

# Seeing Christ on Patmos, Part 3

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.’”

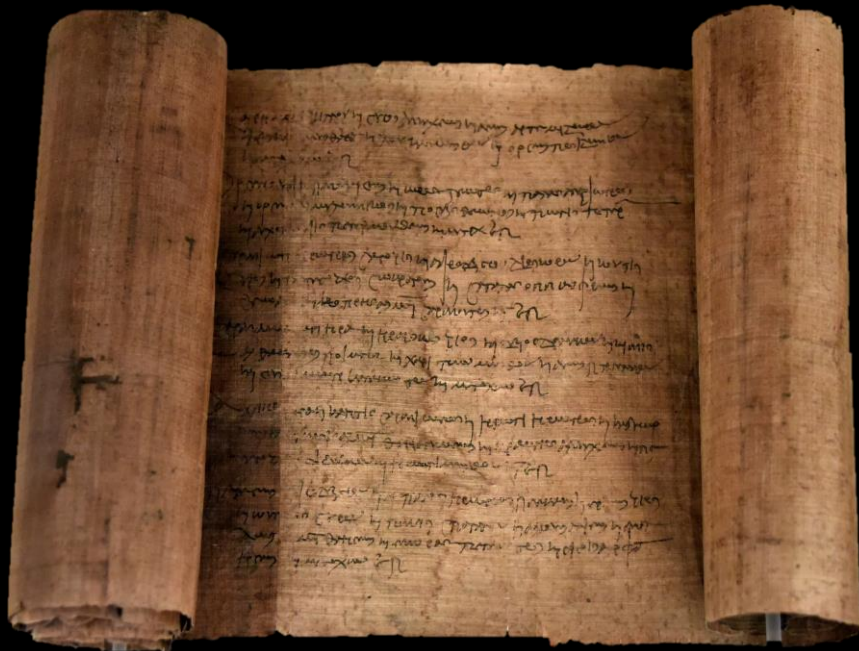
- I. **The Effect of the Vision (1:17a)**
- II. **The Encouragement of the Vision (1:17b–18)**
- III. **The Exhortation of the Vision (1:19)**
- IV. **The Explanation of the Vision (1:20)**

### III. The Exhortation of the Vision (1:19)

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

- **“Therefore”** – after reassuring John of His saving power, Jesus returns to the commission stated in v. 11.



- **1:11** – “Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches . . . .”
- But in contrast to the generic “what you see” of v. 11, Jesus provides a *threefold* summary of the contents of what John is to record.



**“... write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things” (1:19).**

- 1) “the things which you have seen”** – the opening vision of the glorified Christ on Patmos = all of chapter 1 (esp. vv. 11– 18).
  - 2) “the things which are”** – Christ’s assessment of the current state of the churches = chapters 2–3.
  - 3) “the things which will take place after these things”** – the visions of future things which take place after Christ’s assessment of the churches = chapters 4–22.
- “This commission gives the revelatory paradigm for the whole book of Revelation” (Buist Fanning, *Revelation*, 105).

## Revelation 1:19 – The Interpretive Paradigm

“The things which you have seen.”

Theme:  
*Christ*

1:1    1:20

“The things which are.”

Theme:  
*Church*

2:1            3:22

“The things which will take place after these things.”

Theme:  
*Consummation*

4:1

22:21

## IV. The Explanation of the Vision (1:20)

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**“As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: . . .”**

- **“the mystery”** = “something secret” – elements of what John saw in the vision (vv. 12–16) could not be understood, even with the help of antecedent Scripture:
  - 1) “the seven stars,”** which John had seen in Jesus’ right hand (v. 16).
  - 2) “the seven golden lampstands,”** among which John had seen Jesus standing (vv. 12–13).
- John needed an explanation, and this is what Jesus provides.

“... the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (1:20).



- The easier of the explanations is “the seven lampstands.”
- “the seven churches” = seven historical churches of the province of Asia (referred to in 1:4, 11).
- These churches will now become the central focus of the next segment of Revelation (2:1–3:22).



“... **the seven stars** are **the angels** of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (1:20).

- The more difficult of the explanations relates to “**the seven stars.**”
- Jesus identifies them as “**angels**” (ἄγγελοι, *angeloi*)—a term that is widely debated. Two basic options exist:
  - 1) “angelic spirits” – i.e., the guardian angel of each of the seven churches.
    - The term is used approx. 60 in the rest of the book to refer to spirit beings.
    - Daniel 10 speaks of angels overseeing kingdoms.
    - Problem: Jesus → John → angelic spirits → local churches.
    - Problem: The exhortations *to repent* given in the letters are also addressed to these “angels.”



“... **the seven stars** are **the angels** of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (1:20).

2) “human messengers” – i.e., representatives sent to John from each of the seven churches.

