

Prologue to Revelation  
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In our previous discussion, we established the fact Revelation is a triad of literary genre. It has many elements of apocalyptic styled writings, it has elements of prophecy and claims to be prophetic, and it is written as an epistle or letter to the Asian church. As such it speaks with symbols giving a Word from God to specific churches and to the age yet to come.

Before diving into the text, consider the use of symbols in Revelation. Wiersbe issues three considerations for symbols used in Revelation.

1. He used symbols as a sort of spiritual code. These would have been understood only by those who know Christ personally and therefore Roman soldiers could not use Revelation as evidence against Christians.
2. Symbolism is not weakened by time. The dramatic images serve to bring vivid pictures even years removed from the original writing
3. Symbols not only convey information, they impart values and arouse emotions. Emotions play heavily into carrying out commitments. He notes that John's use of the imagery of a beast is far more effective than merely saying he was a world dictator (Wiersbe 108-15).

A caution against getting lost in the symbols.

1. Some symbols are explained (Rev. 1:20, 4:5, 5:8).
2. Others are understood from Old Testament symbolism (Rev. 2:7,17: 4:7). Over 300 references are made to the Old Testament in the book.
3. Some symbols are not explained at all (Rev. 2:17).

Key thoughts of chapter 1:1-8

**Verses: 1-4**

**Revelation – Greek word apocalypse – it is the unveiling.**

Jesus Christ – To His bond servants

The things that must soon take place – Highlights God's sovereignty over all things. The world is in order, an order established by divine power. This is to be an encouragement to believers who might have had reason to doubt. Someone might even say today...what is this world coming to?...hence the revelation of Jesus Christ. This revelation is surfacing from within the character of God. In some ways, it must emerge in response to the condition of all things. Soon is a word that has served to trip many students of the Bible. It need not be so. First we should understand that New Testament saints believed in an imminent return of Christ. That means they were expecting Him at any time. This view is prevalent in the teachings of the apostles Paul and Peter. It is also seen in the Revelation and believed by John. Even so, we must remember that to the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

It was first sent to a particular bond servant, John, for transmission to His bond-servants. The book is then intended to be read and understood by those who have determined to voluntarily give their lives to Jesus Christ. Consequently, verse 3 speaks to the benefit to the bond servant who reads and those who hear leading to a heeding of the things which are written. There is a blessing in store. To those who are in Christ, Revelation is not so much a frightening book of judgment and calamity, but an encouragement to folks who are being severely mistreated by the world and might even have cause to doubt God's divine justice.

Some Christians today doubt God's justice. They will wonder about the existence of Hell and question God's righteousness when He doesn't prohibit unbelievers from making it their destiny while also complaining about Him for allowing men like Hitler and Saddam Hussein to torture and terrorize the lives of humans. These are sometimes the same people. Others might question the morality of people who would choose not to stop such men.

**Verses: 5-8**

### **Seven Identifiable churches Churches of Asia**

Why seven – Newport connects the number seven – a number of completeness or wholeness as symbolic of all churches in the entire body of Christ. Remember from verse three – it is written to bless all bond servants who read.

Some strict dispensationalists, see these seven churches representing seven ages of the church. They will seek to identify particular segments of church history and say one church represents that period of time. Typically of our day they will say we are living in the age or dispensation of the church of Laodecia. They would even say we are living in the age of apostacy. I tend to agree with Wiersbe who says those were not the main reasons these churches were selected, but rather “these letters remind us that the head of the exalted church knows what is going on in each assembly, and that our relationship to Him and His Word determines the life and ministry of the local body” (Weirsbe 141-52).

Others have speculated that the seven churches of Asia had evolved into an organization of seven groups of churches and John is writing to the ones that stood in the center of each of the groups. Some believe the seven were chosen because of some specific relationship to emperor worship in the Roman world (Mounce 1238-45).

