

Revelation 1:4-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-1/revelation-14-7/>

The Revelation is addressed to seven specific churches that existed at the time. John emphasizes that the servants in these churches are fully justified in the sight of God, which is an unconditional position. He further states that each believer already has been granted a great inheritance.

John now pens a salutation to the initial recipients of this letter, this Revelation. The letter is addressed to *seven churches that are in Asia*. The *Asia* spoken of here is the Roman province of *Asia* which was located in modern-day Turkey. The word translated “church” means “to assemble.” The *seven churches* John addresses are the assemblies of believers within seven cities in *Asia* that were originally Greek colonies, but were later assimilated into the Roman Empire. The capital of the Roman province of *Asia* was Pergamos, which was also the home of one of the *seven churches*.

John confers a blessing of *grace and peace* upon those receiving the letter, and attributes the *grace and peace* as coming from God. John describes the God who is granting them *grace and peace* in a comprehensive manner. He begins this by saying the blessing of *grace and peace* comes from *Him who is, and who was, and who is to come*. God was “in the beginning” (Genesis 1:1). God is now, and God will eventually descend to earth to dwell among humans (Revelation 21:1-4). This description applies to the One God, so therefore to all three persons in the Trinity. But it seems that John intended to primarily refer to the Father, since the next phrase refers to *His throne*. It is clear throughout Revelation that the Father sits on the throne, and the Son was rewarded for His faithfulness by being granted to sit on the *throne* with Him (meaning to share His authority).

The blessing also comes from *the seven spirits who are before His throne*. As previously mentioned, the phrase *His throne* likely refers to the *throne* of the Father, based on descriptions throughout this letter. The term *seven spirits who are before the throne* of God only occurs in Revelation. The word translated *seven* occurs 31 times in Revelation, almost as many times as in the rest of the New Testament combined. The word *seven* symbolizes completeness in the Bible, beginning with the seven days of creation, and the Sabbath day being set aside as a reminder that God created the world in seven days.

Since John appears to be listing the members of the Trinity, it seems here that he is describing a manifestation of the Holy Spirit as the *seven spirits of God*. The phrase *seven spirits of God* occurs four times in Revelation (Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The seven spirits of God are described as “being sent out into all the earth” (Revelation 5:6). Jesus also says that He “has” the seven spirits (Revelation 3:1), which is consistent with Jesus stating that He would send the Holy Spirit as a Helper after He ascended, and that the help given by the Holy Spirit would be better for them than if Jesus remained on the earth at that time (John 16:7). It is likely that the term *seven* refers to the vast omnipresence of the Spirit.

Finally, John finishes the list of those from whom he is bestowing *grace and peace* with the one who gave him the Revelation: *Jesus Christ*. *Jesus Christ* is described as *the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth*. The first description in the list provides the primary example each believer is exhorted to follow, to be a *faithful witness*. The word translated *witness* is the Greek word “martyrs,” which again is related to our English word martyr.

The second item in the descriptive list for *Jesus Christ* is that He is *the firstborn of the dead*. Jesus is the first to be resurrected from death, never to die again. Though other people had been raised from the dead in the Old Testament and New, some by Jesus Himself (Jairus’ daughter, Lazarus), these resurrected people eventually died a second time. Their bodies were still mortal. Jesus was resurrected in a new body, one that would never die (Acts 2:24). He is the *firstborn of the dead*, but He will not be the last. He paved the way for resurrection of all who believe (Luke 20:36, 1 Corinthians 15:42).

It is because of this victory over death that John can offer the praise of *glory to Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood*. Jesus’ *faithful witness* to follow in obedience and do the will of His Father resulted in every believer being *released from their sins by His blood*. John includes himself, saying *our sins*. This message is from Jesus to “His servants” who have been *released from their sins by His blood*. So clearly the book of Revelation is a message to believers, to lead them to great blessing.

Even though the initial description is intended to apply to the Father, since Jesus and the Father are One, this description could equally be applied to Jesus. Jesus *is*—the resurrected Jesus is alive and well. He is seated at the right hand of the Father and is reigning over the earth. But Jesus also *was*. As John states in his gospel, Jesus was “in the beginning with God,” and “All things came into being through Him” (John 1:1b-2a). Jesus is an eternal being, that has always been. As God, He is existence itself, the God who disclosed Himself to Moses as “I Am Who I Am” (Exodus 3:14). But Jesus also *is to come*. As the last part of Revelation emphasizes, Jesus will return. He will set all things right, judge all that needs to be judged, and reward those who have been faithful witnesses to His name.

