

# Revelation 1:9-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-1/revelation-19-11/>

*John speaks again and describes his circumstance when receiving the vision, and the introduction to the vision, which was directed toward the seven churches of Asia.*

After hearing directly from God, now John picks the narrative up again. He first describes himself as *your brother and fellow participant in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus*. That John calls himself a *brother* to those in the *seven churches* is consistent with John's assertion in verse 5 that Jesus has "released us from our sins by His blood." All are believers, therefore John is their *brother* in Christ. It is also consistent with the statement in verse 1 that this letter is addressed to God's "bond-servants."

John continues with the bond he has with those receiving the letter. He is a *fellow participant* with his fellow believers in the *seven churches*. John is specifically a *fellow participant in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus*. Of this list of three, John first names himself a *fellow participant in the tribulation in Jesus*. The word translated *tribulation* can also be rendered affliction, trouble, anguish, or persecution. It is the difficulties that come by virtue of following Jesus. It might be rejection by the world, which a believer living as a faithful witness ought to expect, since believers are to be at war against the world (Ephesians 6:12). It could also be persecution, which any believer living faithfully ought to expect (2 Timothy 3:12). In the immediate context, Christianity was an illegal religion and any Christian was liable to be persecuted. It was likely that they all shared the threat of Roman persecution.

The second item John lists as something in which he is a *fellow participant* is the *kingdom* in Jesus. Every believer is a citizen of God's *kingdom*. Not all citizens steward their citizenship well, and there are immense consequences for the actions of each believer, as we shall see. But all believers share citizenship of the *kingdom* of Jesus.

Lastly, John states that he is a *fellow participant* as a *brother* in God's family through his *perseverance in Jesus*. The word translated *perseverance* is most often translated "patience." Most translations of this passage render it "patience," "endurance," or "patient endurance." Every believer shares in having to wait for their hopes and desires to be fulfilled. We all long for the world to be made right. For justice to prevail. For evil to be vanquished. And yet we must be patient. God simply calls us to be faithful witnesses. We cannot fix the world by ourselves. God will do that in His timing.

John now gives some historical background as to how he received this revelation. He states that he *was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*. The *island of Patmos* is an island in the Aegean Sea near Greece. The other ten faithful disciples who served with John were martyred by being put to death, as Jesus foretold (John 21:18-22). John's martyrdom was not physical death, but rather the separation of exile to Patmos.

John was exiled to Patmos *because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*. John was punished because he gave a good *testimony of Jesus and the word of God*. It is likely he was arrested and exiled by Roman authorities because Christianity was an illegal religion in the Roman Empire. The word translated *testimony* is the Greek word “martyria,” the root of the English word “martyr.” John suffered as a faithful “martyria” (witness) for *Jesus and the word of God*. That made him a worthy messenger for this revelation to God’s servants exhorting them to also be faithful witnesses and not fear death, exile, or persecution.

When John received the Revelation he *was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and* stated that he *heard behind him a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, “Write on a scroll what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”*

The *Lord’s day* is not specified. John was Jewish, so he might have been observing the Sabbath. At some point believers began to honor Jesus on the day of His resurrection on the first day of the week, and that eventually became the *Lord’s day*. The Bible makes it clear that it is not a priority what days are honored, but what actions we take and what our motives are for those actions, which might be why this day is left undesignated (Galatians 4:8-11).

John does not describe what it meant to be *in the Spirit*. This phrase appears elsewhere. Paul resolved to go to Jerusalem “in the Spirit.” This seems to be a decision Paul made after an internal conversation with God (Acts 19:21). Jesus describes David prophesying about Him in the Psalms as speaking “in the Spirit.” This seems to describe a person acting in submission to and under the direction of God (Matthew 22:43). Romans 8:9 says all believers are “in the Spirit” since the Spirit of God dwells within them. Ephesians 2:22 uses the phrase “in the Spirit” to describe the growing unity of a group of believers, growing in unity of mission and purpose as a dwelling for Christ. Peter speaks of Jesus being made alive “in the Spirit” referring to His resurrection.

Later in Revelation, John speaks of being transported to other places “in the Spirit” (Revelation 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). This indicates being under complete control of the Holy Spirit. So likely, whatever John meant by being *in the Spirit*, it referred to being under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit in some manner.

John’s contemplation *in the Spirit* was interrupted by *a loud voice, like the sound of a trumpet*. Imagine the difficulty of describing in words a supernatural vision to people who were not present. John might have meant that the voice was *loud* like *a trumpet* is loud, although he could also have meant the voice had audio characteristics of a *trumpet*.

The *voice* came from *behind* him, and made a direct command to *Write on a scroll what you see, and send it to the seven churches*. The Greek word translated *scroll* is “biblion,” which means “book.” We get our word “Bible” from this word. The translators likely chose to translate it as *scroll* because that was the common format for writings of this nature in that era.

It is interesting that the command is for John to *write* what he sees. In this passage, John writes what he heard, and will include along the way many other things he heard, although that was not

commanded. It seems reasonable to conclude that the much more difficult task would be to communicate in writing the incredible things John is about to *see*. God typically does not give commands for behavior we are likely to do anyway. All of God's commands are in our best interest, but often that best interest is not apparent. In this case, God wants to make sure John is prepared to write descriptions of the quite fantastic things God is about to show him. It seems to be considered a given that John will also write what he hears.

The *voice* lists the *seven churches*: *Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea*. The word translated *churches* is "ekklesia." This word was used for civic gatherings of Greek citizens, such as when they gathered to vote. It means "an assembling." The book of Ecclesiastes is taken from this Greek word. It is so-named because the Hebrew word translated "preacher" means "assembler." Ecclesiastes is an assembling of philosophical perspectives on life as a human on this earth.

The original *churches* were often simply groups of believers who assembled in someone's home, a fact noted numerous times in the scriptures (Acts 2:46; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). This makes sense given that Christianity was illegal. In Rome, Christians also met in the catacombs, a series of underground burial tunnels, where their services would blend with various pagan practices, thus avoiding detection and arrest. Christian churches probably did not typically meet in dedicated buildings until after Christianity was decriminalized by the Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D.

It is probable that there were a number of houses in each city that hosted church gatherings, but Revelation speaks of them as one church for that city. This underscores the biblical understanding of "church" as any assembling of believers who meet to stir up one another to love and good works, and remind one another that the Day of Judgment is approaching, in order to maintain an eternal perspective on life (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Jesus will dictate a specific letter to each of these *churches*, located in these seven cities. The fact that God chose to speak to *seven churches* is likely symbolic. The number *seven* represents completion, as God created the earth in seven days. This listing of *seven churches* is likely comprehensive on a number of levels. It seems that each church represents the prevailing spirit of the church during various intervals of time during the history of the church. It is also clear that these *seven churches* all existed within the Roman province of Asia at the time John received this vision. Thus it seems reasonable to presume that the various spiritual states and spiritual challenges addressed in Revelation also represent the spectrum of church cultures and challenges that any church might face at any time.

## **Biblical Text**

**I, John, your brother and fellow participant in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write on a scroll what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."**