



looks like physically. Ancient Christians were only concerned about Jesus from spiritual perspectives. This reflected the Jewish heritage of die-emphasis on physical appearance in favor of the spiritual side of an individual as being the primary point of interest. It is not until centuries later when the side of Greek culture that glorified the physical body prevailed inside the church that physical depictions of Christ begin showing up mostly in art and sculpture but also in the written literature.

What then is it that we are supposed to see from this picture about Christ?¹ Just to see the symbolic picture with its rather gross portrayal of Christ is to miss the point altogether. Symbols are pointers! They do not call attention to themselves, but rather to a deeper reality beyond the symbol itself. For some ways of thinking, getting past the symbol at its surface level meaning is enormously challenging. For others, however, with viv-

¹An interesting survey of the available graphic art depictions (numbering several hundred) of Christ in Revelation chapter one reveals a huge difficulty in artists down through the centuries, and particularly more recent graphic artists, in being true to the biblical text details, rather than using the standard thirty year old European Jewish face of Jesus that dominates most artistic drawings of Jesus' appearance over the past two centuries. Albrecht Durer (the above graphic) comes closer to the biblical text than most everyone else.

id imaginations getting past the symbol to the deeper meaning is much easier. The challenge here is correctly interpreting the signals contained in the symbol that accurate deeper meaning is perceived. Thus it takes a good balance between imaginative thinking and careful analytical thinking to stay on track in the interpretive process.

Hopefully this very apocalyptic portrait of Christ will come through for you not only in proper understanding but also in the dramatic, emotionally provoking manner that apocalyptic symbolism intends to generate. From this picture we need to see a Christ who reigns supremely but stands also in pastoral concern over all His people in His churches. This awesome power serves to sustain and under gird His people especially in times of their suffering and hardship.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As is usually true but even more significant here, careful analysis of both the historical and the literary aspects of the scripture text is essential for proper understanding of the spiritual truths that emerge from the passage.

Historical Aspects:

The historical dimensions of this passage are challenging. Internally, the place markers push us as readers into an apocalyptic world where Christ stands in the middle of seven lampstands while holding seven stars out of the heavens in one hand. When he speaks his voice is so loud that the sound is deafening like that of a flooding sea in the midst of a huge storm. The young man Jesus of Nazareth now stands as a centuries old man like the Ancient of Days portrayed in some of the prophecies of the Old Testament. We, in this portrait, move out of a normal time / place sphere in the natural world into this strange new apocalyptic realm of reality.

Everything in that world possesses heightened reality and the absolute limits of existence in the extremes. For those of us in western culture this apocalyptic reality possesses some of the tones of the science fiction movies that have been popular over the past half century or so. The big difference, however, is that the science fiction world is imaginary, but this apocalyptic picture is reality although clothed in symbolic expression. Comprehending that reality is our challenge.

External History.

Regarding possible sources for this material in vv. 12-16, different elements in the picture are drawn from a variety of imagery background coming out of the Old Testament and familiar to Jews in the

first century from having seen such items in the Jerusalem temple before its destruction some twenty to thirty years before the writing of this book. The Jewish longing for the Jerusalem temple “in the good old days” prior to 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed the temple, served as a backdrop for John’s picturing of the Heavenly temple where the Lamb of God reigned supremely at the right hand of the Father. The earthly temple of the Jews had indeed been destroyed by the powerful armies of the Roman emperor, but the Heavenly temple stood completely intact and untouched by any earthly power. Additionally, the prophetic writings will provide another major source for the imagery found in this passage.

The history of the transmission of this text portion reflects a relatively stable reading of the text with few variations surfacing.

The editors of *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) concluded that among the existing variations of wording only one had enough significance to impact the translation of the passage. In verse fifteen the spelling of πεπυρωμένης, *refined*, is altered to πεπυρωμένω or to πεπυρωμένοι.² This was prompted by the lack of agreement of πεπυρωμένης in case spelling with anything in the sentence.³ For these copyists the existing grammar error needed correcting, but they were uncertain as to whether the participle should modify οἱ πόδες, *feet* (πεπυρωμένοι), or whether καμίνω, *furnace* (πεπυρωμένω). Logically the participle goes with either ‘feet’ or ‘bronze.’ The resulting idea is that of *feet like bronze that have been refined in a furnace*. Both the external evidence as well as internal considerations favor the text reading πεπυρωμένης in

²{C} πεπυρωμένης A C // πεπυρωμένω κ 205 209 2050 2053 2062 it^{ar, eig, h, t} vg cop^{sa, bo} arm eth Irenaeus^{lat}, arm; Cyprian Maternus Apringius Primasius Beatus // πεπυρωμένοι 1006 1611 1841 1854 2329 2344 2351 Byz [P 046] syr^{hmg} Andrew; Victorinus-Pettau Tyconius

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus)*; *The Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus)* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

³“Although πεπυρωμένης is without syntactical concord in the sentence, it was preferred by the Committee not only because it is rather well attested (A C Primasius) but chiefly because it best explains the origin of the other readings. In order to remove the grammatical difficulty some copyists read πεπυρωμένω (κ 2053 the ancient versions al), which qualifies καμίνω, and other copyists read πεπυρωμένοι (P 046 most minuscules), which qualifies οἱ πόδες.” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 663-64.]

spite of its grammatical incorrectness.⁴

In the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed) some fourteen places surface where variations in the wording of the text exist among the existing manuscripts.⁵ Careful analysis



⁴“The variant readings have little significance for translation since the differences are mostly matters of style or grammar rather than of meaning. The feminine genitive participle πεπυρωμένης does not agree in grammatical form with either the noun πόδες (feet) or καμίνω (furnace). But it has rather good manuscript support and best explains the origin of the other readings. In order to remove the grammatical difficulty, some copyists read πεπυρωμένω, which qualifies καμίνω, and other copyists read πεπυρωμένοι, which qualifies οἱ πόδες. (For a more thorough discussion of the grammatical difficulties of the reading in the text, see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 65–66, 96.)” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 527-28.]

⁵Offenbarung 1,12

* εκει 1006. 1841. 2351 M^K (The Greek adverb ἐκεῖ is inserted after ἐπέστρεψα)

* –λησεν 1611 M^A (The imperfect ἐλάλει [was speaking] is replaced by the Aorist ἐλαλήσεν [spoke] or the present λάλει [speaks])

| λαλει A

Offenbarung 1,13

* μεσον κ (μέσον replaces ἐν μέσω)

* επτα κ M lat (ἑπτὰ is added before λυχιῶν)

| txt A C P 1611. 2050 al h sy co; Ir^{lat} Cyp Vic Prim

* ομοιωμα A; Ir^{arm} (ὁμοιον is replaced by ὁμοιωμα)

* υιω A C 1006. 1611. 1854. 2053. 2062. 2351 M^A; Ir^{lat} (ὄϊϙ replaces υἱόν)

| txt κ 1841. 2050. 2329 M^K

*¹ μαζοις A 1006. 1841 al (μαστοῖς is replaced by μαζοῖς)

Offenbarung 1,14

* 1 1611 pc (λευκαῖ ὡς ἔριον λευκόν is reduced down to either λευκαῖ or ὡς ἔριον λευκόν)

| 2-4 2053. 2062 pc

Offenbarung 1,15

* εκ καμινου 2329 h; Cypv.l. Prim (ἐν καμίνω is replaced by εκ καμίνου)

* –μενω κ 2050. 2053. 2062 pc; Ir^{arm, lat} vid (πεπυρωμένης is replaced with either πεπυρωμένω or πεπυρωμένοι)

| –μενοι M sy^{hmg}

| txt A C

Offenbarung 1,16

* κ. ειχεν κ* 2344 pc latt (καὶ ἔχων is replaced either by καὶ ἔχει or καὶ)

| καὶ εχει Ir^{lat}

| καὶ A

* 1 3 2 1006. 1841. 2351 al (δεξιῶ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ is re-sequenced)

| χ. αυτ. τη δεξ. 046. 2329

* –ρες P98 A pc (ἀστέραις is replaced with ἀστέρες)

*¹ 4 1-3 κ (ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει is re-sequenced)

| ὡς ο ηλ. φαινων 1611; Ir^{lat}

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 633-34.]

of these variations reveals what is usually discovered, they represent either stylistic efforts to correct or improve the Greek expression, or else accidental errors due either to not seeing the original form correctly or from not hearing it pronounced correctly by the scribe reading the text in the copying process.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in full confidence that it represents the original wording of the passage.

Internal History. As noted above, the internal place and time markers for vv. 12-16 thrust us into the apocalyptic thought world, rather than into the material world on earth. When John turned to see the source of the heavenly voice, he first saw seven lampstands and a very old, strange looking man standing in the middle of them (note the graphic on page two). But from all indications in the text, the voice he heard did not come from the old man he saw. It is not until verse 17 that the old man speaks to John, and repeats what the trumpet like voice had said to John. But more on that in the exegesis below.

The important aspect here is to not forget the nature of this kind of visionary experience. This ancient kind of religious experience will push the individual into a very different realm of experience in which bodiless voices will be seen as well as heard, sur-realistic depictions of spiritual beings are the norm, the astrological heavens can signify things on earth etc. This is especially true of the ancient Israelite description of such experiences all through the Old Testament, and is particularly true of the eighth century prophets onward. And one must never overlook the other aspect that such depictions are found extensively in non-Jewish writings reflecting other religious traditions in the world leading up to the beginning of Christianity. This abundance of writings in the centuries prior to the composition of Revelation provided John with a wealth of terminology, imagery, and writing strategy to utilize in presenting a written description of his own spiritual experience.

These kinds of 'apocalyptic visionary' experiences quickly move beyond the logical and rational, from a human way of thinking.⁶ The element of mystery plays

⁶An inherent danger here emerges in the history of interpretation. Later interpreters of the apocalyptic materials in the Bible tend to fall prey to a dogmatism which believes that 'apocalyptic visions' with an inherent lack of logical reasoning constitute a superior form of revelation that bypasses common sense and reason. Ironically through applying "common sense" reasoning to conclude the meaning of the irrational symbols, an elitist interpretive mindset develops with occasional extreme dogmatic claims of exclusive possession of divine truth. Alternative interpretations are then seen as heresy and signals of 'false prophets' who do not know God.

More on this will follow at the end of this series of studies on the biblical text with an overview history of interpretation of the

a significant role in the depiction of such religious experience, which is created in large part by the bizarre imagery, unusual grammar expressions etc.⁷ God is far too profound and awesome to ever be limited to strictly rational and logical thinking and action from a human standpoint. Our challenge is to study and analyze as far as is possible, but while realizing that many aspects of the descriptions of visionary experience will jump way beyond human reasoning and logical analysis.⁸ This is where skepticism usually sets in with modern western ways of thinking. But to move toward skepticism when we reach the limits of our logical analysis is to take a seriously wrong turn. The appropriate direction to go at this point is celebration and reverence in the presence of a God who is far too big for us to comprehend with our minds. It is here that the bottom line value of the apocalyptic vision is realized. The limited analysis helps some, but we can never grasp what John was trying to help us see by just analyzing his writings. We must embrace willingly the element of mystery always present in these visions.

Thus out of this perspective the time and place markers inside vv. 12-16 will be treated in the Exegesis section below.

Literary Aspects:

Not only introductory history aspects need to be put on the table, but the literary aspects are important as well.

Genre: Clearly vv. 12-16 stand as the center point of John's apocalyptic vision in vv. 9-20. Foundational is the prophetic vision out of which usually comes a prophetic oracle.⁹ The apocalyptic vision emerges book of Revelation.

⁷Such writing strategy stands in sharp contrast to 'Christian' Gnostic writings beginning in the second century AD. In this later approach attempts to sound profoundly spiritual came through using nonsensical grammar expressions, irrational logic etc. and was intended as a 'covering up' of the mysterious 'gospel' of the Gnostics to outsiders. This supposedly true spiritual message could be understood only by the initiates who had been given the secret gnosis in a highly emotionally charged religious experience that was confirmed by speaking in tongues that no human could understand.

