

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Revelation		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	39		Gary L.W. Johnson
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LOOKING BACK AT A PORTRAIT OF THE COMING KING (Part 1)

We are resuming our study of The Book of Revelation, but before we pick up where we left off (Revelation 9:13-21), I want to return to the opening chapter to once again examine how Jesus is portrayed in chapter 1.

- I. ***EIGHT SYMBOLS THAT GIVE US A PORTRAIT OF JESUS.***¹ In this text we are brought face-to-face with the glorified Lord. John is in exile and very much in a constant state of fear, and he hears these words, *fear not*. The exact phrase, *me phobou*, occurs ten times in the New Testament, usually spoken by Jesus or an angel: Mark 5:36; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; 8:50; 12:32; John 12:15; Acts 18:9; 27:24; Revelation 1:17. In the Old Testament, the same terminology often appears in the prophets as they announce salvation to God's people (see Isa. 41:10). The grammatical implication of this form (present imperative with a negative) means "stop being afraid." In every instance in which this is used in the New Testament, the person is already in a situation of terror in which supernatural intervention is warranted and welcome. When John turned to see who was addressing him in such a voice of thunder, fear gripped him. Fear turned to terror as his eyes adjusted to the vision of Christ and as his mind determined in whose presence he stood. God is terrifying until he utters the wonderful saving words, "Fear not."²
 1. ***The Priestly Robe and Sash of The Glorified Son.*** This identifies Christ as the priest and mediator for his people. "Wonder of wonders, this heavenly High Priest was like us in every respect, not only in our human nature but in our human sufferings and agonies as well, with the exception of participating in sin. Christ was *perfected* from at least two angles. As he became a merciful High Priest and like his brethren, he could be truly sympathetic to believers as they encountered suffering and temptation. The heavenly High Priest learned obedience in suffering. Since he faced temptation and overcame, he can also appreciate the believer's struggle and victory. Hebrews 2:18 tells us that since he has been tempted, he can help those who are being tempted. Certainly, we have a unique High Priest!"³ Barclay has noted: "This figure was clothed with *a robe which reached down to his feet*, and he was *girt about the breasts with a golden girdle*. Here again we have three pictures. (1) The word which describes the robe is *podērēs*, *reaching down to the feet*. This is the word which the Greek Old Testament uses to describe the robe of the high priest (Exodus 28:4, 29:5; Leviticus 16:4). The Jewish historian Josephus also describes carefully the garments which the priests and the high priest wore when they were serving in the Temple. They wore *a long robe reaching to the feet*, and, around the

breast, *higher than the elbows*, they wore a girdle which was loosely wound round and round the body. The girdle was embroidered with colours and flowers, with a mixture of gold interwoven (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, 3:7:2, 4). All this means that the description of the robe and the girdle of the glorified Christ is almost exactly that of the clothes of the priests and of the high priest. Here, then, is the symbol of the high priestly character of the work of the risen Lord. A priest, as the Jews saw it, was a man who himself has access to God and who opens the way for others to come to him; even in the heavenly places, Jesus, the great high priest, is still carrying on his priestly work, opening the way for all to the presence of God. (2) But other people besides priests wore the long robe reaching to the feet and the high girdle. It was the dress of great ones, of princes and of kings. *Podērēs* is the description of the robe of Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:4), of Saul (1 Samuel 24:5, 24:11) and of the princes of the sea (Ezekiel 26:16). The robe the risen Christ was wearing was the robe of royalty. He was no longer a criminal on a cross; he was dressed like a king. Christ is Priest and Christ is King. (3) There is still another part of this picture. In the vision of Daniel, the divine figure who came to tell him the truth of God was clothed in fine linen (the Greek Old Testament calls his garment *podērēs*) and with a belt of fine gold (Daniel 10:5). This then, is the form of dress of the messenger of God. So this presents Jesus Christ as the supreme messenger of God. Here is a tremendous picture. When we trace the origins of the thought of John, we see that by the very form of dress of the risen Lord he is showing him to us in his threefold eternal office of Prophet, Priest and King, the one who brings the truth of God, the one who enables others to enter into the presence of God and the one to whom God has given the power and dominion forever.”⁴

2. ***The White Head and Hair of The Son of Man.*** The exact expression white like white wool, like snow, harkens back to Daniel 7 – but there the reference is to the Ancient of Days (7:9). “We might infer that this merely indicates that Christ reflects the glory of the One who sent him. God’s messengers are images of his splendor as they emerge from heaven to do his will on earth, but the white hair of the Son of Man says more than this. In the symbolic vocabulary provided by Daniel’s vision, John sees *one like a son of man* who is distinguished from and identified with the Ancient of Days – a mysterious combination but consistent with the fact that he lays claim to the title *the first and the last* (1:17), by which God proclaimed his divine eternity (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). The Son of Man is God, infinite in wisdom and holiness.”⁵
3. ***The Blazing Eyes of The Exalted Son.*** “This also stems from Daniel 10:6 (*his eyes like flaming torches*) and will recur in Revelation 2:18 and 19:12. At one level, it pictures the divine insight that penetrates to the core of the human situation. At a deeper level, it continues the image of the judge who knows and acts against his enemies. In both 2:18 and 19:12, judgment is the prime thrust. God is the Divine Warrior who knows the deep depravity of the nations and is going to war against them.”⁶
4. ***The Burnished Feet of Christ.*** “The word translated as *beaten brass* is *chalkolibanos*. No one really knows what the metal is. Perhaps it was that fabled compound called *electrum*, which the ancients believed to be an alloy of gold and silver and more precious than either. Here again, it is the Old Testament which gives John his vision.”⁷

CONCLUSION: Hoekema sums up this section by observing, “Most of the rest of the symbolic details of the vision serve to strengthen this general appearance of Christ as the powerful King-Judge. This is true, for instance, of the eyes like flames of fire. This denotes both His holy anger and His power of omniscience. The eyes of this mighty Judge penetrate into the deepest recesses of the hearts of men; they discover hidden things. Before them all things are an open book, even the secret thoughts and intents of men. Under the glare of those eyes every evil thought or deed, every wicked device, is exposed. And He comes to judge and inflict punishment upon the forces of evil, whether they be found in His church in the world, or in that world itself. Without compromise He will expose the evil, wherever it is found, in the church first (for judgment must needs begin at the house of God), and then also in the world. And having exposed it in its true character and worth, He will visit it with a just retribution. For those flaming eyes also express holiness and righteous indignation and wrath. Somewhat the same idea is expressed in the symbolism of the feet *like unto burnished brass*. They are like white hot, shining brass, burning in a furnace; and with them He will tread down the powers of darkness, all His enemies, until they are consumed.”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹I owe this structure to Campbell Markham, a Presbyterian pastor in Australia. He blogs at Campbell Markham: Thoughts and Letters. This also appears at <https://www.beautifulchristianlife.com> 3/30/22.

²K. H. Easley, *Revelation: Holmes New Testament Commentary* (Holman, 1998), p. 27.

³R. C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God: The Full Revelation of God II* (P&R, 2018), p. 469.

⁴Wm. Barclay, *The Revelation of John: The New Daily Study Bible I* (WJK, 2004), p. 54.

⁵D. E. Johnson, *Triumph of The Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (P&R, 2001), p. 59.

⁶G. R. Osborne, *Revelation Verse By Verse* (Lexham Press, 2016), p. 37.

⁷Barclay, op. cit. p. 57.

⁸H. Hoekema, *Behold He Cometh: An Exposition of The Book of Revelation* (Reformed Publishing Association, 1969), p. 37.