

## **John the Revelator**

60 years! That's how long it had been since I had seen Him!

Oh, so much had happened in those 60 years! He had ascended to Heaven in the clouds. He had left us to carry the message to the ends of the earth.

After he left us, we had gathered for prayer in the Upper Room, the same place He had broken bread with us, the place I had leaned into Him afraid because He had talked of leaving us; I had wondered how we could go on without Him with us physically.

There in the Upper Room the answer had come!

The Holy Spirit indwelt us and the church began that day! And all of a sudden we went from a few dozen people to a few thousand people! And every day God was using us to see others come to Christ!

Over the years hundreds of more churches were planted and thousands of more people were saved as we carried the good news all over the world!

But O what a cost we had paid for the gospel going forth to the nations!

As I speak to you I am the only one of the original apostles who is still alive. The first one to be killed was my own dear brother, James.

Herod arrested him and then executed him with the sword in Jerusalem.

Not long after that, we began to be dispersed throughout the empire. Jesus had prepared us to have trouble in the world, but it is still hard when your friends die.

As the decades went on, I would get the sad news...

Philip crucified in Asia, Matthew beheaded in Ethiopia. Mark, drug threw the streets until dead in Alexandria. Peter, crucified on an upside down cross in Rome. Paul, beheaded in Rome, by the same wicked man, Nero. Andrew, crucified on an x shaped cross. His crime: converting members of the emperor's household. Thaddeus, shot through with arrows and javelins. Bartholomew, flayed alive by pagan priests, and then crucified. Thomas, speared to death in India. Simon the Zealot, sawn in half in Persia. All of them and many more martyrs for the faith.

Oh, so much had happened in 60 years!

Over the last few years God had brought me to Ephesus as one of their pastors. And I would travel to the other churches there in Asia and encourage the people and their pastors. So many good things were happening in those churches! They had endured so many things for the sake of the gospel. But many of them had grown weary in well doing. They were in danger of losing their first love!

And then another terrible time of persecution broke out. Emperor Domitian took power, and a new persecution arose against the saints. In Pergamum they were grieving the martyrdom of Antipas. And Domitian then began having the pastors of the churches arrested and sent them along with other outspoken Christians to his prison island, Patmos. It didn't matter that I was an old man now; I too was arrested and sent to Patmos.

What a terrible place! A ragged, rocky island full of caves sticking out in the Aegean Sea. Only ten miles long and six miles wide! The sun beats down hot off the rocks. Each day we are brought out to work the rocks so Roman roads can be paved. It is hard work for any man to do, let alone a man like me now nearing a hundred years old!

Oh, how discouraged the brother pastors are. As the last apostle they look to me for comfort and hope. As we work the long hours they ask me many questions.

But there are two questions they ask the most:  
Does Jesus really care about what's happening to the churches?  
And is He really coming back?

Oh it grieved me to see the churches hurting so, and the pastors so discouraged.

I was thinking of these things early one Sunday morning. The brothers had insisted that I preach to them each Lord's Day on Patmos, before the guards would make us get back to the rocks.

I had found a little cave cut out of Mount Elias, the highest point on the island. That's where I would go on these Sunday mornings, and I would ask the Holy Spirit to give me a word from the Scriptures to speak to the people.

I couldn't help but think back about those early days with Jesus. Travelling with Him, watching Him teach and heal and change people's lives. Oh how He had

changed me- from an angry fisherman to a loving fisher of men. He used to call me and James the “thunder” boys! But now the church knew me as the apostle of love. How I longed to see Jesus again, to be freed from this decaying body and these difficult times. I envied those who were already with Him!

Had it really been 60 years now?!

I couldn't help it – As the others slept below I began to weep in the dark cave in the predawn hours!

And then I was startled as I heard a loud voice behind me, as loud as a trumpet!

It said, “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches!”

I turned and I saw seven gold lampstands fill the cave with light, and among the lampstands I saw Him!

