

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN REVELATION

BY WATCHMAN NEE

The apostle John's writings, whether his Epistles or his Gospel, were always the last in each category. Revelation was the last of all the books written in the Bible. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written regarding the behavior of the Lord Jesus on this earth, whereas the Gospel of John speaks of "He who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven" (3:13). John wrote at the time when the Gnostics were confusing the Word of God; his writings bring men to heaven to see God's eternal fact in heaven. John brings us out of the realm of man to wholly receive the Son of God. What John wrote has the special feature of bringing us back to the beginning. The Gospel of John tells us that Christ was in the beginning; the Epistles of John speak of the Word of life, which was from the beginning; and Revelation brings us to eternity in the future. The Gospel of John shows the Son of God who was in the flesh—He was in the midst of us, but men mistook Him, thinking that He was only Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, John shows that this Jesus, who was in the flesh, was in the beginning. This is the fact behind the scene. The Epistles of John do likewise. Jesus' person is the Son of God, and His office is Christ. But men did not know the Son of God; neither did they know the Christ. So the Epistles of John especially speak of these two points, bringing us back to the fact behind the scene in the beginning. At the time John wrote Revelation, the world was in great confusion, and Caesar of Rome was at his worst. So John brought us into the condition behind the scenes of the future to let us know how God regards the situation of this world. However, in Revelation we see not only the condition of the world but also the condition of the church. Revelation also shows us what pleases the Lord, what the Lord condemns, and what the Lord's way is for the church when the outward appearance of the church is extremely confusing. The church in her appearance has many manifestations in history, but what way, what condition, is the Lord's desire? This desire behind the scenes is shown by John.

In the Bible there are two groups of seven epistles. God used Paul to write the first group—Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians—and God used John to write the second group. The first seven Epistles speak of the church in a time of normality; the latter speak of the churches in a time of abnormality. The three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are normal, helping men to know God, but the Gospel of John is God's reaction to man's unclearness; that is why it frequently speaks of truth and grace. John's Epistles are also God's reaction to abnormality; that is why they speak of light and love more often. Revelation 2 and 3 are God's dealings with the abnormal conditions of the churches. The first seven Epistles of Paul deal with the normal behavior of the church. Later, the church was not normal; therefore, John wrote the last seven epistles in Revelation. The first seven Epistles contain the truth that the church must know; the last seven epistles show the way that the church must take. Today, if a man really wants to walk in the