

I Hold the Keys of Death and Hades

1: 17-20

DIG: How does John react to the vision and the voice of Christ? Why do you think John reacted as he did? Why does Yeshua touch him? Why is that significant? Why do you think Jesus told John **not to be afraid**? What was John told to do? How would the titles of Messiah be assuring to the believers receiving this letter? Who are **the seven stars**? What is **Hades**? How can one divide up the book of Revelation based upon 1:19?

REFLECT: How would you react if you saw what John saw? Do you think you would **be afraid**? Are you **afraid** today? Do you know and adore the awesome, glorious, powerful Jesus seen in the Scriptures, or have you adopted a culturally appropriate, mild-mannered, user-friendly Yeshua after your own imagination? How should John's portrayal of Jesus affect my attitude in prayer? Am I too flippant or casual when I approach Him? Read Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10. According to them, what is the one thing that is essential for deepening our understanding of obedience to God's Word? Ask yourself, "Do I have the kind of respect and reverence necessary to have true wisdom and understanding?"

The vision of the risen Lord was overwhelming to John, even if he had been the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 20:2). John - the evangelist, theologian, elder, apostle, and select member of Messiah's inner circle - was instantly reduced to a trembling sinner lying powerless before the King of kings and Lord of lords. In short, the vision terrified him.

Like the prophets of old when they came into the presence of God, John fell at His feet as though dead (Joshua 5:14; Judges 13:20; Ezekiel 1:28; Daniel 8:17). Yet in the midst of John's heart-stopping terror, the unsurpassed Son of God stooped down, reached out with His nail-pierced hand, and comforted His old friend. Jesus had done the same thing so long ago at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:7). And once again, Christ placed His right hand on John and comforted him. His touch is always comforting and assuring. Helping the elderly apostle to his feet, He told John: **Do not be afraid** (1:17a). Similar words of assurance were given to those overwhelmed by God's presence throughout the Bible (Genesis 15:1, 26:24; Psalm 25:1-22; Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 14:27, 17:7, 28:10).

The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; He is my Helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies (Psalm 118:6-7).

The comfort **Yeshua** offered was based upon who **He** is and the authority **He** possesses. First, **He** identified **Himself** as **I AM**, the covenant name of **ADONAI**. Next, the **LORD** revealed **Himself** as the **I AM** to Moses at the burning bush (**Exodus 3:14**). Then **Jesus** told the Jewish religious leaders of **His** day: **Before Abraham was born, I AM**. The fact that **He** claimed to be **God** was not lost on **His** detractors because **they** picked up stones to stone **Him**, punishment for blasphemy (**John 8:58**).

Secondly, **Jesus** identified **Himself** as **the First and the Last**, a title used of **ADONAI** in the TaNaKh (**Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12**). When other gods have come and gone, only **He** remains. The **LORD** existed before them and **He** will continue to exist eternally, long after they have been forgotten. **Jesus'** application of that title to **Himself** is another powerful proof of **His** deity.

Thirdly, **Messiah** claimed that **He** was **the Living One**. **He** proclaimed: **I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever!** This would provide tremendous assurance to those persecuted First Century believers who were facing an unspeakable death in the Roman Coliseum. The Greek text literally reads, *I became dead*. **The Living One**, who could never die, became a man and died. As **Peter** explains it, **Christ was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit (First Peter 3:18)**. **He** died in **His** humanness without ceasing to live as **God**.³⁰ In **His** death and resurrection, **Yeshua the Messiah** wrestled away from Satan any authority the devil may have had over **death (Hebrews 2:14-15)**.³¹

As the eternal **I AM, the First and the Last, the Living One**, **Yeshua** alone has **the keys of death and Hades (1:17b-18)**, that is, authority over **death** and the place of the dead (**Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14; John 5:21; First Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 2:14**), not the Roman Emperor. **Keys** were a symbol of authority in Jewish thought (**Matthew 16:19**). Both the believer's **death** and resurrection are in **His** hands. Following the revelation of **Christ** in glory, **John** was again commanded to **write**.

Like a reporter in the midst of a historic event, **John** began frantically recording the vision of **Jesus** still impressed on his mind. **Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later (1:19)**. This appears to be the divine outline of **Revelation**. **John** was told to write about the vision of **the Messiah** that **he** had just **seen** in **Chapter 1**. Then he was to write the present message, the **now** history, of **Christ** to **seven churches** in **Chapters 2 and 3**. Finally, the main purpose of the book being prophetic, **what**

will take place later. John was to introduce the events preceding, culminating, and following the Second Coming in **Chapters 4 to 22.**³² This constitutes a divine outline of the book.

Yeshua helped John and all of us by interpreting two symbols from that vision: **the stars and the lampstands.** He said: **The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (1:20).** With one exception (12:1), wherever the word star is used symbolically in the Bible, it is always a symbol of an angel.³³ Therefore, **the mystery of the seven stars** is revealed to be **the angels of the seven churches,** and **the seven golden lampstands** were **the churches** themselves.³⁴ This fact is hardly surprising in view of the innumerable company of **angels** (Hebrews 12:22) and their assignment as ministering **angels** to those **who will inherit salvation** (Hebrews 1:14). **Angels** are present in the assemblies during their services (1 Corinthians 11:10) and are intensely interested in their protection (1 Cor 4:9; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Timothy 3:16 5:21; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 1:12). Admittedly, the idea of an angel protecting each body of believers is one that stretches our thinking. Nonetheless, it seems to be the teaching of **God's** word here.³⁵ Before revealing the tremendous prophetic scenes of **chapters 4-22,** Christ first gave a personal message to each of **the seven churches** with obvious practical applications to believers of every age (2:1 to 3:22).

But first we need to look at **two principles** that we can take from John's breath-taking experience on Patmos. **First, to better our understanding of who the Messiah really is, the sooner we'll respond in submission and obedience.** John said: **When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead (1:17a).** We sometimes hear people talk about meeting **Messiah** face-to-face, giving **Him** a big hug and hanging out with **Him.** **Jesus** is viewed as their pal. But **John** didn't see it that way after his brief glimpse of **Messiah's** unveiled glory; **he** was on **his** face worshipping the risen Lord. **Second, the greater our willingness to submit to Christ, the deeper His revealed truths will be to us.** No, you won't receive divine visions in the future. No, **Yeshua Himself** will not give you a message for your pastor or messianic rabbi. **John's** deep understanding of **the Lord,** led **him** to a complete submission to **His** authority. In turn, this led to a deepening understanding of **Yeshua** and **His** plans for the future. As we open **God's** Word and encounter **Jesus,** our attitudes of humility and submission will lead us into a deeper relationship with **Him.**

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).