

Among *the* Lampstands



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 1:9–18; Acts 7:54–60; Matt. 12:8; Exod. 20:11; Dan. 10:5, 6; Rev. 1:20; Rev. 2:1–7.*

Memory Text: “ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ ” (*Revelation 2:7, NKJV*).

Psalm 73 describes the psalmist's bewilderment as he observed the boastful pride of the ungodly. They lived in abundance and ease, in contrast to the suffering of the righteous. This injustice greatly troubled the psalmist (*Ps. 73:2–16*), who, in his perplexity, went to the sanctuary (*Ps. 73:16, 17*). There, in the presence of God, he was given a deeper understanding of the matter.

Centuries later, an aged apostle found himself on a rocky prison island because of his faithful witness. In his distress, he got the news that the churches under his care were suffering. Yet, at that critical moment, he was given a vision of the resurrected Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Here, as with the psalmist, the Lord revealed to John some mysteries of this life and the struggles it brings. This sanctuary scene provided him with the assurance of Christ's presence and care—an assurance that John was to pass on to these churches and to the succeeding generations of Christians throughout the centuries until the end of this world's history.

This week, in addition to introducing Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, we will begin looking at the first of His seven special messages to His church, addressed collectively to the seven churches in Asia, but which also have meaning for us today. Next week, we will look at His messages to the other six churches.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 12.

On Patmos

Read Revelation 1:9. What does John tell us of the circumstances in which he received the visions of Revelation?

Patmos is a barren, rocky island in the Aegean Sea; it is ten miles long and six miles across its widest part. The Romans used it, together with other surrounding islands, as a penal colony for banished political offenders. Early Christian authors living relatively close to the time of the writing of the book of Revelation state unanimously that Roman authorities had banished John to Patmos because of his faithfulness to the gospel. On Patmos, the aged apostle surely endured all the hardships of Roman imprisonment. He probably was treated as a criminal, chained in fetters, given insufficient food, and forced to perform hard labor under the lash of the whip of merciless Roman guards.

“Patmos, a barren, rocky island in the Aegean Sea, had been chosen by the Roman government as a place of banishment for criminals; but to the servant of God this gloomy abode became the gate of heaven. Here, shut away from the busy scenes of life, and from the active labors of former years, he had the companionship of God and Christ and the heavenly angels, and from them he received instruction for the church for all future time.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 570, 571.

What other Bible characters have endured hardship, even despite (or maybe even because of) their faithfulness to God? See *Dan. 3:16–23, Acts 7:54–60*.

The followers of Christ should never forget that whenever they find themselves in circumstances similar to those of John, they are not left alone. The same Jesus who came to John with the words of hope and encouragement in the midst of his hardship on Patmos still is present with His people to sustain and support them in their difficult situations.

How can we understand the difference between suffering for Christ’s sake and suffering for other reasons, including our own wrong choices? Or what about suffering for reasons we cannot fathom? How can we learn to trust the Lord in every situation?

On the Lord's Day

Read Revelation 1:10 along with Exodus 31:13, Isaiah 58:13, and Matthew 12:8. According to these texts, what day is clearly specified in the Bible as the Lord's? How meaningful must this day have been for John in the midst of his hardships?

“It was on the Sabbath that the Lord of glory appeared to the exiled apostle. The Sabbath was as sacredly observed by John on Patmos as when he was preaching to the people in the towns and cities of Judea. He claimed as his own the precious promises that had been given regarding that day.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 581.

Revelation 1:10 clearly suggests that the apostle John received the vision on the seventh-day Sabbath. Although looking with anticipation toward future events, even to the second coming of Christ (*compare with Rev. 1:7*), which is called “the day of the LORD” (*Isa. 13:6–13; 2 Pet. 3:10*), John was talking about the time at which he, himself, had the vision of these future events, and that was on the Sabbath—the “Lord’s day.”

