

# **The Companion of the Way**

by

**H.C. Hewlett**

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## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **THE STEWARD OF GOD'S HOUSE - Revelation 1 - John**

#### **I. THE SETTING -- THE LORD AND HIS CHURCHES**

When the aged Apostle John was permitted to suffer banishment do the dreary isle of Patmos, he might well have mused upon the inscrutable dealings of the providence of GOD. Must he who had known the wonder of being pillowed on the bosom of CHRIST come to rest his head on that rugged shore? This, indeed, was fellowship with the Lord JESUS, who dwelt of eternal right in the bosom of the Father but said of the days of His ministry in this world, "**the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.**" Yet more than this was embraced in GOD's will for John, for the time had come for giving through him the book which would complete the canon of Scripture. Seeing that the theme of all of GOD's Word is GOD's Christ, it was most fitting that its final part should record the last glimpse of the glorified Saviour given to men in this life ere His coming again. Beyond this glimpse was the unfolding of things to come, and the triumph of the LAMB, but to us in this church age was given the final message from the ascended Lord for our service and testimony. What then would be the nature of this word to the church, and in what character would the Lord manifest Himself to His servant?

John was the sole survivor of the apostolic band. The direct voice of inspiration would soon cease. The church era was well started, and the lips of Paul and of others who had taught the great doctrines of the Church and the churches had long been silent. Local churches had been established in many lands and in their development had already shown the strengths and the weaknesses that would characterize the witness for CHRIST throughout this present age. In these circumstances it pleased GOD to reveal His Son once more to John, that through the apostle might be sent to the churches the Lord's mind concerning their progress. Seven churches in Proconsular Asia were made recipients of messages that might be termed *interim reports*, for not only did they unfold that which the Lord saw required approval or censure, but they anticipated the final declaration of His mind at His judgment seat. In the light of these seven letters the churches of Asia, and all others since, would have opportunity to adjust their ways and so live that the day of CHRIST would involve for them not shame but only rejoicing.

The vision of the Lord JESUS CHRIST given to John was entirely suited to the purpose of the seven letters. To grasp its meaning more readily, we must remember that the symbolism of the Revelation has its key in the preceding parts of the Scripture. Were our understanding of the Word more spiritual and more penetrative, we would surely find in Scripture itself the solution to the problems of Scripture's last book. The Word of GOD is a matchless harmony; it is complete; nothing is lacking. Like the sun, it is to be studied in its own light. However welcome may be the help afforded by the research of the historian, the true knowledge of the Revelation belongs to the believer who reads it with a mind saturated with the words and teachings of Holy Writ and with a heart responsive with the obedience of faith.

The language of Revelation 1 to 3 makes obvious allusion to the message regarding Shebna and Eliakim in Isaiah 22:15-25. Shebna was the treasurer of David's house, but because of his pride he was to be replaced by Eliakim. His office placed him over the house and gave him a threefold duty touching the servants of the king. In the morning of each day's toil it was his duty to allot to every man his work and to equip him for it. During the busy hours that followed he would inspect and superintend the labour, and in the evening of the day he would pay the wages of each. For this office Eliakim was called, clothed, and commissioned.

As to his call, he was honored by the Word of the Lord with the title "My servant," which indicated his character in GOD's sight and pointed to the greater Servant so richly portrayed in Isaiah's prophecies. Eliakim was the son of Hilkiyah (i.e., the Lord's portion, the root of Hilkiyah being used in the sense of "portion" in Deuteronomy 32:9 -- "**the Lord's portion is his people**") and foreshadowed the One who was uniquely the Lord's portion, and who where all others failed gave Him all He craved. The name Eliakim (i.e., GOD sets up) reminds of the prophecy of the Risen One -- "**He set my feet upon a rock.**" (The word Eliakim includes the root of the verb "set" in this passage in Psalm 40:2). Touching his clothing we read, "**I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle**" (Isaiah 22:21). Now the robe and the girdle remind of the garments in which the Lord JESUS is arrayed in Revelation.

As to Eliakim's commission, GOD said, "**I will commit thy government into his hand: . . . And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open**" (Isaiah 22:21-22). But upon a stronger shoulder and into a stronger hand GOD has placed all authority, for "**the government shall be upon his shoulder**" (Isaiah 9:6), and the Father has "**given all things into his hand**" (John 13:3). The words concerning Eliakim are quoted in the letter to Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7. It is CHRIST who has the key of David and who opens and shuts at His sovereign pleasure. He has also the keys of Hell and of death; He has supreme control over the destinies of all men.