- The term is used elsewhere in the NT to refer to *human* messengers.
- This option makes most sense in light of vv. 4 and 11.
- These representatives are naturally included as recipients of the exhortations in the letters.
- They are probably men sent by the seven churches to minister to John in exile on Patmos, just as men like Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25; 4:18) and Epaphras (Col 4:12) were sent to minister to Paul under house arrest in Rome.



**“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” (1:20).**

- Ultimately, the emphasis in this explanation of the vision is the *sovereignty* of the glorious Christ over His churches.
- As the vision of vv. 12–16 portrayed, and as the letters of chapters 2–3 will go on to describe, Christ is not disinterested in local congregations.
- Whether among the indifferent, the persecuted, or the compromisers, Jesus is exercising His power to convict, comfort, or even close churches.





“He has a right to think and say what he does. In the first place, it is his church. He founded it on the rock and promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). He is its head and the source of its life. In the second place, he knows it intimately. In each of the seven letters he begins “I know” . . . . He walks among the lampstands, patrolling and supervising his churches. He is the chief pastor of his people.”

—John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 19



# EXCURSUS: The History and Theology of “Joy to the Word!” (Isaac Watts)

JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR: ADVENT (CHRISTMAS)  
**Joy to the World!** 58

Isaac Watts ANTIOCH George F. Handel

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come; Let earth re-  
2. Joy to the earth! the Sav-our reigns; Let men their  
3. No more let sins and sor-rows grow, Nor thorns in-  
4. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the

ceive her King; Let ev-ery heart pre-pare Him room,  
songs em-ploy; While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,  
fest the ground; He comes to make His bless-ings flow  
na-tions prove The glo-ries of His right-eous-ness,

And heaven and na-ture sing, And heaven and na-ture  
Re-peat the sound-ing joy, Re-peat the sound-ing  
Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is  
And won-ders of His love, And won-ders of His  
1. And heaven and na-ture sing,.....  
And

sing, And heaven, and heaven and na-ture sing.  
joy, Re-peat, re-peat the sound-ing joy.  
found, Far as, far as the curse is found.  
love, And won-ders, won-ders of His love. A-MEN.

heaven and na-ture sing,



- Authored by Isaac Watts (1674–1748), an English non-conformist minister.
- Watts: “To see the dull indifference, the negligent and thoughtless air that sits upon the faces of a whole assembly, while the psalm is upon their lips, might even tempt a charitable observer to suspect the fervency of their inward religion.”
- Watts is credited with some 750 hymns, including “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” “O God Our Help in Ages Past,” and “Jesus Shall Reign.”
- “Joy to the Word” was published in 1719 as part of a collection of hymns based on the Psalms, entitled, *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*.
- “Joy to the Word” has become one of the most loved Christmas carols, but it was not originally intended to be a Christmas hymn.

- After its publication, the hymn was adopted by postmillennialists, reinterpreted, and used as an anthem about the *first* advent of Christ.
  - Postmillennialism teaches that most of the book of Revelation (1:1–19:10; 20:1–6) was fulfilled by AD 70.
  - The kingdom of Christ (Rev 20:1–6) is already in force on the earth, is expanding, and will eventually overtake the entire world.
  - Thus, Christ’s *first* advent set in motion as a *present reality* all that “Joy to the Word” describes.
- The hymn thus became one of the most famous hymns of the modern missionary movement—as the expansion of gospel proclamation around the world brought about the “spiritualized” realities of the hymn.

- But Watts based the lyrics off Psalm 98 which he read *proleptically*—as describing future events as if in the present.

O sing to the Lord a new song,  
for He has done wonderful things,  
His right hand and His holy arm  
have gained the victory for Him.  
The Lord has made known His salvation;  
He has revealed His righteousness  
in the sight of the nations.  
He has remembered His lovingkindness  
and His faithfulness to the house of Israel;  
all the ends of the earth  
have seen the salvation of our God.  
Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth;  
Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises.

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.  
With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
shout joyfully before the King, the Lord.  
Let the sea roar and all it contains,  
the world and those who dwell in it.  
Let the rivers clap their hands,  
let the mountains sing together for joy  
before the Lord,  
for He is coming to judge the earth;  
He will judge the world with righteousness  
and the peoples with equity.

—Psalm 98:1–9

# **“Joy to the Word” —Isaac Watts (1719)**

## **The Second Coming**

[1] Joy to the world! the Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,  
And heav'n and nature sing,  
And heav'n and nature sing,  
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

## **The Celebrated Sovereignty**

[2] Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

## **The Suspended Curse**

[3] No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as the curse is found.

## **The Confessed Splendor**

[4] He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, wonders of His love.

How long, dear Savior, O how long,  
Shall this bright hour delay!  
Fly swifter round, ye wheels of time,  
And bring the welcome day.

—Isaac Watts