No question that amid his sufferings this vision-filled Sabbath must have become to him a foretaste of a life free from suffering, which he and the faithful of all ages will experience after the Second Coming. Indeed, in Jewish thinking the Sabbath is deemed as a foretaste of the *olam haba*, “the world to come.”

“The Sabbath, which God had instituted in Eden, was . . . precious to John on the lonely isle. . . .

“What a Sabbath was that to the lonely exile, always precious in the sight of Christ, but now more than ever exalted! Never had he learned so much of Jesus. Never had he heard such exalted truth.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 955.

Compare the two versions of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15. These texts point to the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of both Creation and deliverance, reminding us that God both made us and redeemed us. How can we, each Sabbath, resolve to keep before ourselves the reality of God, both as our Creator and as our Redeemer? Think about this, too: What good would it be for Him to be our Creator without His being our Redeemer, as well?

John's Vision of Christ on Patmos

Read Revelation 1:12–18. Compare John's portrayal of Christ with the divine being described in Daniel 10:5, 6. How does Jesus appear in John's vision? What is He doing?

John sees Jesus dressed as High Priest, walking among the lampstands. The picture of Jesus walking among the lampstands points to God's promise to ancient Israel that He would walk among them as their God (*Lev. 26:12*). In Revelation, the lampstands represent the seven churches in Asia to which Revelation was originally sent (*Rev. 1:20*), and (as we will see on Wednesday) the lampstands also symbolize God's church throughout history. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus' watchcare continues to be over His church on earth. He will be continually with His people until He brings them to their eternal home.

Moreover, the picture of Jesus as High Priest among the lampstands is drawn from the ritual practice in the Jerusalem temple. The daily task of an appointed priest was to keep the lamps in the Holy Place burning brightly. He would trim and refill the lamps that were waning, replace the wicks on the lamps that had gone out, refill them with fresh oil, and then relight them. In such a way, the priest became acquainted personally with the situation of each individual lamp. In the same way, Jesus is acquainted with the needs and circumstances of His people and intercedes for them personally.

Read Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19; Revelation 3:1, 8, 15. What does the statement "I know" say about Jesus' acquaintance with the situations and needs of God's people?

Jesus identified Himself with the titles of God as "the first and . . . the last" (see *Isa. 44:6, Isa. 48:12*). The Greek word for "last" is *eschatos*, from which the word *eschatology* (the study of end-time events) comes. The meaning of this word shows that the focus of eschatology is on Jesus Christ, who has the last word on final events. He is the One " 'who lives' " and possesses " 'the keys of Hades and of Death' " (*Rev. 1:18, NKJV*). By His death and resurrection, Jesus has been given the authority to open the gates of death (*Job 17:16, Ps. 9:13*). All who trust in Him will rise from the grave to everlasting life (*1 Cor. 15:21–23*). Jesus' faithful followers don't need to fear, because even the dead are under His watchcare. And if that is so with the dead, how much more is it so with the living? (See *1 Thess. 4:16, 17*.)

Christ's Messages for Then and Now

Read Revelation 1:11, 19, 20. Jesus also spoke seven distinctive messages for the churches in Asia. What does the fact that there were more than seven churches in the province suggest, in general, about the symbolic significance of these messages for Christians?

The messages that Jesus directed John to send to the seven churches are recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. Their meanings apply on three levels:

Historical application. Those messages originally were sent to seven churches located in prosperous cities of first-century Asia. The Christians there faced serious challenges. Several cities set up emperor worship in their temples as a token of their loyalty to Rome. Emperor worship became compulsory. Citizens also were expected to participate in public events and pagan religious ceremonies. Because many Christians refused to participate in these practices, they faced trials and, at times, even martyrdom. Commissioned by Christ, John wrote the seven messages to help believers deal with these challenges.

