

Among the Lampstands

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21, NKJV).



As people hear God's Word, they learn of the comfort and care He wants to provide to us. We also learn about God and the joy He has in store for us.

Introduction

A Revelation of . . .

Rev. 1:9-3:22

Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, wrote more than fifty short stories featuring the adventures of the famous detective and his sidekick. Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance in 1887 in the novel *A Study in Scarlet*. This first novel recounts the first meeting of Holmes and Watson, with Dr. Watson being absolutely astounded by Sherlock's understanding of chemistry, geology, and botany, as well as his ability to formulate hypotheses using deductive reasoning. Soon the pair are investigating the first of what becomes an epic series of fictional murder mysteries that have enthralled readers ever since. In the course of investigating this first murder, Holmes tells Watson, "There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it."¹

What if rather than being intimidated by its complexities, we approach the book as a great cosmic mystery novel?

Doyle's tales of the great Sherlock Holmes have stood the test of time because of Doyle's beautiful writing and masterful storytelling ability and because people connect with the detective's ability to use his intellect to unravel difficult cases. I can't help being reminded of the book of Revelation. Many faithful Bible-reading Christians have shunned a deep reading of Revelation because of its mysterious imagery and complex interworking. Many have viewed the book as "sealed," full of secrets too great for the common reader's intellect. However, what if rather than being intimidated by its complexities, we approach the book as a great cosmic mystery novel? Ellen White viewed the book as essential reading for everyone, saying that "the book of Revelation must be opened to the people. Many have been taught that it is a sealed book; but it is sealed only to those who reject light and truth."² The book of Revelation is just that, a revelation of Jesus Christ and the events that will characterize His soon coming. What a thrilling book to read, study, decode, and cherish!

This week, as you explore the first few chapters of Revelation, understand that it is a thrilling account of Jesus' plan for our world and for the heavenly home that He is preparing for us. Gaining deeper insights and understanding of this book is much more exhilarating than any novel. It is gripping because it is real, relevant, and a vital read for the world today.

1. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1930), p. 36.

2. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 195.

Evidence*The Holy Island of Patmos*

Today, the Greek island of Patmos is a top tourist destination located in the Dodecanese group of Greek islands. Often called the Isle of the Apocalypse, Patmos is home to an archaeological site called the Cave of the Apocalypse. It is believed to have housed John while he was imprisoned on the island. In the eleventh century, a monastery was built on this site and has been a center for Greek Orthodox learning ever since. Each year, tens of thousands of Christian tourists pay homage to the history and significance of this place. In 1999, UNESCO designated the Cave of the Apocalypse a World Heritage site, lending it the formal significance that Christian believers have recognized for centuries.

**This tiny island has had an impact
on the world disproportionate to its size.**

It is not only Christians that travel to Patmos on pilgrimages to visit this biblically significant site. Patmos is also frequented by cruise ships filled with tourists seeking island adventures and looking to enjoy pristine beaches. Great restaurants, unique shops, swimming pools, and resort hotels characterize much of the tourist activity on modern-day Patmos. But this is a far cry from what was happening there some two thousand years ago.

In John's day, Patmos was a remote island under Roman rule. This rocky and desolate island is small, just over sixty square miles in total area, and at the time was nearly devoid of society—a perfect island for the Romans to use as a prison. It was to Patmos, the Alcatraz of the ancient world, that the Roman Empire sent prisoners whom they wanted banished from society. In the year A.D. 95, the Roman emperor Domitian sent the apostle John to this island to silence his evangelistic efforts. The Greco-Roman world was incredibly receptive to the new message of Jesus Christ, so much so that the Roman elite felt threatened by the quickly spreading movement.

Since the time of John, this tiny island has been invaded and occupied by the Turks, ransacked several times by Norman pirates, was a holy destination targeted by the Crusades, and in more recent history, occupied by the Italians and then the Nazis during World War II. There is no question that this tiny island has had an impact on the world disproportionate to its size. It is a historical irony that the very place that was intended to silence the ministry of the apostle John served as a launching pad for the Lord's final message to the world.

Logos
*Revealing Jesus
in Revelation*

Dan. 1:1–21;
Rev. 1:9–11

The opening scenes of the book of Revelation find the faithful disciple John imprisoned on the isle of Patmos. He was sentenced to this fate because of his widespread success in proclaiming the gospel throughout the Roman world. The Patmos prison experience was meant to silence his powerful message. But the Roman authorities could not have been more wrong.

The opening passages of Revelation bear a striking resemblance to the opening passages in the book of Daniel. Daniel chapter one opens with a siege on the city of Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar took several captives, including Daniel. Despite his captivity, Daniel remained faithful to the Lord.

**Jesus is communicating with us that He is right here,
with us, in our church today.**

While the siege on Jerusalem was taking place, Daniel was probably scared for his life and perhaps confused. Similarly, while he was being tried, sentenced, and then transported to a prison island, John must have felt deep strain. Yet through these hardships God gave us the complementary hope-filled works of Daniel and Revelation.