⁸One should clearly distinguish between 'mystery' and 'mysticism' in biblical and theological thinking. "Mystery" is simply a level of reality that transcends normal logical categories of thinking. "Mysticism" is typically a religious movement that prides itself on functioning mostly at the "beyond reasoning" level in an other worldly manner of living. Mystery shows up in scripture, but not mysticism.

⁹"Visions and auditions are reported by the OT prophets (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1-3; Micah ben Imlah 1 Kgs 22:19-23) though the question of prophetic ecstasy is debated. When the prophets speak in Yahweh's name, there is no identification with God on the part of the prophet, for the formula 'Thus says Yahweh' is clearly a messenger's formula (Gen 32:4). Ezekiel's frequent use of 'like' or 'the likeness of' (esp. chap. 1) in the descriptions of his visions could

from this with special apocalyptic tones and images. The oracle may or may not emerge from the vision; usually less often than in the prophetic vision.

be an indication of the ineffability of his experience (cf. Daniel 7, in which the use of 'like' is a literary device). As far as the noetic aspect is concerned, the prophetic experience is certainly thought to mediate a specific kind of knowledge, though evidence does not permit a definite conclusion as to the exact character of the inspirational experience. In some cases the prophets may remain passive, while God speaks to them, but there are also cases when ecstasy is prompted by music (1 Sam 10:5) or when the prophet waits for a message (Hab 2:1; Isa 21:6). Mystics are often reported to quiver; there are also examples of anesthesia or paralysis. One can note Ezekiel's lying immovable for a considerable time (Ezek 4:4) or of passages such as Jer 4:19, which speaks of pain and anguish, but the reaction could just as well refer to the contents of his vision rather than being the result of a mystic experience (cf. Isa 21:3-4). On the whole, the prophets are never described as introspective, and they are always aware of the distance between them and Yahweh. Moreover, the biblical texts do not provide us with adequate information concerning the mental state of the prophets." [Helmer Ringgren, "Mysticism" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 945.]

Literary Setting: The setting of vv. 12-16 is easy to determine. It stands as the center of the apocalyptic vision in vv. 9-20 with vv. 9-11 setting up the vision and vv. 17-20 depicting John's reaction to the vision. This apocalyptic vision comes as the third major element of the introductory chapters with the Prologue in vv. 1-8 first introducing the nature of the book as an Ἀποκάλυψις (vv. 1-3) followed by the epistolary Praescriptio (vv. 4-5a) affirming John's close empathy for his readers, a Doxology of praise to Christ (vv. 5b-6) and two Prophetic Oracles (vv. 7-8) defining another aspect of the nature of the document.

Additionally, this apocalyptic vision serves to set up the seven letters to the churches in chapters two and three. Elements from this vision will be repeated in each of these seven letters.

Literary Structure: The internal arrangement of ideas is reflected below in the block diagram of the Greek text so that the inner connection of ideas is visually apparent.

12 And
14 **I turned around**
 in order to see the sound
 which was speaking with me,
 and
 having turned around
15 **I saw seven golden lampstands,**
13 and
 in the middle of the lampstands
16 - --- **(someone)**
 like the Son of Man
 clothed
 down to his feet
 and
 girded with a golden sash
 across his chest.

14 But
17 **his head and his hair (were) white**
 as white wool
 as snow
 and
18 **his eyes (were)**
 as a flame of fire,
15 and
19 **his feet (were)**
 like burnished bronze,
 refined as in a furnace
 and
20 **his voice (was)**
 as a sound from many waters
16 and
 having...seven stars
 in his right hand
 and

----- a sharp two-edged sword coming out

and

21 his face (was)

as the sun shines

in its power.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

Statement 14 introduces the segment with an emphasis on John turning around in order to see where the voice was coming from. Then statements 15 - 21 describe what he saw after turning around. First, he saw seven golden lampstands (#15) and also an old man looking like the Son of Man (#s 16-21). What follows is a rapid fire description of the appearance of this figure. The description includes his clothes, his head and face along with his feet. His loud voice is included in the description. Obviously this is a highly symbolic depiction of the risen Christ in apocalyptic categories stressing His power and sovereignty.

Exegesis of the Text:

The natural division of the text is on (1) John seeking to see the sources of the voice (v. 12a) and (2) what John saw upon turning around toward the sound of the voice (vv. 12b-16). Two central items are described: the seven lampstands (v. 12b) and the Son of Man standing in the middle of them (vv. 13-16). This will form the outline basis for exegeting the scripture text.

A. Seeking to see, v. 12a

Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ,

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me,

Although the NRSV translation renders τὴν φωνὴν as 'whose voice,' the literal meaning is 'the voice.' The translators are assuming a modern perspective by John so that he assumed the voice / sound came from a visible person standing behind him. In reality, the definite article τὴν links φωνὴν here back to the use in verse ten, φωνὴν μεγάλην, a loud sound. The better translation would be "the voice" or "this voice." This is made clear by the relative clause attached to φωνὴν, ἣτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ, a voice, which was speaking with me.

The sudden turning around to face the heavenly voice is not uncommon in visionary experiences.¹⁰

¹⁰“The motif of a sudden turning around in connection with a visionary experience also occurs in John 20:24, Ep. Hippocrates 15 (ἐγὼ δὲ ἐπιστραφεὶς ὄρω ..., ‘Then I, when I turned around, saw ...’ [Hercher, *Epistolographi graeci*, 296]), and Plutarch Lycurgus 23.2–4 (Lycurgus thought he heard the voice of a man behind him, but on turning around found no one there and therefore regarded the voice as a divine message).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 87.]

Accounts of individuals ascending into Heaven in visionary experiences are relatively common in ancient Jewish literature.¹¹

But in the subsequent visionary depictions in Revelation a variety of patterns are found.¹² In 4:1-2, John looked up and saw an open door with this same voice calling him to ἀνάβα ὧδε, come up here. He is immediately transformed “in the spirit” (Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι) and stands in Heaven before God’s throne. John thus moves instantly into an “out of the body” / “in the spirit” realm of reality.¹³ Yet in 1:10, which sets the

¹¹D. Halperin (“Heavenly Ascension,” 218–20) divides Jewish heavenly ascent literature and references to heavenly ascents into five groups: (1) Rabbinic sources contain several third person accounts of individuals who made heavenly journeys: Alexander the Great (t. Tamid 32b; y. Abod. Zar. 3.1, 42c), R. Joshua b. Levi (b. Ketub. 77b), and Moses (Pesiq. R. 20). (2) Some Jewish apocalypses contain first-person accounts narrating the heavenly ascensions of famous biblical characters such as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Levi, and Baruch. One problem with this literature is the extent to which the ‘I’ of the narrator may be identified with the ‘I’ of the implied author. (3) The hekalot literature (see Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literature*) contains descriptions of heavenly ascents (some in the first person, some in the third), as well as prescriptions for such ascents (often in second person). An example of the latter is the discourse of R. Nehuniah b. ha-Qanah in Hekhalot Rabbati (summarized in G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 9–13). (4) There are supposed experiences of ‘ecstatic mysticism’ associated with Talmudic references to ‘the four who entered *pardes*,’ *merkabah*, and *ma-asah merkabah*. (5) Paul gives an account of his heavenly ascent in 2 Cor 12:1–10, and John describes his heavenly ascent and what he saw in the heavenly court in Rev 4:1–22:9.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 278.]

¹²“There are six scenes in Revelation that center on the heavenly throne room: (1) 4:2–6:17, (2) 7:9–17, (3) 11:15–19, (4) 14:1–5 (here the scene of the Lamb on Mount Zion with the 144,000 in v 1, 3b–5 is juxtaposed with the author’s audition of a heavenly liturgy in vv 2–3a, with an explicit mention of the throne), (5) 15:2–8, and (6) 19:1–8.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 278.]

¹³“εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, ‘Immediately I was in a prophetic trance.’ The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, literally ‘in the spirit,’ occurs four times in Revelation (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Three of these involve responses to an invitation by an angelic being to come: 4:1, ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δείξω σοι; 17:1, δεῦρο, δείξω σοι; 21:9, δεῦρο, δείξω σοι. The term πνεῦμα, ‘spirit,’ in these passages is commonly taken to refer to the Spirit of God, and therefore capitalized in modern English translations (AV [1:10 only]; RSV; NEB; NIV), and is so understood by many commentators (Beckwith, 435; Beasley-Murray, 112; Sweet, 114; Mounce, 133; Lohse, 19, 37; Lohmeyer, 44–45). Yet in all four occurrences of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι, ‘in [the] spirit,’ the noun is anarthrous. Of the seven uses of the term πνεῦμα in the singular in Revelation, ten use the articu-



voice, into the depiction is to underscore the authoritative speaking of God to John. This voice will provide information and give instructions to the apostle throughout the narrative in Revelation.

B. Seeing the picture, vv. 12b-16

John turned around expecting to see this Heavenly Voice that was speaking to him. But he did not see it; instead he saw a dazzling picture of seven lampstands and a really old man standing in the middle of them.

1. The Lampstands, v. 12b

καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς

and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,

The first thing that John saw when he turned around to face the voice was ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς. In this context a λυχνία most likely means a menorah, the Jewish lampstand set up in the Jerusalem temple. Note the somewhat similar expression in Rev. 4:5, καὶ ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God. The specific symbolical meaning

of these seven lampstands is given in verse 20: καὶ αἱ λυχνίαὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησῖαι εἰσὶν, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. But the literal meaning of λυχνία is not given clearly so that we can picture the form of the lampstand. But the Heavenly setting of John's vision via being ἐν πνεύματι (cf. 1:10; 4:2) clearly puts John in the setting of a temple, and the lampstands before the great altar of the Jerusalem temple would have immediately come to mind to John's initial Jewish readers, and most likely reflects the background image in John's vision here.¹⁶ Thus the seven churches

¹⁶καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς, 'Upon turning around I saw seven golden menorahs.' This imagery suggests that a 'temple' is the ambiance for John's vision, and it is likely that 'the seven torches of fire burning before the throne' (4:5) are heavenly menorahs (at the very least they should be understood as models for the menorahs used in the temple), which, like the one or ones in the temple, were positioned to burn 'before the Lord' (Exod 27:21; Lev 24:2-4; cf. 1 Kgs 11:36). Since 'menorah,' even though it is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew מנורה *mēnōrā* or מנורה *mēnōrā*, 'lampstand,' is a technical term for the sacral lampstand or lampstands that stood first in the wilderness tabernacle and later in the first and second temples, the main question for the interpreter is whether the author intended these seven lampstands to be understood in that tradition. There is no explicit indication that John conceived of these as branched lampstands with seven oil lamps like the traditional Jewish menorah used as a religious symbol. The idea of a group of precisely seven menorahs is unknown from Jewish literature. These seven lampstands are understood as arranged in a circle around the exalted Christ (1:13a; 2:1). In part this vision is based on the vision in Zech 4:1-14 (written shortly before the completion of the second temple in 516 B.C.). There a single lampstand is mentioned, with seven separate lamps (Zech 4:2), allegorically interpreted to represent 'the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth' (Zech 4:10), perhaps even here an astronomical reference to the seven 'planets' of antiquity. The allusion to Zech 4:1-14, together with the redolent Jewish imagery in this passage, suggests that the term λυχνία should be translated 'menorah' (K. Gamber, *Das Geheimnis der sieben Sterne* [Regensburg: Pustet, 1987] 24-26). Zech 4 is also picked up in Rev 11:4, where two lampstands are mentioned as well as two olive trees (mentioned in Zech 4:3, 11-14). Ancient representations of the menorah often show two menorahs flanking the Torah shrine (Yarden, *Tree of Light*, plates 93, 94, 95, 101, 109, 110, 114, 119, 130, 193, 194, 206). The lampstand of Zech 14:2 was in turn inspired by the lampstand that was one of the furnishings of the Jerusalem temple. The Mosaic golden lampstand is described in Exod 25:31-40 and Num 8:1-4 as an important piece of sacred furniture in the tabernacle (cf. Josephus *Ant.* 3.144-46), and is variously described as lit every evening (Exod 30:8), or as extinguished at night (1 Sam 3:3), or as burning continually (Lev 24:1-4). This became a popular view reflected in the magical papyri; cf. PGM IV. 3069-70: 'I conjure [you] by the one in holy Jerusalem before whom the unquenchable fire burns for all time.' Cf. PGM IV.1219-22 (Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 61), 'before whom the unquenchable lamp continually burns, the great God ... who is radiant at Jerusalem.' Josephus claims that three lights burned throughout the day, while the rest were lit in the evening (*Ant.* 3.199). The vessels of the Solomonic temple were reportedly looted by the Babylonians (2 Chr 36:7, 10, 18; Ezra 1:7; Dan 1:2), but only Jer 52:19 explicitly