Prophetic application. Revelation is a prophetic book, but only seven churches were chosen to receive its messages. This fact points to the prophetic character of the messages, as well. The spiritual conditions in the seven churches coincide with the spiritual conditions of God's church in different historical periods. The seven messages are intended to provide, from Heaven's perspective, a panoramic survey of the spiritual state of Christianity from the first century to the end of the world.

Universal application. Just as the entire book of Revelation was sent as one letter that was to be read in every church (*Rev. 1:11, Rev. 22:16*), so the seven messages also contain lessons that can apply to Christians in every age. In such a way, the messages represent different types of Christians in different places and times. For instance, while the general characteristic of Christianity today is Laodicean, some Christians may identify with the characteristics of some of the other churches. The good news is that whatever our spiritual condition, God "meets fallen human beings where they are."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 22.

Suppose the Lord were to write a letter today to your local church, a letter written in the form of the messages to the seven churches. What might such a letter say about the challenges your church is facing, as well as its spiritual condition?

Message to the Church in Ephesus

Ephesus was the capital and the largest city in the Roman province of Asia, located on the major trade routes. As the chief seaport of Asia, it was a very important commercial and religious center. The city was filled with such public buildings as temples, theaters, gymnasiums, bathhouses, and brothels. It also was known for the practice of magic and was notorious for immorality and superstition. Yet, the most influential Christian church in the province was in Ephesus.

Read Revelation 2:1–4. How does Jesus present Himself to the church in Ephesus? For what great qualities does Jesus commend this church? What concern does Jesus express?

In their early days, the Ephesian believers were known for their faithfulness and love (*Eph. 1:15*). Although they experienced pressure both from outside and inside the church, the Christians in Ephesus remained firm and faithful. They were hardworking and obedient to the truth; indeed, they could not tolerate false apostles in their midst. However, their love for Christ and their fellow members began to wane. Although the church stood firm and faithful, without Christ's love even their own lamp was in danger of going out.

Read Revelation 2:5–7. What three things does Jesus urge church members to do in order to revive their first love and devotion to Christ and to their fellow believers? How are these three things sequentially related?

Prophetically, the situation in the church in Ephesus corresponds to the general situation and spiritual condition of the church from A.D. 31–100. The apostolic church was characterized by love and faithfulness to the gospel. But by the end of the first century, the church began losing the fire of its first love, thus departing from the simplicity and purity of the gospel.

Imagine yourself as part of a congregation whose love is waning. The members may not be practicing any known or open sin. On one level, they are even doing what's right; yet, they suffer from formalism and coldness. How can Jesus' counsel here free such a church from this situation?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Patmos,” pp. 568–577, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The persecution of John became a means of grace. Patmos was made resplendent with the glory of a risen Saviour. John had seen Christ in human form, with the marks of the nails, which will ever be his glory, in his hands and his feet. Now he was permitted again to behold his risen Lord, clothed with as much glory as a human being could behold, and live.

“The appearance of Christ to John should be to all, believers and unbelievers, an evidence that we have a risen Christ. It should give living power to the church. At times dark clouds surround God’s people. It seems as if oppression and persecution would extinguish them. But at such times the most instructive lessons are given. Christ often enters prisons, and reveals himself to his chosen ones. He is in the fire with them at the stake. As in the darkest night the stars shine the brightest, so the most brilliant beams of God’s glory are revealed in the deepest gloom. The darker the sky, the more clear and impressive are the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, the risen Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, April 5, 1900.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 John shares with the readers what he saw and heard on Patmos. As you read Revelation 1:12–20, what do you see and hear? What words of comfort can you take from the truths revealed in this vision?
- 2 In Revelation 14:7, the first angel urges the inhabitants of the earth at the time of the end to “‘worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (NKJV). This language is taken from Exodus 20:11. What does the first angel’s message tell us about the end-time significance of the Sabbath, as revealed in Revelation?
- 3 There’s a strange irony that many Christians face. The longer they are in the church, the easier it is for their faith to grow dim or even to die out. The opposite, though, should happen. After all, the longer we walk with Jesus, the more we should learn about Him and His love for us. How, then, can we keep the fire of faith not only burning, but burning brighter and brighter, as it should?

