

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Rev 2:7

SEVEN CHURCHES

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

A. EXCERPTS FROM SCHOLAR JOSEPH SEISS (1823-1904) *THE APOCALYPSE AWAKENS BELIEVERS.*

1. Chapters 2 and 3 of the Apocalypse are a distinct and unique section of sacred literature.
2. Seiss affirms the position of the late learned and devout Dr. Bengel who commended the study of these two chapters, **above everything, especially to young ministers.** Dr. Bengel states:

B. EXCERPTS FROM DR. JOHANN BENDEL (1687-1752)

1. "Other epistles are written and sent as the speaker is absent, these two chapters portray the Savior present walking among His Church as Judge, engaged in the solemn act of inspection and decision.
2. They are a prominent and vital part of the Apocalypse and speak special benedictions (*blessings and rewards*) upon its attentive readers, hearers (*and doers of His Word*).
3. Revelation 2-3 contain Christ's own Words and the **very last Words** we have directly from Him.
4. Their message begets the idea of unusual solemnity and importance.
5. **Seven times** the entreaty and command **to hear** what is said in these seven messages is given.
6. Yet there is not another portion of Scripture of equal extent and conspicuity to which so little attention has been paid. Though so specifically and urgently addressed to the Churches, it would seem as if there had been some general concert to prevent them from being seen or heard.
7. Our Savior's most solemn dictate commands attention; yet writers of the Apocalypse itself, in very many instances, have passed these two Epistles (seven messages) with hardly a word of remark, mistakenly commencing the Apocalypse proper with the fourth or sixth chapter."

II. TIMELINE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

A. THE SEVEN CHURCHES WERE LITERAL CHURCHES EXISTING WHEN JOHN RECEIVED THE APOCALYPSE.

B. TWO POSITIONS RELATING TO THE TIMELINE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

1. FIRST POSITION - Each church and the corresponding developments prophetically profile the ecclesiastical history of the Church Age.

- a. **Joseph Seiss** states, "The seven churches are representative and comprehensive of all other churches of all...ages. In other words they give us, from the beginning, the exact picture of the whole history of the Church."
- b. **Theodore Epp** in his book *Practical Studies in Revelation*, points out "Each letter to a specific church describes dominant characteristics of a particular period of church history. We have the advantage of looking back over these things today and can readily see how these various periods correspond with what is presented in these letters."
- c. **H.A. Ironside** author of *Revelation*, states "Seven churches were chosen because seven in Scripture is the number of perfection (completeness); and you have only to read these seven letters and then take any good, reliable record of church history and see for yourself how perfectly the key fits the lock."
- d. **Dr. Henry Morris**, scientist and Biblical scholar, believes there is **significance in the sequence of the order of the seven churches as well as in the total.** "The Book of Revelation—all

of it—is said to be prophecy, if there is any prophecy in it concerning the Church Age, it must be here in these two chapters.” He astutely points out the churches are arranged in a logical geographical order beginning with Ephesus, the closest to Patmos where John first heard the message; the Savior proceeds clockwise through to the seventh, Laodicea which is the very order and unfolding of the historical record of the church age.”

Lastly, Dr. Morris aptly brings to focus, “The messages were intended to apply to the very end of the church age as evidenced from the fact that **the imminent return of Christ is mentioned in His address to the last four churches** (2:25; 3:3, 11, 20). If this is rightly discerned, these four churches specifically represent stages of church development which persist until the end of the age.”

2. **SECOND POSITION, The seven churches do not profile the ecclesiastical history of the church.**

C. PERSONAL POSITIONS RELATING TO THE TIMELINE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

1. The Seven churches and corresponding developments prophetically profile the ecclesiastical history of the Church Age.
2. The position and message of the seven churches of Revelation align with the ways of the LORD, that is, He foretells His story before it unfolds in order that we will know it is He (Isa 42:9).
3. Other examples of His prophetic ways are seen in His times and seasons.
 - a. The rabbis teach us the seven days of creation foreshadow seven millenniums (sexta-septennial), a day as 1000 years and a 1000 years as a day (Ps 90:4; 2 Pt 3:8).
 - b. His seven festivals prophetically foreshadow Messiah’s first and second coming.
These are two of many examples illustrating the LORD’S way is prophetic (Amos 3:7).

III. PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES:

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND LEADING TO JOHN’S EXPERIENCE ON THE ISLE OF PATMOS:

A. PERSECUTIONS OF JEWS AND BELIEVERS (CHRISTIANS)

1. **Nero in 64 A.D.** The people suspected Nero started the great fire in Rome. To divert suspicion from himself he accused the Christians and ordered their punishment. Thousands were put to death in the most cruel ways (among them Paul and possibly Peter, 64-68 A.D.).
2. Titus with the Tenth Legion in 70 A.D. destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, inflicting great persecution on the Jews.
3. **Domitian in 96 A.D.** instituted violent persecution against the Christians on the charge of atheism (probably refusal to participate in emperor worship). Domitian exiled the apostle John to the isle of Patmos.

B. MINISTRY AND DEATH OF THE JEWISH APOSTLES

1. The Bible only records the deaths of two apostles: Judas Iscariot committed suicide shortly after the death of Christ Messiah. James was killed by Herod Agrippa I in 44 A.D.
2. According to traditions, eight Apostles died as Martyrs; at least two, Peter and Andrew were crucified.
3. The deaths of the Apostles, John, Bartholomew and Simon the Canaanite are not known.
4. Within 25-40 years after the death of Christ, all the Jewish apostles had died except John whose death is not recorded. Hence, the Church leadership shifted to the Gentiles believers.
5. The Book of Revelation is dated approximately 96 A.D.

IV. CHRIST MESSIAH’S MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

LETTER TO EPHEBUS 2:1-7

- A. The Church at Ephesus: It was a city of about 300,000, the capital of the province of Asia, a commercial center and principal east-west cross road. It was known throughout the world as the home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—the temple of Diana. This magnificent structure stood in an area 425 by 220 feet, with 126 pillars of marble 60 feet high. Thirty-six pillars were overlaid with gold and jewels. The city proudly entitled itself the guardian of the temple of Diana (Acts 19:35). Through the ministry of Paul, Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, Timothy, John and ordinary believers all of the province of Asia “heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). In their dedication believers burned their books of magic which were valued at a year’s wage for 138 workers (Acts 19:19). **Ephesus is the apostolic age, the first of seven periods of church history.**
- B. Salutation to the Angel: **To the Church at Ephesus** Messiah presents Himself **holding the seven stars in His right hand and walking among the churches.**
- C. Commendation: Ephesus is commended for her works, perseverance, discernment rejection of false apostles and hatred of the Nicolaitans. Nicolaitans is understood to be exaltation of the clergy over the laity (based on the etymology of the word meaning “laity-conqueror.”)
- D. Correction: **“left their first love,”** a deliberate action requiring “teshuvah” to return and repent. Dr. Ryrie points out the word for **“left”** means **“to quit or forsake”** By the Spirit revealing the historical record, we found through the **sin of ignorance** the early church fathers **“left / forsook”** their Hebraic (Abrahamic) parentage / heritage (Rom.4) embracing the deception that the church is the **New Israel**. This error gave place to **anti-Semitism** that impregnated the church and spread rapidly. Christ Messiah clearly states as much as you do good or ill to the Jewish people you do unto Him (Matt. 25:40). Under the Mosaic Law an offering was required for committing the “sin of ignorance / unintentional sin” (Lev 4-5).
- E. Admonition: They were admonished to remember, repent, and return to their first works of love.
- F. Reward: Christ the Messiah overcame His humanity / temptations by **His love for the Father, prayer** and abiding in the Father (Deut. 6:4-5; Heb 5:7-8; Jn. 15:10). The believer’s love for the Lord moves his heart to fully surrender to Christ the Messiah (Rom. 12:1-2). As the believer abides in Christ, the Spirit releases Messiah’s life / overcoming power enabling the believer to be an overcomer in Him (Jn.15:4, 9).
- G. Overcomer: The overcomer’s life points back to Christ Messiah and brings glory to His Name even as Christ Messiah’s life brought glory to His Father (Jn. 17:4). The overcomer’s life is in Christ in the Father with the promise that he will hear and give all the believer needs if we ask (Lk. 11:9-13; Phil. 4:19).

REWARDS FOR OVERCOMERS

OVERCOMER	MESSIAH’S MILLENNIAL REIGN	AGE TO COME
Ephesus - Rev. 2:7	Eat of the Tree of Life	Rev. 22:2
Smyrna - Rev. 2:11		
Pergamum - Rev. 2:17		
Thyatira - Rev. 2:28		
Sardis - Rev. 3:5		
Philadelphia - Rev. 3:12		
Laodicea - Rev. 3:21		

VI. THE SEVEN CHURCHES HISTORICALLY PARALLEL THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AGE

LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT	ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY	PERIOD IN CHURCH HISTORY
• EPHEBUS (2:1-7) REPRESENTS LEADERSHIP, JEWISH TO APPROX. 65 A.D.	APOSTOLIC AGE	30 - 100 A.D.

