

#7: The Seven Churches Revealed

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The key here is that God gave this Revelation to His Son, *not* to John. For whatever the reason, it was shown to John, the Beloved Disciple of Jesus. He revealed to John things that must happen and will soon come to pass. These things were revealed to John by an angel sent by God in order to write them down for our benefit.

This Revelation was not just revealing Christ Himself, but the final events that have, are, and will be occurring around Him. While Jesus was still with His disciples, He spoke of the things written in this book. As human curiosity goes, the disciples wanted to know “when shall these things be?” Jesus’ response is just as curious.

“As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.’ As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately” (Mark 13:1-3).

An interesting note is that Jesus Himself, and the angels, did *not* know of these things until Jesus ascended unto His Father. As far as we can tell, Jesus was not given the details of Revelation until the same time John was given the vision. That makes the writing of this book extremely significant. John was given the finality of the Holy Scriptures in one setting. John, the Beloved, was chosen by God to pen the final words of God Himself. No words of God were ever recorded again. In fact, if anyone decides to either add a few of their own words or delete a few from this book—God will permanently remove him from the Book of Life (see Rev. 22:18-19).

What is up with these “things that must soon take place” when it has been almost 2000 years since John penned these words? The answer is given to us in several passages in the Word. It is clearly spoken in 2 Peter 3:8.

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.”

One day to the Lord is a thousand years to man. God keeps to His perfect order; He starts and finishes the timeline of man in SEVEN days. If these calculations are accurate, that puts us on the living edge of the final days and times of humanity.

Rev. 1:3 tells us, “**Blessed** is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it” (emphasis added). The actual translation is “blessed are those who reads this book out loud to all His assemblies.” If we want to be blessed, we are to make public these words written by John. If we want to be cursed, just add a word or two and that will pretty much finish your career.

THE GREETING

“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” (Rev. 1:4-6).

John’s greeting is to the SEVEN churches, which are in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Even though these were actual churches during the time of John’s writing, the SEVEN churches represent the churches throughout the Church Age. Every type of “Christian” represented in the world today falls into one of these SEVEN types. These churches represent periods of time clearly defined in both secular and Christian history. We will look at this more when we study each church individually. But understand this: these churches were emptied of Christians when the Treaty of Lausanne was penned by negotiators at the Conference of Lausanne. It’s not so much of a treaty, I might add. This peace treaty (signed in Lausanne, Switzerland on July 24, 1923) settled the Anatolian part of the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, resulting in the purging of Christians from the territory due to the “Islamic cultural protection rights” written into the treaty.^{1,2}

The SEVEN churches:

1. **Ephesus** – The desirable church that left its first love (Rev. 2:1-7). Ephesus was the influential capital city of Asia Minor on the Aegean Sea. Ephesus is now known for its huge metropolis of ancient streets, arches, and ruins.
2. **Smyrna** – The persecuted church that suffered poverty and martyrdom (Rev. 2:8-11). Smyrna was located north of Ephesus, in a powerful trading position on the Aegean Sea. It’s known for its harbors, commerce, and marketplaces. The primary ruins of Smyrna are located in the modern Turkish city of Izmir.
3. **Pergamum** – The worldly church that mixed doctrines and needed to repent (Rev. 2:12-17). Pergamum is located on the plains and foothills along the Caicus River in Western Turkey. It was considered a major city in Asia Minor, since the 3rd century BC, and became a Greek and Roman hub for temple worship.
4. **Thyatira** – The false church that followed a seductive prophetess (Rev. 2:18-29). Thyatira is located in western Asia Minor, about 42 miles inland from the Aegean Sea.

The ancient city was known for its textiles and dyeing trade, and is now known as the Turkish city of Akhisar.

5. **Sardis** – The "dead" church that fell asleep (Rev. 3:1-6). Sardis is located on the banks of the Pactolus River in western Asia Minor, 60 miles inland from Ephesus and Smyrna. Popular ruins include the decadent temples and bathhouse complexes.
6. **Philadelphia** – The church of "brotherly love" that endured patiently (Rev. 3:7-13). Philadelphia is located on the Cogamis River in western Asia Minor, about 80 miles east of Smyrna. Philadelphia was known for its variety of temples and worship centers.
7. **Laodicea** – The "lukewarm" church with a faith that was neither hot, nor cold (Rev. 3:14-22). Laodicea is located in the Lycus River Valley of western Asia Minor, a primary trade route between the cultures of the West and East. Laodicea was known as a primary hub for the Roman aqueduct system.