Grace to you and peace – From the position of having had possessions taken away because of their faith, having seen loved ones and brothers and sisters in Christ persecuted, and having experienced real persecution themselves, the idea of having God's favor we call grace could have been subject to doubt. Using the concept of grace and identifying it from the Lord was a reminder of their theological underpinnings which gave them the assurance of God's favor. The Scripture also used the term peace which is a continuation of the Old Testament concept of shalom. I use the term concept rather than words because it would be easy for us to underestimate what these words fully embody. Grace indicates God's favor and peace on the order of Shalom. The word here is iraynay which means quietness and rest and even prosperity. It is often thought to be connected to the Hebrew idea of Shalom which means total peace within

a person leading to prosperity. At rest with others in your life and finally at rest with God. This favor and peace are being sent from Him as our study will follow. Metzger points out that grace and peace go in that order with grace first because it is only due to God's grace that humans can experience peace. This salutation was a favorite of Paul's in writing letters. He often used the phrase and how can we overlook his admonition in Philippians 4:6-7 "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

While the salutation was common, it carries special significance finding itself as a great word of encouragement to some who were experiencing anything but peace in their worldly surroundings and may have been doubting the favor of God on their lives. Perhaps a sidenote should be included here from James 1:2. Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter various trials.

The salutation continues as it identifies the source of this blessing. You will note the sentence runs into verse 5 and pay special attention to the conjunctive word and used multiple times. Him who is and who was and who is to come, note the comma. And for the seven spirits, again note the comma. And from Jesus Christ, note the comma. With this English rendering of the Greek text, one could draw a conclusion that the author has just identified the Trinity. Weirsbe and Newport draw these conclusions while Mounce does not. All three deal with the Greek text.

### **The Trinitarian View:**

Him who is and who was and who is to come is seen as a reference to the Father. It speaks of His eternal nature and also reminds us that it is we who rest in time rather than eternity. God was in eternity before time and exists in what we know as time and exists in eternity as we know it future. He is not bound by time as we mortals are bound by time. This is a concept beyond the comprehension of mortal man but perhaps one we should consider even as our scientists seek to date the creation or evolution of the universe. They speak in terms of billions of years yet God speaks in terms of eternity.

The more difficult to identify in this passage is the second reference, that of seven spirits who are before His throne. Those of us who see the Holy Spirit identified here, interpret the seven to be a symbol of completeness and wholeness just as we mentioned for the seven churches. Bear in mind we will be encountering many sevens in the book as we continue to study. The position before the throne is a reminder that the Holy Spirit is our comforter, teacher, and guide yet His wisdom and counsel find their source in the being of almighty God.

The third reference to God here is in the mention of Jesus Christ. He is identified as Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and as the ruler of the kings on the earth.

### **Jesus Christ**

#### **1. Faithful Witness**

The Greek word for witness is what has become the English word martyr. Coupled with the word faithful, it reminded the Asians and it reminds us that Jesus was a

consistent witness to the truth of God even to the point of becoming the first martyr for the Gospel. As such He is an example and a motivation teaching us the value of truth even over life.

2. 3 First Born of the Dead

This phrase was used of Jesus as far back as Psalms 89:27. It was an encouragement to the early church because it reminded them of promises from Christ. In particular John 14 where Jesus said he must go and get heaven ready for us so that he can come back and get us to take us where he is. This title testifies to His power over the grave and finally to His exaltation as pointed out by Paul in Phillipians 2:9. While the Romans may have been exalting Domitian and worshipping him as deity, believers in Christ are worshipping a risen savior who conquered the grave a feat that no Roman ruler would ever be able to accomplish.

3. Ruler of Kings on the Earth

Again with a view of encouragement in mind, put yourself in the place of late first century believers. Roman rulers were typically known to be eccentric and arrogant. Many believe Domitian was at least receiving worship as a deity and possibly demanding worship. Christians found it difficult to call him lord. Perhaps this should reference to Daniels understanding that it is God who sets up kings and God who removes them. Liberal American Christians should remember this fact when a conservative Christian occupies the White House and Conservative Christians should likewise remember this when a liberal Christian occupies that mansion. Perhaps the chicken little slogan of a falling sky would not strike such fear into the hearts of optimistic Christians.

While considering the many aspects of God, John continues his sentence breaking out into a doxology of praise.