There is a very powerful lesson here about the Christian experience, staying faithful to the Lord, and trusting Him to turn our dark moments into transcendent and eternal lessons. We see here a revelation of Jesus as a personal and loving God who is there through it all, carrying us even through life's dark valleys.

The Lord's Day (Exod. 31:13; Isa. 58:13; Matt. 12:8; Rev. 1:10)

When theologians discuss eschatology, they are discussing that part of theology that deals with death, judgment, and the events surrounding the end time. The book of Revelation and the companion book Daniel are eschatological books, painting a picture through imagery of the events of the end time.

It is the eschatological nature of these books that has led scholars to debate the meaning of the term *the Lord's day* used in Revelation 1:10. Does this term refer to the Sabbath day? Or does this term point forward to the great day of the second coming of Jesus Christ? Whichever side of the scholarly debate you may be on, the beautiful thing is that both arguments are a revelation of Jesus Christ. The first argument, the Sabbath, is a weekly revelation of Jesus Christ in our lives. A day set aside by God, for humanity, from the very beginning of creation in this world. The second argument, the second coming of Jesus Christ, represents the final and most dramatic revelation of Jesus Christ—the day that the sons and daughters of this earth will finally be reunited with our heavenly Father.

Jesus Revealed (Rev. 1:12–17)

As fascinating as the debate regarding the Lord's day may be, what happens to John next literally defies description. We know that he was observing Jesus. But the Jesus in my mind's eye usually doesn't have feet of glowing bronze, a voice like rushing waters, or a double-edged sword coming out of His mouth. It seems John really had a difficult time articulating his vision. Amid this colorful imagery the words *like* and *as* are repeatedly used, associating what he was seeing with human tangibles but also suggesting that the vision of the Lord that he witnessed was beyond linguistic description. What a beautiful revelation of Jesus Christ in His post-resurrection glory.

The location of where Jesus Christ was standing is also of vital significance. He was standing among the lampstands. Revelation 1:20 reveals the mystery of the lampstands: they represent the seven churches. Therefore, as John turned and beheld this vision of Jesus, He was literally with the people of His churches. Jesus has promised to be with us, and with us He is. A further investigation of Revelation reveals that these churches are not only the seven ancient Christian churches of Asia Minor; they are also types of the Christian churches throughout history, right up to today. So when John reports that he saw the Son of man among the lampstands, Jesus is communicating with us that He is right here, with us, in our church today.

Jesus and His Churches (Jer. 2:2; Rev. 2:1–7)

It is important to remember when reading Revelation 2 that the “names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian Era. The number 7 indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.”¹

John begins Revelation 2 with a direct call to the seven churches. This first call to the church in Ephesus begins with revealing only a part of the full vision of Christ given in Revelation 1:12–16: “These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven lampstands” (Rev. 2:1, NIV).

As the second chapter of Revelation unfolds, only segments of the full vision of Christ given to John are used to communicate with the seven churches. This is strategic and deeply symbolic of Christ meeting us where we are. Each church had its own unique challenges and thus needed to have Christ presented to them in a slightly different way. As we grapple with life, we can be assured that Jesus will always be with us, among the people of His church, and ready to meet us where we are. This is how Revelation reveals Jesus.

REACT

In what other ways do you see Jesus being revealed in the opening three chapters of Revelation? What parts of Jesus are revealed to the other six churches? Why?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 585.

Testimony

A Critical Ending

Rev. 1:1–20

“In the days of the apostles the Christian believers were filled with earnestness and enthusiasm. So untiringly did they labor for their Master that in a comparatively short time, notwithstanding fierce opposition, the gospel of the kingdom was sounded to all the inhabited parts of the earth. The zeal manifested at this time by the followers of Jesus has been recorded by the pen of inspiration for the encouragement of believers in every age.”¹

“But after a time the zeal of the believers began to wane, and their love for God and for one another grew less. Coldness crept into the church. Some forgot the wonderful manner in which they had received the truth.”²

“A revelation is something revealed.”

“In exiling John, the enemies of truth had hoped to silence forever the voice of God’s faithful witness; but on Patmos the disciple received a message, the influence of which was to continue to strengthen the church till the end of time. Though not released from the responsibility of their wrong act, those who banished John became instruments in the hands of God to carry out Heaven’s purpose; and the very effort to extinguish the light placed the truth in bold relief.”³

“This revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation. . . . It is ‘the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass.’”⁴

“In the Revelation are portrayed the deep things of God. The very name given to its inspired pages, ‘the Revelation,’ contradicts the statement that this is a sealed book. A revelation is something revealed. The Lord Himself revealed to His servant the mysteries contained in this book, and He designs that they shall be open to the study of all. Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth’s history, as well as to those living in the days of John.”⁵

REACT

What similarities can you see between the Christian world in John’s day and ours? When facing challenging situations, what strength can you draw from John’s experience and the authorship of the book of Revelation?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 578.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 580.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 583.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 584.

Rev. 1:9-18; 2:2-19

How-to *Revelation Today*

Deriving practical, day-to-day lessons from the complex narrative in the book of Revelation can sometimes be difficult. However, as a revelation of Jesus Christ, Revelation can present to its readers some very plain and practical biblical principles to live by.

