

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Small Group Bible Study

## The Seven Churches (I)

### SERIES INTRODUCTION

The Book of Revelation is an apocalyptic literature that has generated much interest amongst biblical scholars and also common readers of the Scriptures from generation to generation. It is a Book that is shrouded with “mysteries” and complexity, lending itself to easy misreading and misinterpretation.

In this Bible study series, we will examine the chapters that cover the historical portion of the Book concerning the Seven Churches. These churches were located in identifiable cities in the present day Turkey. John who also authored the Gospel of John and the three epistles (1, 2, 3 John) had a divine vision while he was on the Island called Patmos, another identifiable landmark off the Aegean Sea. Although it was a vision, the messages he received applied to the seven historical churches. It may be said that these churches serve as mirrors to all churches as well.

Revelation 1 introduces the LORD God Almighty who watches over the universe and all humanity. Jesus Christ is particularly presented as the Lord and Judge of those churches. Chapters 2 to 3 enlarge on the issues of individual churches. What sin, praise and duty did God impress upon the churches? What similarities are there compare to our churches today. What does God expect of us as well?

12 July

**Alpha & Omega**

Rev 1:1-8

19 July

**One Like a Son of Man**

Rev 1:9-20

26 July

**Forsaken Your First Love**

Rev 2:1-7

# The Alpha and Omega

REVELATION 1:1-8

GENERAL SURVEY

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TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

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## Introduction

This prologue introduces some very important aspects that anchor the entire revelation in this Book. Who is the messenger? What is he like? Why should we listen? How must we listen? So what if we miss the message and the messenger? The first words in the last Book of the Bible presents a big view of God, a high view of his authority and his word, and a big view of his salvation. These are the four cardinal distinctiveness of John's God. What about us?

## For Study and Discussion

### 1. The Revelation (1:1-3)

- a. The word 'revelation' [apocalypse] occurs 18 times in the entire Bible. It refers to God making known information to close associates that is meant to be understood. These revelations are largely focused on and connected to Jesus (v2; cf. Lk 2:32; Rom 8:19; 1 Cor 1:7). How then should we read this Book (Rev 22:7, 18-19)? What goal do we seek (Rev 22:17)? Discuss briefly.
  
- b. God gave, Jesus Christ revealed, and his angel communicated to John. What two words are used to describe John's ensuing role and responsibility in view of the revelation? (vv1b&2) Search this passages (Matt 25:23; Lk 12:37; Jn 15:20; Acts 4:29; Eph 6:6) - what must John be prepared for? How about us?
  
- c. Those who are "blessed" must receive the revelation in a threefold manner. How? (v3) The word 'blessed' occurs seven times in this Book (see also 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). Knowing who these blessed ones are, what confidence does it give us?

### 2. The Lord God (1:4-8)

Having received the revelation, John then discharged his duty in making it know to the seven churches in the province of Asia.

- a. What do verses 4-5 tell us about the Trinity – God the Father (cf. Ex 3:14; Isa 41:4), God the Son (cf. Col 1:18; 1 Tim 6:15), and God the Spirit (cf. Isa 11:2; Rev 4:5)? "Seven Spirits" can also mean "seven-fold [Holy] Spirit". The number 'seven' in Hebrew is associated with completion, fulfillment, and perfection.

- b. In his love, what has Jesus done for us and made of us? (vv5b-6; cf. Ex 19:6) How then should we respond to Jesus? (Rom 15:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9)
- c. Verse 7 brings the crucifixion and the Second coming of Christ into juxtaposition.
- i. Matt 16:27 – Will Christ’s return be good news or bad news to humanity?
  - ii. John 19:37 – All people on earth will see Jesus and mourn. Particularly, why do God’s people mourn? What will God bring upon their hearts? Consider Zechariah 12:10.
  - iii. Matt 24:29-31 – At the end of seeing Christ and mourning, what awaits God’s people? Till then, what must God’s people expect to face?
- d. Verse 8 testifies to God as the ‘Alpha’ and ‘Omega’; the first and the last letters of the Greek Alphabet. What does this tell us further about God; particularly his presence with his people and his knowledge of the affairs of this world and of our lives?