in the province of Asia are being represented as a sacred instrument of light that is intended to highlight the full Presence of God who stands in their midst as the Son of Man. Thus, just as the lampstand in Zech. 4:6-9 came to ultimately represent the people of God in ancient Israel, John now sees the people of God reflected in the seven lampstands in the presence of Christ in a similar way.¹⁷ The divine light they are to radiate

states that lampstands (note the plural) were taken from the temple immediately prior to its destruction in 586 B.C. The lampstand was stolen in 170 B.C. by Antiochus IV (1 Macc 1:21; Josephus *Ant.* 12.250 refers to lampstands in the plural), and when the sanctuary was purified and rededicated, it was replaced with another one (1 Macc 4:49–50). According to Josephus this one was seen by Pompey (*Ant.* 14.72). The author of 4 Ezra, referring to the plundering and destruction of the second temple by the Romans, says ‘the light of our lampstand has been put out’ (10:22), using the removal of the lampstand as a symbol of the worship life of the temple. A bas-relief depicting Roman soldiers carrying the lampstand from the second temple is found on the Arch of Titus, erected in A.D. 81 (Yarden, *Tree of Light*, plate 4), an event described by Josephus (*J. W.* 7.148; the problematic history of that stolen menorah is traced as far as possible in Yarden, *Tree of Light*, 3–8). Several passages in the OT indicate that Solomon’s temple had ten separate lampstands, arranged in two groups of five, though they are not explicitly described as branched (1 Kgs 7:49; cf. 2 Chr 4:7, 20–21; 1 Chr 28:15); historically these are the earliest forms of the *menorah* (Voss, *Menora*, 17–20). The rabbis tried to harmonize these discordant traditions by proposing that the Mosaic *menorah* was flanked in the temple by five lampstands on either side (b. *Menah* 98b). 1 Chr 28:15 mentions ‘the golden lampstands [מנורות *mēnōrot*] and their lamps’ and a silver ‘lampstand [מנורה *mēnōrā*] and its lamps.’ Josephus transmits the strange tradition that Solomon had 10,000 lampstands made but set only one of them up in the temple to burn all day (*Ant.* 8.90). The temple lampstands seen by Zechariah are accorded cosmic significance in Zech 4:10b, ‘These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.’ Philo regards the golden menorah as a symbol of heaven (*Quaest.* in Ex. 2.73, 81, 95), and the lamps themselves symbolize the stars (*Quaest.* in Ex. 2.73, 104), or the planets (Philo *Quaest.* in Ex. 2.78; Josephus *J. W.* 5.217; Clement Alex. *Strom.* 5.6). According to Philo, the reason is that the seven planets, including the sun, are light-bringers like the lamps on the menorah (Philo *Heres* 216–25). Eupolemus *Fragments* 2.7–8 observes that Solomon had ten golden lampstands constructed (following 1 Kgs 7:49) but adds the detail that seventy lamps were also made, seven for each lampstand (cf. B. Z. Wachholder, *Eupolemus: A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature* [Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College; Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974] 186–87). On the history of the *menorah*, see Sperber, *JJS* 16 (1965) 135–59, and Voss, *Menorah*.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 88-90.]

¹⁷**Zechariah 4:1-11.** 1 The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. 2 He said to me, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. 3 And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” 4 I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered me, “Do

highlights the glory of God. This will be critical to the divine judgment issued on each of the seven churches in chapters two and three. Each congregation will be measured to a large extent on how well they radiate this divine light.

2. *The Son of Man, vv. 13-16*

13 καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν. 14 ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρὸς 15 καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, 16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.

13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

The other image that John saw was a personage ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, like the Son of Man. Note that υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου is not the direct object of εἶδον, I saw, as is λυχνίας, lampstands. That is, John did not see τὸν υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, the Son of Man. Rather he saw --- ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, (someone) like a Son of Man. This grammar structure reached back to Daniel 7:13, כְּבַר אֱנָשׁ (*kēbar. ʿēnāš*), like a son of man, which is translated from the Hebrew into LXX Greek as ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου -- roughly equivalent to John’s ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου.¹⁸ The unusual construction υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου

you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” 6 He said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts. 7 What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” “ 8 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. 10 For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. “These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.”

¹⁸“The phrase ‘one like a son of man’ (like 14:14) is an apparent allusion to the phrase כְּבַר אֱנָשׁ *kēbar ʿēnāš*, ‘like a son of man,’ in Dan 7:13 (Lietzmann, *Menschensohn*, 56–57; Slater, BT Page 9

over against the synoptic gospels phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου clearly signals John's reaching back to Daniel here rather than to the existing Christian gospels, although it is clear that John is referring to the risen Christ with this term. The prophecy mode of visionary experience pushed John to Daniel and other OT prophets for his terms in order to affirm a connection to this Old Testament depiction.¹⁹ Unfortunately the limitations

44 [1993] 349–50). However, the synonymous phrase כדמות בני אדם, 'like a son of man,' occurs in Dan 10:16, continuing an earlier angelophany described in Dan 10:5–6 in a way very similar to Rev 1:13–15. Dalman (*Die Worte Jesu*, 206, followed by Casey, *Son of Man*, 144–45) thought this more likely to be an allusion to Dan 10:5–6, 16, 18. Somewhat surprisingly, there is nothing in the way that the appellation 'son of man' is used in Rev 1:13 or 14:14 to suggest any influence from or even any awareness of the extensive use of the title in the Gospels, for the anarthrous phrase υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου is an allusion to Dan 7:13 (Lietzmann, *Menschensohn*, 56–57). When Justin refers to the son of man mentioned in Dan 7:13, he uses the anarthrous phrase ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (*I Apol.* 51.9; *Dial.* 31.1, 3; 32.1; 76.1[2x]; 79.2; 100.3 [ὡς lacking]; 126.1), though when he refers to the title in the synoptic Gospels, he uses the arthrous phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (*Dial.* 76.7; 100.3); see Borsch, *Son of Man*, 43; Moule, NTS 41 (1995) 277; Skarsaune, *Prophecy*, 88–90. The phrase in the Gospels and Acts regularly occurs with the definite article: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; the anarthrous phrase υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου occurs in John 5:27 (the only anarthrous occurrence of the phrase in the sayings traditions); Heb 2:6; Rev 1:13; 14:14. Hare (*Son of Man*, 90–96) argues that the anarthrous phrase in John 5:27 expresses a quality or status, i.e., the incarnate status of the Son." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 90.]

¹⁹"The entire vision is a pastiche of allusions to Jewish epiphany language. The main source of imagery for his epiphany is Dan 10:5–14 (probably a description of the angel Gabriel), with features drawn from the description of God in Dan 7:9 (hair white like wool) and of the mysterious figure in Dan 7:13 ('one like a son of man'). The description of Christ also owes something to ancient grandiose depictions of the appearance of great kings (cf. Jos. *As.* 5:6; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 3.73–85) and Israelite high priests (Josephus *Ant.* 4.154, 171). In Jewish literature, similar epiphanic language is found in Jos. *As.* 14:8–11; *Apoc. Zeph.* 9:12–10:9. Significantly, the exalted Christ is described using imagery drawn from descriptions of God (cf. Ezek 1:26–28, upon which Dan 7 is probably dependent) and prominent angelic figures. Similar descriptions of divine beings seen in epiphanies are found in the Greek magical papyri and in descriptions of divine epiphanies in Greek literary texts. The author uses various visual attributes and verbal attributes from the visions in the descriptions of Christ that form the introductions to the seven letters, thereby linking 2:1–3:22 to the introductory commission vision. The entire scene has enough similarities to various OT epiphanies to make it entirely plausible to the reader familiar with that background. The metaphorical character of what John sees is made obvious in v 20, where the seven stars are interpreted as the seven angels of the churches and the seven menorahs as the seven churches themselves (one of the few passages in Revelation in which allegorical interpretations are presented). The seven menorahs are primarily reminiscent of the seven-branched golden menorah of the tabernacle and temple (Exod 25:31–41), also seen in Zechariah's vision (Zech 4:1–2), which

of English grammar make expressing this distinction impossible to preserve in translation.

The terminology of Daniel 7:13 along with generalized imagery usage play an important role here.²⁰ The Son of Man and the Ancient of Days figures in Daniel seem to be two distinct figures, although in the text history as well as in some interpretive history, they end up being the same person in several texts and ancient commentators, both Jewish and Christian.²¹ Clearly for

today is the religious symbol of Judaism. [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 117.]

²⁰**Dan. 7:13-14.** 13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw *one like a human being* coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. 14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

13 ἐθεώρουν ἐν ὄραματι τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἤρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν, καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες παρῆσαν αὐτῷ.† 14 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς κατὰ γένη καὶ πάντα δόξα αὐτῷ λατρεύουσα· καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτοῦ ἐξουσία αἰώνιος, ἣτις οὐ μὴ ἀρθῆ, καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ, ἣτις οὐ μὴ φθαρῆ.†

²¹"While in the MT of Dan 7:13 the 'one like a son of man' is presented to the Ancient of Days (thus clearly distinguishing the two figures), here the 'one like a son of man' is described as if he is identical with the Ancient of Days. This identification was not necessarily original with John, but may already be presupposed by the LXX version of Dan 7:13 found in MS 967 (Giessen, Daniel, 108): ἤρχετο ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν (v) παρῆν καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες προσήγαγον αὐτῷ, 'he came like a son of man and like the Ancient of Days was present, and those who were near approached him.' In MS 88 the reading is similar (Giessen, *Daniel*, 39–40): ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἤρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν, καὶ οἱ παρεστηκότες παρῆσαν αὐτῷ, 'he came like a son of man, and like the Ancient of Days was present, and those who were near were present with him.' The verb παρῆσαν in MS 88 has obviously been influenced by the preceding παρῆν; the superior reading is προσήγαγον as found in MS 967. This reading is found in the only two extant LXX MSS of Daniel, the Codex Chisianus (MS 88, dependent on the Syro-Hexapla) and the incomplete Chester Beatty papyrus codex 967 (late second or early third century A.D.). A third witness is the Syrian translation by Paul of Tella (A.D. 616–17), the fifth column (the LXX) of Origen's Hexapla, the so-called Syro-Hexapla. MS 88, however, is also dependent on the recension of the LXX found in Origen's Hexapla. MS 967 is one of the earliest extant copies of parts of the LXX and constitutes the only extant pre-Hexaplaric text of the LXX (Giessen, Daniel, 17). It identifies the one like a son of man with the Ancient of Days, though it is unclear whether this was intentional or the result of scribal error, or whether this was pre-Christian or reflects Christian exegesis (Bodenmann, Naissance, 73–74 n. 192). A. Yarbro Collins (in J. J. Collins, *CommDaniel*, 103) supposes (plausibly) that ἕως παλαιοῦ ἡμερῶν, 'to the Ancient of Days,' was erroneously transcribed as ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν, 'as the Ancient of Days.' If the change was intentional, the precedent for this exegetical step may have been based on Ezek 1:26, in which Ezekiel saw something like a throne, 'and upon the image of the throne was an image like

John this υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου was also παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν, [the Ancient of Days](#). One important side implication of this linkage in Jewish interpretive history of Dan. 7:13 is the early second century AD rabbinical Jewish identification of this person with the Davidic Messiah.²² John

a human form.’ The Tg. Ezek. 1:26 reads (Levey, Tg. Ezek., 22) ‘and above the throne was the likeness of the appearance of Adam.’ 1 Enoch 46:1 (composed late in the first century A.D.), however, understands Dan 7:13 to refer to two distinct figures: ‘And there I saw one who had a head of days, and his head (was) white like wool; and with him (there was) another, whose face had the appearance of a man, and his face (was) full of grace, like one of the holy angels’ (tr. M. A. Knibb, Enoch 2:131). This passage alludes both to Ezek 1:26 (which contains the phrase דְּמִוּת כְּמַרְאֵה אָדָם *dēmūt kēmar·ēh ·ādām*, ‘the likeness as the appearance of a man’) and to Dan 7:9, with Dan 7:13 providing the connecting link (Feuillet, RB 60 [1953] 180ff; Quispel, VC 34 [1980] 1–2).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 90-91.]

