

# Heavenly Vision: Christ and His Church (Part 2)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do you remember the magic eye phenomenon?

Just too long ago, the magic eye came in books and postcards and posters. Well, let me describe it. Maybe you'll remember. The magic eye, and I'm borrowing this from Dennis Johnson in his book, Wrath of the Lamb.

The magic eye craze passed just as I was getting the hang of it. This computer-generated pop art, pioneered in Japan and the United States, appeared in the 1990s.

So maybe, you know, some of you are much too young for that. As posters in mall, art stores, then books, postcards, and other novelty items. To the uninitiated, the conversation of the Illuminati, clustered before a display window, staring intently at the poster, may sound mystical.

Do you see it? No. All I see is a pattern on the surface. Look behind the surface. Try to focus beyond the picture.

[ 1 : 13 ] Not quite. Almost. Oh! Oh, yes! There it is! Dolphins frolicking under the sea, coming right out of the picture toward me. Oh! Oh, the 3D is absolutely beautiful.

You ever had that experience? Remember this? Remember any of this? I could never see it. I think it was a fraud. I just don't think it, you know. She would say, oh, no, you can see. Just got to focus. I couldn't do it. Well, apparently, some people can see it. The three-dimensional effect is astonishing, apparently, but neither mysticism nor magic is involved.

It seems that the computer graphics can torque slightly a repeating design pattern on a page and so deceive our sense of perception into seeing three-dimensionally another pattern hidden within the design that first meets the eye.

The trick, apparently, you know, you've got to look beyond. Don't focus. The trick is to focus your vision not on the surface of the page, but at a focal point beyond, behind, beneath the surface, until the hidden picture emerges before your eyes.

[ 2 : 29 ] Now, why do I bring this up? Well, the magic eye phenomenon provides a parable. For Christian thinking about the world. You see, to see the pattern that counts, you have to focus beyond the surface.

To see the shape of deep realities not accessible to the casual observer. Like everyone else, Christians spend time, much of every day, with eyes and minds focused on the surface of things. Details about deadlines, delays, dollars, dress, food, shelter, you know, living, going and coming, work and recreation, politics and more.

Attending to everyday issues is necessary and right. But our hearts long to see the big picture. The meaning that lies behind all the details.

The book of Revelation. That was shown to John unveils the deep pattern behind the surface of history. We need to see Jesus here.

[ 3 : 41 ] To meet his blazing eyes of heart-searching holiness. To wake up to the trumpet blast of his voice. To respond to his jealous demand for exclusive and passionate loyalty.

Shocked, insensible, insensible by the impact of his splendor. We need to then hear his words of compassionate comfort.

Quelling our fears and quickening our hopes. Every congregation, every Christian, whatever its struggle at its post on the battlefield, needs to fix its eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

And we get an amazing view of Jesus. John, the apostle John, who once resided at the Last Supper on Jesus' breast, remember?

The one who he described himself as the one whom Jesus loved. The one who Jesus was friends with. That John now sees Jesus in a way he'd never seen him before.



down?

It's a war. It's a symbol of war. It's also a warning. It's also an announcement for the king. Different kinds of reasons to hear a trumpet. So John hears a trumpet. He turns to see it.

[10:02] And what he sees are two different things. He sees seven golden lampstands. And then he sees in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man. So let's divide this vision into two.

The first thing he sees is not the son of man, but the lampstands. And the last thing explained in this vision, verse 20, are the lampstands. So we begin and end with the lampstands, which are the churches. And then in the middle of it is the son of man. He's the highlight of the vision, the son of man. So let's look first at the church, the lampstands.

The church, as he defines in the end of verse 20, the seven lampstands are the seven churches. The church, here's how I would summarize what is pictured here. The church is pictured as the spirit-empowered light of Jesus in a dark world. You say, where'd you get that? Well, lamp, and so it's a light.

