

## Revelation — Lesson 5

1:4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, *5a* and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

The phrase “from him who is, who was, and who is to come” is similar to other descriptions and titles for God. For example, in Exodus 3:14 God says “I am that I am,” in John 8:58, Jesus says “Before Abraham was, I am.” In Hebrews 13:8, Jesus is described as being the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The Greek in verse 4 is quite unusual. Various translations include “The Being, the Was, the Coming,” and “The Being One and the Was One and the Coming One.” The definite article precedes each of the nouns, “the was, the is, the is to come.”

Barclay tells us that John bursts the bonds of grammar to show his reverence for God. Where we have “from him who is,” John retains the nominative case and in effect has “from he who is.” John’s reverence for God will not allow him to alter the form of his name even when the grammar demands it.

Further, where we have “from him who was,” John has “from the ‘he was.’” John uses a grammatically impossible construction to avoid using a form of “to become” that might imply that God could change. Those suffering persecution were particularly concerned with the changelessness of God. He had saved his people in the past—he would save them now.

I sometimes wonder if we have the same reverence for the changelessness of God. I am certain that the denominational world does not. God is the fixed point; we are not. And yet many denominational songs (some of which are in our own songbook) sound as if just the

opposite were true — that man rather than God is the unchanging fixed point. When we sing songs (as we often do) that picture us placing a crown on Jesus' head — who is changing?

There is a very unusual form of the Trinity in these verses in that we have the Father, the Son, and the Seven Spirits who are before God's throne. The figure of the seven spirits is used elsewhere in the book. In Revelation 3:1 we read:

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has **the seven spirits of God** and the seven stars. 'I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead.

In Revelation 4:5 we read:

From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are **the seven spirits of God**.

In Revelation 5:6 we read:

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and **with seven eyes**, which are **the seven spirits of God** sent out into all the earth.

Some suggest that the Spirit is *one* in name but *sevenfold* in virtue. See, for example, Isaiah 11:2, where we read:

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

But there are only 6 virtues listed there! The seventh is the spirit of godliness and is found in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Also, the seven spirits may correspond to the seven churches. Hebrews 2:4 speaks of God as giving “gifts” (“shares” in Greek) of the Spirit and thus these seven spirits may be the seven shares of the Spirit given to the seven churches. Again, the symbolic nature of the number 7 likely indicates completeness.

There is likely also an allusion here to Zechariah 3:9 and 4:6, 10, where we find the seven eyes set upon the stone before Joshua the High Priest. Compare again Revelation 5:6 (seven eyes).

This passage contains several descriptions of Christ. Jesus is called a witness because he has first hand knowledge of God. He is the perfect witness. Recall John 18:37.

Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. **For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.** Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.”

Jesus is the first-born of the dead. This points to the resurrection of Christ. Paul used the phrase “first-born of the dead” in Colossians 1:18 and the phrase “firstfruits of them that sleep” in 1 Corinthians 15:20.

The term “first-born” also points to preeminence. Jesus is the one with power and honor, the one in first place. In Psalm 89:27, God said of David that “I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.” David was not the first-born son of his father Jesse but he was certainly the preeminent son of Jesse. Recall Colossians 1:15, 18:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; ... He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be **pre-eminent**.

Jesus is the ruler of kings. This may refer again to Psalm 89:27, this time as a reference to the Messiah rather than just to David. Nero and Domitian thought they were all powerful and answerable to no one, and yet Jesus was their king. That Jesus is the King of kings means

that he is the King over everyone and everything. We do not make Jesus king when we obey him — we obey him because he is already king!

Hal Lindsey claims that Jesus is *not* ruling now. But what does the Bible say? In 1 Peter 3:22 we see that all powers have been made subject to him. In Ephesians 1:22 we read that all things are in subjection under him. In Revelation 2:27 we see that Jesus has power over nations. Finally, in Matthew 28:18, we see that Jesus has all authority in Heaven and on Earth. Jesus is king!

**5b To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.**

This is a wonderful description of what Jesus has done for man. What did he do? He loved us. He freed us from our sin. He made us a kingdom of priests.

The phrase “washed us from our sins in his own blood” in the King James Version should probably read “set us free from our sins at the price of his blood.” The best Greek manuscripts have ‘lusanti’ (freed) and not ‘lousanti’ (washed). As Israel was freed from Egyptian bondage to become a new kingdom, so we have been freed from the bondage of sin and death to become a new kingdom.

He loves (present tense) us and set (past tense) us free. The death of Christ was a singular past event that is a continuous expression of God’s love.