²²“Rev 1:13–14 may reflect an early stage of the later rabbinical polemic against the ‘two powers’ heresy. Proponents of this heresy, often identified with Christians and/ or Gnostics, interpreted certain biblical texts in such a way that angelic beings or divine hypostases in heaven were understood as equivalent to God (cf. Segal, *Two Powers*, x). This heresy was traced back to Elisha b. Abuya, nicknamed Aher, ‘Other’ (ca. A.D. 110–35). This heresy had an earlier phase, reaching into the first century A.D., in which the two powers were complementary, and a second phase in which the two powers were understood as antagonistic (Segal, *Two Powers*, 17). Dan 7:9–10 appears to have been as important exegetically for the “heretical” view as it was to the rabbinic defense against it. One passage that may reflect the time of Akiba (early second century A.D.) is b. Hag. 14a (I. Epstein, tr., *Babylonian Talmud*):

One passage says: “His throne was fiery flames” (Dan. 7:9) and another passage says: “Until thrones were placed; and One that was ancient of days did sit”—there is no contradiction; One (throne) for Him, and one for David: this is the view of R. Akiba.

“If authentic, this suggests that early second century A.D. rabbinical authorities identified the ‘son of man’ figure in Dan 7:13 with the Davidic Messiah (cf. Midr. Ps. 21:5). In the continuation of the passage quoted from b. Hag. 14a, the two figures of Dan 7:9–13 are understood as God’s two aspects of mercy and justice. This identification is also reflected in the formulation of a new messianic name עֲנַי *enny*, ‘Cloud-Man,’ and בֶּר נִפְלִי *br nypli*, ‘Son of the Cloud’ (G. Vermes in Black, *Aramaic*, 327–28). If the rabbis were antagonistic to any tradition of a manlike figure in heaven beside God (Segal, *Two Powers*, 52), it is striking that Rev 1:13–14 also avoids interpreting Dan 7:9–13 in terms of two figures. This polemic based on Dan 7:9–10 is correlated in rabbinic sources with references to God as first and last (Isa 44:6; 41:4); cf. Rev 1:17b, with the elaborate interpretation of the divine name (Segal, *Two Powers*, 33–34):

I was in Egypt.
I was at the Sea.
I was in the past,
I will be in the future to come.
I am in this world,
I am in the world to come.

This is comparable to the divine name in Rev 1:8: “who is and who was and who is to come,” and with an emphasis on God as one who raises people from the dead based on Deut 32:39: “See now that I,

is very well adopting this perspective and affirming that Christ is that very person. In Rev. 14:14, this expression ὁμοιον υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου is used for the second and last time by John in Revelation:

Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ νεφέλη λευκή, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν νεφέλην καθήμενον ὁμοιον υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου, ἔχων ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ στέφανον χρυσοῦν καὶ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ὄρεπτανον ὄξύ.

Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was **one like the Son of Man**, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand!

Both instances clearly reach back to the experience of Daniel in 7:13, which is not some distant future experience but as a present reality taking place now.

What becomes important in John’s depiction of this υἰὸν ἀνθρώπου is his appearance, which is given in great detail with a seven fold depiction.

First are his clothes: ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν, [clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest](#). Elsewhere in Revelation only seven angels appear clothed in a similar manner (cf. 15:6): καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι [οἱ] ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσᾶς, [and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests](#).

The two articles of clothing highlighted by John in 1:13 are a ποδήρη and a ζώνην. The first, the ποδήρη, is a bit unusual in that the word is literally an adjective meaning “reaching to the feet.”²³ Very likely this unusual reference draws upon Daniel 10:5²⁴ and/or Ezekiel 9:2

even I, am He. I kill and I revive” (Segal, *Two Powers*, 84). These texts are all based on speculation on the significance of the divine name and, when combined with allusions to Dan 7:9–13, suggest that John is preserving a Jewish polemic against understanding Daniel as referring to the two powers.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 92-93.]

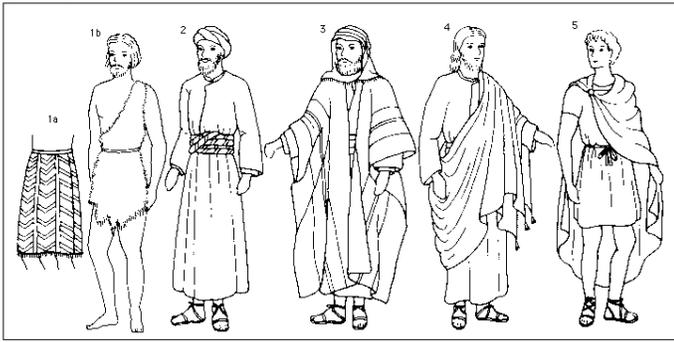
²³**ποδήρης, ες** (πούς+ήρης ‘fit’) **reaching to the feet** (Aeschyl. et al.; LXX; EpArist 96; Philo, Fuga 185) subst. ὁ ποδ. (sc. χιτῶν; used w. χιτῶν X., Cyr. 6, 4, 2; Paus. 5, 19, 6; Ex 29:5; Jos., Ant. 3, 153. Without χιτ. Appian, Liby. 66 §296; Ex 25:7; 28:4; Ezk 9:3; EpArist 96; Philo, Leg. All. 2, 56; Jos., Bell. 5, 231; TestLevi 8:2) **a robe reaching to the feet Rv 1:13**; B 7:9.—DELG s.v. πούς and -ηρης. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 838.]

²⁴**Dan. 10:5. I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist.**

καὶ ἦρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ ἄνθρωπος εἶς ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσινω καὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν περιεζωσμένος βυσσίνω, καὶ ἐκ μέσου αὐτοῦ φῶς,†

Ancient Styles of Dress: 1a. One type of loincloth (Semite, ca. 1800 B.C.); 1b. Animal skin; 2. Men's tunic or coat; 3. Men's mantle; 4. Himation; 5. First-century cloak or cape. (HBD p. 227)



from the LXX translation.²⁵ Although the fabric of this robe is not identified specifically here, it is labeled as λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν, *pure shining linen*, in Rev. 15:6. A variety of Greek words designated this fabric: σινδῶν (cf. Mt. 27:59, Jesus' burial cloth); ὀθόνιον (cf. Jhn. 19:40, John's term for Jesus' burial cloth); βύσσινος, ἡ, ον (cf. Rev. 18:12, 16; 19:8, 14, designation of expensive clothes); βύσσοσ (cf. Lk. 16:18 & Rev. 18:12 alt. txt; another designation of expensive clothes); λίνον (only in Rev. 15:6 as term for linen clothes). The implication of the robe is that it is of fine quality and thus proper for a person in authority to wear. If made of linen rather than the more common wool, it was even more a mark of prominence.

The tendency of the LXX to use ποδήρης, ες in reference to the robes worn by the high priest in both the tabernacle and the later temple worship meetings²⁶ points toward this picture of Christ in John 1:13 as being in the role of the great high priest of God in the Heavenly temple. This is not absolutely clear, but the evidence seemingly points this direction. However, Aune in the *WBC* is not so persuaded and makes strong arguments against this association.²⁷ These ar-

²⁵“The phrase ‘wearing a long robe’ may be an allusion to the vision of Dan 10:5, in which the revelatory angel is described as ‘clothed in linen’ (LXX: ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσιννα), or to the vision of Ezek 9:2, which also describes an angelic being as ‘clothed in linen’ (LXX: ἐνδεδυκὼς ποδήρη).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 93.]

²⁶Cf. Exod. 25:6; 28:4, 27; 29:5; 35:8; Ezel. 9:2-3; Zech. 3:4. This idea is given messianic tones in intertestamental Jewish writings: cf. Wisdom of Solomon, 18:24; Sirach 27:8; 45:8.

²⁷“One of the problems in interpreting vv 13–16 is determining the significance of the imagery used to depict the exalted Christ. One common, but unfounded, view is that Christ is presented in priestly garments (cf. Wolff, NTS 27 [1980–81] 189). The term ποδήρης occurs twelve times in the LXX and always refers to a garment worn by the high priest, though the term is used to translate five different Hebrew words, so that the Greek term ποδήρης can hardly be understood as a technical term: (1) חֹשֶׁן *hōšen*, ‘breastplate,’ found only in the Priestly writer and most often translated λογεῖον, ‘oracular breastplate’ (e.g., Exod 28:15, 22), but translated ποδήρης in Exod 25:7; 35:9; (2) מַעִיל *mē'il* in Exod 28:4; 29:5; (3) אֶפֶד *ēpōd*, ‘ephod,’ in Exod 28:31; (4) בַּד *bad* in Ezek 9:2, 3, 11;

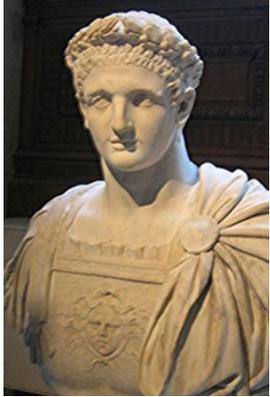
guments are persuasive to me. Other commentators look at these details much too superficially and without the detailed, careful analysis that is required in order to make a strong case for the priestly association.

But as was typical in the ancient world, and the first century Roman world in particular, the mark of real distinction was not so much the kind of outer garment worn by the man, but the insignia etc. layered on top of this outer wrap around garment. Thus the sash layered around his chest is the real mark of distinction: περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν, *with a golden sash across his chest*. What is very interesting is that the picture painted of a golden sash diagonally placed across the chest is rather common in the Greco-Roman literature as symbolic attire for kings and gods.²⁸ While the term ζώνη normally signifies a belt worn around the waist in order to hold the wrap around

and (5) מַחְלָשׁוֹת *mahālāšōt* in Zech 3:4. Actually, the most common Hebrew term for the robes of the high priests and priests in the OT is כֶּתֹנֶת *kētōnet*, which is usually translated χιτῶν (e.g., Exod 28:4, 39, 40; 29:5, 8; 35:19; 39:27; 40:14; Lev 6:3). ποδήρης is also used of the high priest's robe in Wis 18:24; Sir 27:8; 45:81; Ep. Arist. 96 (the vestments of the high priest are described in 96–98); Josephus *Ant.* 3.153; and Philo *Leg. All.* 2.56. In *T. Levi* 8:2–10, which contains a list of priestly vestments intended for the heavenly consecration of Levi, his robe is called ἡ στολή τῆς ἱερατείας, ‘the robe of the priesthood.’ Philo *Mos.* 2.109–10 uses the term ὑποδύλης, which he distinguishes from the ἐρωμίς, ‘ephod.’ Philo describes the purple robe, using the alternate term ποδήρης, in some detail (*Mos.* 118–21). Robes and belts (which gathered the robes at the waist) were basic articles of clothing in the ancient Mediterranean world used by both men and women (cf. *Odyssey* 6.38). Since the ‘one like a son of man’ is wearing only a long robe and a golden sash, these two garments by themselves cannot be claimed to be priestly vestments. Nothing is said about the rest of the vestments (the ephod, the trousers, the turban, the crown, and so forth), nor are the material and color of the robe specified. There is therefore no clear intention on the part of the author to conceptualize the appearance of the exalted Christ in priestly terms.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 93–94.]