The presentation of CHRIST in the first three chapters of the Revelation as the treasurer of the letters to the churches. In them we see the steward *going on circuit* around the churches and giving to each a report on its welfare. The letters all begin with a glimpse of His Person and authority, for all toil and testimony must spring from His bidding and His equipping. To each church He speaks, "I know," and to five of the seven, "**I know thy works.**" He examines the condition of each, comforts or rebukes as is necessary, and makes recommendations for the future. Finally, He promises rewards to the overcomer. Here, then, are exemplified the three phases of the steward's task. It is CHRIST who appoints to us our work as servants of GOD and

who prepares us for that work. CHRIST is the Overseer of our toil, and from His hands shall be received such rewards as He shall be pleased to give at the judgment seat.

## II. THE REVELATION -- THE HEAVENLY MINISTER

To the Patmos vision we turn to behold the glory of GOD's steward, and we listen to the words wherewith John recounts his experience of the unveiled presence of the Lord. **"I John . . . was in the isle that is called Patmos . . . I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day"** (Revelation 1:9-10). It was a compensating vision which was given him. It has been truly said that "the world gave us Patmos, but GOD gives us the Spirit." So often has it been demonstrated that amid trial and affliction the believer is made to overcome by the Spirit's ministry of CHRIST. John heard a great voice, the voice of the First and the Last, bidding him write what he saw to the seven churches, each of which was named by the speaker. So John proceeds.

**"And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; in the midst of the seven candlesticks on like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle"** (Revelation 1:12-13). Each candlestick represented a church, as the Lord stated, and each was golden, because set up by GOD Himself. How it must have cheered John's heart as he thought of those churches so dear to him, the first of which he had long lived with, to see the value GOD put upon them! In spite of all their failure they were **"of him, and through him, and to him."** In their midst was none other than the Lord JESUS. His presence was *the secret of their continuance*, even as with the churches of every century and of today. But for that faithful presence and His untiring ministry, none could maintain testimony in this dark scene.

**"One like unto the Son of man."** Often had John heard the Lord speak of Himself by this title of His true humanity, which proclaimed Him to be the One in whom every noble and precious trait proper to manhood found full and harmonious expression. Because of His humanity He was the appointed judge, even as He spoke, **"The Father . . . hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man"** (John 5:26-27). In John's vision title stresses particularly the experience in manhood of the One whom he beheld in such majesty. Having served the will of GOD in the conditions normal to human life, sin apart, and being made **"perfect through sufferings,"** He is an assessor who has known every circumstance of trial which a holy being could experience. Perfect in His understanding of His people's path, of their service, and of their needs. He is still the Son of man. His eyes are as a flame of fire, but they are human eyes; His voice is as the sound of many waters, but it is a human voice; His feet are like unto fine brass, but they are human feet.

The garment and the girdle tell of the *great glory of person* which the Lord JESUS brings to His office as steward. It is noteworthy that John should see them and write of them, for he it was who described in John 13 the scene where the Lord had exchanged His outer garments for the girdle in order that He might wash the disciple's feet. The grace and humility of the upper room pictured most suggestively the facts of the Lord's stoop from Heaven. Then He had laid aside His vestments of majesty, the splendor which had always surrounded Him, and condescended to take the servant's form that He might carry out the lowly ministry linked with the girdle. But in Patmos John beheld the Lord wearing both garment and girdle together. Once more He was clothed in majesty, having been glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the

world was, but He nevertheless remained the gracious minister to the needs of men. Moreover the position of the girdle claims attention. It might be worn around the loins, as befitting toil in the harvest fields of earth, or around the heart, as suited to the service of the sanctuary. It was the latter which John saw, for though the Lord retained the servant's form, His toil on earth in weariness and suffering was completed, and in its place was the tranquil ministry of His glorified state.

The sublime description of CHRIST in Revelation 1:14-16 comprises seven distinct glimpses of His person, which are given in two groups of three and four respectively. That the feet should be mentioned immediately after the eyes, and before the voice and the right hand, indicates a purposive arrangement of John's subject matter. The first group tells of the holiness which ever pertains to CHRIST's dealings with His people in the witness for Him, for never for a moment can one act on His part be at variance with His essential, eternal purity. He is not only holy, but holiness itself. Hence all that is contrary to His nature is unholy. Because He changes not, there can be neither variation of His character, nor relaxing of His standards for His people. In both Testaments the word is "**be ye holy; for I am holy,**" and this whether as in Israel's case, surrounded by the excesses of heathendom, or, as in our case, amid the disdain of GOD and the consequent decline of morals so painfully obvious in this present day. The second group tells of CHRIST's complete sufficiency to supply everything His people require for their life and witness. The unveiling of His person is always GOD's answer to our need. For every fresh realization of our own inadequacy GOD has a fresh revealing of the inexhaustible fullness of CHRIST.

