

John is unprepared for the encounter he has with Jesus Christ in this passage for Christ's appearance is quite different from the last time John saw Him. Christ now instructs him to document the things that he sees, things that will reveal not only the state of the church at the time but also the future events surrounding Christ's return.

¹² And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me” - In vs. 10-11 John describes the voice that he heard, a voice that was as loud and distinct as a trumpet commanding him to write what he sees and send it to seven churches in Asia (Minor). John naturally turns to see who is speaking.

“And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks [lampstands]” - John sees seven lampstands made of gold, each holding an oil lamp. Verse 20 reveals that these golden lampstands represent the seven churches that will receive copies of what John writes.

¹³ And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

“And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man” - The lampstands were surrounding a being that John describes as someone “like unto the Son of man.” The Greek does not include the article “the” so John is apparently saying that he saw a human figure, that is, someone that looked like a “son of man.” In the Bible when the phrase “son of” is used in conjunction with a generic term, such as in “son of man” or “son of Belial” it typically means someone who shares the nature of whatever he is a “son of.” So when John says that he sees “one like unto the Son of man” he’s referring to someone who has a human form like a man. However, the identity of this person does not stay in doubt for long, for in vs. 17-18 we see that this person is Jesus Christ by what He says. Jesus Christ referred to Himself 81 times as “the Son of man” in the gospels. In **Dan. 7:13**, we see a reference to Christ: “*I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.*” Daniel saw someone that looked like a man in his vision.

“clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps [chest] with a golden girdle [belt]” - The garment reached the feet of its wearer and included a golden “belt” that wrapped around the chest. Apparently this was not a narrow belt like what we wear to hold our pants up but was closer to a vest or a cummerbund. The image is of a decorative garment that a king or a priest might wear.

¹⁴ His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; ¹⁵ And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

“His head and his hairs were white [light; bright; brilliant; white] like wool, as white as snow” - The Greek word for “white” refers to a color that is so white it’s dazzling or brilliant, perhaps even glowing. The fact that John makes two comparisons to the whitest objects he could think of implies his struggle to convey just how white the head and hair was. During one of his visions, Daniel saw the LORD with white hair: **Dan. 7:9** “*I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.*”

“and his eyes were as a flame of fire” - The glowing eyes speak of the ability of Christ’s gaze to penetrate into the depths of men’s hearts to see their most hidden secrets. Nothing is hidden from His eyes.

“And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace” - John compares the feet to high-quality brass that has been heated in a furnace until it glowing, which would be consistent with the other attributes of Christ’s appearance.

“and his voice as the sound of many waters” - The previous comparison to a trumpet spoke of the loudness of the voice but now John compares Christ’s voice to the sound of many waters. It’s difficult to imagine the sound that John was hearing since he was trying to describe the supernatural and only being able to draw from his own limited human experience.

Daniel had a vision in which he saw a “man” whose description is very close to John’s description of Christ: **Dan. 10:5-6** “*5 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: 6 His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.*” Some commentators believe this “man” to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

¹⁶ And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

“And he had in his right hand seven stars” - The right hand was the hand of strength and power, as is the metaphor of sitting on someone’s right hand. We can only imagine that John was seeing seven points of light in Christ’s hand.

“and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword” - Being God, Christ could appear to John in any form He wanted. We can only surmise that this is not a figurative sword but a literal one coming out of Christ’s mouth. This sword is mentioned in Christ’s message to the church in Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17) and again at Christ’s return (Rev. 19:15) and each time the sword signifies judgment.

“and his countenance [face; appearance] was as the sun shineth in his strength” - The expression “as the sun shineth in his strength” refers to the brightness of the unobstructed sun on a cloudless day. Christ’s face and/or general appearance was as bright as the sun. What Peter, James, and John saw at Christ’s transfiguration was only a glimpse of His glory through His human flesh (**Matt. 17:2** “*And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*”). What John sees now is likely still muted compared to Christ’s unrestrained glory but is more glorious than when Christ was in human flesh.

¹⁷ And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: ¹⁸ I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead” - John is so overwhelmed by the sight of Christ that he either faints or has become so weak from fear that he is unable to stand.

“And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last” - Christ touches John with His right hand (the hand of strength) and assures him that he has nothing to fear. He confirms that He is the One Who was speaking before John turned around by identifying Himself as “the first and the last.”

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen” - He wants John to realize that He is Jesus Christ, the One that rose from the death, for He further identifies Himself as the One that lives, Who was dead and is now alive eternally. Who else but Jesus Christ could make that claim?

“and have the keys of hell [Hades: abode of the dead; the grave] and of death” - Man fears death but the resurrected Christ has power over both life and death. He decides who dies and He has the power to resurrect those He chooses. Doctors have a limited ability to preserve life but they cannot give life or extend it beyond the capacity of their patient’s body. Only Christ can give life to the dead because He is the source of life.

John 5:21 *“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.”* (“quickeneth” means “to make alive”)

John 5:25-26 *“²⁵ Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. ²⁶ For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;”*

John 10:17-18 *“¹⁷ Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. ¹⁸ No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”*

¹⁹ Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

This second command, which is simply an extension of the first (v. 11) provides a natural outline for the Book of Revelation. John is instructed to write concerning three things:

- **“the things which thou has seen”** - The things John has seen up to this point (chapter 1) including the mystery of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks.
- **“the things which are”** - The things that Christ instructs John to write to the churches (chapters 2 and 3). The churches would be the current recipients of John’s writing so they would be “the things which are.”
- **“the things which shall be hereafter”** - These are the future events that will be revealed to John over the remainder of the vision he is experiencing (chapters 4-22).

²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks” - Christ now explains the meaning of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks.

“The seven stars are the angels [messenger; envoy] of the seven churches” - In the context of these churches, the word for angels cannot refer to angelic beings because angels cannot serve as pastors of churches. In the messages that Christ has John write to the churches in chapters 2 and 3, each message is addressed to the angel of that particular church. Christ also would have no need for John to write to an actual angel in His behalf so the “angel” (messenger) of each church was apparently the pastor or lead elder of the church. Christ is holding the seven stars in His right hand, indicating His ownership and protection of them as well as His sovereignty over them.

“and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches” - Each “angel” has a corresponding candlestick (lampstand) and each candlestick represented the church associated with that angel. The fact that John sees Christ in the midst of the candlesticks speaks of His presence among the churches, watching over them. Christ’s message to each church comprises the next two chapters.