

01. Seven Letters to the Churches Introduction & chapters 1 & 2

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Revelation ch 1 - 2

Introduction

The Book of Acts covers about 30 years of early Church history.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation cover the next 2,000 years to the present time.

The seven letters to the Seven Churches occur prior to all the cluster of signs we find in **Revelation chapter 6. (The end times as in Matthews account)**

The opening of the 7 seals.

Prior to ch 6 are chapters 2 & 3 about the Churches. These are prophetic letters.

Each has a closing phrase. He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

This study will explore the Seven Letters by Jesus Christ to actual historical churches and the church ages they represent. These letters describe with amazing precision, the unfolding of all church history in advance. It fills the gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel.

Why these seven? Why not Jerusalem or Rome? There are a lot of others we read about in Pauls letters which are not mentioned.

Jesus picked these seven specifically - the **meaning** of each name is relevant to the letter.

There are four levels of Application.

1. **Local**, actual historic churches with validated needs.
2. **Admonitory**:- 'Hear what the Spirit says to the churches' (plural) It applies to all churches both then and throughout history. Any church can be recognised in terms of these 7 characteristics. Each letter went to all of them. Because they were a part of the whole vision. John wouldn't have cut each one out and sent each one to each of the seven. The whole Book of Revelation would have gone out together with all the letters to all the churches as a whole.

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3. **Homiletic** (how does it affect your walk) - **Personal**:- 'He that has an ear let him hear'
Each letter applies to each of us. There is some element of each of the churches in every one of us. Therefore, this is a very important application.
4. **Prophetic**:- These letters describe in amazing detail and precision, the unfolding of all church history in advance. In any other order, this would not be true. And so we will see how these letters chronicle the church events which fill the gap between the 69th and 70th Week of Daniel. As we come to the last Church, the Laodicean Church we can see clearly that this is the church age in which we are living.

Why Prophecy?

Old Testament: 1,845 references to Christ's rule on the earth;

17 OT books give prominence to the event.

New Testament: Of the 216 chapters, there are 318 references to the Second Coming; it is mentioned in 23 of the 27 books.

For every prophecy relating to His First Coming, there are eight treating His Second Coming. The first coming was absolutely literal, therefore the second coming will be absolutely literal too.

The Seven Churches are the focus of Chapters 2 and 3 and are the most important in the entire book.

These chapters are the ones that affect us the most because after that we will be watching events from a different place.

We are living in the most turbulent times the world has ever been through as the entire globe is affected. We need more than ever, to make sure we make a difference in our family, among our friends and within our communities.

Although the letters start in chapter 2, chapter 1 sets the scene. It starts with a greeting from both John and Jesus. We see Jesus in all His glory **vv13-17**

The Book of Revelation is a lens through which we can view the rest of the Bible.

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He (The Spirit) Shall Glorify Me" John 16:14

- Old Testament - Christ in Prophecy
- Gospels - Christ in History
- Acts - Christ in the Church
- Epistles - Christ in Experience
- Apocalypse- The catastrophic end crisis of our present age. It will involve the spectacular appearance of the King of Kings taking over His global empire. He paid for it on the cross and takes possession of it as revealed in this book.
- We also get the imprisonment of Satan
- The Millennial reign on earth of Jesus Christ
- Final Battle and the abolition of sin
- New Heaven and New Earth

The Central Theme of the Bible

- The Old Testament is the account of a Nation
- The New Testament is the account of a Man
- The Creator of all became a Man and His appearance is the central event of all history.
- He died to purchase you and me and is alive right now
- The most exalted privilege is to know Him. That's what the Bible is all about.

Revelation = The Unveiling.

- The Consummation of all things
- The Only book in the Bible promising a special blessing to the reader.
- 404 verses that make up this Book it contains 800 allusions from the Old Testament.
- It presents the climax of God's Plan for Man (you and me)
- Of this Book the most relevant to us are chapters 2 and 3

To whom was this vision given.?

The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him.....

It was given by God the Father to Jesus the Son who in turn gave it, by His Spirit, to His servant John.

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John wrote one Gospel and 3 Epistles

The overall theme of the book is in **v7** The second coming of Jesus Christ

The Divine outline of the Book is found in **ch 1:19**.

'Write the things which you **have seen** and the things **which are** and the things which **will take place** after this.

Past, present, future. The Book is divided into these three things.

1. What John has seen - The Vision of Jesus Christ in **Ch 1:12-18**
2. The things that are - the 7 churches - present
3. The things which will take place **after** this - future (meta tauta)

Our focus in this study will be the things that are. Which are the Churches.

After the Churches, come the things which will subsequently take place.

There is no need to try and change the order in which the Book is given. God is precise and detailed as we have already discovered in past studies.