Further, Jesus made us a kingdom of priests to God. In Exodus 19:6 God said “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” Under the old law only the priests had access to God. Through Jesus Christ everyone can now enjoy this access. Under the Old Law, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and he could so only once a year, and even then he had a cord tied around his foot so that

he could be dragged out in case he died. Now we all may *boldly* approach the throne of grace. (Hebrews 4:16 and Hebrews 10:19–22)

In Exodus 25:8, God said, “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.” In many ways the entire Bible is a variation on this theme. It was (past tense) fulfilled perfectly in Jesus Christ. We all have access to God through Jesus. We are all priests.

The church of Christ is a kingdom of priests. Isaiah 61:6 told us about it long ago:

**But you shall be called the priests of the LORD**, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.

And 1 Peter 2:9 described the church in very similar terms:

But ye are a chosen generation, a **royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Part of our challenge in this book will be to look at things through other’s eyes. To understand the book we need to look at it through the eyes of its first century readers, but we also need to try to see things through God’s eyes. We need to see the church as God sees the church — the beautiful bride of his son, the eternal kingdom, the royal priesthood.

We often make the point that Revelation is trying to describe what we cannot see (Heaven) in terms we can understand, but we may find that it is really describing something we *can* see (the church), but that we are not seeing properly.

**7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth**

will wail on account of him. Even so.  
Amen.

Verse 7 is John's motto: Jesus is coming in order to set things right! No matter how hopeless things may seem at the moment, Jesus is coming and he will set things right. That's not a bad motto for us as well!

This language is from the Old Testament and carries with it a subtle reminder that the readers should keep in mind that God has never failed to deliver his faithful people from an oppressor. If they have studied the Old Testament, they should already know this!

And this is a subtle reminder to us as well: Many today seem to be waiting around with *closed* Bibles to receive a revelation from God! Although truth may be scarce, the supply has always exceeded the demand!

Does verse 7 refer to the coming of Christ at the end of the world, what we often call the *second* coming of Christ? Many say so or at least assume so, but let's be careful. If it does then it would seem to violate the time frame for the book given a few verses earlier. The book's stated focus concerns things that were about to happen soon. Further, recall that although Matthew 24:30 uses similar language, it cannot refer to the end of the world there due to the time frame given by Jesus in Matthew 24:34.

A better interpretation of verse 7 in view of John's time frame would have this verse apply to the figurative return of Christ to judge Rome just as the similar language in Matthew 24 referred to the figurative return of Christ to judge Jerusalem.

In the Old Testament, the idea of coming on clouds or on a cloud was used to describe God's judgment against Egypt (Isaiah 19:1; Ezekiel 30:3, 32:7) and against his own people (Ezekiel 34:12).

In Daniel 7, Daniel had a vision in which four kingdoms were depicted by four beasts that ruled the earth. The fourth beast was the Roman empire. After the days of that beast's power we read in Daniel 7:13–14 that Daniel "saw in the night visions, and, behold, with the

clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, ... and to him was given dominion, and glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." In Revelation 22:7 Jesus said he would come without delay. Just as he had done before, Jesus was coming without delay to rescue his people and judge those were oppressing his people.

We are told here that not everyone would welcome that coming. The tribes of the earth would wail on account of him. In this book, we will find that the wicked are described as those who dwell on earth. To God's people, Christ's coming is a promise of hope, but to the enemies of Christ his coming is a threat.

Verse 7 says that "every eye will see him, every one who pierced him." Zechariah 12:10 says "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced," and only *John's* gospel makes reference to that prophecy (John 19:37). Again, we have a link back to John's gospel.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says  
the Lord God, who is and who was and  
who is to come, the Almighty.

The phrase "alpha and omega" (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) denotes completeness. It is similar to our phrase "A to Z." Nothing is left out. Christ is all sufficient. The phrase is used again at the end of the book in 22:13. Also, recall Isaiah 44:6.

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and  
his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "**I am the  
first and I am the last**; besides me there is no  
god."

Verse 8 says that God is the Almighty—that is, the one who has dominion over all things. The word occurs 10 times in the New Testament — once in Second Corinthians 6:18 where the Old Testament is quoted and 9 times in Revelation. Even though no earthly empire had been able to withstand Rome, John is assuring the church ("the panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ") that their God is the Almighty and that they will be victorious. Read Revelation 19:6.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! **For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.**"

Is this book relevant today? Absolutely! We all need to be reminded that God is the Almighty! Not the nations of this world, not the political leaders, not the armies, not the terrorists, not science, not medicine — but God! If we place our trust in anyone or anything else, then we are fools. There is but one eternal kingdom and but one eternal king!