Spirit-filled, we're going to see from the Old Testament vision that it's like this. The church pictured as the spirit-empowered light of Jesus in a dark world. Remember, Jesus said, you are the light of the world. The city set on a hill cannot be hidden. You don't take a lamp and put it under a bushel. So Jesus already referred to the church as a light. You together are the light.

He was the light. I am the light of the world. So not far to go for the church to be the lampstand, to be the light in the world. So what did he see? Saw seven lampstands. Well, what are lampstands?

[11:46] Where do you see lampstands? Remember, this is a first century vision. So not today where you see lampstands. Where do you see lampstands in the first century? Where were lampstands back then?

Here's a hint. It looked like this, but it was seven feet tall. Hello. Okay. Okay. There's nothing. Sorry, church. It's just a symbol. Stubborn symbol. Look at that.

Where do we see a lampstand? Temple. Tabernacle. Temple. Right? Seven feet tall. I saw one in 1995 in the little shop in Israel, in Jerusalem, where they were rebuilding the furniture for the rebuilt temple. They are planning to reoccupy the temple mount, and they want to be ready. They've already done the furniture, saw the priest thing. They're trying to figure out, well, back in 95, they were still trying to figure out what was what out of those 12 jewels, right? But the lampstand was really, really impressive. All gold. Seven feet tall. Huge. So what's the lampstand? What was it doing in the temple, in the tabernacle? Remember, the tabernacle is you have the outer court, then you go to the actual holy place, which has two sections. The first section, where the priest went in every day, on the left, they would have the lampstand, and they would tend every day to the lamps. They would put oil in to refurbish the oil, make sure they're burning, and they were to do that twice a day, every morning, every evening, because the lamps were to never go out. They were to burn continuously.

Okay? And then on the right, you had the table of showbread with the 12 loaves, right? In front, right in front of the veil, right in front of the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant sat, where the mercy seat was, there was the table of incense representing the prayers. Okay? So they tended to the bread, the incense, the lampstand. What's the lampstand there? Obviously, the bread refers to the 12, refers to the 12 tribes. They're present there in the holy place. Incense, the prayers.

What's the lampstand symbolizing? Light. Light. What is light? Who is light in the Bible? God is light. Presence of God.

[14:15] Say, oh, well, the presence of God is behind the curtain, right? He's supposed, well, yes, he is there, but he's also not limited, is he? He's everywhere. He was the light that led them and followed them in the wilderness, right? He's often displayed as light. So it's the light. Signifies God's presence. God is light. In him, there is no darkness. So how does he interpret now these things?

But down in verse 20, well, let's look at the stars first. In verse 20, he interprets, he says, the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven of gold lampstands. The seven stars are, dun-dun-dun-dun, the angels of the seven churches. In his hand, as he's holding seven stars, the seven stars are seven angels. Okay. So what does that mean? Seven angels. Now, some have said, well, those angels, that word angelos, so our word angel is just a transliteration of the Greek, angelos. Okay. So it's angel, but its meaning is messenger. So the seven stars are seven messengers.

So some have said, well, that must be a human messenger, a human representative of each church. And it is possible the word angelos has a couple of times in the new Testament meant

human messengers.

So when John sent messengers, he sent angelos to Jesus. He sent messengers. He sent angels to Jesus. Well, John didn't have angels. He had met human messengers. Are you the one? And then they reported back. Jesus said, John, the Baptist was the angelos. He's the angel. Well, no, he's not. He's just John.

He's kind of dressed weird, but you know, he's John. He's the messenger. So it can mean human messenger, but here's the problem. One, never does the new Testament refer to a church having a single representative, a single leader. Always the new Testament refers to plurality of leaders in each church, a plurality of elders. There's not a pastor of church. There are pastors also known as elders, also known as overseers. They're all the same thing. So that goes against it. Secondly, the word angel appears, the Greek word appears 67 times in the book of revelation, everywhere else from chapter five on, it's obviously a heavenly angel because they're in heaven.