Everything in the Book is given in signs or codes but they are all explained somewhere else in the Bible. And one reason it is such a blessing is that if you go through this Book systematically it will take you to virtually every other Book in the Bible.

The Keys are self-contained. So quite often a statement will be made followed by an explanation within the body of the text or even in the same verse.

For instance, the last verse of **ch 1:20**

20 *The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The **seven stars are the angels** of the seven churches, and the **seven lampstands** which you saw **are the seven churches**.*

It explains what it means in the same passage. It's not hidden.

The seven churches represents The Church age. This is known as the times of the Gentiles.

The church age is represented by these seven short letters to the churches.

First - They are all messages of Christ to the churches. They are the last audible statements of Jesus Christ given in the scriptures. Previously, the last audible statements of Christ were given to Paul on the Damascus Road.

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Second - these letters involve the visible rather than the invisible church. The invisible church is composed of all true believers since Pentecost. Sometimes referred to as the universal church.

The visible church is the local body or local church which may consist of both believers and unbelievers. The invisible church has only believers, the visible church can have both. We will see that the seven churches contain both.

Third - We will see that Christ has something against 5 of these churches and nothing against 2. He also finds something good in 6 of these churches but nothing good in the 7th church. The 7th church is entirely out of His favour.

Fourth - There are 4 common things in all 7 letters.

- a. Every letter contains a description of Jesus Christ taken from the description of the glorified Son of Man found in ch 1
 - b. All 7 letters contain the words 'I KNOW'
 - c. All contain a promise to him who overcomes.
 - d. All contain the words 'He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. It is an admonition to obedience. The churches are required/responsible to meet the demands of the letters.
- These seven churches were seven real churches existing in John's time.
 - Looking through the historical-prophetic perspective we can recognise that all seven church types exist throughout the church age. No matter what part of church history you turn to you will find all seven types of churches. These seven types will continue to exist until the time of the Rapture.
 - While all seven types of churches always exist, one type will tend to dominate a particular period of church history.
 - Thus these letters present a prophetic picture of the seven historical periods in which the visible church will develop. Therefore we need to keep this in mind while studying the letters.

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Ch 1 gives a complete description of the Son of Man.

Each of the letters takes a part of that description and relates it to the content of that letter.

We are now living in the Church age. The Church age will carry on until the rapture, when it is removed.

Revelation ch 1

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

3 Blessed is he who reads (aloud) and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

"show" = This is not a sealed book (Rev 22:10). It is to be understood, in contrast to Daniel, (Dan 12:4). it is real and tangible.

"shortly" = *en taxei*: rapidly in execution (tachometer). "What I begin I will also end" (1 Sam 3:12; Luke 18:8).

This book contains A tremendous promise. Yet it is known to be the least read book in the Bible!!

The promise is in verse 3 and it is for us. No wonder Satan puts people off from reading it. We will be blessed. Read, Hear, Keep, if we want to be blessed.

4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from Him (God) who is and who was (Col 1:15-17) and who is (Heb 7:25) and is to come (Rev 1:7) , and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, (John 14:1-3; John 8:14) the firstborn from the dead,(Col 1:18-20) and the ruler over the kings of the earth (Matt 25:31;1 Cor 15:24) . To Him who loved us (Gal 2:20; John 3:16) and washed us from our sins in His own blood, (Heb 7:25;9:14)

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6 and has made us kings and priests (1 Peter 2:9; Luke 19:17; Rev 2:28; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5) to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Be aware of the tenses.

7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

"Every eye shall see Him": Personal, physical (Dan 7:13; Mt 26:64; Mt 24:30); "pierced him" (Zech 12:10). This refers to His Second Coming, not the Rapture. If Christ will be coming to the earth at that time, there is no point in being caught up in the air. The Rapture has already taken place by this point.

"...pierced Him": Zech 12:10.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

"John" is specifically referenced five times: 1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8.

"Companion in tribulation": Domitian's reign. John was exiled from A.D. 86 to 96.

Vision of the Son of Man

9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,

"Lord's Day"

- Seventh Day ordained in Eden Gen 2
- Observed before the giving of the Law
- Did not gather manna on Shabbat Ex 16
- Law given at Mt. Sinai Ex 20

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- Antichrist will seek "to **change the times and the laws**" **Dan 7:25**
- "Do not move the ancient landmarks..." **Prov 22:28**
- Millennial Temple only be open on Shabbat and the new moon **Ezek 46:1**
*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. **Colossians 2:16-17***

"I Was in the Spirit..."

- The "Day of the Lord" (at Patmos) **1:10**
- To the throne in heaven **4:2**
- Carried away in the wilderness **17:3**
- Carried to a mountain **21:10**

"I heard": **(v.10)** I turned **(v.12)**, I saw **(v.17)**, I fell at His feet **(v.17)**.