John conveys *grace and peace* from God to the believing audience of this letter. The word translated *grace* is the Greek word “charis” which means “favor.” Sometimes God bestows favor upon humans because of His mercy and love. He sent Jesus to die for the sins of humanity for this reason (John 3:14-16). Every believer has already received this favor, as the merit of Jesus has been imputed to them through the grace of God. So it is not likely this type of “favor” is in mind, since all those addressed in this letter have already had their sins cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

At other times, God bestows favor upon someone because of something they have done that pleased God. 1 Peter 5:5 tells us that God opposes those who are proud but gives “grace” (charis/favor) to the humble. Of course only God decides who is humble, based on the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). It is likely that John is saying here that God is communicating His great desire to favor the recipients of the letter. God loves them, and desires their best. He wants them to succeed. The fact that this letter is addressed to them is in itself an

immense measure of God's favor. He is giving to them a message that can lead them to receive incredible blessings, if they choose to hear and obey.

In like manner, God is conveying to them that this letter is intended to bestow *peace* upon them. The basic message of Revelation includes the idea that God is in control, so the ultimate outcome of things is not up to us. To the extent we adopt this perspective, it ought to bring great *peace*. But the message does not stop there. If it did it could lead to fatalism. No, rather the message of Revelation is that each believer is called to be a faithful witness, as *Jesus was a faithful witness*. That means making good choices. The choices of each believer matter immensely. Making good choices to be a faithful witness is how a believer can be an "overcomer" and receive the great rewards promised in this book (Revelation 2:26). And that is fully within our control. No one can stop us from being a faithful witness. Putting these two perspectives together ought to bring great *peace*.

It seems likely that the bestowal of *grace* or favor and *peace* is being granted by the giving of this letter. Even modern believers ought to consider the same offer and grant as applying to them as well.

After bestowing the blessings of *grace* and *peace* to the believers receiving this letter, John praises God, saying *to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever*. John directly states the reason for his lavish praise, to desire that God's reign should never end. It is because *He made us into a kingdom*; He made us *priests to His God and Father*. This introduces another theme that runs throughout Revelation, that God's intended blessing includes sharing God's authority in reigning over the earth as servant leaders and servant kings. God has *made us into a kingdom*. This is stated as something that has already occurred. It might be similar to the grant of a Promised Land God made to Abraham as a reward for his faithful service. The grant was made, but it remained to be possessed. Part of what will be spelled out in Revelation is what servants/believers need to do in order to possess this inheritance that has already been granted.

Another thing that has already been granted to believers is the station of being *priests to His God and Father*. *His* here must refer to Jesus. Which means each believer has been granted the station of being a priest to *God the Father*. A priest is one who intermediates between *God* and other persons, to intercede on their behalf. It will become clear as Revelation unfurls that living as a *faithful witness* is a means not only to possess the inheritance of the *kingdom*, but also to fulfill our assigned office as priests to the *Father*. John ends this declaration of praise for the amazing bestowal God has made upon us by saying *Amen*, which means "may it be fulfilled." John not only praises God for what He has done so far, but wishes to see it completed.

Now John declares a prophetic forecast of a future event: *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen*. After His resurrection, when Jesus ascended into heaven in the presence of the disciples, a "cloud took Him up." Then angels revealed to the disciples that they would see Jesus return in the same manner (Acts 1:9-11). John was there, and now repeats that Jesus *is coming with the clouds*. This event is future, and it is certain. Revelation will emphasize that each believer should be focused upon preparing for that event. It will not matter

whether we are alive for the event. What will matter is whether we are prepared for the event. We prepare by being a *faithful witness*, as Jesus was a *faithful witness*.

It seems that when Jesus ascended, it was only witnessed by a few people. That will not be the case when He returns. When He returns *every eye will see Him*. All the world will see. Jesus inferred this when answering three questions posed by the disciples in Matthew 24. Jesus made it clear that if someone says “Here is Jesus” not to believe them. When He returns, there will be no question, everyone will know it. It will be like lightning. No one has to wonder whether lightning struck, it is there for all to see (Matthew 24: 23-27).

John, a Jewish disciple and witness for Jesus, notes particularly that the returning Jesus will be seen by the Jewish nation, noting *even those who pierced Him* will see His return. The Bible assigns primary responsibility for Jesus’ death to the generation of Jews who rejected Him as their Messiah. After Jesus’ resurrection, Peter exhorted a group of devout Jews to “be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40). However, since the entire world will see, this could also include the Roman world (which today consists of the western cultures) as it was a Roman soldier that thrust a spear into Jesus’ side while hanging on the cross (John 19:34).

However, it will not only be the Jews who *mourn* over Jesus when they see Him. *All the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him*. This mourning will likely be because of a realization they have rejected the One who is the king of the world, and now there is an enormous price to be paid for their rejection. It might be a little like a group of misbehaving teens mourning that their parents returned home early from their trip.

John then states, *So it is to be. Amen*. This is essentially saying the same thing twice, since “Amen” can mean “so be it.” In Hebrew, emphasis comes from repetition. The strongest emphasis is when something is repeated three times, such as “Holy, holy, holy.” In this passage, John includes two Amens and one “*so it is to be*.” It seems that in John’s introduction he wants to be clear that Jesus is returning, and people ought to take this seriously and prepare for His return, because it is an absolute, undeniable factual reality.

Biblical Text

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, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— and He made us into a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.