## **Discipleship Pointers**

The eternal God reveals himself to his people centrally in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

1. God’s message to his people is meant to be heard and heeded. We are to serve and to bear witness to the Word of God with steadfastness, because Christ’s return and his judgement of all things are imminent. Those who do are most blessed in Him.
2. God is the eternal ruler; he is all knowing, all powerful and all present with his people. We do not fear, nor do we be anxious about what life will throw at us. He is sovereign and in control.
3. God is the eternal lover; he redeems sinners at the cost of Jesus’ blood, and he made them into saints. Our priestly calling is to bring praises and glory to God.
4. We look forward to Christ’s imminent and visible return before all people on earth. It will be bad news for the unbelievers and good news for all who mourn with remorse and repentance in Christ.
5. This is the God of the seven churches in Asia who admonished them. He is also our God who admonishes us today through his holy word and perfect Spirit. Let us hear and heed for the time is near.

## **Family/Group Moments**

- If people were to observe from the side-line how you live and the manner that you respond to challenges at home or at work, what will they conclude about your God? Will it be like the God that John has testified in the Book of Revelation?
- “I am the Alpha and the Omega” – God is not just at the beginning and at the end of life. Rather, He is from the beginning through to the end of life. What difference does this make with regards to your sin, faith, and duty?
- The Book of Revelation is given to encourage faith and give assurance to God’s people so that we will abide in Christ to the end. Knowing the bigness and greatness of our God is the most important starting point. Start talking to your child about God from young. Tell them what he is like, how you need him, and why he can be trusted. Start today and keep bearing witness to him in your family.

# One Like a Son of Man

REVELATION 1:9-20

## GENERAL SURVEY

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## Introduction

God gave John a vision. What was God's purpose for doing this? Central to that vision is the "Son of Man". It was a crystal clear vision that absolutely blew John off his feet. Who is the Son of Man? What is he like? What will he do? God did not leave the churches to second guess the meaning and significance of the symbols in the vision. He made it clear to them. Therefore, let us study this vision by keeping to what is clearly revealed and explained. Let us refrain from vain imaginations that so many in our time and age have fallen into doing, leading themselves and others into confusions and divisions, hence contravening the very purpose of this vision.

## For Study and Discussion

1. The Circumstances (1:9-11)
  - a. How did John identify himself in verse 9? What might that suggest about the circumstances facing the people of God then? (Cf. Jn 15:18-21)
  
  - b. Why was John on the island called Patmos? What did the Spirit of God instruct him to do?
  
2. The Vision (1:12-16)
  - a. John saw seven golden lampstands (v12). According to Rev 1:20, what do they represent?
  
  - b. John also saw "one like a son of man" who is Jesus the Christ (v13).
    - i. Where was he positioned? What might this suggest about his relationship to the churches?
  
    - ii. What was he wearing? Compare with Daniel 7:9-10 concerning the Ancient of Days – what does his clothing suggest about his functions and authority?
  
    - iii. His eyes were like a flame of fire (v14). Consider 1 Corinthians 3:13 – what do you think the son of man would come to do eventually?

- iv. “Seven stars” in his “right hand” (v16a) – What does a “right hand” position signify (Eph 1:20)? What does the “seven stars” refer to? (1:20)

[Note: In Lk 9:52 and Jas 2:25, ‘angel’ is translated as ‘messenger’ and refers to human beings. It is unlikely that each church has a special guardian angel. Rather, each church has a human leader who would act as God’s vital messenger.]

- v. “Sharp two-edged sword” (v16b) – What does Hebrews 4:12 inform us about its likely meaning and thereby its significance in the context of this passage?

3. The Consequences (1:17-20)

- a. John was terrified in his encounter. What was it that immediately gave him assurance? Why?

- b. What authority does Jesus have over us? Is it good news or bad news?

- c. What must John do the message? Similarly, with whom will you share the good news today?

## **Discipleship Pointers**

Jesus Christ is God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Priest and Judge, the Gate-keeper to heaven and hell. Worship, trust and obey him!