**"His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace"** (Revelation 1:14-15). In the snow-white head we see *holiness ruling*, in the flaming eyes *holiness searching*, and in the burning feet *holiness moving*. His head is white, for His rule is marked by perfect purity. We are His bondmen, over whom He has right of complete dominion, but the basic principle of His government is holiness, even as Isaiah learned when he saw His glory and heard the adoration of the seraphim. If we would see His power put forth in blessing in our lives, then must we yield to His holy will the unreserved submission which is prepared for entire adjustment to the claims of His character. Holiness is imperative to blessing. Is it a vision of Himself which we crave? Then the Word speaks: "**Follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord**" (Hebrews 12:14). Is it service in which we would glorify Him? Then the Word speaks: "**Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord**" (Isaiah 52:11). Is it prayer in which we fail? Again the Word speaks: "**I will . . . that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands**" (I Timothy 2:8).

**"His eyes as a flame of fire."** We cannot escape *their penetrating gaze*. The depths of the heart lie bare to the solemn inspection. No motive is missed, and no secret thing is overlooked. To Thyatira the Lord sent the message: "**These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire . . . I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts**" (Revelation 2:18, 23). Those eyes are still upon us today, as they shall be at His judgment seat.

Then, then, I feel that He,  
(Remembered or forgot),  
The Lord is never far from me,  
Though I perceive it not.

In darkness as in light,  
Hidden alike from view,  
I sleep, I wake, as in His sight,  
Who looks all nature through.

From the dim hour of birth,  
Through every changing state,  
Of mortal pilgrimage on earth,  
Till its appointed date,

All that I am, have been,  
All that I yet may be,  
He sees at once, as He hath seen,  
And shall for ever see.

How shall I meet His eyes?  
Mine on the Cross I cast,  
And own my life a Saviour's prize,  
Mercy from first to last.

What things does He see in us -- the unclean thought, the eye not turned away, the secret grudge, the jealousy of another's blessing, the unwarranted suspicious of another's motives, the greed for mammon, the proud ambition? These, and much else hidden from men under the guise of an outward rectitude, must be judged before the gaze of CHRIST if we are to know "**years of the right hand of the most High.**"

"**His feet are like unto fine brass.**" Brass is the symbol of judgment, as it is so often in Scripture. When He moves in the midst of His churches to carry out His discipline, His steps are holy. He has not one standard for His foes and another for His friends. It is the same holiness which tests all and judges all. To Ephesus He said, "**These things saith he who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks . . . Repent . . . or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place**" (Revelation 2:1, 5). Yet even in these activities, His love and patience are fully manifested, and those glowing feet *pause in their stately tread* that He may stand at the door of a heart and plead for the fellowship which has been denied Him. "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me**" (Revelation 3:20).

"**And his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength**" (Revelation 1:15-16). Nowhere in Patmos would John be far from the surges of the Aegean Sea, but they were all hushed by this glorious voice. Its sound is compared in Scripture to the pealing of thunder: "**The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth**" (Psalm 29:3) (see Job 37:5), and to the voice of a multitude (Daniel 10:6). But when it speaks peace to the soul it is as heavenly music.

Thy voice, like great waters -- how calmly our soul  
Shall hear in the glory its deep waters roll!

But here and now it sounds above the restless waves of this world's commotion and stills the heart to rest.

It is in this voice that first we find in this passage the sufficiency of CHRIST, for embraced within its flow is every stream of truth that comes from the heart of GOD. The voices of lawgiver, of psalmist, and of prophet, all gave precious words from the one eternal fount, but all their message, and far more, is conveyed by the voice of the Lord Himself. Even so are we taught in the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews that the days of partial revelation are ended, in that GOD has spoken to us by His Son. He is the ultimate Messenger of GOD, even as He is all the Message. We listen in all our variety of need to the voice of CHRIST and find therein no lack of supply, but rather that which is given directly for our own heart. As the many waters *blend in perfect harmony* of sound, so the streams of truth in the Person and work of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the life.

**"And he had in his right hand seven stars."** The right hand speaks of power. As Moses and the children of Israel by the shore of the Red Sea sang to their GOD, **"Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power,"** so with even deeper meaning we acclaim the triumph of CHRIST's journey through the sea of death to the shore of resurrection and **"the saving strength of his right hand."** The seven stars were the angels (the messengers) of the seven churches. In the world's darkness each church was a candlestick; each person who was given responsibility within a church was a star. As the star has its shining, so the servant of CHRIST and of the church has his ministry. Each star was held in the Lord's right hand. Each servant, whatever his service, was *safe in His care*, safe within a clasp both possessive and protective, which was at once omnipotent in its strength and exquisite in its gentleness.

