

Glimpses of God

A THREE YEAR OLD GIRL was talking with her grandmother and after awhile she asked, “Grandma, do you know what you and God have in common?” Her grandmother was eager to hear her answer, and after a moment her granddaughter said, “You are both old.” That would only come from a little child. But God has been around a lot longer than her grandmother. When we think about God, what comes to our minds? Years ago, I was invited to a meeting between a Mormon elder and a Christian woman. She had asked me to come to her home and help her understand what Mormons really taught. During the meeting, the Mormon elder said that they believed Jesus Christ was God. After awhile I asked, “Don’t you believe that Jesus was a man who became a god? You believe that we can become gods too!” The Mormon elder paused for a moment and then said, “That is our deeper teaching.” The Mormon’s view is that there are many gods and the god of our world was once like us. He is having babies with his many wives. It is not surprising that different views of God exist. A few are childish, some are demonic, and one is correct. In this study, Jesus gives us several unusual glimpses of Himself!

FIRST GLIMPSE OF GOD. We saw in our last study that the prophecies in this book were given to the apostle John through God the Father to Jesus Christ, and then to the angels. But John adds a personal greeting to the churches about whom his vision was given.

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; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth . . . (NASB) Rev. 1:4-5a

John welcomes seven churches that once existed in Asia Minor, in what is now the country of Turkey. In our coming studies we will see that these seven churches are Ephesus,

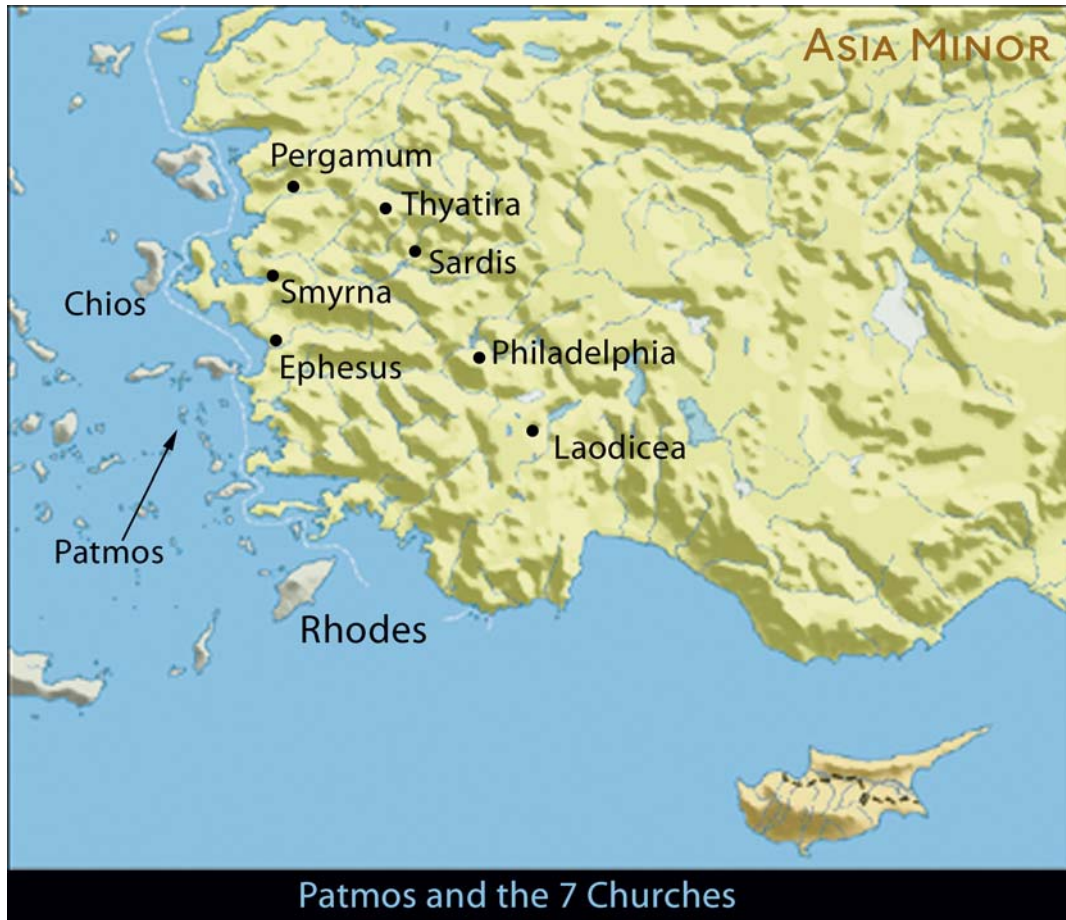
Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

They are also welcomed by Him “who is, who was, and is to come.” The meaning of these Greek words is wonderful because each of these three verbs - “is, was, and is to come” - implies continuous action. The idea is that God always was in the past. He continuously existed in the past, and continues existing in the present and will continue to exist in the future. God is not old like grandmother because He always exists. He never grows old. His eye is not dimmed nor does

He get tired. Yet, He is the Ancient of Days. He was not a man who was born and then became a god. The Apostle John does not agree with the Mormon view of our God. The Mormons serve a pagan god - a god of their own imagination.



These things you have



done, and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you . . .
(NASB) Ps. 50:21

This is our first glimpse of God. He exists but not us! We are physically born and we physically die. We enter this world and we leave this world. We often live for this world and not the next. Why? We come and we go. God is not like us.

SECOND GLIMPSE OF GOD. The Holy Spirit also greets the seven churches. Here He is called the seven Spirits. This is very unusual, but it is an Old Testament reference to the Holy Spirit (compare Zech. 4:2-10 with Rev. 4:5 and Rev. 5:6). Then Jesus Christ greets the seven churches. So God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit greet the seven churches but not the angels. Here is our second view of God. God is a trinity. God is not like us.