Gift of a Child

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Janice Clark never planned to adopt a former student's baby, but then the telephone rang on a cold March day.

"I'm having a baby that I can't keep, and I'm wondering if you will have him," Annette said.

"What do you mean by 'have him'?" asked Janice, a 47-year-old physical education teacher at Mamawi Atosketan Native School, a Seventh-day Adventist mission school for First Nations children in the Canadian province of Alberta.

"I want you to adopt him," said Annette, 18, already the mother of two.

Janice didn't think the girl was serious, but she tried to organize a meeting with Annette and her parents. Every effort fell through.

Two months later, Janice's phone rang. It was Annette.

"Could you come to the hospital to support me tomorrow when I give birth?" she asked.

She was going to have the baby by Caesarean section.

Janice and her husband, who have five biological children and four foster children, arrived at the hospital in the early morning. The nurse greeted them with the words, "Oh, you're the adoptive parents."

Janice was shocked. She had thought that Annette had other plans for the baby because adoption had only been mentioned once in that single phone call.

In the hospital room, Janice asked the expectant mother about her plans.

"What's the baby's name?" she asked.

"It's your baby," Annette said. "You should name him."

Only then did it sink in that this would be her adopted baby.

A healthy boy was born a few hours later, on May 12, 2016. Janice stayed at the hospital that night and brought the baby home a day later. She named him Huxley.

Janice believes that Annette gave her the baby because of the teachers' love at the school.

"It's not about me personally," she said. "I worked with her family at this school for many years. She and all her siblings know that the teachers love them. That's why she asked us to be the boy's parents."

Tears formed in Janice's eyes as she spoke.

"It's so humbling to think that I am part of this picture," she said. "I'm expected to teach Huxley about his Creator?"



Part of the second quarter 2018 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped Mamawi Atosketan Native School expand its education program. The former student's name has been changed.

"God knows what is happening, and He has perfect timing," Janice said. "All we can say is 'Praise the Lord!'"

Part I: Overview

▶ **Key Text:** *Revelation 2:7*

▶ **Study Focus:** Our focus this lesson will be on the introduction to the messages to the seven churches (*Rev. 1:9–2:7*).

▶ **Introduction:** Revelation 1:9–20 provides the backdrop for the messages to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. Aspects of the glorious vision of Christ provide the unique setting for each of the seven messages. Jesus knows each of the seven churches and meets them where they are. The lesson closes with a more detailed look at the message to the church in Ephesus (*Rev. 2:1–7*).

▶ **Lesson Themes:** The focus passage (*Rev. 1:9–2:7*) introduces the following themes:

I. The Identity of the Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10

The Sabbath is the best explanation for John’s understanding of the Lord’s Day.

II. Jesus Meets the Churches Where They Are.

Jesus approaches each of the seven churches with different characteristics drawn from the introductory vision (*Rev. 1:9–20*).

III. John’s Basic Outline of Revelation (*Based on Revelation 1:19*)

In Revelation 1:19 John summarizes the whole vision as concerning the things that are and the things that will happen in the future. Revelation 4:1 shows that much of Revelation focuses on the future. This future begins in John’s time and extends until the end of time.

IV. Interpreting the Seven Messages to the Seven Churches

The messages to the seven churches contain information for the actual churches in Asia Minor, but they also parallel the spiritual conditions of Christianity in different historical periods.

▶ **Life Application:** Students are invited to consider the implications of the startling picture of Jesus in Revelation 1:12–16, John’s reaction to this picture (*Rev. 1:17*), and Jesus’ gracious and comforting response to John (*Rev. 1:17, 18*).

