

Revelation - The Greeting 1:4-8

Read: Dan 7:13,14; Zec 12:10; Rev 1:4-8; (Ex 19:6)

God's Response to the Plight of His People:

a. Send a letter to seven churches

John writes, 'to the seven churches in the province of Asia'. Now we go straight to the wonder of this book and the way it was written for there were at least ten churches established in the Roman province of Asia by the time John was writing. If we dig deep enough we will gain insights into how this letter really works.



So why did God send a letter to only seven – and did the whole letter get read in those seven churches? Yes, there were seven actual churches and the things that Jesus said to them addressed real situations – but the fact that there were seven tells us that God has more in mind than just those seven. We will look more closely further on as to the significance of the number seven but suffice it to say at present that there is a coming together of the real and the symbolic – with no contradiction. God gave Jesus the Revelation 'to show his servants what must soon take place' (1:1) and as we serve God this letter is clearly for us also.

The seven, beginning with Ephesus, which was nearest – and perhaps dearest – to John in Patmos, then proceeding north to Smyrna and Pergamum, then south-east to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, formed a kind of irregular circle. Imagine how John felt as he was given the message for the church he knew and loved so well – Ephesus. What does Jesus say

to our church? That is the important question. We can make it more personal – what does Jesus say to me personally?

b. Remind them of who God is

Father, Spirit and Son

Two questions:

There are no mistakes in Scripture – there is a reason for everything. Firstly, why the unusual description of God in these verses - 'him who is, and who was, and who is to come...'? Could it be that, in the midst of changing and difficult circumstances, God wants to remind his people of his eternal nature, his changelessness. Is there not a reminder here of the situation that Israel was in when God called Moses by the bush and gave his Name to Moses (Ex 3:13-15)? Will not the same God who delivered Israel from Egypt also deliver all his people ultimately from their oppressors?

Secondly, why the unusual order? We normally think of Father, Son and Spirit but in this description we have Father, Spirit and Son. We need to remind ourselves of the nature of this book. Wilcock describes this letter as, 'an acted word, a word dramatized, painted, set to music – a word you can see and feel and taste.' Behind the description of Father, Spirit and Son is OT imagery. John's vision is going to take him into the heavenly sanctuary, of which the Jewish tabernacle was a copy and shadow (Heb. 8:5). In the tabernacle that Moses built the ark in the Holy of Holies represents the throne of God; the seven-branched lampstand in the Holy Place before it represents the Spirit, and in the courtyard before that stands the altar, with its priest and its sacrifice both representing the redeeming work of Christ.

There is a wonderful wholeness and consistency about this book. Many of the readers would find the message coming alive as it is set in scenes so familiar.

'Seven spirits'

Why 'seven spirits' as a description of Holy Spirit? Perhaps just as the seven churches represent what the church is meant to be in essence, so the 'seven spirits' remind us that God's Spirit is one in essence even though he works in a variety of ways and through a variety of people. Churches may vary in specific ministries and even emphasis but there is an irreducible essence – without which it ceases to be church.

Prophet, Priest and King

The background here is Ps 89:27,37. Jesus is portrayed as Prophet, Priest and King. Prophet – in that he faithfully bore witness to the truth – and that is what these Christians were being called to do in the face of death itself. He is seen as a Priest – in that he offered himself and died, then rose from the dead to obtain new life for the rest of God's children; and King – in that he is now exalted as King of kings and offers us a share in his kingdom – with all the blessings that come from that!

Jesus has fulfilled all the roles – Prophet, Priest and King. We were told this would be a Revelation of who Jesus really is – and this is what we have got. How this description of Jesus would have encouraged the hearts of these people in their difficult circumstances!