Oh, it had been 60 years but it was Him! But He looked so much different than the man I had walked with, the man I had seen crucified. Only once before had I seen Him look like this- on the mount of transfiguration.

His head and hair were white like snow, His eyes aflame, His feet like mighty pillars, His voice as strong as a waterfall!

In His hands he held 7 stars, and from His mouth came a sharp two edged sword!  
And oh, His face filled the cave with light like the noonday sun!

Oh, when I saw Him I fell at His feet like a dead man!

He laid His right hand on me, and I felt like I was back in that upper room with Him all over again!

And He said, “Don't be afraid!” I am the first and the last! I was dead, but look- I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. Therefore write what you have seen, what is, and what will take place after this. The secret of the sevens is this: the stars I hold in my hand represent the pastors of those churches, and the lampstand represents those churches!”

Oh, He had not forgotten us!

He told me to write and then He dictated to me a message for each of the seven churches. The messages showed me He was presently aware and involved with what was happening in His churches! There were words of encouragement to us first! He reminded us of who He was, is, and will be! He talked about the things we were doing right! Only then did He address what we needed to repent of! And then He returned to telling us what blessings awaited the victors!

It made me think about the little letter in which I had written the thing that makes us victors is our faith in Jesus. Oh, I was so encouraged by the message the Spirit had given to the churches.

But Jesus had so much more in store for me in that cave!

Next He transported me in a vision to Heaven! And I saw the throne of God. The One seated on it looked like radiant jasper and carnelian stone. Completely surrounding the throne was an emerald rainbow, the most awe-inspiring rainbow I had ever seen.

Friends, even now I struggle to communicate with you the things I saw. Many of the things I saw I can only tell you what it was “like” that I saw.

Around the throne were 24 elders. From the throne came flashes of lightning and loud thunder. Before the throne was something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

In the middle of the throne were four living creatures who had eyes in the front and back. They never stop saying ‘holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and who is coming.’” As they sing, the elders would bow down and cast their crowns before the throne and praise and honor the One on the throne for His creation of all things.

Then I saw something in the hands of the One seated on the throne. It was a scroll with writing on the inside and the outside. Amazingly, it had seven seals.

Living in the empire I knew what seals were for. Official papers from Caesar had a series of seals on them to make sure no unofficial person would read the contents. The most important papers had one seal for Caesar, a second seal for the Senate, a third seal for the general of an army, and a fourth seal for the governor of the province. But this scroll had seven seals! The number of perfection –this must be the most important message ever!

An angel announced that no one in Heaven or on earth or under the earth was worthy to open the scroll or even look at it, let alone make its events come to pass. And so I wept, because no one was worthy to open the scroll.

Then one of the elders said to me, “Stop crying, the Lion from the tribe of Judah has been victorious, so He may open the scroll and its seven seals.” And then I looked, and I saw Him again, like a slaughtered Lamb standing next to the throne. He that John the Baptist had proclaimed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was also the Lion of the tribe of Judah! The Lamb and the Lion!

The elders then took up stringed instruments and bowls filled with sweet incense, and as the incense rose I saw the words to prayers I had heard prayed rising toward the throne, and they sang about the redemption Jesus had provided to people of every people group on earth. And as they sang I looked and saw thousands of thousands of peoples of every color and size and shape join them in singing something like the seven fold blessing we sing! As long as I live I will picture the saints in Heaven singing those praises!

It was very hard for me to see what came next! When I had written my gospel, unlike the other three gospels, I had written no chapter about the coming tribulation. As an old man I thought perhaps I wouldn't have to address that time that is coming in writing. But God had other plans. The next visions I saw and was told to write would wind up being 13 chapters in this Revelation. Maybe for you the thing you least want to do for God will be the very thing He leads you to do for Him!