²⁸“The epiphanic language of Greek poetry often emphasizes the golden appearance of the garments and accoutrements of the gods (cf. Williams, *Callimachus*, 39). The epiphanies of Zeus in *Iliad* 8.41–46 and of Poseidon in *Iliad* 13.20–27 (both passages nearly identical verbally) became the model for the use of gold in divine epiphanies. Callimachus *Hymn to Apollo* 32–35 is representative: ‘Golden is the tunic of Apollo and golden his mantle, his lyre and his Lyctian bow and his quiver; golden too are his sandals; for rich in gold is Apollo’ (tr. G. R. Mair, LCL). This epiphanic language could also be applied to the description of heroes, as in Vergil *Aeneid* 1.589–94, where Aeneas is described as ‘splendid in bright light, grand as a god,’ for Venus had ‘made his eyes shine out with power and joy-like ivory carved to beauty, like some work of silver or Parian marble chased with gold’ (tr. Copely, Vergil, 19–20). In *Odyssey* 9.544–45, Circe is depicted as wearing a golden girdle (ζώνην ... χρυσεῖην).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 94.]

outer garment in place,²⁹ the specific details here, περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς, clearly portray this as a sash attached diagonally across the chest rather than around the waist. Against this ancient pagan backdrop, this individual in 1:13-16 stands as a kingly deity with royal authority and responsibility.



Emperor Domitian

What then is the message of the robe and the sash? Clearly John reaches back into his Jewish heritage to portray Christ in the kingly role of power and authority. That the image presented by his dress communicated a similar message out of John's contemporary non-Jewish world helps reinforce the portrait of Christ as king and ruler standing in the midst of His people with complete authority to protect and to discipline them as needed. With images of emperor Domitian being set up by the early 90s in the cities of Asia portraying him in full array as the most powerful ruler on the earth and as divine, these readers of Revelation were reminded that their first loyalty was to the Ruler over the kings of the earth. And this Ruler stood as their protector and guarantor of eternal life. Domitian could never provide what the risen Christ was already giving them.

Second is his head: ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός, **His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire.**

The first depiction of the head paints an unusual image of an extremely old man whose skin and hair have turned snow white. In remembering that Jesus was a dark skinned middle eastern Jew, this contrast stretches our understanding. This image comes

²⁹ζώνη, ἡς, ἡ (Hom. et al.; Kaibel 482, 3; pap, LXX, EpArist, Philo, Joseph., Test12Patr, JosAs; Mel., Fgm. 8b 24 'zone', loanw. in rabb.) **belt, girdle**, in our lit. only of a man's belt or girdle, unless the ref. is to heavenly beings (Rv). Of the Baptist ζ. δερματίνη (4 Km 1:8= Jos., Ant. 9, 22) **Mt 3:4; Mk 1:6**; GEb 13, 79 (s. DBuzy, Pagne ou ceinture?: RSR 23, '33, 589-98 and on Ἰωάννης 1). Of Paul **Ac 21:11ab**. Of the Human One (Son of Man) περιεζωσμένος πρὸς τ. μαστοῖς ζ. χρυσᾶν **Rv 1:13**; sim. of angels περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζ. χρυσᾶς **15:6** (cp. 4 Km 3:21 περιεζωσμένοι ζ.—The golden belt or girdle as Ps.-Callisth. 2, 21, 17). λύειν τὴν ζ. loose, i.e. remove the belt (Hyperid., Fgm. 67) MPol 13:2. This belt is also used to hold money (Plut., Mor., 665b ἀνθρώπου ... ζώνην δὲ χαλκοῦς ἔχουσαν ὑπεζωσμένον; PRyl 127, 32 [29 A.D.] ζ. ἐν ᾧ κέρματος (δραχμαὶ) δ'; 141, 22) **Mt 10:9; Mk 6:8**.—B. 434. DELG s.v. ζώνη. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 431.]

straight out of Dan. 7:9 in picturing God as the Ancient of Days (παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν), and John now applies it to Christ.³⁰ This was a popular image in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition as well.³¹

The image of Christ as an extremely old man plays off the ancient near eastern respect for the elderly. Those with white hair on their head are assumed to be wise and insightful, and thus worth of respect and esteem and honor. Thus John saw Christ standing as the very epitome of wisdom and understanding. His judgments to be made regarding the spiritual condition of the seven churches will be correct and insightful since they come from His infinite wisdom.

Also in connection to his head come the depiction of the eyes of this Ancient of Days: καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός, **his eyes were like a flame of fire.** Again Dan. 10:6 seems to be the source of this image.³²

³⁰**Dan. 7:9.** As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and **the hair of his head like pure wool**; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

ἐθεώρουν ἕως ὅτε θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν, καὶ παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν ἐκάθητο ἔχων περιβολὴν ὡσεὶ χιόνα, **καὶ τὸ τρίχωμα τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔριον λευκὸν καθαρὸν**, ὁ θρόνος ὡσεὶ φλόξ πυρός,†

³¹“The same metaphor in which the hair of God is mentioned and its whiteness compared with wool is mentioned in the theophany described in 1 Enoch 46:1; 71:10 (the so-called Parables of Enoch in 1 Enoch 37-71, probably no earlier than the late first century A.D.) and is certainly dependent on Daniel as well: ‘his head was white like wool.’ In Apoc. Abr. 11:2, it is said of the angel Iael that ‘the hair of his head [was] like snow.’ The son of Lamech was born with hair white like wool (1 Enoch 106:2, 10), which is understood as characteristic of angels (1 Enoch 106:5-6). The metaphor of comparing the head of an old man to snow also occurs in Jos. As. 22:7 (a description of the aged Jacob). In keeping with the ancient Near Eastern attitude toward the elderly, this metaphor conveyed such notions as respect, honor, wisdom, and high social status. The mention of both the head and the hair is at first sight problematic, for only the hair could be white. The καὶ is therefore exegetical or explanatory, i.e., ‘his head, that is, his white hair, was like white wool,’ using the order of the general and the specific. The repetition of the adjective λευκός is awkward. The detailed description of ‘one like a son of man’ in vv 14-15 begins with the head and eyes and then turns to the feet, a stereotyped pattern of description often found in ancient sources (e.g., Philostratus Vitae. soph. 552).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 94-95.]

³²**Dan. 10:5-6.** 5 I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. 6 His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, **his eyes like flaming torches**, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude.

5 καὶ ἤρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμοῦς μου καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος εἷς ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσινον καὶ τὴν ὄσφιν περιεζωσμένος βυσσίνῳ, καὶ ἐκ μέσου αὐτοῦ φῶς,† 6 καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ θαρσις, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ὄρασις ἀστραπῆς, **καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ λαμπάδες πυρός**, καὶ οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλκός ἐξαστράπτων, καὶ φωνὴ λαλιάς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ φωνὴ θορύβου.†

Also such an image is found often in the Jewish apocalyptic literature as well; and also in the Greco-Roman literature.³³ Eyes of fire was understood in the ancient world to signify deity and consequently sharp or piercing vision that could see clearly and profoundly. The latter repetition of this image in 19:12, οἱ δὲ ὄφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός, for the ‘rider on the white horse’ re-enforces this understanding since there this portrait of eyes is in connection to Christ as Judge and Warrior leading the armies of Heaven in battle against evil.

Third are his feet: καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, **his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace.**

John now turns to the feet with the depiction of them not as flesh and bones, but as looking like bronze. Clearly this is not a fashion conscious description!

Again John is appealing to Dan. 10:6 where the Ancient of Days possesses arms and legs that appear like bronze: οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλκὸς ἐξαστράπτων, **his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze.** John only picks up on the οἱ πόδες segment of the description. What is interesting is that this individual is barefoot, but with feet like this who would need shoes!³⁴

³³“In 1 Enoch 106:5–6, the newborn son of Lamech has ‘eyes like the rays of the sun,’ understood to be a characteristic of angels. It is said of Jacob the patriarch that ‘his eyes (were) flashing and darting (flashes of) lightning’ (Jos. As. 22:7). In Greek tradition the eyes of the gods were thought to have a special quality, which was usually described as bright and shining (*Iliad* 3.397; *Hymn to Aphrodite* 1.181; cf. Mussies, “Identification,” 4). According to Apollodorus 2.4.9, Herakles ‘flashed a gleam of fire from his eyes [πυρὸς δ’ ἐξ ὀμμάτων ἔλαμπεν αἴγλην],’ an indication that he was a son of Zeus. The comparison of eyes with fire is a frequent metaphor in Greek and Latin literature (*Iliad* 13.474; 19.366; *Odyssey* 19.446; *Ps.-Hesiod Scut.* 72; Euripides frag. 689 [Nauck, *Tragicorum graecorum*]; Herodian 1.7.5; Apollodorus 2.4.9; Vergil *Aeneid* 6.300; 12.102; cf. Neuer Wettstein, ad Rev 1:14), used in contexts where humans are described in ways that are characteristic of the gods (Statius *Silv.* 1.1.103 [the eyes of Domitian’s equestrian statue]; Suetonius *Augustus* 79.2 [the eyes of Augustus]).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 95.]

³⁴“The ‘one like a son of man’ described here is apparently barefoot, and it is worth noting that Israelite priests apparently wore no special footwear when officiating in the tabernacle or temple. In *Acts of John* 90, in the context of a retelling of the transfiguration of Jesus, his feet are described as being whiter than snow. The famous Prima Porta statue of Augustus portrays the emperor, rather atypically, as barefoot. According to Hannestad (*Roman Art*, 51), this is generally understood as an indication that the individual depicted is in the sphere of the divine, and that the statue of Augustus portrays the deceased and deified emperor. Similarly, one panel of the Ravenna reliefs depicts four deceased members of the imperial family including Augustus, and perhaps Antonia (Claudius’ mother), Germanicus, and Drusus, all barefoot (Hannestad, *Roman Art*, 100–101 fig. 63). The Vatican statue of Claudius as Jupiter also portrays the emperor as barefoot (Hannestad, *Roman Art*, 104

One very real difficulty here is in understanding the word χαλκολιβάνῳ, found only here and in 2:18 in repetition of 1:14. It is not the normal Greek word for bronze, either χαλκίον (Mk. 7:4), χαλκοῦς (Rev. 9:20), or χαλκός (Rev. 18:12).³⁵ But these three terms also mean copper as well. In the minting of Roman coins, the term ὀρείχαλκος (an alloy of copper and tin, i.e., bronze) is commonly used. One of the challenges to John’s term is the second part of this compound term: -λιβάνῳ, which comes from λίβανος and means ‘frankincense.’ The signal that the term doesn’t literally mean a ‘copper scented frankincense’ is the qualifier attached to it: ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, **like that refined by fire in a furnace.** Clearly the reference is to a hard metal that has been created by a refining process. Consequently different translations will assume different metals, mostly either brass or bronze.³⁶ That confusion

fig. 65). According to Fraenkel (Horace, 204 n. 4), in the literary presentation of divine epiphanies in Horace and in Greek poetry, the appearance of the god, anticipated in prayer, is frequently described in detail, and ‘special attention was paid to the god’s gait, and sometimes also to the manner in which he was to set his feet on the ground and to his footwear’ (e.g., Sophocles *Antigone* 1144; Aristophanes *Frogs* 330–31; *Persians* 659–60; Catullus 61.9–10; Vergil *Georgics* 2.7–8). In the brief description of the Great King of Persia in Aeschylus, *Persians* 660–62, only his sandals and royal tiara are mentioned (i.e., he is described ‘from head to foot’). In Callimachus *Hymn* 2.3, the feet of Apollo are described in epiphanic language as καλῶ ποδί, ‘with beautiful foot.’ In PGM XIII.705, the magical practitioner is advised to look at the feet of the god when he appears, not his face. Bare feet were also required in certain ritual situations, such as the procession that bore the ashes of Augustus (Suetonius Aug. 100.4), and for Pythagoreans, who sacrificed and entered temples (Iamblichus *De vita Pyth.* 85, 105). In the brief theophanic description in Exod 24:9–11, only the feet of God are seen on a pavement of sapphire.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 95–96.]