Remember the Sabbath day. Revelation 1:10 reveals to us that the Lord spoke to John on the Sabbath, “the Lord’s day.” The significance of the Sabbath day is found throughout Scripture, and its relevance is highlighted again here in the experience of John. Seek to make the Sabbath a special day, a unique experience, and a day of true rest and rejuvenation in Christ. Set up Sabbath traditions. Select a playlist of Sabbath-only musical selections and create a home atmosphere that is distinctive to the Sabbath with special fragrances or meals.

You are part of the church that is discussed in Revelation and treasured by God.

Seek to form deep relationships. As God is describing the characteristics of His churches, He tells each church, “I know you.” God knows us independently and fully and has communicated this to us through the book of Revelation. As we model Christ and seek to be more Christlike in our daily lives, we need to seek deep and meaningful relationships with those around us.

Love your church. The book of Revelation may be confusing at times, but there is one truth that is without question: Jesus loves the church and is concerned about her well-being. As defined in the New Testament, the church is the body of Christ, the people who accept the message of Jesus and choose to live by His Word. You are part of the church that is discussed in Revelation and treasured by God. This should elicit a deep commitment to the church body as a public expression of your faith.

Listen. In Revelation 2, the Lord says to the church in Ephesus, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the spirit says to the churches” (verse 7, NIV). By committing to daily devotions and a committed prayer life, we can begin to tune in to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives. There is an intentional and faithful commitment that is needed for the Christian to hear and respond to the Lord. God’s instruction in Revelation is both direct and practical for a daily application.

So many biblical characters found themselves passing through deep, existential wilderness experiences. Joseph was cast off by his brothers and ended up imprisoned; Moses was led into the wilderness for 40 years of spiritual training; David had a wilderness experience as he was being hunted by King Saul; and even the ministry of Jesus included a critical wilderness experience of forty days after which He was tempted by Satan.

[John's] experience was no small setback.

John's wilderness experience, imprisoned on the island of Patmos, provided a setting for God to reveal Himself to us all through John's captivity. His experience was no small setback. After working tirelessly to advance the message of Jesus Christ in the Roman world, John found himself imprisoned and isolated from those he wished to carry the good news to. How demoralizing that must have been! Yet even through this, his heart and soul were dedicated to his Lord; and when God spoke, John's heart was open and he was able to hear.

There is a very practical lesson in John's experience that we can apply to our lives today—keep pushing forward in Jesus. This is more than a daily commitment to prayer and devotion. These things are critical in the life of a Christian, but there will be days when devotions are rushed and skipped, and days when prayer may seem like a hopeless ritual. Life can become very dark, and we have all been there at one point or another. I think John was there as the reality of his banishment set in and he realized that where he was going, there would be little opportunity to advance his ministry.

At some point, we all arrive on a metaphorical Patmos in life. Experiences such as financial ruin, relationship problems, falling to temptations, or life's failures may tempt us to give up our faith. But, like John, the faithful can be assured that even through suffering, God has a grander plan that we are unaware of. And while our tribulation in this world may be severe, it is also temporary and small when compared with the eternity that has been promised us.

REACT

1. What kind of hard experiences has life thrown at you? Looking back now, how have these experiences contributed to your overall maturity and spiritual development?

2. Is there someone in your life who is going through challenging times? How can you be of service to them?

Meggan N. Harper, Enumclaw, Washington, USA

Exploration

John's Revelation and Message to Us

CONCLUDE

The book of Revelation was given to us by God through John while he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos. Revelation is a highly symbolic book that can be a struggle to read and understand, but remember that the symbols were inspired. The first three chapters of the book address the struggles of the churches in John's day as well as providing a prophetic profile of the churches that would exist throughout Christian history. Revelation is not only highly symbolic; it draws heavily upon language and themes from the Old Testament. Ultimately, the book of Revelation reveals the character and work of Jesus Christ.

CONSIDER

- Creating a list of names for Jesus that you can keep in your Bible as you read through this quarter's lessons and study the book of Revelation.
- Making a list of the promises that each church in Revelation 2 and 3 is given. Take note of how many promises are offered by Jesus to each church.
- Getting acquainted with the person of John by reading chapter 56, "Patmos," in the Ellen White book *The Acts of the Apostles*.
- Writing a letter of support for your local pastor, schoolteacher, principal, or conference official, encouraging this leader and uplifting their ministry. Combine this with a pledge to keep their ministry in prayer.
- Compiling a playlist of songs based on the book of Revelation. Take time to listen to several of them and identify the connections you hear to the book of Revelation.
- Taking some time to research artists' depictions of John's vision of Christ and then creating your own artistic representation of this scene.

CONNECT

Exodus 25:37; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 58:13; Daniel 1, 2; John 10:11; Revelation 17:14.

Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, chap. 57, "The Revelation."

Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Andrews University Press, 2002).

Seth J. Pierce, *What We Believe: Prophecies of Revelation for Teens* (Pacific Press®, 2013).