Revelation 1:1-7 (G. Gardner) 71497

Bible Treasury: Volume N7, Revelation 1:1-7, Notes of an Address on (1:1-7)

It is very important when studying any portion of the word of God to take notice, not merely of its context but, of the scope of the book in which it is found. We are so apt, when coming to the Scriptures, to simply seek what meets us in our present circumstances—most necessary at the beginning, when grace shows us our need as guilty and undone, and God does guide more or less to that portion which meets us, but afterward when we are established in the grace of God it is the Spirit's work to show us what concerns Christ and the varied aspects in which He is presented. Thus, as has often been said, if I want to learn the gospel I must begin with the Epistle to the Romans, for that unfolds “the gospel of God concerning His Son,” and not only gives me forgiveness of sins, but complete deliverance from law, self, and Satan, and does not leave me till it has told me of the love of God that is shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit which is given to us, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father,” and that there is no condemnation for me in Christ, and that there is no separation from His love.

Take another epistle—Ephesians—this, in one sense begins where Romans and Colossians leave off, or rather, though it starts with the same faith, yet it leads me into the counsels and thoughts of God about me—what was in His heart before time began.

So in this often neglected book of the Revelation we are treading quite different ground. It was given to John, the last of the apostles, at the fag end as it were, when the church having been set up failure had come in. When everything of man's responsibility had failed, it discloses God dealing in judgment. It completes the word of God as to books. There is a verse in Colossians which speaks of Paul being raised up to “complete the word of God.” That, I apprehend, was as to subjects—the mystery being revealed to him—but not as to books.

It is with the preface we are occupied to-night, and we know how important in human writings the preface is. It gives the scope of the book in a nutshell, and no careful reader will overlook it. So here in a divine way.

Ver. 1.— “The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him.” A remarkable statement! But we must remember that our Lord Jesus took the place of a servant, and as the Servant He is going to receive the kingdom. Doubtless this explains the words, “which God gave unto him to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass,” etc. It is all “servants.” The Lord Jesus receives this Revelation and sends and signifies it by His angel to His servant John, who writes it to the seven churches.

Ver. 3—How blessed that such words should he found in the preface of this book of judgment! If God gives us the book He intends us to read it, and by His help to enter into it; yet He deigns to pronounce at the very outset His blessing on those who do so.

“The time is near.” This book is not a sealed one in the sense in which Daniel was told to seal his prophecy. Then the time was distant; now it is at hand.

Ver. 4 So John writes to these seven churches.

Notice how he greets them. How different to the nearness we see in the form of greeting in the Epistles— “Grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here it is far more distant, because relationship is not in keeping with the character of the book. “From him which is, and which was, and which is to come” it is God revealed in His Old Testament character of the Eternal Jehovah.

“And from the seven Spirits.” You will search in vain for any such expression in the Epistles. There, you will find “one body, and one Spirit,” “by one Spirit were we all baptized,” etc. In connection with the church, unity must be expressed; here “seven” sets forth the perfect, complete action of that same blessed Person. “Before his throne.” As you are aware, there are two thrones spoken of in this book, the “great white throne” at the end, before which all the dead stand, and the throne “set in heaven” in chap. 4, upon which God sits as Creator, and which the Lamb afterward occupies. The “seven Spirits” seen before it seem to set forth the Spirit's action in preparing the way for the setting up of the throne on the earth.

Ver. 5—Now we come to the pith and marrow of this introduction (if I may so say), “Jesus Christ” —the Christ of God, the Anointed One here below, Jesus His own personal name which He took here—my Savior. “Grace and peace from Jesus Christ”! Oh, how blessed to get such a greeting on opening the book of judgments which begin as they must, at the house of God. “Who is the faithful witness.” This gives a key to the book. Though all else have proved unfaithful, God has had one “faithful witness,” not a but the faithful One who trod that path unswervingly from the manger to the cross. At the end, as Paul says, He “witnessed the good confession.” Pilate, the representative of the Roman Empire (of which you and I once formed part, but who are now “not of the world”), might ask, “What is truth?” and reject it in the person of the One before him. Yet then was He witnessing “the good confession” even in the face of death at the hands of cruel men, that death as the holy Martyr—a murder of which the world stands condemned to this day.

“And the first begotten of the dead.” Oh, are you not glad to think of it! Not only the “faithful witness” here, but in death, and through death, and beyond it, the Victor, the firstborn of the dead, who has conquered all connected with it, and is now the Head of a new creation, the other side of it.

“And the prince of the kings of the earth.” Do you believe that? Amid all the upheaval of nations and the efforts of man to “balance the powers,” do you believe there is one who is the Prince of them all, and who shall reign “from the River to the ends of the earth?”

But there is something beyond. Not only are there His threefold glories revealed, but our God would have us know Him as the lover of our souls. “To him that loveth us.” To Him whose affection is ours, and who “has washed us from our sins in his own blood.” He has not only set His love upon us, but He has freed us completely from our sins. They are not only forgiven but forgotten. He may and will deal with us for our ways and works. He must appraise us (as He did the seven candlesticks), but the question of our sins can never be raised again for judgment. We do not “come into judgment,” but are already passed out of death unto life” (John 5:24).

Ver. 6— “And hath made us unto his God … kings and priests.” Do you know your dignity? Royalty and nearness to God seem the two thoughts expressed here. In Peter we are called a “holy priesthood,” and a “royal priesthood “; the latter is the thought here. A little later on, the elders are seen sitting round the throne “with crowns of gold.” Yes, we shall reign with Him. But here—as brethren and companions in tribulation and the kingdom and patience of Christ (which will not be forever) we wait. Soon we shall be with Him; and with Him all the saints—not as now, unknown, despised, and scattered—shall be manifested in glory. Yet, while waiting, we are already “priests” — “He hath made us priests to his God and Father.” We have access now.

Ver. 7—This is our last point—testimony. “Behold, he cometh with clouds,” not for His saints but with them. “And every eye shall see him,” without exception; “and they also which pierced him.” In Zechariah 12:10, we have a prophecy as to this, and, in the day that is coming, the Jews who cried, “His blood be on us and on our children,” will find it on them in terrible vengeance indeed. “And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” Is this the Christian hope? Assuredly not. For the believer in view of all the terrors that are coming can be tranquil and calm. “Perfect love casteth out fear.” So we can say, “Even so. Amen.”

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