1. When the Church of God suffers for the sake of the Gospel, Christians are called to centre their confidence on Jesus Christ, whose power and authority is over all.
2. Jesus Christ is both priest and judge over the affairs of humanity, and his judgement will be thorough and sharp. He will not leave any sin hidden and unpunished. For those who ‘pierced’ Jesus in the very sense of rejecting his saving work on the cross; Jesus’ coming again is bad news!
3. Yet for those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, the hope of eternal life releases them from fear. Jesus’ coming again is good news!
4. Jesus Christ is God, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the living One, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty, the key-holder to heaven and also to hell. Fear Him, worship Him, embrace Him and adore Him. He is our God, our Creator, our Ruler and our Judge. Amen!

## **Family/Group Moment**

- Pray for the suffering churches around the world where Christianity is opposed and believers are oppressed and persecuted. Pray that Christ Jesus our Saviour and Lord will always be exalted amidst the sufferings of his people.
- Are we harbouring sins in our lives? God knows and sees all things. His judgement shall be swift and sharp. Surrender to God and let him empower us to battle sins in us and around us.
- Knowing how great and mighty our Lord God is, how will you live? How will you follow him?

# Forgotten Your First Love

REVELATION 2:1-7

## GENERAL SURVEY

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## Introduction

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3:23) Paul's statement is certainly true not only of individual sinner, but also of the church of Christ – the gathering of God's people, yet-to-be perfected saints. In view of God's holiness, all churches will certainly fall short of his glory. God's appraisals of the seven historical churches in Asia remain true and relevant for churches all around the world today. It is wise and prudent to take God's criticisms and warnings to heart. How does ORPC fair in comparison to the seven churches? Let's begin this journey of self-appraisal with the church in Ephesus.

## For Study and Discussion

1. According to verse 1, God “walks among” the seven churches. What does this description tell us about God's relationship with his people? (Consider Genesis 3:8)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. God knows his people. What did God know particularly of the church in Ephesus?
  - a. Read Acts 19:1-20 for a background to the church in Ephesus. What do you notice about their faith? What kind of challenges did they have to face?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. According to verses 2 & 3, what three tests were they faced with? How did they fare in those tests? Are those three tests ours as well today? How?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Read Ephesians 1:15-16, what did Paul commend the church for? Yet, what was eventually their most serious offence against God? (v4) How could this be possible for believers today as well? Discuss.

3. What warnings and corrective actions did God demand of the believers? (v5)
  
4. Should they fail to take heed, God would remove their lampstand, i.e. church (cf. 1:20). What is meaning of this punishment? Consider verse 7 – How serious is the consequence of disobedience?
  
5. The Nicolatians were followers of Nicolas (see Acts 6:5). Rev 2:15 indicated that some followed the teaching of the Nicolatians which God would make war against. Search up a Bible Dictionary to find out about the Nicolatians and their teachings. What is so dangerous about them? Why is it necessary and commendable to oppose them?

## **Discipleship Pointers**

Let us love God for God's own sake. Beware of backsliding!

The Apostle John who wrote Revelation has a lot to say about 'love' in his epistle as well, particularly 1 John.

1. Love is indispensable in God's church because "...God is love." (1 John 4:8)
2. God's love is being perfected in us when we keep his commands (1 John 2:5).
3. We cannot claim to love God if we continue to love the world and the things in the world (1 John 2:15).
4. We also cannot claim to love God if we do not love one another (1 John 4:7-8, 20).
5. To abide in God's love is to have confidence in the day of judgement (1 John 4:15-17). To slide back from loving God and eventually to turn away from God completely is to lose one's place in the Paradise of God (v7).

Knowing how central the love of God is for the church of God, we can now understand the seriousness of God's charge against the church in Ephesus, "You have left/forsaken your first love." (Rev 2:4) Pray that we individually and corporately at ORPC will not leave/forsake the love of God.

## **Family/Group Moments**

- Is your service pleasing to God? Have you persevered in resisting evil? Have you also boldly exposed and expelled false teaching? In which area/s do you need to glorify God?
- Do you love ORPC? Do you love your fellow small group members, co-workers, and those seated next to you in worship Sunday after Sunday? If you can't sincerely say you do, then search out God's love for you. Pray that it is not symptomatic of a backsliding love for God.
- "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but love is not God. What is the difference? How do we ensure that we do not forsake God even in loving others?