Part II: Commentary

Revelation’s introductory vision (*Rev. 1:12–18*) centers on a glorious picture of Jesus. He is “like the Son of Man” (*Rev. 1:13*), the One who died and is alive forevermore (*Rev. 1:18*). Based on Daniel 10:5, 6 and a number of other Old Testament texts, this vision portrays the glory of Jesus otherwise seen only at the Transfiguration during His earthly ministry. The characteristics of Jesus in the vision are repeated throughout the seven messages of chapters 2 and 3. The vision is like the stage backdrop to the first act of a play.

In addition to the vision of Jesus (*Rev. 1:12–18*), the lesson addresses the location and time when John received the vision (*Rev. 1:9–11*), a basic interpretation of the vision (*Rev. 1:19, 20*), and an analysis of the message to the church at Ephesus (*Rev. 2:1–7*).

Main Themes of Lesson 2 Elaborated:

I. The Identity of the Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10

The most popular view among commentators is that the “Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10 is Sunday, the first day of the week. The strength of this view is that later church fathers used the phrase with reference to Sunday, and the Latin equivalent, *dominus dies*, became one of the names for Sunday in the Latin Church. But all clear references to Sunday as “the Lord’s Day” are much later than Revelation and, thus, cannot serve as evidence for the meaning referenced when John wrote.

The best explanation for the Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10 is that John was referring to the seventh-day Sabbath. While the exact phrase “the Lord’s Day” (*kuriakê hemêra*) is never used elsewhere in the New Testament or in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, many strong equivalents refer to the seventh-day Sabbath. The seventh day is “the Sabbath of the LORD [*kuriô*] thy God” (*Exod. 20:10, Deut. 5:14*). “The LORD” (*kurios*) often refers to the seventh day as “my Sabbath” (*ta sabbata mou—Exod. 31:12, 13; Lev. 19:3, 30; Lev. 26:2; Isa. 56:4–6; Ezek. 20:12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 24; Ezek. 22:3–8; Ezek. 23:36–38; Ezek. 44:12–24*). In the Hebrew of Isaiah 58:13, Yahweh calls the Sabbath “My holy day” (*NKJV*). And finally, all three Synoptic Gospels (*Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:27, 28; Luke 6:5*) quote Jesus as saying that “the Son of Man is Lord . . . of the Sabbath [*kurios tou sabbatou*].” It would be strange, therefore, if John used the phrase “the Lord’s Day” for any other day of the week than the one we call Saturday.

II. Jesus Meets the Churches Where They Are.

Jesus appears on the scene of Revelation in spectacular fashion (*Rev. 1:12–20*). The same Jesus is in close relationship with the seven churches (*Rev. 1:20*). He knows each of them intimately (*Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; Rev. 3:1, 8, 15*). And He introduces Himself to each church with one, two, or three characteristics from the earlier vision.

The message to Ephesus (*Rev. 2:1–7*), for example, describes Jesus as the One who holds the seven stars in His hand (*Rev. 1:20*) and walks among the seven golden lampstands (*Rev. 1:12, 13*). In the message to Smyrna (*Rev. 2:8*), Jesus is the First and the Last, the One who died and came back to life (*Rev. 1:17, 18*). In the letter to Pergamum, He approaches with a sharp, two-edged sword (*Rev. 2:12, Rev. 1:16*). So it goes throughout the seven church letters.

Here's the interesting thing, Jesus presents Himself in a different way to each of the seven churches. He is able to adapt to each church's particular needs and circumstances. In other words, He meets each church as it is. And if no church and no Christian has the full picture of Jesus, then we all have reason to be humble. We are all learners, even with all that we have been given.

III. John's Basic Outline of Revelation (*Based on Revelation 1:19*)

The author of Revelation often embeds clues about the organization and key ideas of the book in the transition texts. One of those transition texts is Revelation 1:19. In this text, John lays out the plan of the whole book. The text begins, “Write, therefore, what you have seen” (author's translation). This sentence parallels Revelation 1:11: “Write what you see” (author's translation). Revelation 1:11 is present tense and Revelation 1:19 is past tense (Greek aorist indicative). This means the entire vision of Revelation was given between the command in Revelation 1:11 and the command in Revelation 1:19. Now he is told to write it out.

