

Revelation 1:12-17a

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Now John, the disciple who Jesus loved, meets the messenger, who turns out to be the risen and glorified Jesus. Although John was quite close to Jesus during His earthly ministry, when he meets Jesus in this glorified state he falls at His feet like a dead man.

Having heard the voice behind him, John naturally turns to view the speaker. We now learn why the speaker chose to show up behind John, for when John sees the speaker, he falls down *like a dead man*. John turned to see the voice that was speaking with him, and when he turned he saw quite a scene. It was likely that while dwelling on Patmos in exile, John's living conditions were not lush. Tradition tells us he dwelt in a cave. But now John sees an elaborate setting. *After turning, John saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands he saw one like a son of man*. This *son of man* turns out to be Jesus, as will become clear in verses 17 and 18.

The phrase *son of man* was a favorite term Jesus used to describe Himself. In total, the four gospels use the term Son of Man eighty-four times. All but two of these occurrences are found in Jesus' own words. But every occurrence of Son of Man in the gospels is either directly or indirectly attributed and applied to Jesus. The prophet Daniel also describes a Son of Man sitting on the throne of God ([see our Tough Topics article on "The Son of Man"](#)). It seems likely John is telling us here "this must be Jesus," although it also seems clear the risen Jesus does not create in John a sense of warm familiarity that might be typical of such a reunion. This fits with the theme of Revelation: God and Jesus are in control of all human events. Jesus is no longer just a servant. He is now the rightful King, awaiting installation until the proper time.

The *seven golden lampstands* represent the *seven churches*, as we will be told in verse 20. That Jesus is standing *in the middle of the lampstands* is probably symbolic of the fact that Jesus is an integral part of these churches. They are a part of the Body of Christ, and therefore an extension of Himself.

This *Son of Man* was *clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and wrapped around the chest with a golden sash*. This might be a description of a royal arraignment. John is describing the risen Lord, who now reigns. Further, Jesus' *head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire*. Clearly Jesus' appearance had changed dramatically from when John last saw Him. John was one of three disciples who saw Jesus transfigured on a mountain, and viewed Him in a glorified state (Matthew 17:1-2). The description there includes Jesus turning bright and his clothes becoming white, but the three disciples there with Him do not fall down like dead men, and there is no *gold sash*. It is also interesting that John did not include this event in his gospel, but ended up with an elevated version of that event that he now records.

It seems reasonable to presume that the difference stems from the fact that now Jesus has risen from the dead, defeated death, and has ascended to the throne of His Father, taking the authority of reigning over all the earth as a human king (Revelation 3:21). The appearance we are seeing

now is the appearance of The King. The hair of *white, like snow* might represent age and wisdom. In Daniel 7, the “Ancient of Days” is described with a similar appearance, and is clearly God on His throne in heaven. The *eyes like a flame of fire* might remind us that Jesus sees all, and can judge even to the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:2). The *sash of gold* probably indicates royalty.

John continues with the description of Jesus, telling us that *His feet were like burnished bronze when it has been heated to a glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters*. Jesus’ *voice* would have been very recognizable to John had He used his earthly voice. Now, His voice was *like the sound of many waters*. The *sound of many waters* refers to the sound of ocean waves. John is on an island, and hears such sounds constantly. In this case, John includes the qualifier *many* to combine with *waters*. He might have intended to indicate that the voice seemed to come from all directions, and have an immense depth, which could convey Jesus’ omnipotence.

The description of Jesus’ *feet* being like *burnished bronze when it has been heated to glow in a furnace* is particularly descriptive. Perhaps John had seen a blacksmith working on bronze, having heated it to a flaming orange glow prior to hammering it into the desired shape. In the Bible, *feet* are often connected with dominion. Rulers would often walk through their land, with the idea being that they had dominion over all the land upon which their feet trod. This is likely part of the reason Abraham toured the land of Canaan; he was claiming dominion based on God’s promised grant of land to his descendants (Genesis 15). This was symbolized when the people entered the land, as God parted the Jordan River when the priest’s feet touched the water (Joshua 3:14-17).

It was also customary for a conquering king to place their feet on the necks of those they vanquished, as a demonstration of their dominion (Joshua 10:24). God states through David in the psalms that He will make Jesus’ enemies a “footstool for Your feet” (Acts 2:35). At times, God instructs people to remove their sandals as a sign of reverence, because the ground they are standing upon is holy (Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:15). This would be an act of submission. Similar to John’s reaction to this regal figure; John *fell at His feet like a dead man*, which is an act of complete submission.

Believers in the early church laid offerings at the feet of the Apostles, indicating that they had shifted dominion of those funds to the Apostles (Acts 4:35). The feet are also used as a metaphor for action (Romans 3:15, 10:15). It seems Jesus’ feet of *burnished bronze* represent feet that will take whatever action He decides to take, and no one can stop Him, as well as representing complete dominion. As John already stated in 1:6, “to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.” Because of His faithfulness as a human, God has placed Jesus as the authority over all the earth (1 Corinthians 15:27; Revelation 3:21; Philippians 2:5-9).

Also in the scene John saw, *in His right hand Jesus held seven stars*. Jesus will tell John in verse 20 that “the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.” Also John reports that *out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword*. This pictures Jesus as one who speaks what is true. The sword is used in scripture as an image for truth, and truth comes through the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). John records in his gospel that God’s word is truth (John 17:17). It also likely

represents Jesus as the great Judge, the one who will bring justice to the earth. The sword is a symbol for justice (Romans 13:1-4) and Hebrews 4:12 states that:

“...the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

(Hebrews 4:12)

Jesus' *face was like the sun shining in its strength*. We will be told in Revelation 22:5 that in the new earth, the Lord God will illuminate the earth, such that there will be no need of the sun.

John took all this in, in a brief moment, because he says that *when he saw Jesus in this state, he fell at His feet like a dead man*. The act of falling at Jesus' *feet* is the practical outcome of a mortal coming face to face with the glorified Jesus, as well as a symbolic reality that John is recognizing Jesus' authority and dominion. John is a willing and obedient servant of Jesus.

That John had this reaction when he saw Jesus is remarkable, since John's relationship with Jesus was particularly intimate while Jesus walked the earth. To the point that Jesus placed His own mother into John's care as He hung on the cross (John 19:27). But when John saw the risen and glorified Jesus, his reaction was to fall *at His feet like a dead man*.

As Philippians 2:5-11 tells us, Jesus left His authority and glory in heaven and came to earth, taking on the form of a human in obedience to His Father, and learned obedience. He was tempted as we are tempted (Hebrews 4:15). But now Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father, and has been granted the earth as His reward for faithful obedience. As we will see later in Revelation, Jesus will take possession of the earth in like manner to Joshua taking possession of the Promised Land. Interestingly, “Joshua” is the English translation of the Hebrew name Yeshua, while “Jesus” is the Greek version of Yeshua, which means Joshua and Jesus had the same name. Jesus is the second Adam (Romans 5:14), the second Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) the second Joshua (Revelation 19:11-16) and the second David (Matthew 1:1) who will reign on the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7:13). To even Jesus' closest friend on earth, when this majesty was manifested (likely only in part) John was overwhelmed.

This is important to consider. As Jesus states toward the end of Revelation: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to reward each one as his work deserves” (Revelation 22:12). Facing Jesus, the judge who judges in absolute truth, will be a serious moment. John tells us in his epistle that it is a cause for fear, unless we are living as Jesus would have us live in this life (1 John 4:17-18).

Biblical Text

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And after turning I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and wrapped around the chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze when it has been heated to a glow in a

furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 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. 17a When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.