

Doxology, Address & Greeting

vv. 4-6

This section before us reminds us that Revelation, like every other NT epistle, is a letter that was written & sent to people of that time period in order to encourage, exhort, rebuke, warn, teach doctrine, and to give them hope. As such, this 1st verse contains 3 distinct parts: the name of the writer, those he was addressing, and a greeting. It goes like this – John (writer)...to the 7 churches that are in Asia (the first recipients)...grace to you and peace (the greeting). Added to this are 3 phrases to describe the source of the greeting & this is done in part by means of a doxologyⁱ, where glory & power are ascribed to Jesus Christ.

The first question that usually arises in v. 4 is “Why only 7 churches?” Surely, there were more than 7 in the Roman province of Asia in that time period. Paul alone established many churches that are not even among these 7 – Colossae, Galatia (which was a number of churches on its' own), Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Antioch, Miletus, Corinth, etc. The number 7 denotes perfection and that number comes up a lot in Revelation, especially in the number of judgments being poured out. This is symbolically, at least, an overview of 7 churches which were considered typical assemblies whose attributes mirrored the attributes of all the churches then extant.

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It is simple to make the application, with minor variations only, of the character of these 7 churches to what we see in Christian churches today or anytime in history up to this point.

From an historical viewpoint, these 7 churches were ones that John had a good relationship with. It is a known fact that John spent most of his ministry years in the province of Asia, having left the environs of Jerusalem in the late 60's during the rebellion of the Jews which led to the destruction of the city & the Temple by the Romans in AD 70. It was during the time that followed these events that John 'took over' as the Apostolic shepherd over the churches of Western Turkey (Asia), the role which Paul, now dead a/o about AD 66, had held to that point. God did not leave those young churches without a shepherd Apostle who would be there for their pastors' sake.

The Greeting

The Greeting, “peace to you” is a common NT greeting, used by Paul in 10 of his letters (not I or II Timothy or Titus) & is also used in I & II Peter. The use of 'grace' vs 'greetings' (which was secular form of greeting in that day) reflects the Christian view of the amazing favour that God had bestowed on His people who did not deserve it, and who in fact deserved the opposite.

'Peace' was a common greeting in OT times – “shalom” in Hebrew is a wish for well being for the recipient, and in NT times carries the added meaning of God's grace in Jesus Christ, especially when coupled with 'grace'. Grace always precedes peace in this sense – there can be no peace without grace.

The source of this greeting is given to us and it is 3-fold:

- V. 4c – “the One who is, who was & who is coming” – the Father
- V. 4c – “from the 7 Spirits before His throne” – the Holy Spirit
- V. 5b – “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of kings of the earth.”

Many want to see Jesus in v. 4c, but His position as 3rd in this list precludes that and by process of elimination, we see that the 1st greeter is God the Father, the Great I AM. Certainly, there is a reminder here of that name which the Father gave Moses in Ex. 3:14- “I Am Who I Am”, Jehovah. That name represents the same sort of concept of eternal self existence as depicted in Rev. 4c – is, was, is coming. This title is used numerous times in Revelation – 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5. Interestingly, in 11:17 & 16:5, John drops the “is coming” probably because His advent by that point of the book is no longer future, but is a present reality. Why say this “is coming” of the Father when it is Jesus who is coming? Remember that God the Father & Jesus the Son are One – cf. John 10: 30, and when Jesus returns, it is as a representative of His Father so Jesus' advent is the Father's advent in the triune sense.

The 2nd source of the greeting, “the seven spirits” is not angels, as some commentators have postulated, but is the Holy Spirit. Some draw the idea of angels from Rev. 8:2, but that these angelic beings would be placed side by side with the Father & Son as greeters makes little theological sense because they are not equal to the Trinity members, but the Holy Spirit certainly is. ②

However, there is a question as to why 7 spirits? In 14 other places in Revelation, He is referred to as the Holy Spirit or the Spirit, or the Spirit of Prophecy. Some argue that it is because 7 churches are named, but what is being said in 4:5 & 5:6 about the 7 spirits is universal and global in scope, not local to only 7 churches.