³⁵A difficulty in translation is distinguishing between brass (an alloy of copper with zinc) and bronze (an alloy of copper with tin). The commonality of copper pushes the Greeks to use χαλκο- in compound forms, but not in clear distinction between the two alloys of brass and bronze mentioned above.

³⁶Note the translation patterns:

English: *like unto burnished brass* (ASV); *like burnished bronze* (RSV, RSVCE, ESV, ESVUK, Mounce, NASB, NRSV, NRSVA, NRSVACE, NRSVCE); *like bronze* (CEV, EXB, NCV, NIV, NIVUK); *like bronze metal* (NIRV); *like glowing bronze* (GW); *like fine bronze* (HCSB, LEB); *as the finest bronze glows* (Phillips); *both feet furnace-fired bronze* (Message); *like polished bronze* (NET, NLT); *like brightly polished bronze* (Voice); *like unto fine brass* (KJV, DRA, 21st Cent.KJV, CEB, ERV, GNV1599); *like fine brass* (NKJV); *like brass* (GNT); *like orichalc* (Knox); *like shining brass* (NLV); *like burnished brass* (WEB); *like to latten [and his feet like to dross of gold, or latten]* (WYC).

Spanish: *semejantes al bronce* (BLP, BLPH); *semejantes al bronce bruñido* (LBLE, RVR1960); *brillaban como bronce pulido* (DHH); *brillaban como el bronce* (TLA); *eran como bronce pulido* (NTV); *eran semejantes al bronce pulido* (RVC, RVR1995);

should exist between the two metals is not surprising given their appearance in raw form. Note the bronze on the left and the brass on the right graphics.



rael was coming from the east; **the sound was like the sound of mighty waters**; and the earth shone with his glory.

LXX. και ἰδοὺ δόξα θεοῦ Ἰσραηλ ἤρχετο κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς πύλης τῆς βλεπούσης πρὸς ἀνατολάς, **καὶ φωνῇ τῆς παρεμβολῆς ὡς φωνῇ διπλασιαζόντων πολλῶν**, καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐξέλαμπεν ὡς φέγγος ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης κυκλόθεν.†

Some translations seem to miss the point of the qualifier: ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, **as having been fired in a furnace**. These feet have been hardened into this tough metal by the suffering and pain of a refining process. These are not dainty, pleasant to look at feet. Instead, they are tough, hard as metal feet made so by the suffering of the Son of Man. Thus they possess strength and power to support the judgments of their owner, the Son of Man.

The point of walking around barefooted with feet looking like hardened brass or bronze was to stress the doing of sacred duties on a solid footing of power and authority. His feet were solid and needed nothing between them and the ground for either protection or comfort. No one could challenge His authority. One step by this gigantic figure with these feet would crush any enemy instantly.

Fourth is his voice: καὶ ἡ φωνῇ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνῇ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, **and his voice was like the sound of many waters**.

Once again the OT prophets provide the background for John's expression. Note especially Dan. 10:6 and Ezek. 43:2.

Dan. 10:6. His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, **and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude**.

LXX. καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ θαρσις, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ὄρασις ἀστραπῆς, καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ λαμπάδες πυρός, καὶ οἱ βραχίονες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πόδες ὡσεὶ χαλκὸς ἐξαστράπτων, **καὶ φωνῇ λαλιᾶς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ φωνῇ θορύβου.**†

Ezek. 43:2. And there, the glory of the God of Israel *parecían al bronce bruñido* (NBLH); *parecían bronce al rojo vivo* (NVI, CST); *eran como bronce brillante* (PDT); *pies semejantes al latón fino* (RVA)

German: *gleichwie Messing, das im Ofen glüht* (LUTH1545); *wie Golderz, das im Ofen glüht* (LUTH1984); *gleich Golderz, wie im Ofen geglüht* (ZB); *glänzten wie flüssiges Gold im Schmelzofen* (HOF); *glänzten wie gleißendes Gold, das im Schmelzofen glüht* (GNB); *glänzten wie Golderz, das im Schmelzofen glüht* (NGU-DE); *wie schimmerndes Erz, im Ofen geglüht* (SCH1951); *wie schimmerndes Erz, als glühten sie im Ofen* (SCH2000); *gleich glänzendem Erz, als glühten sie im Ofen* (EB); *glichen dem Golderz, als wären sie im Schmelzofen glühend gemacht* (Menge); *glänzten wie Golderz, das im Schmelzofen glüht* (EUB); *glänzten wie im Feuer gereinigtes Erz* (NLB). [Messing=brass; Golderz=gold ore; Erz=ore/bronze]

French: *étincelait comme du bronze incandescent* (BDS); *étaient semblables à de l'airain ardent* (LSG, NEG1979); *étaient semblables à du bronze ardent* (SG21).

The general contours of these OT prophetic images in connection to the speaking of God gives John the image for the speaking of this Ancient of Days.³⁷ When this God speaks His voice is so overpowering that it deafens.³⁸ This same OT prophetic background provides the imagery source for similar expressions in the Jewish *Apocalypse of Abraham* in 17:1 and 18:1.³⁹

Thus the voice of this Ancient of Days speaks with overwhelming authority and power that goes way beyond human ability to speak.

Fifth is his right hand: καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, **In his right hand he held seven stars**.

One should note the very awkward grammar structure here. The depiction of his head, his hair, his feet and his voice in vv. 14-15 are straight forward as-

³⁷Also in this background is **Ezek. 1:24.** When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings **like the sound of mighty waters**, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army; when they stopped, they let down their wings.

LXX. καὶ ἤκουον τὴν φωνὴν τῶν περυγῶν αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι αὐτὰ ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτος πολλοῦ· καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐστάναι αὐτὰ κατέπαυον αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν.†

³⁸Just as Dan. 10:6 ends with mention of the roar of the 'Son of man's' voice, so the portrayal of v 15 concludes, although the actual language describing the voice is taken from the MT of Ezek. 1:24 and 43:2, where God's voice is compared to the roar of many waters. God's voice in Ezek. 43:2 is located near the end-time temple of chs. 40-48, and Jewish writings located it in Israel's temple itself (*Midr. Rab. Gen. 3.4; Pesikta de Rab Kahana 21; Midr. Ps. 104.4; and Midr. Rab. Lev. 31.7*). The Son of man's voice is also set in a heavenly temple context (see also on 1:12, 16), which underscores further Christ's divine attributes." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 210.]

³⁹**17.1-3.** And I said to the angel, "Why have you now brought me up here, because my eyes cannot now see distinctly, and I am growing weak, and my spirit is departing from me?" And he said to me, "Remain close by me and do not fear, for the One whom you cannot see is now coming towards us **with a great voice of holiness**, even the Eternal One who loves you. But you yourself cannot see Him. But you must not allow your spirit to grow faint on account of the choirs of those who cry out, for I am with you to strengthen you."

18.1-3. And while he was thus speaking fire came all about us, and there was a voice within the fire **like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the sea in violent motion**. And I desired to fall down there and worship, and I saw that the angel who was with me bowed his head and worshiped, but the surface of the high place where I seemed to be standing changed its inclination constantly, rolling as the great waves on the surface of the sea.

sertions with the verb of being assumed rather clearly. The depictions of the sword and his face in v. 16b-c resume this same grammar structure. Tucked between is the participle phrase *καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων*, and having in his right hand seven stars. John inserts this trait by using an attributive participle phrase. The attributive participle from the verb ἔχω occurs some 60 times in Revelation, and thus is not out of the ordinary for this document, although unusual in Greek writings generally in this form. In a limited way the shift in grammar construction provides a break from the listing, and possibly highlights emphasis on the image of the right hand.

This image stretches the mind dramatically. This Ancient of Days has a right palm that is large enough to hold seven stars.

In the ancient world such imagery for a powerful ruler was relatively common, and the seven stars could refer to a variety of heavenly bodies.⁴⁰ These stars or

⁴⁰According to ancient sidereal lore, seven stars could represent (1) the seven planets, (2) Ursus Major (a constellation with seven stars), or (3) the Pleiades (another constellation of seven stars); each of these possibilities requires a short discussion.

“(1) In antiquity, the ‘seven stars’ are often used to represent the seven ‘planets’ (Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Venus, and Saturn). Though these seven planets were almost universally accepted in the Hellenistic and Roman world, there were three different planetary orders (Beck, *Planetary Gods*, 1–11): (a) The order based on distance from the earth has two variants (because the positions of Venus, Mercury, and the Sun cannot be determined relative to each other): (i) the older ‘Egyptian’ order: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Sun, and Moon, and (ii) the later ‘Chaldean’ order, which came to dominate late Hellenistic astronomy (note the position of the Sun in the center): Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon. (b) The astrological, horoscopic order (probably originally based on distance, though priority was given to the Sun and Moon for other reasons): Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. (c) The Mithraic ‘grade’ order: Saturn, Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. In some of the depictions of Mithras slaying the bull, the presence of seven stars in the field symbolizes the seven planets (Vermaseren, *Mithraica III*, 9 [plate IV], 12 [plate XII], 37; Vermaseren, *CIM-RM*, 1127B, 1206, 1216, 1727, 2244, 2354, 2359). Clement Alex. (Strom. 5.6) compares the menorah in the Jewish temple with the planets (see Comment on 1:12) and compares the light in the middle and in the highest position with the sun, following the ‘Chaldean’ order.

“(2) Seven stars can also represent the stars that form the constellation Ursa Major, known as ἡ Ἄρκτος, ‘the Great Bear’; the Septentriones, the seven plowing oxen; ἡ Ἄμαξα, ‘the Wain’; or (in the United States) the Big Dipper (Aratus Phaen. 26–27; Corp. Herm. frag. 6.13 [Scott, *Hermetica* 1:412–13; A. J. Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste* 3:37]; Vettius Valens 13.27; see Job 9:9; 38:32, where the Hebrew term *אֵיִשׁ* *ayish* is translated ‘Bear’ in the RSV and NRSV and ‘Great Bear’ in KB3, 778).

“(3) In addition, since there are seven stars in the constellation Pleiades, this sidereal group could be alluded to (Malina, *Revelation*, 70). This constellation was apparently known to the author of Job 38:31, where the Hebrew term *כִּמָּה* *kimā* refers to ‘das Sie-

planets were typically considered to be gods of some sort that possessed supernatural power. For John to picture the Ancient of Days holding these seven stars in his right hand of power underscored the immense authority of this figure. And additionally when these seven stars are identified with the seven churches in v. 20 it is an additional affirmation of supernatural authority being expressed by these stars through the churches.

Again John seems to have drawn mostly from Dan. 12:3, 6-7⁴¹ for this image which reflects in Daniel much of the above understanding.⁴² Additionally Zech. 4 may be playing some role in the shaping of this image.⁴³ At least in later Jewish interpretive tradition after the first century, Zechariah and Daniel are linked up in

bengestirn,’ i.e., Pleiades (KB3, 450).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 97-98.]

⁴¹**Dan. 12:3, 6-7.** 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, *like the stars* forever and ever. . . .

6 One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, “How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?” 7 The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished.