9 I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, 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."

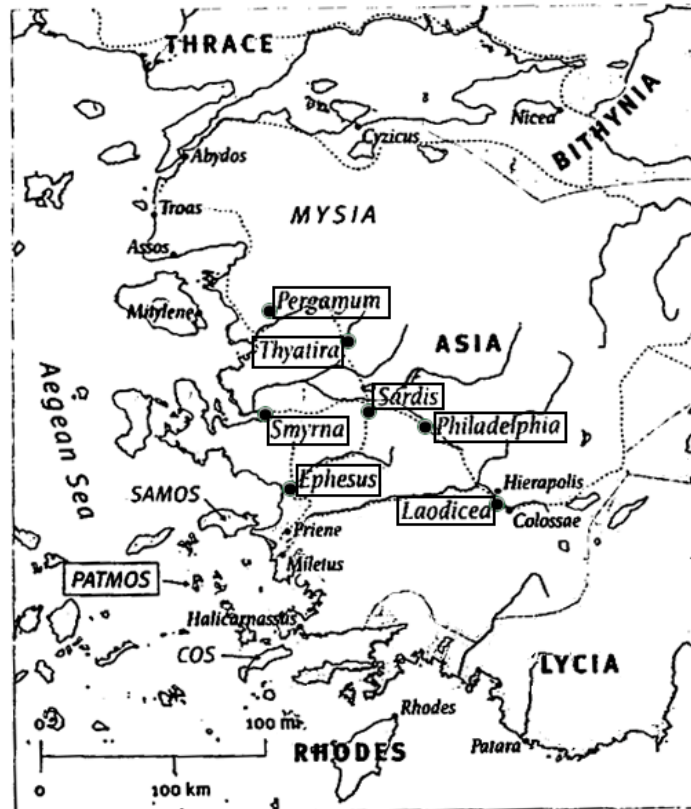
The Greek word "tribulation" denotes a pressing together (as of grapes) or a squeezing or a pinching. In John 16:33, Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

**Hailey:** "Tribulation had been the lot of the church from its beginning, but it was now breaking upon the saints with an increasing intensity."

Governors of the various provinces could at their own discretion have a criminal executed, enslaved, or banished to an island. The most common places of Roman banishment were the rocky Aegean islands off the coast of Asia, which included Patmos. As we have discussed, John may have been banished there by Domitian himself while his father Vespasian and brother Titus were away from Rome.



Patmos is a rocky and uninviting island located about 70 miles southwest of Ephesus. The island is about 10 miles long and 6 miles across as its widest point. The sea almost pinches it off in one place, forming a harbor. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the word “sea” is used 22 times in Revelation.



Banishment to Patmos for John may have involved hard labor at the quarries. Sir William Ramsay says that John’s banishment would have been “preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, work under the lash of the military overseer.”

John did not refer to himself as an apostle or as a close associate of Jesus, but as a brother of those being persecuted and as one who shares in their tribulation. As Barclay says, John did not preach endurance

from his easy chair. No one will ever listen to one who preaches heroic courage to others while he himself has sought a prudent safety.

“In the spirit” means under the influence of the Spirit. This book, as with all Scripture, is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. It is God breathed.

The reference to Sunday as the Lord’s day given here is the first such reference in literature now existing.

A trumpet often accompanies the voice or the appearance of God. Recall Exodus 19:16 when the Law was given, and recall the description of the final judgment found in 1 Corinthians 15:52.

What about the order of the churches? Many elaborate theories have been put forth to explain it. The simplest theory seems the most likely. The churches listed in verse 11 are arranged in the order that a traveler on foot would take if he started at Ephesus, the closest church to Patmos. There is about 30 to 45 miles between each of the listed congregations. (Although when we get to the *last* of the seven letters we may see yet another possible reason for this particular ordering.)

Notice in verse 9 that John was a partaker with them *in the kingdom*. **If the kingdom did not already exist at the time of this writing, then this claim by John makes no sense!** And yet how many commentaries on Revelation argue that the kingdom has not yet come?

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 girdle round his breast; 14 his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; 16 in his right hand he held seven stars, from his

mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword,  
and his face was like the sun shining in  
full strength.

The golden lampstand (or menorah) is a familiar Old Testament image. Exodus 25:31–37 tells us that such a lamp was in the tabernacle. Such a lamp is also mentioned in the vision of Zechariah 4:2 —

And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a **lampstand all of gold**, with a bowl on the top of it, and **seven lamps** on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on the top of it.

Then and now, the menorah depicts Judaism, and yet verse 20 will tell us that these seven lampstands are the seven churches. Which is it? What we see here is something we commonly see in the New Testament — descriptions of God’s people from the Old Testament used to describe God’s people in the New Testament. God’s people did not change from the Old to the New; **God’s people have always been the faithful remnant**, and today that faithful remnant is the church.