Others go back to Isaiah 11:2 where a 7 fold depiction of the Spirit is found, yet a close reading of Isaiah 11:2 shows only 6, not 7 energies of the Spirit.ⁱⁱ Yet others see this as depicting the perfection (# 7) of the Holy Spirit & His energies or works as depicted throughout Scripture – cf. I Cor. 12:10; 14:32; Heb. 2:4; Rev. 22:6; Rom. 12:6. However, the emphasis on fullness of ministry is not found in the context of this phrase throughout Revelation.

The best explanation takes us to Zechariah 4:1-10. where Zechariah refers to 7 lamps that are “the eyes of the Lord” (v. 10 & cf. Rev. 5:6). In fact, Rev. 4-5 carry similar symbolism to Zech. 4 and the prominence of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world is demonstrated by Zechariah 4:6.

The 3rd person greeting the churches is Jesus Christ, and this is the last time He is called that until Rev. 22:21. In the remainder of Revelation He is called simply “Jesus” or is given another title which mirrors the activity taking place. For example, He is shown here in Rev. 1:5 by 3 descriptive titles:

- “the faithful witness” (see also 3:14), alluding to Ps. 89:36-37 which refers to David’s throne. In fact, all of Ps. 89 is a commentary on the Davidic covenant of II Sam. 7:8-16.
- “the firstborn from the dead” – also refers back to Ps. 89:27 where God promises to make David’s seed His firstborn “the highest of the kings of the earth” – cf. also Col. 1:18. He is the firstfruits of all those who will be raised from the dead – I Cor. 15: 23.
- “the ruler of the kings of the earth” – again Psalm 89:27. This is a clear foreshadowing of Jesus’ future role as King of Kings & Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16) and notice all 3 of these titles key off of His Davidic lineage! That is significant, especially when we get to Rev. 20.

It is John’s intent (thus God’s) that we see in these 3 titles a fulfillment of the promises made to David regarding an eternal kingdom with His Son on the throne from II Sam. 7.

The Doxology vv. 5b-6

John follows immediately with a doxology in 5b to elaborate on the work of Jesus Christ, the One who loves us and set us free from our sins by His blood. Notice that His love is in present tense, while “has set us free” is in past tense. It is that past action in time (at Calvary) that has placed us in a position where He now loves us eternally, a continuing action – cf. Gal. 2:20 (“loved us”). The blood He shed for us on that cross released us from our sin debt and it was by this blood that He purchased all the benefits that are now ours as a result – cf. Rom. 8:32. ③

As a further result of His atoning work, “He has made us a kingdom”, not a place, but the people who comprise the kingdom – IOW – a collective designation for all who believe in Christ & this certainly refers to the Messianic Kingdom on the verge of being set up in the pages of this letter.

He has also appointed us as priests (further evidence of His love for His own) so that not only a corporate entity is in view, but individuals within that kingdom as well. Whereas OT law forbade any but descendants of Aaron / Levi to hold the office of priest, Jesus has created a new family relationship in which all believers have a priestly ministry to God, including full access to His throne. This is expressed in Rev. 1:6b – “priests to His (Jesus’) God and Father”. He Himself was a priest of the order of Melchizadek – cf. Heb. 6:20.

It is to Jesus Christ that the glory and dominion are ascribed “forever & ever”, the same Him who loves us – to Him be the glory & dominion. Note Rev. 5:12.

“Look” or “Behold” denotes something new, something prophetic will follow this pronouncement. Note Rev. 21:5-8. This verse here (7) is actually the theme verse of Revelation and introduces the main topic of the entire book – the return of Jesus Christ. It is based on a combination of Daniel 7:13 & Zech. 12:10. Jesus also used these same OT verses spoken during the Olivet Discourse as He referred to His 2nd advent – Mt. 24:30.

The object of v. 7, the One coming is without a doubt the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the object of praise in vv. 5-6. Although His actual return is not described until Rev. 19:11-16, this verse here presents that event as the whole purpose for the writing of the book. The details preceding His return are the things being shown to His slaves so they would recognize the season of His return.

