



# LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES



May 28<sup>th</sup> 2017 — Part 4

Rev. 1:4-8 — “The Two Witnesses to the Certain Return of Christ”

## The Greeting

Like many NT books, the Revelation includes a greeting which identifies the author as well as the intended recipients of the letter.

Rev. 1:4-5b—<sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

- This greeting is similar to others found in letters written by other apostles such as Peter (1 Pet. 1:1-2) and Paul (2 Cor. 1:1-2).

\_\_\_\_\_ → The Seven Churches in \_\_\_\_\_

- The greeting reflects the bicultural background of the early church:

⇒ “Grace” (*charis*) was a Greek greeting while “Peace” (*eirēnē*) was a translation of the common Hebrew greeting (*shalom*).

## Grace & Peace from the Triune God

God the \_\_\_\_\_: “...him who is and who was and who is to come...”

⇒ This title for God appears only in Revelation and is perhaps an explanation of the concepts behind the divine name YHWH in the OT.

The \_\_\_\_\_: “...the seven spirits who are before his throne...”

While it may seem odd that the Spirit is described in these terms, the use of the number seven implies completion or fullness. The Spirit is also given a seven-fold designation in Isa. 11:1-2 where He is referred to as the Spirit of:

(1) The Lord, (2) wisdom, (3) understanding, (4) counsel, (5) might, (6) knowledge, (7) and the fear of the Lord

\_\_\_\_\_ : “...and from Jesus Christ

⇒ While the greeting itself has a Trinitarian formula, so the description of Jesus Christ comes in the form of a triad.

Christ is: (1) *the faithful witness* (2) *the firstborn of the dead* and (3) *the ruler of kings on earth*.

⇒ While it is possible to understand these titles sequentially, John declares Jesus to be each of these *presently*.

**Christ’s \_\_\_\_\_ has ensured that the promises of God have begun their fulfillment in Him and will be fully accomplished in near future through Him.**

This is further established by the OT background of this passage (Ps. 89:19-29). Here, the psalmist recalls God’s promises to David that one of his offspring or descendants would sit on the throne of his house forever.

Ps. 89:27—And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth

## The Doxology

Rev. 1:5b-6—To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood<sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- These wonderful theological truths about Christ have deeply personal application for His people.

1. We are loved!
2. We have been freed from the bondage of our sins by His blood!
3. We have been made into a kingdom!
4. We are priests to His God & Father!

## The Promise

Rev. 1:7—<sup>7</sup> Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

“Behold” — ἰδοῦ (*idou*) — “Look!” “See!” This term serves as a marker the text to draw attention to what follows.

- This statement concerns the certain return of Christ as well as its results. This is communicated through allusions to two key OT passages:

Dan. 7:13—*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.*

⇒ Daniel’s vision of the coming of the Son of Man describes the defeat of the world system and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Zech. 12:10—*“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”*

⇒ Zechariah’s prophecy concerns the response of Israel to the coming of Messiah to Jerusalem. The “mourning” envisioned by the prophet is one of sorrow and repentance.

### Interpreting the Passage

1. This statement regarding Christ’s return is the key verse in 1:4-8
2. Christ’s certain return in accordance with the Son of Man prophecy of Daniel 7 is affirmed.
3. The coming of Christ will cause unbelievers to wail because of judgment (Rev. 18:9) but will also lead many, both Jew and gentile, to turn to Him in repentant faith.
  - ⇒ John also partially quotes this Zech. 12:10 in his gospel in reference to the events immediately following Jesus’ death on the cross (John 19:31-37) which the other gospels describe as including sorrow of many of the Jewish crowds (Luke 23:48) as well as the confession of faith from the Roman centurion (Mark 15:39).

**The First Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_ — “Even so. Amen.”

- This phrase can be understood to mean “This will certainly come to pass!” This is emphasized by the combination of both Greek (*nai*) and Hebrew (*amen*) terms which once again reflect the diverse culture of the early church.

**The Second Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 1:8—“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

- While some want to identify Christ as the one speaking here, it makes more sense within the wider context of the passage to understand these words as coming from God the Father.

Compare with 1:4b — “...who is and who was and who is to come...”

The Alpha & Omega →

The Lord God →

The One who is and who was and who is to come →

The Almighty →

## Concluding Observations

1. The significance of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ witness to Christ, the God-man.
2. These witnesses are to encourage us in the \_\_\_\_\_ as we await the fulfillment of His promises for the \_\_\_\_\_.