What is the BIG deal about the number SEVEN—like seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven personages, seven vials, the seven spirits, the seven dooms, and bringing up the rear, the seven new things? Seven is the number of God. Six is the number of man (one mark short of perfection). The Lord God worked for six days and rested on the SEVENTH. This is why man labors in vain to discover God. No works can be used to accomplish entering into God's rest without Christ. Even in our study of the seven churches, six of them are found with true born-again believers; whereas, the seventh is spit out of the mouth of God because they attempted to enter the Sabbath by blending the Roman culture with Christianity. The result? - a lukewarm church that repulses the Son of God.

In **verse 4**, John extends grace and peace to the churches.

In **verse 5**, we are shown the witness of Christ—the first in everything. Let's look at the following things He was first in:

1. The 1st Faithful Witness (Rev. 1:5)
2. The Word in the form of Flesh (John 1:1)
3. The 1st begotten of the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-30)
4. The 1st and only Prince of all kings (Isaiah 9:6)
5. The 1st to have blood cleanse all sin (1 John 1:7)
6. The 1st to shed blood for redemption of sins (Heb. 9:22)
7. The 1st to show redemption (1 Peter 1:18-23)

This is what gives Christ authority over all—first place shows and reveals authority. Christ was first in all things; therefore, He is over all.

Verse 6 states, "*And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*" (Rev. 1:6, KJV).

There are four positions of power that come with these positions:

1. Bride of Christ
2. Royal Priesthood
3. Children of God
4. Seated at the Right hand of God

The phrasing of Revelation 1:6 (regarding believers being “kings and priests”) is explained in the *Jerusalem Targum*.³ It renders, “*ye shall be unto me*”, (מלכין וכהנין), “kings and priests”; and paraphrases it thus, “*and ye shall be before me*”, (מלכין), “kings” crowned with a crown, (וכהנין), “and priests” ministering. Jews, to this day, believe that all Israelites are the sons of kings, and sometimes their theologians are called “kings of the law”, (מלכי תורה). These trusted scholars adhere to the same thing to the word of the Lord as is here attributed to Jesus Christ.⁴ So this verse clearly positions the Bride of Christ as sharing in our King’s role as king – just as a wife shares in the oneness of the calling of her husband.

Every believer has been washed white as snow through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Due to this purification, we have been made (by God, through Christ) to live out these new positions. In God’s eyes, there is no longer a separation of formal ministry from laity, for we are all priests!

The Cross was not only used to clean up our condition, but it was also used to bring us a new position. Be on guard for any church that keeps the priesthood separate from laity. They are supporting a movement of the False Prophet. For the False Prophet needs this separation in order to have “authority” over the people.

Let’s take a look at **verse seven**: “*BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.*”

The Second Coming of the Lord is a critical part of the belief system of each and every believer. The Hebrew reason for the Rapture is the Groom (Christ) coming to get His Bride. Just as the timeline suggests: Jesus courted us during His ministry; became engaged with us during the New Testament period; and as verse seven reveals, will return (the Second Coming) as a gracious act of coming for His Bride (see John 14:3; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:23).

Each of these Scriptures refers to the next great event for the Church. It’s all about the clouds, the Groom, and the Wedding Feast that awaits us. More about this later, but we can be assured of this—His Second Coming will be a great and glorious moment that will occur at the same time, all over the earth, for every believer.

In **Verse 8**, we discover the proclamation of the Alpha and Omega. God is speaking in this passage as the Great I AM. The Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is the beginning of the Letter of the Law and He is the end. God is making it clear that He has always been and will continue to be. This is significant in understanding the details of how the book of Revelation ends. If this statement is being made by God, and be assured that it is, the outcome of this book is predestined for VICTORY.

John’s Commission

“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’ Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades’ ” (Rev. 1:9-18).