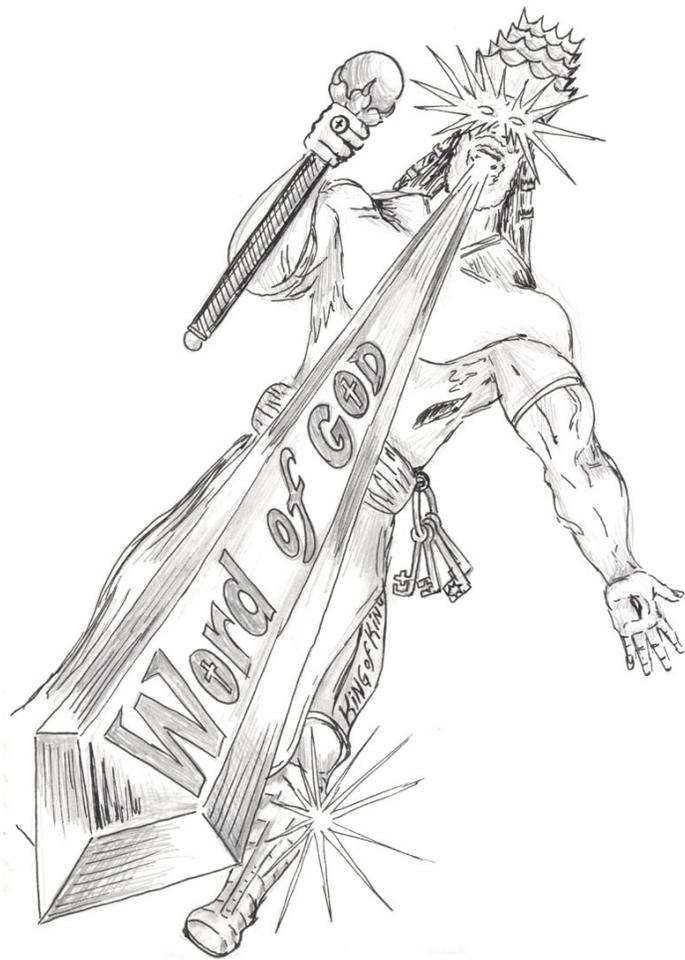
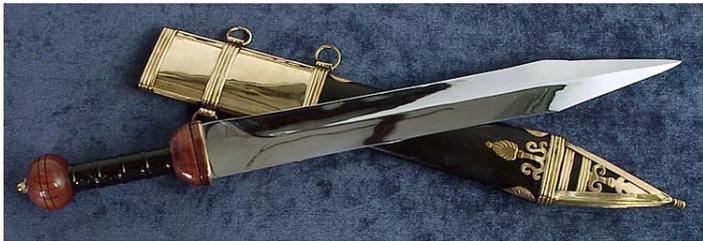
⁴²“In light of the influence from Daniel 10 observed so far, there is reason to view the metaphor of ‘stars’ as originating also from Daniel (for the close association of ‘stars’ with the heavenly man cf. Dan. 12:3, 6–7 in both LXX and Theod.). The heavenly ‘man’ ‘above the waters’ in Dan. 12:6ff. is the same figure as in Daniel 10, and the ‘stars’ (ἀστέρες) in 12:3 symbolize the ‘wise’ among Israel who have been resurrected to heavenly glory. Rev. 1:20 identifies the stars with ‘angels’ (see the comments there). The point is that Christ is the priestly ruler not only of the church on earth but also of its heavenly counterpart (‘hand’ being metaphorical for sovereignty).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 210-11.]

⁴³“Like the seven lampstands, the number of the ‘seven stars’ may also have arisen in part from the ‘seven lamps’ of Zechariah 4 (see below). In Jewish writings the Zech. 4:2 lampstand is said to symbolize the righteous in Israel and is equated with the wise who will shine like the stars in Dan. 12:3 (*Midr. Rab. Lev.* 30.2; *Sifre Deut.* 10; *Pesikta de Rab Kahana* 27.2; *Pesikta Rabbati* 51.4). McNamara sees the Palestinian Targum to Exod. 40:4 as the background for 1:20a, where the ‘seven lamps’ of the tabernacle are viewed as ‘corresponding to the seven stars, which resemble the just that shine unto eternity in their righteousness,’ the latter phrase being a clear allusion to Dan. 12:3!¹²³ The Zechariah lampstand and the stars of Dan. 12:3 were thus equated in Jewish writings, so that their combination in Rev. 1:20 is natural and may suggest that the ‘stars,’ even if angelic, represent the church’s heavenly existence and the ‘lampstands’ its earthly existence.¹²⁴” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 211.]

a common understanding. Whether this was true in the first Christian century is another matter that cannot be claimed with any evidential basis.

The tendency of modern interpreters to see this image of the stars in the right hand as either John's polemic against mythological-astrological teachings of the ancient world or as derived solely from the OT prophets represents a false dichotomy of viewpoint. The issue here is not an 'either/or' choice. Instead, it is the standard reaching by John into the OT prophets for sources of imagery that affirm the absolute sovereignty of this Ancient of Days over any and all claims to power -- either human or divine -- in his late first century world.

Sixth is his mouth: καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὄξεια ἐκπορευομένη, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword.



This image, when pictured visually, is indeed strange. And is obviously symbolic in meaning. But

what meaning?⁴⁴ Why did John need to specify a two-

⁴⁴“**sword**, a close-range weapon composed of a metal blade, which was usually bronze or iron in the biblical period, and a wood or bone handle (Judg. 3:22). The sword is distinguished from the dagger on the basis of length; the former designation is normally applied to weapons that are over one foot long. Depending upon its function (i.e., slashing or stabbing), the blade was single or double-edged (Judg. 3:16; Ps. 149:6), curved or straight, pointed or blunt. Since swords were so common in the ancient world, the biblical writers provided few descriptive details about these weapons. Fortunately, archaeologists have recovered many swords and daggers from virtually every period of antiquity; this makes it possible for readers of the Bible to obtain some understanding of the weapons mentioned in particular biblical episodes.

“Between the third millennium B.C. and the Greco-Roman period (333 B.C.-A.D. 324), the sword evolved through a variety of shapes, lengths, and levels of durability. The earliest swords were made of bronze and averaged only about 10 inches in length; blades were double-edged, straight, and pointed. While this daggerlike weapon was used primarily for stabbing, the longer sickle-sword was made for slashing. Through the centuries, numerous changes were made in blade production and in the method of attaching the blade to its hilt, but the major change in the development of swords took place when iron-working became widespread. Archaeological and biblical evidence points to the Philistines' early monopoly on the military use of this superior metal (1 Sam. 13:19-22). With the arrival of the Iron Age ca. 1200 B.C., the straight, long sword was developed as a formidable weapon for the first time in history. Since iron possesses greater hardness and strength than bronze, iron was ideal for the forging of longer blades and more durable cutting edges. The double-edged, pointed sword reached a length of 30 inches, and this weapon was strong enough for thrusting and slashing. Although the long sword was improved and used throughout the Mediterranean region until relatively modern times, Greek and Roman soldiers also used shorter swords. The typical sword of Roman soldiers in NT times was the *gladius*, a lightweight, well-balanced weapon with a blade about 2 feet long (see Eph. 6:17: 'sword of the Spirit,' Lat. *spiritus gladius*).

“Between the first biblical reference to the sword, the mysterious 'flaming sword' in Gen. 3:24, and the final mention of this weapon, the sword of judgment in Rev. 19:21, the term 'sword' appears in the Bible well over four hundred times, making the sword the most frequently mentioned weapon in Scripture. References to swords occur in accounts from every biblical period. Most passages refer to the literal weapon of war, but the sword also symbolizes aggression (Jer. 2:30; Matt. 26:52), disharmony (2 Sam. 2:26; Matt. 10:34), deceit (Ps. 55:21), divine assistance (Ezek. 30:21-25), God's word (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12), and divine wrath (Isa. 34:5-6; Jer. 50:35-37; Ezek. 21:9-20; Hos. 11:6). Since the sword was normally kept in a sheath (1 Sam. 17:51), the drawn sword signified war (Judg. 8:10). The prophets allude to the drawn and sheathed sword to symbolize the threat of God's judgment (Jer. 47:6; Ezek. 21:3-5, 28-30). Highly figurative are the book of Revelation's references to the sword of judgment that protrudes from the Lord's mouth, a probable reference to the power of his words of judgment (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). Above all of this military terminology stands the hope that an age of peace will eventually eliminate the need for swords (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3; see Joel 3:10, where this situation is reversed).”

[Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Page 17

edged sword?⁴⁵ Interestingly, this element of the apocalyptic image seems to be derived more from the general prevalence of swords in the ancient world, rather than from specific apocalyptic images in the Jewish tradition, although some scattered references to similar imagery exists in these writings.⁴⁶

The grammar structure again is quite unusual here with the noun ῥομφαία, *sword*, qualified by δίστομος ὀξεῖα, *sharp, two-edged*, but no definite article, which is demanded when other qualifies are attached to a noun. An irregular pattern surfaces several times with the use of ῥομφαία elsewhere in the book of Revelation: 1:16; 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21.⁴⁷ Only in 2:12 is a further reference made to a sharp, two-edged sword: ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα.⁴⁸ Elsewhere the depiction is either that of just a sword or a sharp sword (ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, 19:15) coming out of his mouth.

Clearly in the context of usage of ῥομφαία for sword here signals the message of divine judgment coming from the mouth of the Ancient of Days. This can be derived from two sources. First, the sword typically represents the tongue in speaking across the ancient world.⁴⁹ Particularly prominent in this background im-

Harper & Row, 1985), 1002-03.]

⁴⁵One should note that the most commonly used term for sword in the NT is μάχαρα, which was a short sword or dagger (29 of the 36 NT references to a sword).

⁴⁶**First Enoch 62:1-2.** 1 And thus the Lord commanded the kings and the mighty and the exalted and those who possess the land, and he said, “Open your eyes and lift up your horns, if you are able to recognize the Chosen One.” 2 And the Lord of Spirits seated him upon the throne of his glory; and the spirit of righteousness was poured upon him. And *the word of his mouth will slay all the sinners*, and all the unrighteous will perish from his presence.

Second Esdras (=IV Ezra) 13:8-10. 8 After this I looked and saw that all who had gathered together against him, to wage war with him, were filled with fear, and yet they dared to fight. 9 When he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude, he neither lifted his hand nor held a spear or any weapon of war; 10 but I saw only *how he sent forth from his mouth something like a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he shot forth a storm of sparks.*

⁴⁷Some assume this signals different composition times for different parts of the book, but this is very difficult to establish with any degree of certainty. The better option is to view this unusual pattern as another of the frequent irregularities of grammar etc. that typify the composition of the document. No apparent reason can be legitimately deduced as to why this was done.

⁴⁸“The term ῥομφαία was normally used to refer to a large sword used both for cutting and piercing, while μάχαρα was used for a short sword or a dagger (the somewhat arbitrary rule of thumb for archaeologists is that the latter is sixteen inches or shorter). The Roman legionary carried a *gladius*, a straight sword.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 98.]

⁴⁹“That the sword issues from the mouth of Christ suggests that the sword is a metaphor for the tongue, i.e., for the words he speaks. Speech is frequently compared to a sword or dagger,

agery is the idea of words of judgment or sentencing of individuals. This is particularly the case when modifying terms such as ‘sharp’ and/or ‘double-edged’ are attached. Second, the remaining uses of ῥομφαία in 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21 reflect the Son of Man speaking words of judgment and condemnation as though these words were cutting and destroying like such a sword would do in battle.⁵⁰

Seventh is his face: καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ, *and his face was like the sun shining with full force.*

This final depiction points most directly to the deity of this Ancient of Days. His face is more bright than the noonday sun and thus cannot be looked at directly.