The concept of His coming with the clouds indicates that His return will be from above, which is verified in Rev. 19:11,14. Daniel’s vision – Dan. 7:13 – makes that connection with the clouds to the time when He returns to rule over a worldwide, everlasting kingdom. It is this vision from Daniel that Jesus refers to in Mark 14:60-65; Matt. 26:63-68 as He responds to His questioners, especially the High Priest, about who He is. It is this admission that finally cements His fate as they take what was the truth to be blasphemy.

The passage from Zechariah 12:10-14 talks about the future repentance of Israel in the time when the Lord restores Jerusalem and the nation to a place of supremacy in the world. The addition by John that “every eye will see Him including those who pierced Him” makes it clear that this will be no secret return to earth, but an event no one will miss or mistake for something else. “Those who pierced Him” refers to those Jews who perpetrated His death – a prophecy noted by John in John 19:37 and notice the specific wording in JN 19:36-37. This could also include the Romans who were involved as well. Apart from God supernaturally allowing the actual people involved (long dead) to somehow see this event (unlikely), this means by “every eye” that everyone within the generation of those alive when He returns will see Him whom their ancestors pierced. ④

Finally, in v. 7 – “and all the families of the earth will mourn over Him.” Why are they mourning? First of all, the scope covers more than just Israel here, and includes the whole earth. This tells us a couple of things. 1.) The destruction of the Temple & Jerusalem cannot be the fulfillment of this because that did not engender worldwide mourning, and it would have to be explained why Jesus did not return in AD 70 if that was the fulfillment. This verse alone provides a satisfactory response to those who are post-millennial in their theology. 2.) the people of the earth will mourn His appearance because they’ve bet all of eternity on His non-existence. This mourning is remorse, not repentance, & because of the devastation already inflicted on the earth prior to His arrival, His presence guarantees that they are without hope. They’ve just lived through a preview of

what fate awaits them under God's eternal wrath and His return now, which seals their fate, will be no comfort to the unsaved.

Notice the double affirmation that ends v. 7 – “this is certain”, “amen”. These 2 things together in Greek formulate a strong certainty that what has just been prophesied will indeed take place. The actual literary device is called a *synonymia*, and is also used in Rev. 22:20 – “It is so. Amen.” IOW, it is absolutely a fixed promise that the return of Jesus Christ will occur exactly as said, and will be preceded by the judgmental effects detailed within this book.

The Father's Declaration

v. 8

Verse 8 adds a further emphatic divine declaration verifying the truth of this prophecy. Bullinger paraphrases this sentence this way; *“I, the Almighty Lord of Hosts, the unchangeable God will accomplish all My will, fulfill all My word, and execute all My judgments.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

It is not 100% clear whether this is God the Father or Jesus speaking here, but the best evidence seems to point to the speaker being Jesus. “I Am” was a frequent designation He chose for Himself throughout John's gospel, and elsewhere. He calls Himself the Alpha & Omega in Rev. 22:13, and since Jesus has been the One in view since vv. 1-7, a switch to the Father here is unlikely. Also, in Rev. 1:17-18, similar titles are ascribed to Christ without any question.

There is also good reason to think that this is the Father speaking too. He is the “I Am” of the OT, and Lord God is a frequent title for Him in the OT too. In Rev. 1:4, “the One who is and who was and who is coming” referred to the Father, but either way, it is obvious that a close relationship between Father & Son exists throughout this book – so much so that at times they are indistinguishable One from the other. ⑤

Robert Thomas comes to the conclusion that the Father is the One speaking in v. 8 as He confirms the truthfulness of this prophecy about His Son. When He refers to Himself as the Alpha & Omega here, it is a reference to His completeness – the Greek alphabet begins with Alpha and ends with Omega, so this title expresses eternity, perfection and completeness. See Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12. Either way, v. 8 ends this section on a note of great, divine, unshakeable authority.

Next lesson – Rev. 1:9-16 – The Risen & Glorified Lord

ⁱ “Doxology” – “an ascription of glory to the persons of the Trinity” – according to the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church

ⁱⁱ Robert Thomas; Revelation 1-7; Moody; pp. 67-68

ⁱⁱⁱ E.W. Bullinger; Commentary on Revelation; Kregel; 1984; p. 149.