



the Seven Churches *of* Revelation

Seven Churches of Revelation

Overview

Rev 1:11 Saying, I am **Alpha and Omega, the first and the last**: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

The Assignment:

In this correspondence that will be read in the Churches throughout the region of Turkey, John wants to connect with the hundreds of persecuted believers that have fled to the area by identifying himself as a fellow brother in the tribulation that has plagued the early Church. John also presents himself as a part of the brotherhood in kingdom of those patiently awaiting the return Jesus Christ.

John time stamps the oncoming events with the statement: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”. The “*Lord’s day*” is not a Jewish festival day or Sunday the day of protestant worship. The Lord’s Day is marked as the first day that Jesus Christ begin to speak to John through visions and revelations. The day “the Lord” began to speak to John is set apart from every other day that John experienced while exiled on Patmos.

John begins his writing assignment after the revelations begin on the Lord’s Day. He is writing as a fellow brother to his audience under assignment by Jesus Christ to write what he will see and to distribute what he writes to the listed seven Churches.

Introduction

The First Symbol: “Seven Golden Candlesticks”

The first symbol disclosed in John’s vision is of seven golden candlesticks. When John turns to hear the voice that begins speaking to him on the Lord’s Day he encounters seven golden candlesticks. The candle sticks are representative of a Jewish candelabra called a Menorah. The menorah was a temple utensil set near the table of shewbread just outside of the Holy of Holies. (Ex. 25:31-39) The menorah as were the all temple artifacts was crafted according to a design pattern that God gave to Moses. (Ex. 25:39)

The menorah is a symbol of continuous, ongoing light (illumination) and worship. The Levites were required to keep the oil that fueled the lamps fresh and full. The combined seven candlesticks make one complete candelabra (menorah) and collectively represent the role of the Church to provide illumination in **a world of spiritual darkness** and to maintain its responsibility to the ongoing worship of a true and living God in the face of great adversity that the Church was already experiencing.

The presence of Jesus in the midst of the “menorah” is a foreshadow of the forthcoming message to the Church that will emphasize the necessity of the spiritual renewal and restoration of temple worship.

The description of Son of Man

The illustration describes the likeness and attire of a High Priest or Judge. There are seven dominant features that represent the finished work of the Messiah. In eternity Jesus Christ serves as High Priest and the Judge of all humanity. The list of the seven features is as follows:

1. (1:13) “garment down to the feet” - the long garment of the High Priest, (Ex. 28:4) The length is indicative of being fully covered, nothing exposed. The long garment is also a sign of wealth, royalty, and authority, made from one continuous piece of cloth, especially when worn as a robe of victory after the defeat of a great enemy.
2. (1:13) “girt about the paps” - the paps or *curious girdle* is the Priestly “ephod” or breast plate that contains the urim and the thummim (Num. 27:21, Ex. 28:30) that are stones used to determine fate and final judgment of divine or civil matters; in particular distinction between good and evil, wheat and tares, sheep and goats. (Matt. 13:30, 25:32)
3. (1:14) “His head and hairs” - the description of white like wool and as snow are metaphors for the concept of virtuous purity, without mixture, untainted, and not defiled. (Deut. 22:9-11) Referencing head and hairs combined is intended to feature his full head of hair as a crown of authority, naturally produced and not an ornament placed upon the head. The crown of head hairs is the highest form of purity and rightful authority.
4. (1:14) The additional six physical features, “**Eyes** (flame of fire), **Feet** (Brass), **Voice** (sound of many waters), **Right Hand** (holding stars), **Mouth** (sharp sword), **Countenance** provide a completed presentation of seven features to symbolize the finished work of Jesus/Messiah as Savior and High Priest.

The Message Receiver:

Rev 1:17 - John falls prostrate before the living God as if he were dead. A lifeless body, without personal status or value; without credible works or righteousness. He is a person fully vulnerable and disposable before the living God. *When we see the fullness of the Son of Man our human identity or works cannot stand in the presence of God.

The Message Giver says: “Fear not I am: first and last”; the eternal one, always present and living and chooses to receive/ accept John for the assignment and task at hand.

Resurrection Confirmation:

Rev 1:18 - Verbal authentication of the identity of Jesus-Messiah and Son of Man: He is the personification of both death and life. He is the one born into humanity to die for humanity. He was dead and now lives and is alive forevermore. He will not experience death again, because the Son of Man and Judge of all humanity has possession of the keys of hell (the grave) and of death. Note: the extra emphasis on: “I am”, 3x’s- triple affirmation of truth.