And how do we know that these are the people of God? Because verse 13 tells us that Christ stands in their midst. Jesus loves his people; Jesus cares for his people; Jesus stands with his people. This is a beautiful opening to this book of comfort for the people of God. Jesus is not watching from afar; he is standing in their midst. Again, we are reminded of Exodus 25:8.

The title “Son of Man” in verse 13 is a Messianic title from Daniel 7:13, and is also frequently used in the New Testament as a title for Christ. There is no doubt about whom John is writing here.

The long robe and the golden girdle in verse 13 denotes the clothing worn by the High Priest when he was officiating on behalf of the people. And, of course, we again see a description of Christ. Hebrews 4:14 tells us that Jesus is our High Priest.

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus’ head and hair were white as white wool and white as snow. This description also comes from Daniel 7, but there it is not used of the Son of Man (God the Son) but rather is used

in Daniel 7:9 to describe the Ancient of Days (God the Father). John uses Old Testament descriptions of God the Father to describe the risen Christ. The symbol of whiteness depicts the purity and sinlessness of Christ. (Compare Isaiah 1:18.)

The voice of Christ is described as the sound of many waters. God is described the same way in Ezekiel 43:2 —

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel  
came from the east; and the sound of his  
coming was like the sound of many waters;  
and the earth shone with his glory.

Remember that as John was writing this he could likely hear the roar of the Aegean Sea.

Verse 15 tells us that Christ had feet of bronze. What does that mean? To see what the feet of bronze depict, we should do what we will often be doing to understand the symbols in this book — we should see how the same symbol was used in the Old Testament.

In Micah 4:13, feet of bronze were used to depict the power to trample.

Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; For I  
will make your horn iron, **And I will make  
your hooves bronze; You shall beat in  
pieces many peoples.**

In Daniel 10:6 and Ezekiel 1:7, feet of bronze were used to denote the speed and the strength of those sent by God to do his will on the earth. The message is don't get in their way! The message to Rome is prepare to be trampled!

Verse 16 shows a sword coming from his mouth. This figure is a common symbol for judgment. In Isaiah 11:4, God smites the earth with the rod of his mouth. Also, recall the description of God's word from Hebrews 4:12–13 —

For the word of God is living and active,  
**sharper than any two-edged sword**, piercing  
to the division of soul and spirit, of joints

and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **And before him no creature is hidden**, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

And recall from John 12:48 that we are judged by the words of Christ!

Verse 14 tell us that his eyes were like a flame of fire. We see a similar description in Daniel 10:6 of the messenger of God sent to Daniel. We also see those eyes in the verses we just looked at from Hebrews 14 — “all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Perfect eyes are required for perfect judgment, and Christ’s eyes are perfect. He sees all. Nothing is hidden from him.

Verse 16 describes the face of Christ — like the sun shining at full strength! The description in verse 16 reminds us of the transfiguration of Jesus. In Matthew 17:2 we read that his face shone like the sun. There, as here, the description denotes the glory and the divinity and the power of Christ.

Verse 16 tells us that he held seven stars in his right hand. The symbol is explained in verse 20, which we will consider in just a moment.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19 Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter. 20 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.

And how does John react to this vision of the risen Christ? Verse 17 tells us: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”

The Bible is full of similar accounts from those who come face to face with divinity.

- **Ezekiel 1:28** (Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. **And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.**)
- **Ezekiel 3:23** (So I arose and went forth into the plain; and, lo, the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar; **and I fell on my face.**)
- **Ezekiel 43:3** (And the vision I saw was like the vision which I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and like the vision which I had seen by the river Chebar; **and I fell upon my face.**)
- **Luke 5:8** (But when Simon Peter saw it [the miracle of Jesus' filling their nets with fish], **he fell down at Jesus' knees**, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.")
- **John 18:5-6** (Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When he said to them, "I am he," they drew back **and fell to the ground.**)
- **Isaiah 6:1-5** ("**Woe is me! For I am lost;** for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!")

Do you think maybe we have lost some of that awe when it comes to Christ? Is it possible that he has become too familiar to us? Remember who it is who is writing this. If anyone could have claimed a special familiarity with Jesus, it was John, his cousin and the apostle whom Jesus loved. (John 13:23) And yet, look at the relationship we see here. Is Jesus our friend? Absolutely. You will never have a better friend than Jesus. Is Jesus the eternal Almighty God, who created and upholds the entire universe, and who is the very image of the invisible God, whose face appears as the sun shining with full strength? Absolutely! And let's remember that the next time we are tempted to plaster His name on a t-shirt or a bumper sticker.