THIRD GLIMPSE OF GOD. The Apostle John then speaks a very personal note to the one he loves - Jesus Christ. No introduction to any other New Testament book starts like this. It is a memory of the writer's Master, a memory of the

time that he had with Jesus when He was on this earth.

. . . To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB) Rev. 1:5b-6

This opening statement drips with love like water. The fourth gospel tells us that John was the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). John remembers the One he loves and the One who loved him.

But he includes all of us when he says "To Him who loves us . . ." John wants us to know that his Friend loves all of us and has released all Christians from the debt of our sins! He has promised all Christian that they will live in His kingdom and will spend eternity with the One who "is, was, and is to come."

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS,

and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (NASB) Rev. 1:7-8

THE APOSTLE JOHN. John now identifies himself to the seven churches. History tells us that John had ministered to at least some of them and maybe all of them. Since some of the churches are going to be rebuked for their lack of love, faithfulness, and willingness to suffer for Jesus, John reminds them that he was on the island of Patmos. He is an example of how a Christian should be willing to suffer for Jesus.

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (NASB) Rev. 1:9

The Romans had turned the island of Patmos into a prison. John was imprisoned there during the reign of Caesar Domitian because he was a Christian. Patmos is a small island about 37 miles or 59.6 kilometers off the coast of the nation of Turkey in the Aegean Sea. The island is small and measured about 10 miles by 6 miles (16.1 Km by 9.7 Km). The Romans would banish prisoners there and then force them to work the mines on the island until they were dead. John was about 85-90 years old. This would have been difficult for him. Yet, his heart remembers Jesus with loving warmth. History tells us that he was released later when the Roman emperor Nerva came

to power.

To suffer for Jesus means "I love you, Jesus." It is the greatest sacrifice a person can make for our Lord, short of death. Yet, many do not want to suffer for Him. In fact, it is common for Christians to be afraid to witness for Jesus because they fear the words of rebuke. There is a statement that goes like this, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." I believe the statement is wrong. Words do hurt! They prevent us from telling others about Jesus. John did not fear the pain of working a mine. John was willing to suffer for his Friend. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that those who suffer for Him will receive great reward.



Starburst Galaxy - Glory of God

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NASB)

Matt. 5:10-12

SEVEN CHURCHES. I wonder if Jesus gave John the vision that follows because he had suffered, because he had been faithful and was willing to suffer for Him. We are not told why Jesus visited him, but I wonder. Yet, it is only important that Jesus came. John received the vision on a Sunday. The Holy Spirit helped him to receive and understand the vision.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, "Write in a book what you see, 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." (NASB) Rev. 1:10-11

As the vision started, John must have been surprised to find that someone was speaking to him from behind. I am sure that he did not know who was talking. He simply heard the voice tell him to write a book and send it to seven of the churches, that were near his prison. Two of them were great churches but five of them were not.

GLIMPSE OF JESUS. So John did what most of us would have done. He turned around to see who was speaking and saw seven golden lampstands and someone standing in the middle.

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. (NASB) Rev. 1:12-13

"One like the son of man . . ." is Jesus Christ. He is clothed in a robe of royalty, and it speaks of His divine dignity and grace. The golden girdle or better "the gold sash" is a picture of Jesus' holiness (Eph 6:14), a holiness that we do not understand, a holiness that we can only receive when Jesus releases us from or removes our sinful deeds from the record of our lives.

And His head and His hair were white like white wool,

like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. (NASB) Rev. 1:14-15

Jesus' white hair reminds us of His wisdom (Prov. 16:31; 20:29). For it is from Him and in His Word that we find wisdom.

Wisdom is with aged men, With long life is understanding. (NASB) Job 12:12

His eyes of fire remind us that He sees and knows all that we do (Job 34:21). There is no escape. The divine "camera" is

on and a record of your deeds is being made, and His feet of burnished bronze means that He will some day be our just and holy Judge (Rev. 2:18-29). His voice is one of authority, for He spoke the world into existence and His Words are truth.

And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth

came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. (NASB) Rev. 1:16

Just two verses ahead we are told that these stars are the seven angels or pastors of the seven churches.

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. (NASB) Rev. 1:20



Trifid Nebula - The Glory of God

These men are under Jesus' control. He will judge them or bless them. It depends on them.

JESUS IS LIGHT. And "His face was like the sun shining in its strength. . . ." Rarely do we think of God as shining as light. Isaiah the prophet describes our God as light when he talks about heaven.

No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory. Your sun will set no more, Neither will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be finished. (NASB) Isa. 60:19



Revelation 21:22-23 says the same thing. God will light up heaven. There will be no need for stars or the sun. And when Jesus was here on the earth He appeared as light for a brief time.

And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (NASB) Matt. 17:2

I wonder if that is why He made the stars? Scripture says the heavens speak of the glory of God. God must be beautiful. He shines as light. And Rev. 1:16 says that Jesus' "face was

like the sun."

JOHN'S REACTION. John was afraid when he saw God.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon 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. (NASB) Rev. 1:17-18

John's friend did not look like the One he knew on earth. This meeting was different. It was not the meeting of two humans, but of a man and his glorified Friend - his God.

CONCLUSION. A kindergarten teacher told her students to draw a picture of something that was important to them.

In the back of the room was Johnny. He was working hard even though everyone else had finished. So the teacher walked back to see what he was drawing. "What are you drawing?" asked the teacher. "God!" Johnny said. The teacher responded, "But no one knows what God looks like." "Johnny answered, "They will when I am done!"

That is what the Apostle John did for us. He drew us word pictures of our God. God is holy, just, all powerful, and glorious! In His glory He shines as light!