

# “From God in Three Persons”

Revelation 1:4–6



## Text and Outline

“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 has made us *to be* a kingdom,  
priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory  
and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

- I. The Needy  
Addressed (1:4a)
- II. The Provision  
Supplied (1:4b–5a)
- III. The Provider  
Exalted (1:5b–6)

- These verses comprise the book's *salutation* (1:4–5a) and *opening doxology* (1:5b–6).
- Immediately after the book's unique superscript (1:1–3) wherein John identified the book's contents as *prophecy*, he resorts to the practice of writing a typical Greco-Roman *letter*.
- John's salutation includes the regular ingredients:
  - an identification of the writer;
  - an identification of the recipients; and
  - an expression of a greeting or wish.
- In a sense, the book of Revelation could be called "Asians" (like the letter "Galatians").



# I. The Needy Addressed

“**John** to the seven churches that are in Asia”  
(1:4a).

- “John” – a simple identification.
- He was already identified in v. 1 as “the slave of Jesus Christ.”
- There was no need to add anything more; he was well-recognized and beloved by those to whom he wrote.
- John arrived in the Roman province of Asia from Jerusalem c. AD 68.



“Apostle John the Theologian on Patmos” by A. N. Mironov

## “John to the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4a).

- Why these particular churches from the Roman province of Asia?
- There were other known “Asian” churches in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Troas—and undoubtedly more.
- Some suggest “seven” simply refers to *completion*; thus, they are *symbolic* of the universal church.
- But it is best to see these “seven” as real churches upon which the Apostle John had focused much attention in the latter years of his ministry.



- These seven churches were all found along a circular route, and they “bound together the most populous, wealthy, and influential part of the province” (Ramsay, *Letters*, 132).
- Ultimately, these were churches in significant *need*.
- John, their apostolic shepherd, had been removed from their midst and exiled to Patmos (1:9).
- Each of the churches were struggling with something—whether *complacency, compromise, or discouragement*.
- They needed a word of God (1:2) that would be both specific to their situation (chapters 2–3) and yet applicable to all their situations.

## II. The Provision Supplied

“**Grace** to you and **peace**” (1:4a).

- The NT writers take the standard wish of the Greco-Roman salutation and fill it with theology.
- The two terms are the lifeblood of all true believers; they represent our defining experience and our greatest ongoing need.
- “**Grace**” = “the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful and unearned, at work in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinful men.”
- **Peace**” = “the effect of the reception of grace, the soul-health which comes when grace makes one’s heart right with God and dispels all fear.”



**“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” (1:4b–5a).**

- John identifies the source of this blessing as *threefold* in nature.

**(1) “Him who is and who was and who is to come”** – a reference to *God the Father* and His *glorious eternity and immutability*.

- The title in the Greek—“from Him who is and who was”—is incorrect as to its grammatical appearance in the sentence, but this emphasizes the unchangeableness of the name.
- To describe the future, John doesn’t say “who will be” but “who is to come”—emphasizing the futuristic theme of the book.



- Ultimately, the title is an allusion back to Exodus 3:13–14, and God’s revelation of His name to Moses at the burning bush.
  - **Exodus 3:14** – “Then Moses said to God, ‘Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you.” Now they may say to me, “What is His name?” What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’”
  - *YHWH* (יהוה)—the Hebrew Tetragrammaton.
- “Such a reminder would be especially appropriate at a time when the church stood under the shadow of impending persecution. An uncertain future calls for One who by virtue of his external existence exercises sovereign control over the course of history” (Mounce, 46).

**“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” (1:4b–5a).**

**(2) “the seven Spirits who are before His throne”** – a reference to *God the Spirit* and His *omniscience* and *efficacious activity as emissary*.

- The title will be used again in 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6.
- Some believe it refers to angels—perhaps even the seven archangels identified in Jewish apocalyptic works, but “holy angels” are never elsewhere called “spirits” in Revelation.
- Moreover, angels would never be listed between God the Father and God the Son, especially as a source of “grace and peace.”

- In this title, John alludes to the description of the Spirit given in Zechariah 4:1–10.
  - **Zechariah 4:1–10** – “Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. He said to me, ‘What do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it . . . Then he said to me, ‘This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts. . . . For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.”