Here is John seems to be reaching back to the transfiguration experience of the earthly Jesus record-

and the emphasis on sharpness suggests the effectiveness or power of the words (4Q436= *4QBarēki Napši*. [tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 437]: ‘You will place my mouth like a sharpened sword’). This is the case in Ahiqar 100b (2.18) = tr. Porten-Yardeni, *Textbook*, 2:37: ‘Soft is the speech of a king (yet) it is sharper and mightier than a [double-] edged knife’ (cf. Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:500). Reason, effective speech, and the word of God are often compared with a sword or dagger (Pss 52:2; 57:4; Wis 18:15–16; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12; the term μάχαρα is used in the last two references). It is possible that v 16a is based on an allusion to Isa 49:2, where in the context of the second Servant Song, the speaker says ‘He [God] made my mouth like a sharp sword,’ perhaps in combination with Isa 11:4, ‘he shall smite the earth with the rod [MT: שֶׁבֶט; LXX: τῷ λόγῳ] of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked’ (see Comments on 19:15, 21. In Heb 4:12, the word of God is said to be ‘sharper than any two-edged sword.’ In all these passages, the ‘sword’ is clearly a metaphor for judgment (A. T. Hanson, *Wrath*, 166–67). In the Jewish magical text entitled ‘The Sword of Moses,’ the term ‘sword’ is apparently a metaphor for the Ineffable Name of God (see M. Gaster, ‘The Sword of Moses,’ in *Studies and Texts* [New York: Ktav, 1971] 1:288–337). Note that the phrase בפי הרב *bēpī hereb* or ἐν στόματι ῥομφαίας, literally ‘with the mouth of the sword,’ is an idiom for ‘with the edge of the sword’ (e.g., LXX Josh 6:20; 8:20; Judg 1:8, 25; 4:15, 16; 20:37; 21:10; 1 Kgs 15:8; 22:19; T. Levi 6:5; Jos. As. 26:5), so that the phrase ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία, ‘the sword from his mouth,’ could be construed as a play on words. The swords (κινδύμη *kydynym*) described at some length in IQM 5:11–14, for use in the eschatological struggle by the sons of light, are scimitars (i.e., curved swords) with a single edge. In Cleanthes’ famous hymn to Zeus, the thunderbolt wielded by Zeus is called two-edged in line 10 (ἀμφήκη ... κεραιβόν), suggesting the analogy with a two-edged sword.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 98-99.]

⁵⁰Interestingly Paul uses a somewhat similar image in **2 Thess. 2:8.** *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.*

καὶ τότε ἀποκαλυφθήσεται ὁ ἄνομος, ὃν ὁ κύριος [Ἰησοῦς] ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσει τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ,

ed in Matt. 17:2.

And he was transfigured before them, **and his face shone like the sun**, and his clothes became dazzling white.

καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, **καὶ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος**, τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς.

Although the metaphor ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, **as the sun**, could imply beauty in some ancient expressions, in the widely used tradition of ancient Judaism and early Christianity such a comparison was to assert deity and divine authority.⁵¹ Clearly this is John's point here with this more detailed image. This Ancient of Days as God Himself has such a bright appearance that no one can look directly at Him. The appropriate response is that of Moses at the burning bush experience:

He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." **And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

2. What does the text mean to us today?

If we thought we understood Jesus of Nazareth from the four gospel accounts, we now realize that our highly limited understanding has not been able to see Him from a Heavenly perspective. John now introduces us to the risen Christ with apocalyptic depiction that expands our perspective enormously.

This Son of Man is the one coming on the clouds in triumphant return (v. 7), and He indeed is the sovereign God whose existence is eternal (v. 8). These prophetic oracles prepare us to have our eyes opened wide so as to catch a glimpse at this One. John in eloquent

⁵¹“καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ, ‘and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.’ This may be an allusion to Dan 10:6, where it is said of the angelic revealer that ‘his face [was] like the appearance of lightning.’ In the description of the angel in Rev 10:1, it is said that ‘his face was like the sun.’ The face could be compared with the sun as a metaphor for beauty (Wis 7:29; Jos. As. 14:9; 18:9), but more frequently as a metaphor for sanctity, divinity, or transcendence, often in theophanies or angelophanies (e.g., the transfiguration in Matt 17:2, ‘his face shone like the sun,’ a phrase not found in Mark or Luke; see also Rev 10:1; 2 Enoch [rec. J and A] 1:5; 19:2; 4 Ezra 7:97, 125; Apoc. Zeph. 6:11; cf. 1 Enoch 14:21; 106:2).

“There is also a widespread Judeo-Christian tradition that emphasizes the brightness of the faces of the righteous, often comparing their faces with the radiance of the sun or the stars (Matt 13:43; 4 Ezra 7:97, 125; T. Job 31:5; b. Ber. 17a; cf. Exod 34:29; Dan 12:3; 1 Enoch 38:4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 51:3; for references to rabbinic literature, see Str-B 1:752; 3:790; Stone, 4 Ezra, 245 n. 46). In Jos. As. 14:9 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 2:225), ‘his face was like lightning, and his eyes like sunshine, and the hairs of his head like a flame of fire of a burning torch.’ The phrase ‘in full strength’ (literally ‘in its might’) refers to the brightness of the sun unimpeded by clouds (cf. Judg 5:31).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 99.]

apocalyptic language paints a glorious picture of this Christ who stands in the midst of His churches both in authority and protection of them. No Roman emperor, no matter how splendid his garb and how pompous his triumphant parades through the streets, could begin to compare with this Ancient of Days in the midst of His people.

In presenting this kind of picture of Christ to his readers, John sought to reassure them of the rightness of their religious commitment to Christ. The pagan gods and goddesses including the emperor of that late first century world possessed no power comparable to that of this Son of Man.

One of the clear messages of such a portrayal of Christ is that of coming judgment. The picture of Christ in vv. 13-16 affirms in the strongest of language that the Son of Man has both the authority and the divine power to exercise judgment over all, including His own people.

In this epiphany of Christ in vv. 13-16 John reached out to a huge treasure of terms, imagery, and religious understanding from the Old Testament prophets along with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition of the intertestamental era.⁵² He skillfully selected appropriate elements

⁵²“The vision itself (vv 11–20) was experienced in a state of trance, i.e., ‘in the spirit’ (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), perceived to be a normal vehicle for receiving prophetic and apocalyptic revelations. The vision consisted of an epiphany of the heavenly Christ, framed by the command that John write what he will see (and hear) in a scroll to be sent to the seven churches (vv 11, 19), a functional equivalent of the OT messenger formula ‘go and tell.’ On turning around, John first saw seven golden menorahs (interpreted in v 20 as symbolizing the seven churches), and in their midst stood “one like a son of man” (an allusion to Dan 7:13 with no hint of influence from the Son of Man traditions in the Gospels), with white hair, eyes like fire, feet like polished bronze, and a voice like the roar of ‘rushing waters’ (NIV). Using this combination of imagery, which originally referred to two figures in Dan 7:9–14, one ‘like a son of man’ (Dan 7:13) and the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9), the author has virtually equated the two figures. He held seven stars in his right hand (interpreted in v 20 as the angels of the seven churches), a sharp sword issued from his mouth, and his face shown like the sun. John responds in a manner typical for characters in such vision reports: he falls down paralyzed with fear. The awesome figure utters an oracle of assurance urging John not to be afraid and identifies himself with a series of descriptive phrases that leave the reader no doubt that this is none other than the exalted Jesus. In vv 17b–18, he not only describes himself with the divine titles ‘the First and the Last,’ also used in 2:8; 22:13 (a divine title drawn from Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), and ‘the Living One’ (titles that were appropriate only for God), but he also refers to his death and resurrection and to the fact that he possesses the keys to Death and to Hades. According to the ancient mythical view, both heaven and the underworld were linked to this world by doors or gates. In Hellenistic Anatolia, the ancient goddess Hekate was accorded universal sovereignty as mistress of the cosmos and was popularly thought to hold the keys to Hades. John therefore portrays Christ as usurping the authority of Hekate as well as that of every other

from that treasure house of ideas and crafted them together in eloquent portrayal of the risen Christ as the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days. By drawing upon this background imagery and language familiar to most of his readers, the message came through to John's intended readers, but seemed confusing and senseless to any outsiders who might examine the document.

One of the roles of this apocalyptic vision in vv. 9-20 is to prepare the readers for the seven letters that follow in chapters two and three. Elements of this depiction in vv. 13-16 will be repeated in each of these seven letters as the basis of Christ's thorough examination of each community of believers. On the basis of this divine authority demands will be made; warnings of being put out of existence will be given; appeals to repentance and straightening out one's spiritual life will be laid before each congregation. But also promises of eternal life and divine blessing will be issued to those who are faithful to this Christ on the basis of His divine authority.

The other role of this apocalyptic vision will be to prepare the readers for the second phase of John's vi-

natural or supernatural authority. The command to write in v 19 involves just two subjects: 'what you see, namely' (1) 'the present' and (2) 'the imminent future,' a modification of the widespread Hellenistic tripartite prophecy formula that emphasized the past, present, and future.

"The entire vision is a pastiche of allusions to Jewish epiphany language. The main source of imagery for his epiphany is Dan 10:5-14 (probably a description of the angel Gabriel), with features drawn from the description of God in Dan 7:9 (hair white like wool) and of the mysterious figure in Dan 7:13 ('one like a son of man'). The description of Christ also owes something to ancient grandiose depictions of the appearance of great kings (cf. Jos. As. 5:6; Dio Chrysostom *Or* 3.73-85) and Israelite high priests (Josephus *Ant.* 4.154, 171). In Jewish literature, similar epiphanic language is found in Jos. As. 14:8-11; Apoc. Zeph. 9:12-10:9. Significantly, the exalted Christ is described using imagery drawn from descriptions of God (cf. Ezek 1:26-28, upon which Dan 7 is probably dependent) and prominent angelic figures. Similar descriptions of divine beings seen in epiphanies are found in the Greek magical papyri and in descriptions of divine epiphanies in Greek literary texts. The author uses various visual attributes and verbal attributes from the visions in the descriptions of Christ that form the introductions to the seven letters, thereby linking 2:1-3:22 to the introductory commission vision. The entire scene has enough similarities to various OT epiphanies to make it entirely plausible to the reader familiar with that background. The metaphorical character of what John sees is made obvious in v 20, where the seven stars are interpreted as the seven angels of the churches and the seven menorahs as the seven churches themselves (one of the few passages in Revelation in which allegorical interpretations are presented). The seven menorahs are primarily reminiscent of the seven-branched golden menorah of the tabernacle and temple (Exod 25:31-41), also seen in Zechariah's vision (Zech 4:1-2), which today is the religious symbol of Judaism."

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 116-17.]

sion when he is transported into Heaven itself in this vision and stands before the very throne of God.⁵³ Some of the qualities of the Son of Man are also the qualities belonging to God Himself. Here John turned around in order to see this Son of Man. In part two, he looks up into Heaven to experience the extension of the vision (cf. 4:1-2). The continuation of this vision introduced in 1:9-11 will pick back up in 4:1 and extend through chapter twenty-two. Thus John's vision pulls together the entire experience of now and then into a unified picture of experiencing spiritual reality not possible through mere sensory experience and understanding. One can only grasp such deep spiritual reality through the visionary experience that John had.

The lingering question coming at me repeatedly through this study has been: How clearly do you understand who Jesus is? The fourth gospels paint one picture of the Son of Man in compassionate ministry -- a very important picture to have. But John's vision here introduces us to another equally important picture of the Son of Man as the coming Judge of all humanity!

One of the continuous challenges to the followers of Christ is balance. Our understanding of Christ must be inclusive of who He is in every aspect of His being. We dare not focus on just one element to the neglect of the others. The picture of the Good Shepherd as painted in more modern times appeals to us. But that is only one small part of who Christ is. This apocalyptic picture of Christ in vv. 13-16 discloses to us another hugely important aspect: Christ is the coming Judge!

Not only is our biblical understanding and religious doctrine at stake here in maintaining a balanced picture. Our very spiritual health depends upon this balanced understanding of our Christ. In fact, our spiritual life will be vibrant and healthy only to the extent that we achieve and maintain this balanced perspective of Christ.

May God help us see Jesus clearly. And before we see Him coming with the clouds!

⁵³“John's divine commission narrated in 1:9-20 introduces not only the proclamations to the seven churches dictated to him by the exalted Christ (2:1-3:22) but the main part of Revelation as well (4:1-22:5). This is a commission for a particular task (i.e., to write what he will see and hear), not a report of the inaugural vision calling him to a prophetic vocation (like those of many OT leaders and prophets; cf. Exod 3:1-12; Judg 6:11-17; Isa 6:1-13; Ezek 1:1-3:11). Part of John's inaugural vision may be preserved in 10:8-11, itself modeled after part of Ezekiel's inaugural vision in Ezek 2:8-3:4 (much as the commission of Ezra in 4 Ezra 14 is modeled after that of Moses in Exod 3:1-12). The purpose of this visionary commission to write is to provide divine legitimation for a controversial message.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 115.]