Verse 9: We are to embrace John as another believer, just like you and me. He is keeping himself on the same playing field as fellow believers. He admits to his troubles, trials, and difficulties. In fact, John was in exile to this island (Patmos) because he was trouble and a threat to the rulers at large. John was faithful and true to His Master to the very end. The island to which he was banished was almost unknown in that day. No condos, markets, or local fellowships; just a dreary and lonely piece of dirt that popped up out of the ocean. Just like God, He takes advantage of what “they meant for evil, God meant it for good” (Gen 50:20). John lived and wrote this book under the terrible persecution of Nero (which means 666) and Domitian (AD 81-96), both ruthless and vicious rulers of that age. When the emperor banished John to this 15 mile-in-circumference island, he thought he had destroyed the influence of John. But, God clearly used this banishing as a writing sabbatical for His Beloved. You really have to wonder sometimes how Satan feels when he observes God consistently using his attacks to exalt and lift up the Lord’s Saints.

Verses 10-18: It is most fitting that John was caught up in this vision on the Sabbath...the day that God rested from creation; the day that was set aside as holy; the day that Christ was resurrected from the dead; the day the New Testament Church was born; and now, the day when all of continuous history is put on the pages of eternity through the Lord’s Beloved friend, John. How fitting!

Try to picture this: John’s back is toward the SEVEN churches and his face is toward the kingdom of God. A great and mighty voice sounds out like a trumpet announcing a king and says: *“Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches”* (vs. 11). OK, that would be enough to wake anyone up. Up to this point, John’s vision was merely introductory. But now, he encounters his first of many visions that will be revealed one by one.

Seven Golden Lampstands and The Face of God—John turns around to face the thundering voice and what does he see? The “Son of Man” (Christ) standing in the middle of the seven lampstands (the SEVEN churches) made of pure gold. The “Son of Man” was clothed in a robe, breasted with a plate of pure gold, with hair as white as the purest wool from the purest sheep, eyes glowing with a flame of eternal fire, feet covered with bronze, and a voice like the roar of many waters. In His right hand He held SEVEN stars, out of His mouth came a razor sharp two-

edged sword, and His face was like the sun shining at the peak of day. Can you imagine how John felt? No man can!

Once seeing the face of the Lord, John did what any Beloved of Christ would do—fell at His feet, as if a dead man. Christ reached down and touched John’s head with His right hand and said, *“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades”* (vs. 18).

These keys represent the complete authority over the souls of all—believers and unbelievers. Christ is clearly communicating that He has the right to lock, or unlock, the gates of hell—showing supreme authority over Satan, the Beast, and the Antichrist (Heb. 2:14; Isa 22:22; Matt. 16:19).

The one who holds the keys to a building or room is the one who has authority over that domain. Before the act of the Cross, Satan held these keys; BUT not anymore. Now the decision is in the hands of our Lord regarding who goes to heaven and who goes to hell.

Verses 19-20: John is commanded to pick up his pen and write. Jesus said unto him, *“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”* Was Jesus repeating verse 11? Most likely, John was in a state of awe and wonder. This command was needed for John to step into his role of record keeper of the Book of Life. Let’s keep things in perspective here. John had just seen his Master reveal Himself in a way that he had never seen before. He just experienced the might and splendor of Christ’s final glory and felt the tender touch of his Savior’s hand - for even I weep now, attempting to write such a moment. Our greatest imaginations cannot imagine or embrace this moment John was having with his Groom. Our day is coming when we, too, will experience the literal might and tenderness of our Savior, Lord, and Groom.

Jesus now reveals that the meaning for the writing of the book of Revelation is on its way. In verse 20, He reveals the meaning and purpose of the SEVEN lampstands and SEVEN stars.

Verse 20: Jesus reveals the foundational and foremost Revelation: *“As for 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 are the SEVEN churches.”* The Church is the body of Christ. The SEVEN churches that surround Him (remember that Christ was standing in the middle of the seven churches) are sick and in need of strong exhortation.

The Baptism of Fire is about to take place for the Church/Bride, so that we can be presented to Christ in purest form.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh,

but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body” (Ephesians 5:25-30).

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Treaty of Lausanne," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Treaty_of_Lausanne&oldid=551691022 (accessed April 25, 2013).

² Wikipedia contributors, "Turkey," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Turkey&oldid=552134977> (accessed April 25, 2013).
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³ *Jerusalem Targum*. definition: Aramaic translation of the Bible. From Jewish Encyclopedia.com, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14248-targum> (accessed May 6, 2013).

⁴ Based on John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible* (Rev. 1:6). Public domain - Published in the years 1746-1768.

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