Turkey (Asia Minor) - OVERVIEW

Background: All seven Churches are physically located in the region of Turkey, centrally situated above the Mediterranean, adjacent to the Aegean Sea, in proximity to Corinth, Athens, and other Grecian islands. The Black Sea, situated on the northern border, connects to the southern regions of European Russia, and on its southeastern boundaries, adjoins the ancient land of Mesopotamia, now comprising modern-day Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

In the days of the Messiah and the early Church, Turkey was at the center of the known world and a hub for all global travelers. Turkey played a significant role in global commerce, trading goods across a diverse range of cultures. Its culture was greatly influenced by contemporary Greek influence that still dominated social and civil trends throughout the world.

In the third century A.D., this region would host the capital city of the Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople. It served as a secondary Imperial city for the complex rulership of Rome, separated into Western and Eastern Empires. The Eastern Roman region became known as "*Byzantine*", a Latin term referring to a complex and intertwined political system. During the time Rome governed the known world, it was divided into two distinct regions, labeled as West and East.

The Early church system was formed around what was known as the Pentarchy, five churches (or regions) connected under the dominant influence and leadership of Jerusalem. The five church regions of the Pentarchy were: Jerusalem, Alexandria (Egypt), Antioch (Turkey, the first Gentile Church), Constantinople (Turkey), and Rome.

When the early Christian Church was infused into the structure of Roman government under Constantinople, the Church in Rome (West) and the Church in Constantinople (East), gained favor and influence more than the other branches of the Church it was connected within the Pentarchy.

In the 6th Century, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch became conquered territories under Islamic rule, and Christian values and influence were diminished, causing the structure of the Pentarchy to be less tenable. The Western Church, influenced by Roman government and culture, and the Byzantine Church in Constantinople, influenced by Greek culture, were the surviving active standard bearers of the Pentarchy. Each Church believed its status, representing the Roman Empire, was superior to that of the other.

Over time, a breach between the Western and Eastern Church became irrevocable. In 1054 AD, the Roman State Church formally crystallized into the Western Latin Church, and the Church of Constantinople became recognized as the Eastern Greek Church. The division and formal separation of the once co-related Church is known as the Great Schism.

When the Western Roman Empire came to an end in the 5th century, the Eastern-Byzantine Empire survived and continued to thrive independently until a native of the land, Osman I, a Turkish leader, began the longest reign of any regime, the infamous Ottoman Empire, which controlled the territory until the early 19th century (1453-1922).

Today, the Roman State Church is known as the Roman Catholic Church, and the Eastern Greek Church is known as the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Eastern Church, with its origins in Greek Culture, believes that, in comparison to the Roman Catholic Church, it maintains a stronger harmony with the traditional practices and rudiments of the Early Christian Church. The Latin Church is rooted in its foundation, infused with the regalia of Rome. It presents itself as the single "*universal*" (catholic) Church that sustains the authority and succession of the first Apostles.

Seven Churches – Ephesus

Church of Ephesus

Background: All seven Churches are physically located in the region of Turkey and were all a part of the future Byzantine Empire. This area was formally an original part of the Eastern Roman Empire and was strongly influenced by Greek culture. **Ephesus was the influential capital city** of Asia Minor region.

Synagogues found outside the boundaries of Palestine are generally a sign of Jewish migration. There are three primary explanations for the migration of Jewish communities outside the Palestine region: natural migration (self-relocation), post-captivity resettlement (such as the Assyrian and Babylonian migrations), or forced resettlement resulting from expulsion or persecution.

The presence of a synagogue in Ephesus (Acts 18:19) suggests that it was a refuge city for Jews who fled to the region as a result of post-captivity resettlement (II Chronicles 36:22/II Kings 17:5) or expulsion (Acts 8:1, 12:1-2, 11:19-20, 13:14-50, 19:20-22; *Antiochus IV, 171 BCE).

Ephesus was a significant focal point of concern in the early days of the Church. The Apostle Paul made two excursions to the region of Southwest Asia to engage with the Gentile believers. The Apostle John, when exiled to the island of Patmos, received a declaration of judgment for the seven Churches in Asia. Ephesus was the first church listed, and the oral verdict against them called them to repent and return to their first works, or to risk having their place in their relationship with God being removed. (Revelation 2:7) No Church is featured more in the New Testament than the Church of Ephesus.

Ephesians Church History- The first Apostolic excursion to Ephesus records a warm reception of Apostle Paul, specifically a small group of Jewish believers that showed an interest in his teachings about the Messiah. The Apostle was invited to extend his visit so they could learn more. Instead of staying, he departed, hoping to reach Jerusalem to celebrate the annual feast, leaving Aquila and Priscilla, the husband-and-wife ministry team, to continue teaching and sharing the gospel. (Acts 18:19) Apollo, the celebrated orator, arrived to preach to the Ephesians during the tenure of the husband-and-wife duo. (Acts 18:24-25)

(Acts 19:1) - The Second excursion records a much different outcome. Upon arrival, the Apostle learns of the new souls disciplined into the “way of the Messiah”, but they have not been taught about the active presence of the Messiah residing in the hearts and lives of the believers through the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Baptism, in water or by the Spirit, is a signal that identifies the practitioner and their teacher.