**"And out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword."** It is the Word of GOD which is so described as proceeded from the mouth of its AUTHOR -- the Word in all its penetrating and discriminating power and in all its finality of authority (cf. Hebrews 4:12). To Pergamos the Lord said, **"These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; . . . I . . . will fight against them with the sword of my mouth"** (Revelation 2:12, 16). With the sharp sword He will smite the nations at His coming in glory (Revelation 19:15), but first it must deal with evil among His own people. John saw the sword proceeding out of His mouth. It was not that it left the lips of CHRIST to lie inert, as it were, upon the ground, but that it streamed ceaselessly from Him. Thus was pictured one of Scripture's most profound facts, i.e., that the Word of GOD, while complete and given once for all, is presented as being ever *freshly spoken from the heart of GOD* to the heart of man. It is the living Word, which has been aptly described as being "contemporaneous with every generation of believers." The words of men partake of the frailty of their authors and pass away as they do, but the Word of GOD is instinct with His timeless life.

**"And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."** In these words *the all-sufficiency of CHRIST* blazes out in full vigor. As the sun in the sky to the physical creation, so is the face of CHRIST to His redeemed ones. As this earth derives all its light, its heat and its energy from the sun, so in the spiritual realm we derive all from the exalted Saviour. On the holy mount His face shone as the sun; in the Day of the Lord, to those who fear His name, He shall

arise as "**the sun of righteousness with healing in his wings**" (Mal. 4:2). He is our Sun, and we may well pray --

Oh, may no earth-born cloud arise,  
To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes!

In John's vision there was no cloud. The glory of GOD poured forth its full radiance from that blessed face. The churches were candlesticks, and their messengers were stars -- all for the world's night, but the Lord was the Sun whose gladdening light shone upon "**the children of light, and the children of the day**" (I Thessalonians 5:5).

### III. THE BLESSING -- THE ACCOLADE OF THE PIERCED HAND

**"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not"** (Revelation 1:17). The glory was more than John could bear. He was not yet in the resurrection body, in which he would be at home in presence of such majesty. Overwhelmed by the vision, he fell at CHRIST's feet as if dead. Then there touched him the right hand that sways the destinies of the universe, and he felt it resting upon him in all its comforting grace and sustaining strength. Yet it was a human hand, one that long before in weakness had rested in a mother's tender embrace, one that had known the lowly toil of a carpenter's shop and had provided for others the necessities of life. It, too, had known the mystery of pain; through its palm a nail had bound Him to the tree. Upon the scars in His hands the wondering gaze of John had rested in that days when, risen from the dead, the Lord had said, "**Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.**"

The touch of His hand brought great cheer to the aged apostle. It was not only that the Lord should bend in grace over His prostrate servant and raise him in life and strength. Others had felt His touch in the days of His humiliation and even after His resurrection, but none had known it in the exercise of its heavenly rule. Thus did John receive the accolade of the Lord of all. Upon their faithful followers, the kings of this world bestow knighthood with the touch of the naked sword, the symbol of warfare, but the Sovereign of the eternal throne gives His honor with the touch of His pierced hand, the symbol of *victory already won*. Then through the apostle's heart there swept the music of the many waters as CHRIST spoke His words of peace. John need not fear. It was for the culmination of his life's service that the Lord had appeared unto him, and that He might equip and commission him for the task that awaited. "**Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.**"

**"I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death"** (Revelation 1:17c-18).

The Lord JESUS is the first and the last, the eternal One whose being precedes all creature existence, and whose glory is all its goal.

He is the One who has "**life in Himself**," not derived but His eternally.

He is the inexhaustible fount of life for His people in all their frailty.

He is the One who became dead.

As John heard those words and recalled his memories of Calvary, the spear, and the wounded side, he must have marveled that the Living One could ever taste death. But that death was past, and the crucified One was alive for evermore, and John was bidden to look up and see the triumph of the resurrection in the person of his Lord.

Thus for John also was there the realization of the perpetual presence. John was the last to whom CHRIST revealed Himself in such fashion, but the fact of the presence is unchanged. For us as we serve here until the Lord comes, there is neither a vision of His glory to these eyes, nor His touch upon these bodies of humiliation. Nevertheless to faith there must ever be visible that wonderful face, and by faith there must ever be heard that voice whose matchless harmonies enthrall the soul, and whose words of cheer hush the sighing of the heart and awaken the song of praise. And faith must feel in every Patmos the invigorating touch of that hand, so gentle and yet so strong, the hand adorned with its nailprint, and in whose care we and all our service are safe. So shall we in our day, amid all the claims of life "**be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**"

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