What has John seen? Two things: “The things which are” and “the things which shall be hereafter” (*Rev. 1:19*). So the book of Revelation includes both things current at the time of the seven churches and things that were yet to come, from their perspective.

In Revelation 4:1 Jesus says to John, “Come up here, and I will show you *what must take place after these things*” (*NASB; emphasis supplied*). This statement is similar to Revelation 1:19. Beginning with Revelation 4:1, the rest of Revelation focuses primarily on the future after John's time. While there are flashbacks to the cross (*Rev. 5:6, Rev. 12:11*), and

even events before Creation (*Rev. 12:4, 7, 9*), the primary focus, for most of the book, is events future to John's day.

What, then, are "the things which are and the things which will take place after this" in Revelation 1:19? The answer: everything between Revelation 1:19 and 4:1, namely, the messages to the seven churches. As the lesson brings out, the seven messages also have prophetic significance for the whole Christian era, in addition to addressing the situation of those seven churches and the messages that Jesus brings to them. Careful attention to Revelation 1:19 shows how key texts of Revelation can help readers see the structure in John's mind and in the mind of the One who gave him the vision.

IV. Interpreting the Seven Messages to the Seven Churches

The messages to the seven churches are "prophetic letters." They are more like Matthew 24 than they are like Daniel 7 or Revelation 13. So their message concerns seven actual churches in Asia Minor, the ones that originally received them (*Rev. 1:4, 11*), and, by extension, for all those who read these messages (*Rev. 1:3; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; and so on*).

There were, however, more than seven churches in Asia Minor, but the spiritual conditions in those churches parallel the spiritual conditions of Christianity in different historical periods from the time of John until today. So embedded in these messages to seven historical churches was a grand survey of the major developments of Christian history. These periods are briefly discussed in the specific comments on each church in lessons 2 and 3.

V. The Messages to the Church in Ephesus

The church in Ephesus is the first congregation addressed by Jesus, describing Himself as the One who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands and holds the seven stars in His right hand (*Rev. 2:1*). The verbs "walks" and "holds" portray Jesus' personal care and close attention. Despite Jesus' care for them, the church loses its original love for Him becoming distracted with other things and needs to repent. This first message applies not only to the first-century church of Ephesus but reflects Jesus' assessment more generally of the Christian church in the first century. Little by little the early Christians' first love experience subsided and the need for a turning back to their earlier fervency became evident (*see 1 John 4:7-11*).

Part III: Life Application

1. *Why is the gracious, forgiving Jesus, who washed the feet of His disciples, portrayed in such a spectacular and startling way in Revelation 1:12–16? While the appearance of Jesus frightened John to his core, fear was not the response Jesus desired (Rev. 1:17, 18). Like an elementary school teacher in the classroom, God sometimes has to earn our respect before we will take His graciousness seriously. But to truly know God is to love Him. The Father is just like Jesus (John 14:9).*

2. *What does the description of Jesus in Revelation 1 say to us about Jesus' appeal to all humanity? In John's vision of Jesus in Revelation 1, Jesus is carefully described as "One like the Son of Man," having white hair and eyes like a flame of fire. His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength, and He holds stars in His right hand. He is the "first and the last" and possesses the keys to Hades and Death. This description certainly is reminiscent of the "One like the Son of Man" in Daniel 7:13, and God-fearing Jews who longed for their Messiah would certainly take notice. Commentators also have mentioned, however, that the description of Jesus would likewise appeal to Gentiles with some of their ideas of deity. For sure, Jesus is presented as the One who can fulfill the true longings of all humanity. He meets us where we are and lifts us up. He is like us yet possesses the keys to Hades and Death. He is all-powerful yet wise and caring. He is humanity's true desire.*