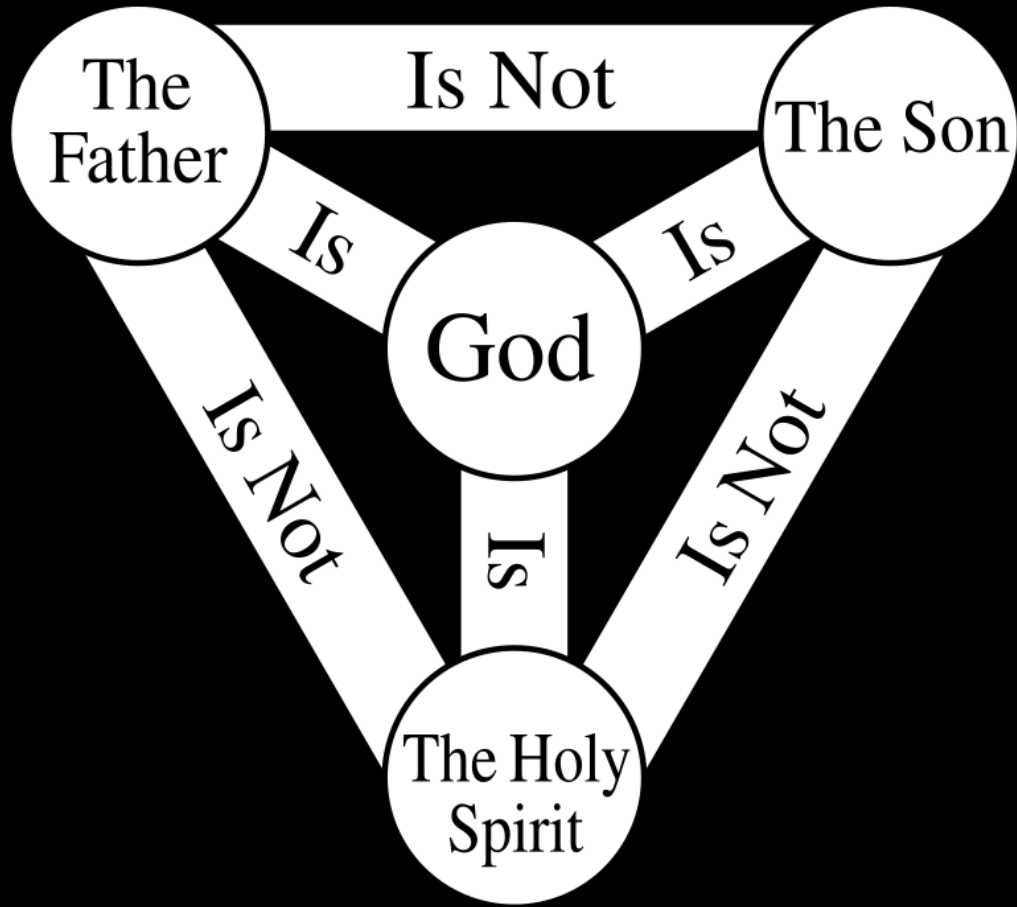
“from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from **Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth**” (1:4b–5a).

(3) “**Jesus Christ**” – a reference to *God the Son* and His *glorious work as Redeemer and Ruler*.

- Jesus is left to the end so that John can describe Him in greater detail (v. 5a) and ascribe to Him a special doxology (vv. 5b–6).
- **“the faithful witness”** – His faithful revelation of truth both in His earthly ministry (e.g., 1 Tim 6:13) and here (cf. Rev 1:1).
- **“the firstborn of the dead”** – His decisive defeat of death on behalf of His redeemed (cf. Col 1:18).
- **“the ruler of the kings of the earth”** – His exaltation to the right hand of the Father and His coming reign (cf. Rev 19:16; 20:1–6).



- This threefold description of Jesus Christ echoes emphases from Psalm 89—an OT exposition of the Davidic Covenant (cf. 2 Sam 7:8–16).
  - **Psalm 89:37** – “. . . a faithful witness . . .”
  - **Psalm 89:27** – “. . . I shall make him My firstborn . . .”
  - **Psalm 89:27** – “. . . the highest of the kings of the earth . . .”
- Moved by the Spirit to describe Jesus Christ in this way, John is emphasizing the importance of the Davidic Covenant.
- The rule of the Messiah—the fulfillment of all the promises—is near (v. 3)!



- The ultimate provision for the needs of the churches is none other than the *Triune God*.
- All of the believers' challenges with complacency, compromise, and discouragement find their resolution in the majesty of the One-in-Three Father, Son, and Spirit.

### III. The Provider Exalted (to be continued)

“To Him **who loves us** and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1:5b–6).

- Upon describing Jesus Christ, John cannot help but break into doxology.
- “**who loves us**” – unlike in other instances where Christ’s love is described as something *achieved* (cf. Gal 2:20), here it is described as something *continuing in the present*.
- He did not just love us on the cross—in history; He loves us *now, in the present!*



**“Hallelujah, What a Savior!”**  
**(by Philip Bliss)**

“Man of sorrows!” what a name  
For the Son of God, who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim!  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood,  
Sealed my pardon with His blood;  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we,  
Spotless Lamb of God was He,  
Full atonement! Can it be?  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die,  
“It is finished,” was his cry;  
Now in heaven exalted high:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,  
All his ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew this song we’ll sing:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!