

The Seven Churches of Revelation



*The counsels and blessings
of Jesus to His Church*

3 in a series

Introduction

In our modern electronic age, we have an efficient communication system that enables us to contact any part of the world almost instantly. In the days of the Apostle John, there was no internet, email or Skype. At best, the mail system sometimes took many months before a message could be delivered. To add to the problem of communication, not everyone could write and if they could, the cost of writing materials was prohibitive to many people. When a message was received, it was looked upon as a major and extra special event.

Just imagine you were living in the year 95AD in Western Turkey. You've come to worship in the church on Saturday morning, the day of worship in those times. While you are in church, the church elder announces that he has a letter from Jesus Christ. This would indeed be a moment of excitement. You can hardly wait to hear the message. Your curiosity would be intense. The book of Revelation is this letter from Jesus and we are still able to read it 2,000 years later.

Question 1: Can you see how the book of Revelation is a letter from Jesus to Christians today as well as in the first century?

Overview of Session #3 (Revelation chapters 2 & 3)

1. The number 7 in the book of Revelation
2. The seven messages to the seven churches
3. The "Great Controversy" between Christ and Satan
4. A History of Christianity
5. The promises of Jesus Christ to the Seven Churches

1. The Number Seven in the Book of Revelation

First of all, we want to examine the significance of the number seven in Revelation. This number occurs frequently throughout the book. Note the following examples –

- *Seven Churches - Rev 1, 2 & 3*
- *Seven Spirits - Rev 1 & 4*
- *Seven Lampstands - Rev 1*
- *Seven Blessings – Rev 1, 14, 16, 19, 20 & 22*
- *Seven Seals – Rev 6 - 8*
- *Seven Trumpets – Rev 8 - 11*
- *Seven Thunders – Rev 10*
- *Seven Plagues – Rev 16*

7 - Seven

What is the significance of number 7?

The reason why it is repeated often has to do with the Hebrew language which was spoken by the Jewish people and also used in the original writing of the Old Testament.

The number 7 in Hebrew means completion, perfection or totality. It is indeed God's special number in the Bible. The Hebrew word for seven is "Sheva" which carries the **meaning of completion and perfection.** There are other parts of the Bible where this word is used such as in the opening book of Genesis. Here we read that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, calling this final day of the week a rest day and a holy day by placing a special blessing on it. The seventh day was called God's holy day.

By comparison the number 6 is associated with humankind. At creation, the man and woman were created on the sixth day. In *Revelation 13*, the number 666 is said to be the number of a man. This subject will be studied more closely in future lessons.

In Revelation chapters 2 & 3 we see 7 messages that are sent to these 7 specific churches but they are meant for all of God's churches on earth from these early times, even to our time today. There are special messages and blessings to be received by all followers of Jesus.



The main street of Ephesus – once lit by lights on both sides

Question 2: What is the meaning of number seven in the Hebrew language?

Question 3: Why do you think it is a number of significance for God?

2. The Seven Messages to the Churches

In the messages to the churches, there is a pattern. Each church is –

1. *Named by Jesus*
2. *Given a partial description of Jesus (From chapter 1)*
3. *Known by Jesus for special character traits*
4. *Commended by Jesus for something specific*
5. *Rebuked by Jesus for something specific*
6. *Counselled by Jesus to act in a specific way*
7. *Promised by Jesus a specific reward if they remain faithful.*

From this list, it is obvious that Jesus knows each of these churches intimately just like He knows each one of us with our weaknesses and strengths. He is interested in our character development and desires to have a close relationship with each one of us to prepare us for eternity. In the vision of Jesus standing among the lampstands is a picture of Jesus mingling intimately with His beloved people. The desire of Jesus today is that we allow Him to guide our life that He might safely lead us to His kingdom.

A special message is tailored to each specific church. A blessing comes to us today as we examine each message to these churches. They are located in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation.