Ministries of New Life
Revelation - Lesson 6
SEVEN CHURCHES - EPHESUS

Marilyn Lake Griffin
 Revelation Chap 2-Pt.1
 4.15.&19.14 Lesson 6
 7 Churches- Ephesus H O

MESSIAH'S WORD TO HIS CHURCH (REVELATION 2:1 - 3:22)

CHURCH	SALUTATION TO THE ANGEL	COMMENDATION	CORRECTION	ADMONITION	REWARD
EPHESUS 2:1-7 The Zealous Church, Apostolic Age 30-100 A.D. • Temple of Diana • Commercial Center	MESSIAH REVEALED: • Holding seven stars • Walking among the Churches	For their: • Works • Endurance • Discernment • Hatred of Nicolaitans	• Left their/His First Love	• Remember • Repent • Repeat first works	THE OVERCOMER: • Will Eat of the Eternal Tree of Life
SMYRNA 2:8-11 The Suffering Church, Age of Persecution 100 - 300 A.D. • Beautiful City, Trade Center • Center of Caesar Worship • Significant Jewish Populace	MESSIAH REVEALED: • The First & the Last • Firstfruits from the Dead	For Enduring: • Tribulation • Poverty • Martyrdom	• No Correction • (However Smyrna failed to repent for leaving their/ His First Love.)	• Do Not Fear • Be Faithful	THE OVERCOMER: • Receives a Crown of Life • Escape the second death
PERGAMUM 2:12-17 Power Controlled Church, Imperial Church Age 313 - 606 A.D. • Constantinian Era • Highly anti-Semitic • Pagan worship	MESSIAH REVEALED: • His Words are a sharp two-edged sword.	• Steadfastness for Messiah's Name & • Faith	• Idolatry • Immorality • Paganism • anti-Semitism	• Repent or Messiah will fight against them with the sword of His Mouth	THE OVERCOMER: • Will eat of the hidden manna & • Receive a white stone, a new name.
THYATIRA 2:18-29 The Adulterous Church, Age of the Papacy 606 - 1517 A.D. • Trade Center (Acts 16:14) • Dark Ages; Self Effort • Religious Ceremonies • Fornication	MESSIAH REVEALED: • Eyes like flame of fire • Feet like burnished bronze	• Increasing number of good works.	Rebuke for: • Jezebel's teaching and practices, • Fornication • Adultery	• Failure to repent will bring great tribulation.	THE OVERCOMER: • Will be given authority over the nations. • I will give him the morning star.
SARDIS 3:1-6 Church of Dead Orthodoxy, Reformation Age 1517 - 1649 A.D. • Trade Center • Worship of Cybele • Loose Living	MESSIAH REVEALED: • The Seven Spirits of God and • The Seven Stars	• Only a few were found faithful.	• Lifeless profession • Incomplete works	• You are dead • Wake-up • Repent • Failure to respond will bring sudden judgment.	THE OVERCOMER: • To be clothed in white garments • Name in the Book of Life
PHILADELPHIA 3:7-13 Church of the Open Door, Missionary Age 1649 - 1900 A.D. • Grape Growing • Worship of Dionysius • Earthquakes	MESSIAH REVEALED: • The One Holy & True • The One Who has the key of David • Who opens & shuts • Who shuts and no man opens	• Using opportunities • Little Power, yet • Faithful	• No Correction In the 1990's a call to Repentance emerged: confessing: • anti-Semitism • Leaving our First Love.	• Doing well • Hold Fast • Patient endurance	THE OVERCOMER: • Will be kept from the great tribulation • Be a pillar in the temple of God. • Write on them the name of the City, Jerusalem
LAODICEA 3:14-22 The Neutral Church, People Ruling, Age of Apostasy 1900 - ? A.D. • Banking, Wealthy Trade Center • Black Wool • Medicines	MESSIAH REVEALED: • The Amen • The True & Faithful Witness • Ruler of creation	• No Commendation	• Materially Rich • Spiritually Poor: Wretched Miserable Blind Naked	• True Riches are in Messiah (Christ): <u>Gold</u> - the Word <u>White raiment</u> - His Righteousness <u>Eyesalve</u> - Repentance	THE OVERCOMER: • Will sit with the Messiah (Christ) in His throne to sup and fellowship with Him.