They're myriads, right? They're standing in the sun. They're huge, you know, or they're powerful or they're controlling the wind. Obviously they're heavenly angels. So out of the 67 times, 58, 58 times from chapter five on refer to heavenly angels, it's unlikely that the, that the nine references before chapter five refer to human angels, human messengers. So, okay, then, then here's the problem. So once we go to chapter two, right, it says to the angel of the church of Ephesus, right?

[17:44] Chapter two, verse eight, to the angel of the church of Smyrna, right? Verse 12, to the angel of the church of Pergamum, right? All seven churches are addressed to the angel of this church. And then it says, this is what I like about you. This is the works I see you're doing. And, but I have this against you. So it implies that the angel's responsible for the good and the bad in the church.

Some people have trouble with that. I don't have any trouble with that. Remember in Corinthians, Paul said, we're going to judge the angels.

Why would you go to, right? Civil law courts. You should judge between brothers. Don't go to a, to a, to a secular judge. Go before Christians. We're going to judge angels for goodness sakes.

So angels are accountable. We learn in the book of Revelation that not all angels are good angels, right? There are angels that the dragon has. The dragon has a third of the angels that he takes with his tail, which tells us that angels are not perfect. They are glorious. They are powerful. They are amazing, but they're not perfect. They can rebel. They have independent thinking. They can follow someone else. We will judge them. So an angel being a representative of each earthly church. Yeah, I think so. It tells us two things. One, we have help. Guardian angel. Hebrews defines angels as ministering spirits that are helping believers. Some way. We are in a spiritual battle. And I think part of what Revelation is showing us is behind the scenes.

[19:37] What seems like, oh, okay, we have a church. We have so many members, right? We reside here in Palmer Lake and we're on a hill. We're the light of the hill, whatever, whatever. Behind the scenes, there are both good forces and evil forces battling for this spiritual position right here.

It's reminding us that we're not alone. In his hand, he holds the angels of every church. He is sovereignly in control. And those angels, yes, will be responsible. Churches go bad.

That means maybe the angel wasn't doing all his part as well as the church not doing their part.

Okay. Just an interesting way to think about this. Then he says, who are the lampstands? Well, the lampstands are the seven churches, he says. The seven lampstands stand for the seven churches. Remember the number seven? We're going to see it all through this book. The seven is a number for perfection. It's a number for fullness, for completeness. So he's writing to seven churches in Asia Minor, just not far from the island of Patmos where he was. These seven churches are all on the same postal route. They're all connected by the same road. They're all in order. There were other churches. There's the church of Colossae, the church of Thessalonica, the Philippians. You know, what about all those churches? Well, those, Corinth.

He's not excluding those. He's just making a representative seven. These seven stand for all churches. Not only then, but now. So the seven, every church is a lampstand. That means every church is to give light to the world. Every church bears the presence of God. Every church is a witness for Christ, a representative to Christ. Jesus said, you are the light of the world. Let your light shine in such a way that they may see your good works, but not glorify you, but glorify the Father. Father, Jesus was a light that came into a dark land. We are lights in a dark land as well. We're not to hide our faith. We don't put our light under a bushel. Our life is, so what? What does that mean?

How are we shining in the world? It's not that we're out there in people's faces, but that we somehow live distinctly. We don't look like the world. Our choices, our values are different. Our demeanor is different. Our hope is different, right? There's some light. So let's look. Now, I told you that this book of Revelation only makes sense in light of the Old Testament, okay? Much of the visions and the pictures that we see are borrowed or echoed from the Old Testament. So where else do we see a lampstand vision in the Old Testament? And how does that vision inform us? Well, there's a vision given to the prophet Zechariah, and this was given at a time in the history of Israel when they were in exile, right? And they're making their way back. They had failed the Lord, so the Lord let them be captured by another nation. And now, 70 years later, they're starting to make their way back to Jerusalem.

[ 23 : 02 ] And so people are coming back. Zerubbabel comes back and builds the temple. Nehemiah comes back and builds the wall. Ezra comes back and does the preaching, reforms them spiritually. So this was a, did I say Zechariah? It's, it is Zechariah the prophet, but it's a message to Zerubbabel, who was one of the ones who led back the return exiles. So listen to this, Zechariah 4, 1 to 10.

