

# PROPHETIC COMMISSION

**<sup>9</sup>I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day**

John is sharing the suffering of the churches, having been exiled to the island of Patmos because of the faith.<sup>1</sup> But he also shares with them the power of the exalted Christ and so the capacity to endure persecution as Jesus himself endured it. We recall the words of Jesus:

Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

– Matthew 10:38

They will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations because of my name.

– Matthew 24:9

We recall especially the following from John's Gospel:

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.

– John 15:20

In the world you face persecution. But take courage, I have conquered the world.

– John 16:33

Paul expresses sentiments similar to those of our author:

We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

– Romans 5:3

Because of his proclaiming of God's word and the testimony which he was giving concerning Jesus, John had been exiled to the island of Patmos. There 'on the Lord's day', in an intimate encounter with the risen Jesus ('I was in the Spirit'<sup>2</sup>), he was graced to receive certain insights into what was happening to himself and to his community. It is these insights which he is sharing with them through this book.

The word 'Lord's' (Greek *kyriakê*) occurs only twice in the New Testament: here, and when Paul speaks of 'the Lord's supper' (1 Corinthians 11:20). John is referring to 'the first day of the week'<sup>3</sup>, the day on which the Christians assembled to celebrate the resurrection of Christ through a communal sharing of the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus locates this persecution 'at the end of Domitian's reign' (Against Heresies V.30.3, quoted by Eusebius, History of the Church 3.18). Domitian died 96AD.

<sup>2</sup>Also Apocalypse 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.

<sup>3</sup>Compare Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2.

<sup>4</sup>See Ignatius of Antioch *Ad Mag.* 9,1; *Didache* 14,1; Justin Martyr *Ap.* 67,7; *Letter of Barnabas* 15,9.

John presents his experience in the style of Daniel:

At that time, I Daniel had been mourning for three weeks  
... As I was standing on the bank of the great river ( that is  
the Tigris), I looked up and saw ...

– Daniel 10:2,5

John hears ‘a loud voice like a trumpet’. This phrase will recur throughout the Apocalypse, and is to be understood as a powerful (‘loud’) and intelligible (‘voice’) communication, heralded (‘trumpet’) as God’s word. It came from ‘behind’, that is to say from an unexpected direction, catching John by surprise. We recall Ezekiel's description of a similar experience:

The Spirit lifted me up ... and I heard behind me the sound  
of loud rumbling.

– Ezekiel 13:2

We will soon discover that the one speaking to him is the risen Jesus. John is told: ‘Write in a book what you see.’<sup>1</sup> Writing in a book indicates that what is being revealed to him is something fixed, dependable and determined. Similarly in the prophet Isaiah:

Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it  
in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness  
forever.

– Isaiah 30:8

He is to write what he sees. When John speaks of seeing he is not referring to simply having a look. To ‘see’ is to reflect and to come to a profound appreciation through prayer of the significance of what is being revealed. This is possible only through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In exile, John has been reflecting on the situation in the churches of Asia, listed here beginning with the capital Ephesus and moving in a circle, north, east and southeast. Verse nineteen will make clear that his reflections go beyond the condition of the churches in Asia to the meaning of human history, seen in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>10b</sup>and I heard  
behind me a loud  
voice like a trumpet saying,  
<sup>11</sup>“Write in a book  
what you see and  
send it to the seven  
churches,  
to Ephesus,  
to Smyrna,  
to Pergamum,  
to Thyatira,  
to Sardis,  
to Philadelphia,  
and to Laodicea”.

<sup>1</sup>Compare Apocalypse 1:19.

## The seven churches of Asia