Over those chapters I saw seals opened, trumpets blown, bowls of wrath poured out. The severity of the judgments was breathtaking. The seventh seal seemed to include all that came after, as did the seventh trumpet. This was clearly the seven year period that we had come to call Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. During it God's judgment on the sinful world system was poured out. During it I rejoiced to see so many of my fellow Jews respond to Jesus and become great witnesses. During it I rejoiced to see so many from every nation receive Christ before it was too late. This must be the best way God had determined- After thousands of years seven short years to call the world to a final answer.

Oh, but I was the one who had written “For God so loved the world,” and it was bitter in my heart to see others who would not repent, despite so many last chances from a holy and loving God. Instead they worshipped Satan and followed his two beasts, the antichrist and the false prophet.

As these visions of the tribulation unfolded, I was brought back and forth between what was happening on earth and what was happening in Heaven. And Heaven's perspective was so different than earth's. On earth men were grieving the loss of their sin based economy and killing those who turned to God. But Heaven was welcoming martyrs home and saints were praying for just judgment of Satan and his sinful system.

I thought about how much this applied to the situation I had always known living in the Roman Empire. All wicked rulers would eventually get what they deserved, whether Herod, Nero, Domitian, the coming Antichrist, or Satan himself.

Time doesn't allow me to speak of the amazing things I saw angels do during this time. They fought against demons on our behalf, they sealed and protected 144,000 witnesses during this time. They restrained weather so God's plan could unfold to take back this earth that is rightfully His!

And then I heard one of the greatest announcements I had ever heard! At the end of the great tribulation a loud voice in heaven proclaimed that the marriage supper of the Lamb had now come! I remembered back to the Upper Room, when Jesus had told us he would not taste of the wine again with us until He returned to set up His kingdom on earth!

And I saw the saints in Heaven dressed in fine linen as this moment came. Somehow the radiance of the garments corresponded to the righteous acts they had done for Jesus on earth, I know not how!

And then I saw Heaven opened, and Jesus Christ came riding out of Heaven on a white horse, and the saints of Heaven rode after Him on white horses! On His robe it said, **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS!**

And as He came to earth I saw those who had still not repented gathered against him under the leadership of the beast and the rulers of the world. But Jesus defeated them with the sword of His mouth. And he threw them alive into the Lake of Fire.

Then He bound up Satan for a thousand years. And Jesus and the saints reigned over the earth from Jerusalem, as the prophets had said. It was how the earth always should have been! At the end of that time there was another battle, this time it was led by Satan and included whoever among those born during the thousand years was foolish enough to join him. As they marched on Jerusalem, fire from Heaven consumed them.

And then, hallelujah, I saw Satan thrown into the Lake of Fire!

Then I saw all of those who had ever rejected Jesus stand before God on His great white throne of judgment. And the books of their deeds were opened in God's sight. These are the ones who were not in the Lamb's Book of Life, the record of all people who turned to Christ in faith. I couldn't help but think about how sad it was that they had not repented and turned to Jesus. Instead of receiving His blood to cover their sins, they were standing before God based on their own merit.

And every one of them trusting in themselves or something other than Christ for salvation was thrown into the Lake of Fire, forever separated from God. How heartbreaking it was for me to see! Why wouldn't they repent? He had given them so many opportunities- positive ones, negative ones, so many chances!

But thank God the vision didn't end there!

Next I saw the New Heaven and the New Earth and the New Jerusalem coming down from God! And oh the wonderful things I saw the saints experiencing there! It was breathtaking beyond description! You can read about it in the book I've written!

But the best things about the New Earth were what wasn't there- No Satan, no sin, no persecution, no death! Only God with His people experiencing eternal life!

Well, the visions ended there, but remember, I am the one who wrote "for God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life!"

Friend you don't have to go to the Lake of Fire!

The Spirit bids you come to Jesus and live!

The Bride of Christ, the church, bids you come to Jesus and live!

Even though there are many who haven't responded yet, Lord, you have given the world enough opportunities:

We bid you to come back for us this very day!

May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints until that day, whatever they are facing!           Amen!           Come Lord Jesus!