The angel said to me, what do you see? And 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 that are on the top of it. And I said to the angel who talked to me, what are these, my Lord? He said to me, this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel. So here, he has a vision of a lampstand, not seven lampstands, one lampstand with seven lamps. This is what it means, he says. Here's the message of that vision. This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, who is the governor at the time, who is rebuilding the temple, okay? Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.

Zerubbabel is rebuilding the temple. He's not going to do it by his strength, not by his power, but by the Holy Spirit. Okay, listen to the message, keeps going. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plain. He shall bring forward the top stone with shouts of grace, grace to it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house. His hand shall complete it. He will finish this temple. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice. And you shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. He's going to keep building. These seven, seven lamps, these seven are also the seven eyes of the Lord, which reigns throughout the whole earth. All I want to draw from this gives us some insight. Okay, here's another lampstand.

Here's a lampstand that represents not only God's presence, but God's power. He sees a lampstand. And the Lord says, this is what it means, not by might, not by strength, but by my spirit, he will rebuild. He will finish completing the building by my spirit. So he's spirit empowered, not only the presence of God in the lampstand, but the power of the spirit, promise of Christ's power to do his work. Even if it's a small thing, isn't that interesting? Those who despise the day of small things, yeah, they're building a temple, a little town, big deal. That's no big deal.

[ 25 : 51 ] The church is considered a small thing in the eyes of the world. What's the church? They're irrelevant now. They're old fashioned, they're irrelevant. Some of them still preach. Can you believe that? Don't they know that's an outmoded method? Supposed to use video now.

Some of you may feel like a small thing and despised as a, as a, as a light in the world. You may feel that way. God specializes in small things. God does much with little. Ask the, those who were fed in the feeding of the 5,000. He does much with, he doesn't need much. He needs a willing heart. So first part, we see the interpretation of the lampstands as the church, as the spirit empowered light of Jesus in a dark world. Now let's look at the main vision beginning of verse 13. He sees in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man. This son of man we're going to see in this vision is both a glorious priest and king. He's a priest and king who is shepherding and who is sovereign. So what does he see? First of all, verse 13 to 16, we see the image. He see verse 13, one like a son of man clothed. How? With a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

Well, to us today, that doesn't mean anything. But to somebody in the first century and from the Jewish background, that would mean something very clear. He's a high priest. He's already walking amidst lampstands, which is a picture of temple setting. He's with the lampstands. He's the priest doing the work among the lampstands. He's got the long robe of a high priest and he's got the golden sash. That's not down here. It's crossed here. That's the high priest. That's Aaron. So he's got the image of a priest. But then we go on and it changes now in verse 14. The hairs of his head

were white, like white wool, you know, like lamb's wool. Interesting. Somebody in Sunday school pointed that out to me. Wool, that's like lamb, right? That's come from a lamb, right? Yeah, I missed that.

Like white wool, like snow, white purity. His eyes were like a flame of fire. Can you imagine? What's that? His eyes are blazing fire. Okay. His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace, just that heated, hot, shining bronze. His voice. We already heard that the sound of his voice sounded like a trumpet. Now it adds that his voice is like the roar of many waters, like a thundering waterfall. [ 28 : 58 ] Okay. In his right hand, he held the seven stars, the angels. Excuse me. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. What are these pictures?

What are these conveying? This is not what Jesus looks like today. It's not saying when we get to heaven and we see him, he's going to have a sword point, you know, and he's going to be so glorious we can't look at his face. It doesn't mean that's what he looks like. It means that's what he's like.

