

40. Behold, He Comes

To whom is the Revelation dedicated?

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia." Revelation 1: 4.

Here, for the first time, the prophet mentions to whom he is writing. His book is dedicated to the "seven churches which are in Asia," that is, the Roman proconsular province of that name at the western end of Asia Minor. A little later these churches are listed as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Some, who would depreciate the importance of this prophetic revelation, quote this verse as proof that John was simply writing to the churches of his diocese, from which he had been exiled by the Roman government. But when we examine this explanation we quickly discover its inadequacy. If John were writing merely to the churches over which he had oversight, why did he single out certain groups and omit others which were equally large and important, and certainly must have come under his jurisdiction? Why, for example, is there no mention of the church of Miletus, which was actually nearest to the isle of Patmos? Why was not Colosse listed, seeing that it was a neighbor church to Laodicea, and had a special letter from Paul? Why is Pergamos listed, yet nearby Troas omitted?

These certainly would be very real difficulties if John had simply been writing to the churches of his diocese, but if John was led to choose these seven out of all the cities in his care and listed them in this particular order for some wider purpose, the problems disappear.

When the messages to the churches themselves are studied, this wider purpose quickly becomes obvious. The seven churches were specially chosen and arranged in this order to represent seven periods in the story of the church from the days of John to the end of time. Because these particular cities portrayed in their character and history the distinguishing features of the seven ages of the church.

What benediction does John desire for the believers of all the churches alike?

"Grace be unto you, and peace." Revelation 1: 4.

While special words appropriate to their condition and needs were to be spoken to the individual churches, John began with a comprehensive benediction for all. "Grace" is the love of God in action on behalf of men, while "peace" is the fruit of grace in the life.

From whom does this grace and peace proceed?

"From Him which is, and which was, and which is to come!" Revelation 1:4.

This title of God indicates the eternity of His being (compare Exodus 3:14 and Hebrews 13:8), and according to the arrangement of the elements emphasizes His past, present, or future activity. Here, and in verse eight, the emphasis is on the fact that He who "was" and "is to come" is even now active on behalf of His people. In chapter four, verse eight, the elements are set in chronological order, "was, and is, and is to come," to indicate the grand sweep of His eternity.

Who is associated with God in the bestowal of the divine blessing?

"And from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ." Revelation 1:4,5.

Because the "seven spirits" are "before" the throne of God and not with God in His throne, some interpreters have thought them to be angels, but it is unlikely that created beings would be placed between the Father and Son. Clearly the designation "seven Spirits," is synonymous with the Spirit of God. The number suggests the perfection of His being and the sum of His activity on behalf of mankind.

Associated with the Father and the Spirit in the divine benediction is Jesus Christ Himself, so that the blessing upon the churches comes equally from all three Persons of the Godhead.

How has Jesus made this divine benediction effectual in the lives of men?

"Who is the faithful Witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth." Revelation 1:5.

In His capacity as the "faithful Witness," He made known the purpose of divine grace first through the prophets, and then in His own person. "Behold," says God through the prophet Isaiah, "I have given Him for a witness to the people." Isaiah 55:4. (See also John 18:37.) As the "first begotten of the dead," Jesus blazed the trail from death to new life for those who avail themselves of the merits of His vicarious atonement. And when finally He comes as "Prince of the kings of the earth," the victory of grace will be

complete. (Isaiah 9: 6, 7; Revelation 17: 14; Revelation 19: 16.)

In what other terms is Christ's activity on the sinner's behalf described?

"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." Revelation 1:5.

Nowhere more fully than in the gospel and the epistles of John is the wonder of the love of Jesus declared. So also here he emphasizes that it is out of that infinite love that the redemption and exaltation of the saints issues.

What added dignity has Christ conferred upon redeemed humanity?

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." Revelation 1:6.

Not only are the redeemed restored to fellowship and communion with God, but they are organized into a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19: 6), or as Peter expresses it "a royal priesthood." 1 Peter 2:9.