Question 4: What do you think was the motive of Jesus in giving these strong messages to the churches? _____



The Seven Churches of Revelation Location

3. The “Great Controversy” Between Christ and Satan

In four of the seven messages to the churches, there is a mention of a being called Satan. Satan is an angel that rebelled against God and was expelled from heaven by God along with the angels who gave their allegiance to Satan. They were cast out of heaven to the earth and after successfully deceiving Adam and Eve have continued their rebellion against God. Satan’s power is referred to in four of the seven messages –

- *To the city of Sardis*
- *To the city of Pergamum*
- *To Thyatira*
- *And to Philadelphia*

From very early in Revelation, we see this evil force at work within the churches opposing God and His faithful followers. This ‘good versus evil’ is a continual theme throughout Revelation and peaks in chapters 12 – 14. Indeed, a spiritual battle is continually in progress. It is a battle of the mind with the forces of evil labouring to gain allegiance. Then in contrast, we have the convicting and appealing Spirit of God pleading with people’s hearts in order that He might save their souls. The battle rages on in the minds of individuals, in churches and in all places of planet Earth throughout history.

Understanding this battle enables us to realize why there is so much evil in the world. There is a constant striving for the allegiance of the mind. Whether we like it or not, we personally are caught up in the very midst of this battle.

*Satan and his angels
cast out of heaven*



Question 5: Can you see how you are personally involved in the battle between good and evil? _____

Question 6: Would you like to learn more about this subject? _____

4. The History of Christianity

Each of the messages to the churches has a parallel application to the history of the Christian church over the last 2,000 years. This is the period between Christ's resurrection and His promised Second Coming. These are the times that match the main theme of the messages to the churches.

- *Ephesus was a passionate church and so was the Christian church in general between 30 – 100 AD.*
- *Smyrna was a persecuted church and so was the Christian church between 100 – 313AD.*
- *Pergamum was a compromising church and so was the Christian church between 313 – 538 AD.*
- *Thyatira was known as a corrupt church which characterizes the Christian church between 538 – 1560s.*
- *Sardis was regarded as a lifeless church just like the church between the 1560s – 1790s*
- *Philadelphia was the church of revival paralleling the church between the 1790s – 1840s.*
- *Laodicea was an indifferent church representing the church from the 1840s to today.*

The text of Revelation does not specifically say that the messages of the churches are written as history in advance. However, the description of the church during these periods is remarkably similar to the language used by Jesus to describe each of the seven churches. Jesus hates sin but He loved the churches in the first century. Likewise, He still loves the church in our day even though it falls short of perfection. To say He loves the church also means He loves us each one, for it is individuals that make up the church.

Jesus makes the passionate call to us each one –

Revelation 3:20 "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me."



*The lukewarm waters
of Laodicea*

5. The Promises of Jesus to the Churches

The churches may have shortcomings but Jesus has some wonderful promises to those who remain faithful and in His strength become overcomers. These are the promises -

I To Ephesus He promises –

Revelation 2:7 To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

II To Smyrna He promises –

Revelation 2:11 He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death (Punishment of the wicked).

III To Pergamum He says –

Revelation 2:17 To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name which no one knows except him who receives it (The hidden manna refers to spiritual food from God. The white stone is a sign of acquittal or forgiveness and the new name represents the character of the overcomer).

IV To Thyatira He promises –

Revelation 2:26 And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.

V To Sardis He promises –

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

VI To Philadelphia He promises –

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him my new name.

VII To Laodicea He promises –

Revelation 3: 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.

Towards the end of the Book of Revelation, we see how these promises will be fulfilled to all true believers. God not only talks about promises - He also delivers. He is a promise keeping God. He will indeed do what He says He will do.

Question 8: How do you feel about these promises of God?

Question 9: What is the benefit of eating from the Tree of Life? _____

Question 10: What is meant by "the second death" (Rev. 2:11)? _____

Question 11: Is your desire to have your name written in the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5)?