11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

Why these seven churches? Sixty-three years after Pentecost over 100 churches existed. Why not Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, Colossae, Philippi, Galatia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Miletus, Hierapolis, Troas, etc.?

12 Then **I turned** to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,

Lampstands (not "candlesticks") = *luchina*: lightbearers (**Ex 25:31-40**)

"I am..." (**John 8:12 9:5**); "You are..." (**Matt 5:14; Phil 2:15,16**).

Every local church is the bearer of God's light in this dark world (**Dan 7:9-14**). This scene should remind us of the tabernacle. The high priest had the sole oversight of the **menorah**. He lighted the lamps, trimmed the wicks, poured the oil. If one of them was unsatisfactory, he was the one who snuffed it out (**John 15: 1 John 5:16**).

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13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

"in the midst" = where is He right now? "Son of Man": 85 times in gospels (83 by Christ Himself), **Ps 3:4; Rev 14:14.**

We see Him here as our Great High Priest, in charge—and in control—of His Church.

Jesus' tasks:

Intercession **Heb 7:25**

Cleansing us **1 John 1:9**

Advocacy **1 John 2:1**

Inspection **Rev 2 & 3** [Largely ignored by the church!]

The following physical description is reminiscent of the descriptions found in **Matt 17** (Transfiguration) and **Dan 7** (Ancient of Days).

14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire;

1) **Hair**, head: wool, snow **Dan 7:9, 13, 22**

2) **Eyes**: flame of fire too pure to behold evil **Heb 1:13**

all things naked **Heb 4:13**

work tried by fire **1 Cor 3:13**

refiner's fire **Mal 3:2**

"He loves you so much He can't take His eyes off you!"

15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

Numbers 21:6-9 Makes no sense until Jesus explains to Nicodemus...

"fiery" = "brass."

⁶ So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.....

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John 3:14-15

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. **John 3:16***

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

***16** He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and **His countenance was like the sun** shining in its strength.*

"...two-edged sword":

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. **Hebrews 4:12***

*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: **Ephesians 6:17***

(The Word of God is consistent throughout)

"...his countenance was as the sun...":

Matthew 16:28 - 17:2

The Transfiguration

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

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17 *And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.*

"First and the Last"

- Isaiah 41:4
- Isaiah 44:6
- Isaiah 48:12
- Revelation 1:11
- Revelation 1:17-18
- Revelation 2:8 "was dead and am alive"
- Revelation 22:13

- **The Divine Outline: Revelation 1:19**
- *Write the things which you have seen [The Vision of Christ, Chapter 1],*
- *and the things which are [The Seven Churches, Chapters 2, 3],*
- *and the things which shall be hereafter [That which follows after the Churches,*
- **Chapters 4-22];**
- Revelation 1:19
- "...hereafter," "after these things" = *meta tauta.*

18 *I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*

19 *Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*

20 *The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.*

(For further teaching on the meaning of the angels or stars of the churches refer to the audio message)

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Chapter 2

Seven Design Elements

Each of the letters to the seven churches have the following elements

- The Name of the Church (the message is embodied in the name of the church)
- And in the title of Christ that is used. (different one each time for each letter)
- Commendation (good news)
- Concern (the bad news)
- Exhortation
- Promise to the Overcomer.
- Closing phrase 'He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'

So it's Jesus's assessment of what's going on in the churches. The church is still young, but it has had time to get established and it didn't take long for things to start going wrong. So He names particular churches which reflect in the name the type of church it is and uses His own Name in its various elements which we can recognise. He gives the good news about what they are doing and tells them about what displeases Him and to get it fixed. There's a special promise to the Overcomer and an admonition to hear what He is saying.

The first of the seven elements is found in the letter to Ephesus. The word Ephesus means Darling or, Desired one. This matches the tone of the letter.

It represents the period of the Apostolic Church which began in AD30 and continued to about 100AD. Ephesus was the type of church that typified the Apostolic Church.

New Testament Period

In the New Testament period Ephesus was the largest city of its day. As the harbour gradually became unusable, traffic diverted to Smyrna.

Ephesus was the centre for the study of arts and magic; renowned over the world for talismans, incantations, books, charms, etc.

(Burnings, **Acts 19:19**). Paul's first visit was brief and was directed toward the Jewish community; he later made a second visit--he was driven from the synagogue and settled in the school of Tyrannus for two years until the uproar in 58 A.D.

(**Acts 19:24-41; 20:1**). Ephesus later became the centre for missionary operations throughout Asia.

Imitators followed, but without power.

(Seven sons of Siva: **Acts 19:12-17.**) After Paul left Ephesus and journeyed through Macedonia, he returned (to Miletus) for his famed farewell to the Ephesian elders.

1st Audio message ends here.