These are pictures conveying, symbols conveying something about his nature. He's a priest. His hair and the blazing feet and face represent his holiness, his glory, shining glory. His eyes penetrating with judgment, fire judgment. He's a judge. The voice and the mouth, the thunderous voice and the mouth, that is a sword. He's a warrior. And notice it's a two-edged sword. So it's a sword that can both kill because we will see in Revelation 19 as the sun comes back on the horse, it's with the sword of his mouth that he slays the nations. So it's two-edged. It can slay the nations, but it's also a sword that we recognize in the New Testament. It's the word of God, the sword of the spirit that cuts to us, not to slay, but to heal, to correct, like a surgeon.

It's a two-edged sword. He's both a shepherd and he's a warrior. He is the Messiah that is coming back. So who is he? Well, verse 17, we're given the identity.

John says, when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. He's overwhelmed by this. Imagine, I mean, we just have the words describing, but imagine his experience, seeing all this shining, this glory, the face. I can't even look at the face and the sword. What does that mean?

[ 31 : 15 ] He figures, I think, that he's seen God. And if you see God, you will not live. He's dead. I'm done.

I just saw, oh, God didn't mean to. And who is it? Who is this frightening person?

We'll get the first hint by his right hand. You know, the one that holds all the star, same right hand, touches him, hurt him, touches him, comforts him, strengthens him and says, don't be afraid. Fear not.

Why? Because of who I am. John, don't you recognize me? No. You don't look anything like I saw the last time. What does he say? Verse 18, who is he?

Well, at the end of verse 17, fear not, I am the first and the last. In other words, I'm eternal. I'm the beginning and the end. And the living one, the eternally existing one, here comes bigger hint, I died.

[ 32 : 27 ] Oh, and I'm alive forevermore. Oh, that only applies to one person. There are other people that had died and were resurrected, but they're not alive forevermore.

There's only one person that applies to. That's Jesus Christ. He died and lives and lives forever. Lazarus died and raised, but he died again.

Isn't he? The widow's son, Ray, died, raised, he died again. Only Jesus lives forevermore. He's the one who conquered death. He conquered death in order to pay for our sins.

And he adds one more thing. And by the way, I have the keys. I got the keys of death and Hades.

Hades, by the way, is not hell. Hades is the Greek term for sheol, which is the term for the grave.

Gehenna is the word Jesus uses for hell. Hades is simply the grave. I have the key of death and the grave. I can put your life into death and the grave, or I can take your life out of death and the grave.

[ 33 : 42 ] I have conquered death. I can now have the authority. Remember, Jesus said right before he ascended, all authority has been given to me. Where? In heaven and on earth.

That's pretty much everywhere. All authority has been given to me. He has the keys. So what is the importance of this?

What are we seeing here? Well, the importance is that Jesus not only rose from the dead, but he now walks among his churches.

He is that vision of a son among the lampstands. He's in the midst of the lampstands. He is with his church. He is the priest king.

He is both shepherding those churches and sovereignly judging those churches, as we're going to see in the next two chapters. He looks at each church with those piercing, blazing eyes and says, I see your works.

[ 34 : 48 ] You're faithful. You're doing this. You're doing this. But I also see that over there. And we're going to listen to each of those seven letters and say, okay, is that us?

And some of it's going to be us. Some of it's going to be us. So we need to hear what he says. So he walks among the churches.

In his glory, in his blazing holiness, his voice still trumpets as thunder. His eyes still judge with piercing clarity. His sword still strikes, both to heal and to slay.

In chapter 19, we're going to see that as he returns, it is the sword of his mouth that slays the nations that would not repent. Let me meddle with you a little bit.

Has that sword struck you? Has he pierced you? Have you heard that thunderous voice? But maybe it was a calm voice.

[ 35 : 57 ] Have those eyes pierced into your heart? Into your conscience? And seen what no one else has seen? Have you come to faith in him?

Have you once stunned and frightened by who he is, also experienced his gentle hand touch you and say, it's okay, I got you.

Now that you see me, I got you. Now that you come to me, I got you. You're forgiven. This vision of Jesus here in Revelation 1 has echoes back to Daniel chapter 10.

It's so similar to the vision that Daniel saw. It's similar language. There's a similar image. There's a similar reaction that Daniel has. There's similar comforting that Daniel's given.

