

“To the Seven Churches” – Revelation 1:4-8

Introduction: The importance of the book of Revelation is seen in these verses. No other epistle – whether it is one of the Pauline Epistles, or one of the General Epistles – has such a description of Christ as given here. It indicates how much emphasis ought to be placed on Him in our study of this book, as opposed to us, or the world. If we take that consideration into our study of this book then the images and prophecies will be clearer because we will be looking at them in respect to who wrote them, and who they are about.

In many reference Bibles, and in many commentaries, these verses are considered the “salutation” to the book (or, actually, letter). As were the other epistles found in the New Testament (from the book of Romans on), this book was written to a church or group of churches (or, in the case of a few of the books – to either individuals or groups of people other than a church). As with letters we write today, there is often a greeting, or a salutation – usually beginning with the word “Dear.” This is often followed by a general comment section where expression of longing, or questions of how they are doing, are given. That is what these verses represent – the greetings from John to the seven churches of Asia (Minor).

I. WHO WROTE THE LETTER – VS. 4A

“John” – not much needs to be said here other than that this is John the beloved Apostle.

II. TO WHOM THE LETTER WAS SENT – VS. 4B

“The seven churches which are in Asia”

A. These churches are named in verse 11, and are given specific comments in chapters 2 and 3

1. Ephesus
2. Smyrna
3. Pergamos
4. Thyatira
5. Sardis
6. Philadelphia
7. Laodicea



B. There may have been more churches in Asia Minor at the time but there are only 7 listed here, and they are referred to as "the seven churches," not "seven of the churches," which may indicate that these were the only ones that existed, or, more likely, these were ones that had contacted John while on the isle of Patmos to see how he was doing – it's not clear why only seven are mentioned but they were real, literal churches

III. WHO AUTHORIZED THE LETTER – VS. 4C-8

A. All three Persons of the Godhead – vs. 4c-5a

1. The Father – “from him which is, and which was, and which is to come”
2. The Holy Spirit – “from the seven Spirits which are before his throne”

a) This phrase has caused much controversy over the years when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity – there is no dogmatic way we can know for certain what is meant here because all it tells us is that the letter is from, in part, “the seven Spirits which are before his throne”

b) These seven Spirits are mentioned again in the book of Revelation

Rev 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Rev 4:5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Rev 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

- c) The Bible says in Ephesians 4 that there is "one Spirit" so there appears to be a contradiction here. This is where the controversy lies – is there one or seven, as it states in the book of Revelation.
- d) Considering the fact that the word "Spirits" is capitalized would make it appear to be referring to the Holy Spirit, as well as the fact that it is coupled with the Father and the Son – to be seven angels or seven ministrations of Christ or of the Father would make its connection here out of place, and even heretical if it is referring to angels
- e) It is my understanding of this, based more on the logical, reasonable explanation of the Father and the Son being joined with the Holy Spirit as making these seven Spirits the "complete fullness and diverse activities" of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the "one Spirit" the Apostle Paul spoke of
- f) This is an apparent allusion to the sevenfold character of the Holy Spirit resting upon Christ according to the prophecy in Isaiah 11:2-5

Isa 11:2-5 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; (3) And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: (4) But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. (5) And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

(1) *The spirit of the Lord*

(2) *The spirit of wisdom – skillfulness, wit*

(3) *The spirit of understanding – ability to apply knowledge*

(4) *The spirit of counsel – ability to give aid and planning*

(5) *The spirit of might – internal force, power – power residing within*

(6) *The spirit of knowledge – intelligence*

(7) *The spirit of the fear of the Lord – recognition of power*

g) It gives us in 1 Corinthians 12 the manifold ministry of the Holy Spirit, as well as Romans 12 – it says that there are

“diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” – pointed here to the number seven

3. The Son – “and from Jesus Christ” – vs. 5a

B. Vs. 5b-8 – Christ is described in several ways here to show His critical part in the forming of the book of Revelation and the critical part He will play in the unfolding of the events for which it describes

1. He is seen as the “faithful witness” – His Word is absolutely trustworthy – in the court of heaven and earth, His Word is absolutely truthful
2. He is the “first begotten of the dead” – in His resurrection from the dead, He became the first-fruit of those that died in Christ – His resurrection guarantees we will rise also

1Co 15:20-23 But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. **(21)** For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. **(22)** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. **(23)** But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.

3. He is the “prince of the kings of the earth” – The word for “prince” here literally means ruler or chief, and translated as

“prince” is not saying He is in subjection to the kings as the son of a king would be the heir to the throne under the king but it means He is the “principle chief” of the kings – He is superior to them, over them, chief among them all

Psa 72:11 Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.

Psa 89:27 Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.

Pro 8:15-16 By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. (16) By me princes rule, and nobles, *even* all the judges of the earth.

4. He is referred to as “Him that loved us” – no greater love can be seen than when Jesus left heaven and gave His life for our sins

Joh 15:12-13 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (13) Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

1Jn 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

5. “And washed us from our sins in His own blood” – nothing else would need to be said than this
6. He is the one that “made us kings and priests unto God and his Father”
 - a) This idea is expressed here by saying that Christ had made us in fact kings and priests; that is, Christians are exalted to

the dignity and are invested with the office, implied in these words. The word "kings," as applied to them, refers to the exalted rank and dignity which they will have; to the fact that they, in common with their Saviour, will reign triumphant over all enemies; and that, having gained a victory over sin and death and hell, they may be represented as reigning together. The word "priests" refers to the fact that they are engaged in the holy service of God, or that they offer to him acceptable worship.
Albert Barnes

- b) The terms used here are used in other passages of Scripture to show how God views us in relation to the Son – we are joint-heirs with Christ, and as such, we will rule and reign with Him in the Millennial reign, and, with that in mind, God viewing our life in eternal terms, sees us as that already

1Pe 2:5-9 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (6) Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. (7) Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, (8) And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. (9) But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar

people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Exo 19:5-6 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: (6) And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

7. He is the One to whom "glory and dominion for ever and ever" belong
8. Verse 7 says that "he cometh with clouds" – this is referring to the Second Coming, or Second Advent, at the end of the Tribulation when He comes back to establish His kingdom

Mar 13:24-26 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, (25) And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. (26) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

9. The above point is based on the next phrase regarding Jesus Christ – "every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all the earth shall wail because of him" – the only ones that will see Him at the rapture are the believers, so this can't be the rapture spoken of
10. Vs. 8 – He is said to be "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending" –

that is He is the beginning of all things and He will be the ending of all things – He is eternal and He is God

11. Then it gives us the exact same statement of Christ, the Son of God, as it did in verse 4 regarding God the Father – “which is, and which was, and which is to come”
12. He is then called “The Almighty” – there aren’t too many other Scripture verses that so clearly state that Jesus is, was and ever shall be God Almighty

Conclusion: What wonderful things are said here in the greetings from John to the seven churches of Asia!! It would be good for us to remember these sayings as we consider who we are in relation to who He is!! We are precious in the sight of the Father because of the work of the Son!!