The command 'fear not' in verse 17 is generally the first thing heard after God appears to his own people! Recall, for example, Genesis 26:24.

And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father; **fear not**, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake."

But we should note that the God is most definitely *not* telling the Romans to fear not. They should be terrified!

One of the most beautiful pictures in the entire book is here in verse 17. John has fainted dead away at the sight of Christ, and how does Jesus respond? He kneels down, places his right hand on John, and tells him not to fear. That was also a message to the seven churches, and it is also a message to all Christians. Jesus is on our side, and he is *not* a distant monarch. **Jesus upholds the entire universe, and yet he notices sparrows.** A wonderful savior is Jesus our Lord!

The next few verses describe the great power of Christ.

Verse 17 tell us that Jesus is the first and the last. Again, we have Old Testament descriptions of God applied here to the risen Christ.

- **Isaiah 44:6** (Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "**I am the first and I am the last**; besides me there is no god.")
- **Isaiah 48:12** (Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He, **I am the first, and I am the last.**)

Verse 18 tell us that Jesus is the living one. Again, many Old Testament passages come to mind.

- **Joshua 3:10** (And Joshua said, "Hereby you shall know that **the living God** is among you.)
- **Psalms 42:2** (My soul thirsts for God, for **the living God**. When shall I come and behold the face of God?)

- **Hosea 1:10** (Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Sons of **the living God.**”)
- **Jeremiah 10:10** (But the LORD is the true God; he is **the living God** and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.)

Jesus is God! Nowhere else in the Bible is the divinity of Christ any more clear than it is in these verses. Virtually every Old Testament description of God the Father is applied in this book to God the Son.

When you study modern commentaries about Revelation you often hear a lot about “the antichrist.” But 1 John 2:22 tells us that an antichrist is anyone who denies the divinity of Christ, which means there are *many* antichrists in the world today.

Verse 18 tells us that Jesus possesses the keys of death. Just as it still means today, to possess the key to something is to control that thing. I control the Honda out on the parking lot. I can make it open; I can make it start; I can make it stop. To have a key means to have authority. Recall Isaiah 22:22 —

And I will place on his shoulder the **key** of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

It is in that same way that Jesus possesses the key of death. Jesus conquered death—he controls it. Rome thought that it controlled death, but bloodthirsty Rome and its bloodthirsty emperors will soon learn otherwise! They will soon be swimming in blood!

Keys are often associated with locked gates, and death has gates.

- **Psalm 9:13** (O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death.)
- **Psalm 107:18** (They drew near to the gates of death.)



- **Isaiah 38:10** (I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years.)

Jesus has the key to that gate. When he says “Come forth!,” the dead come forth and no gate can hold them back.

2 Timothy 1:10 tells us that Jesus abolished (past tense) death. But 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 tells us that Jesus “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” **How can death remain as an enemy if it has been abolished?** Hebrews 2:14-15 provides the answer:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, **that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life-long bondage.**

Death has been conquered (past tense) but it will remain until the last day when, as 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 tells us, death will be swallowed up in victory.

Rome and death are in a similar position, and when Jesus is coming in judgment the very last place you want to be is in the same position as death! By the time this book ends, Rome will also have been judged and conquered (past tense), and yet we may find that Rome like death will remain for a time after it has been conquered. But as with death, the final outcome for Rome will never be in any doubt.

In verse 19, John is told to write everything down. He is told to write down what is (that is, what he is now seeing in the first vision) and what is to come (that is, what he is about to see in the second vision, which starts in Chapter 4).

The mystery of the 7 stars and the 7 lampstands is explained in verse 20. As with other mysteries in the Bible, this mystery is something that was formerly not understood but that has now been revealed. Revelation is not the only book with such mysteries. We have:

- The mystery of godliness in 1 Timothy 3:16.
- the mystery of marriage and the Church in Ephesians 5:31–32.
- The mystery of the hardening of Israel in Romans 11:25.
- The mystery of the promise to the Gentiles in Ephesians 3:4.

Verse 20 gives us the explanation for the the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands. The seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches.

Before we look at what this explanation means, let's pause to note two important things we should take from verse 20.

First, verse 20 confirms that this book contains figures. Jesus refers to stars and lampstands, but he clearly tells us that these items are figures. So, for those who pride themselves in taking everything in this book literally, they need to study verse 20 very carefully.

Second, verse 20 tells us with absolute certainty what these particular figures represent, and we will see other explanations in this book. This is but one example of someone (in this case, Jesus himself) explaining a part of the vision to John during the vision itself. These explanations are signposts to let us know if we are on the right road with the other symbols in the vision.