What honor is due to so wonderful a Savior?

"To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Revelation 1:6.

Jesus gave up the "glory" which He had with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5), and took upon Him "the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7) in order to accomplish man's redemption. Having triumphantly carried out His work of love, He will be fully entitled to resume the glory and dominion which He voluntarily set aside.

When will this well-deserved glory and dominion be conferred upon Him?

"Behold, He comes with clouds." Revelation 1:7.

Daniel was shown in vision the heavenly ceremony just before the second advent at which glory and dominion will be conferred upon Christ. (Daniel 7:13,14) Here John pictures the triumphal procession of the glorified Christ from heaven to earth. (Compare Matthew 24:30; 26:64.)

How openly will Christ's glory be manifested?

"And every eye shall see Him." Revelation 1: 7.

The "glorious appearing" of Jesus will be both visible and audible to every living soul upon the earth. It will be a spectacular unveiling to the whole world of the once crucified Savior as King of kings, and Lord of lords. The sight of it will be brilliant "as the lightning" that "comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west." Matthew 24:27. The sound of it will be as "a great sound of a trumpet," which will arouse even the sleeping dead. (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.) Glorious, indeed, will be the triumph of Christ.

What special group will be raised to see His triumph and sense their shame?

"And they also which pierced Him." Revelation 1:7.

Sad to say only a remnant of those who see Him will rejoice. To a vast number His coming will bring consternation and shame. Among this class will be "they also which pierced Him."

Now the actual perpetrators of the crime of crucifying the Son of God died many centuries ago. How then will they be able to see coming in glory the One on whom they laid cruel hands? Obviously they must be raised immediately prior to the second advent for the purpose of witnessing His triumph. If they were raised in their "order," as Paul puts it (1 Corinthians 15: 23), they would not Come forth until the second "resurrection of damnation!" But in order that they may realize the depths of their folly in laying unholy hands upon the Lord of glory they will be raised in a "token" resurrection just before Jesus appears.

Some commentators believe that this special resurrection is referred to in the twelfth chapter of Daniel, where we read that, at the standing up of Michael, or Christ, "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Daniel 12: 2. If this is a description of one event and not an amalgamation of the first and second resurrections, the last phrase could portray the murderers of Jesus who will be raised to witness His return.

Who will be included in that tragic company we are not precisely told, but it certainly will comprise not only those who actually nailed Jesus to the cross and pierced Him as He hung there (John 19: 34), but all those who were responsible for bringing Him to Calvary. Their humiliation will be complete when they see the crucified One coming again in all His glory as King of heaven and earth.

What fear will possess the enemies of Christ in that day?

"And all peoples of the earth shall wail because of Him." Revelation 1: 7.

Later in the book of Revelation John depicts the consternation of the wicked when they behold the returning King. (Revelation 6: 14-17) This mourning, however, will not be a sorrow unto repentance, for probation will have closed before Jesus returns. At His second coming Christ will have no evangelist for the sinner as He had when He came the first time. Rather will He come as a judge to execute the righteous sentence of God upon the rejecters of His mercy.

What personal postscript does Jesus add to this picture of His work of redemption and judgment?

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 13.

In the previous verses John wrote what he was told concerning God's purpose of salvation and of judgment which will be brought to fruition at Christ's second advent. To this recital Jesus adds, as it were, His personal signature. "Alpha" and "Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and fitly represent Jesus who is the "beginning and ending" of the divine purposes. (See also Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13) He is also the "Almighty" who will unfailingly bring them to pass.

How was John, as representative of the true people of God, affected by this revelation of Christ's second coming?

"Even so, Amen." Revelation 1:7.

To what he was shown concerning the glorification of the redeemed John added a joyous "Amen." Verse 6. With sadness, however, he appends also to the doom of the wicked his "Even so, Amen!" God's purposes will all, in His good time, be fulfilled. They cannot fail. It is for us to determine, by the surrender of our lives to Him, that we will be eternally within and not outside the sphere of His redemptive providence.