His ‘severity’ (Rom 9:22) toward it? How could He, who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, not loathe and hate that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite, as Heaven is.”

—A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 83

Revelation 1:17b–18 – A Description of the God-Man

- Jesus claims *eternality, aseity, victory over death, and authority to render ultimate judgment*—prerogatives only One both God and man can claim.
- These are also qualities which relate directly to salvation, and so provide *comfort and assurance* to recipients of such salvation—to men like John.

Title	Emphasis	Nature
“The first and the last”	Eternality	Divine
“The living One”	Aseity	Divine
“I was dead . . . I am alive”	Victory over death	Human
“I have the keys of death and Hades	Authority to judge	Human

- This One commands John to cease *fearing*, but *not* to cease *worship*.
- The scene in Revelation 1:17–20 unfolds differently than at the end of the book, when *an angel* appears to John:
 - **Revelation 19:10** – “Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”
 - **Revelation 22:8–9** – “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.’”

Have you come to terms with the Christ John saw on Patmos?