There's a similar message. It's like, is this a coincidence? I think not. Because the visions back in the Old Testament prepare us to see these visions in Revelation.

[ 37 : 11 ] The language. John would have been familiar with that. So listen to these words from Daniel 10. See if you find any similarities. Daniel says, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man, clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold, from up around his waist.

His body was like burl. His face, like the appearance of lightning. His eyes, like flaming torches. His arms and legs, like the gleam of burnished bronze.

And the sound of his words, like the sound of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision. But a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves.

So I was left alone. And I saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance, in other words, my vigor of life, was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell to my face. In deep sleep.

[ 38 : 25 ] What's that? He's knocked out. He's faint. It's overwhelmed. With my face to the ground, and behold, hmm, this sounds familiar, a hand touched me.

A hand touched me. Could it be the same hand? A hand touched me, and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now have been sent to you.

And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, because I was still afraid, then he said to me, fear not. Well, that sounds familiar.

Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard. And I have come because of your words.

And he says something strange. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me 21 days. What? The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me 21 days.

[ 39 : 36 ] But Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me. Michael? You mean the angel? Michael? You mean that Michael? Came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia.

And I came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the later days. For the vision is for days yet to come.

So, what do we have here? What does that kind of, what does that tell us? It's very similar to Revelation 1. It's an overwhelming vision, the same reaction he faints, he's a dead man, he's out. But then you have the same comfort, the hand that comes, the comforts, the same message. Fear not. And I've come to help you understand what is to happen. That's the same thing John was told as he sees the vision.

I'm telling you about things, you're going to write what you see, and what is about to happen, and what will happen after that. For in Daniel, the vision was, it's in the latter days, it's for the future. [ 40 : 42 ] To John it is, it's for now. These things must soon take place. For I am near. I'm here. I'm coming.

I'm coming. I'm coming. I'm coming. Not all at once, I'm coming. I will come to the church who does not repent, and I will remove its lampstand. I will come to bring plagues.

I will come to save. I will come to finish, ultimately, at some point. I'm coming. So we have a very similar message, and it's again, to Daniel, he's told something that's going on behind the surface. Daniel, you know where I've been? I've been fighting the prince of Persia. You know, the ones who have control over you right now. In heaven, I'm fighting the prince behind the scenes.

Oh, Michael's here to help. Michael's here to help. We're going to win. Don't worry about it. Michael. Michael's here. 21 days. Okay. Not a long time. There's a picture going on behind.

[ 41 : 55 ] Not all is as it seems. Evil forces are at work behind the scenes. There are evil spirits. Paul says, we are in a spiritual battle, right? We're to wear spiritual armor. Why?

Because our fight is not with flesh and blood. It's not with what we see. It's what we don't see. Peter did not fail because it was, you know, just a little slave girl.

What can she do? we fight against evil forces, the spiritual forces.

Evil forces are at work behind the scenes. But here in this vision, we see it's all in Christ's hands. We on earth are churches who are lampstands.

We are in a spiritual battle. But our Savior, our King, our Shepherd, and our Sovereign walks among the churches. And he holds the angels in his hand who represent, who are the go-between between us and him on earth.

[ 43 : 05 ] And he says to the church, fear not. Fear not. Jesus Christ is alive and is in full control of history.

As we say today, he is risen. Have you given him control of your life?

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the word. We thank you for this incredible vision. We thank you for what it shows us about Jesus.

He is everything the Gospels say that he was. He was gentle. He was forgiving. He was a friend of sinners.

He was an enemy of hypocrites. But Father, we see him now that he is also risen. He's also glorious.

[ 44 : 08 ] He is our priest who always hears us, who intercedes for us at all times. And he is our warrior. He is our king. He is our judge who judges us with mercy, but will judge those who do not repent with certainty.

And so, Father, may we spend the rest of this day and even this week remembering what we've heard, what we've seen.

May it strike us in a good way. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.