The new converts were practitioners under John the Baptist; they were introduced to the Messiah and accepted John’s teachings, but they were not taught about the enduring presence of God residing in men to follow the guidance and instruction of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul preaches the prophetic message of the Holy Ghost to them and lays on them to receive and accept the truth spoken to them. They begin to speak the words of Torah, which are unknown to them, as a sign of the presence of God residing within them.

(Acts 19:8) - The Apostle ministers in the Jewish synagogue for three months, but he is rejected by Jewish leadership. He is forced to discontinue his presentations in the synagogue, although many are interested in hearing him teach.

The leadership of the synagogue labeled his teachings as heresy, relating to teaching “of the way”, a slang term created to reference teachings connected to the Messiah, who confessed to be the son of God, and teaching “the way” of God. Apostle Paul continues his ministry using a local Greek school, teaching the “way of the Messiah” for two years.

(Acts 19:11) - The Apostle’s teaching is accompanied by miracles and evidence of the presence of God upon his life. The attraction and attention draw local Greeks to hear the word originally set apart for the Jewish members

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of their community. Hearing the same truth and their Jewish counterparts, many Greeks (Gentiles) are drawn to declare faith in the Messiah.

The message of the Messiah and the Apostle's miracles began to travel across all of Asia (Turkey). The central geography of the capital city provided a global platform for the word of God to be shared across the expanse of Asia (Turkey) and throughout the world.

The success of the gospel in Ephesus created conflict among local business owners who profited from the sale of idol gods and the accessories used in idolatry. The loss of income created an uprising against the Apostle. Books and idolatrous paraphernalia were publicly burned by those who converted to a newfound faith in the Messiah.

The City was well known for the worship of the goddess Diana. The Romans celebrated the idol god of agriculture, passed down as Artemis by the Greeks, but originally known in Egyptian culture as "Ishtar". The worship of agriculture was a strong factor among early cultures because agriculture is the first formalized business practice for sustaining civilization. The land was essential to feeding the inhabitants of Earth. The practice of worshiping the earth was common and essential to human survival.

Lesson One

The Revelation Message:

_Rev 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write ; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his **right hand**, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden **candlesticks**;

Rev 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

Rev 2:3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Rev 2:4 Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Rev 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Rev 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Rev 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

(Revelation 2:1) - The letters are written with a specific message to each Church. The letter to the Ephesian Church opens with a declaration of authorship, referring to the Resurrected Christ, described as the one who holds the stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden candlesticks.

The stars are a symbol of the Angelic that cover or oversee the candlesticks, which represent the seven Churches. An Angel assigned to watch over the Church aligns with other references to Angels that are sent throughout the earth as messengers and ministering spirits to aid God's people. (Psalm 91, Matthew. 4:11) The Church has a specific assignment in the earth, and the Angelic offers the unseen help and influence available to them.

The presence of the Resurrected Christ is expressed as being among the Church. God is not separated or detached from the Church. The Church is not an independent work or asset of ministry. It only has power to execute its purpose when God is formally present within the Church.

(Revelation 2:2) - "I know thy works and thy labor", God knows how the Church works where it places its labor resources and energy. He is also aware of its patience, knowing what the Church will tolerate and what things or people it will not. It was known to God that the Church of Ephesus would not tolerate those who were known and labeled as evil. The identity of evil men was quickly exposed as well as those who were known as false apostles.

(Revelation 2:3) - "And hast borne and hast patience and for my namesake has labored..." Taken great steps in keeping track of those who were notable offenders of the faith. Similar to the manner in which notifications are posted of wanted offenders to make sure that those who were labeled as such are on public display.

It is not unusual for religion to focus more on tracking evil wrongdoers and keeping the public's attention on them and promoting their labor as a means to live a lifestyle superior to others, thereby diverting attention away from internal scrutiny.

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(Revelation 2:4) – After reviewing their self-claimed accolades, God reveals what He has against them. The Church left its first position of love. The tenor of their commitment to love God has waned. Leaving the first position of love implies a replacement connection. The Church is charged with loving something more than it loves God. Anything that competes with God's love is a sign of leaving the first position of love.

Foreign attraction causes someone to leave their first love. Fatal attractions fueled by infatuation cause people to lose their focus on the primary and settle for the secondary. Chasing the secondary removes all safety precautions and sensitivity to danger warning signs.

(Revelation 2:5) – The Church is instructed to course correct and return to its first love. Lost love is not repaired by new works, deeds, or gifts, but by resetting the course and truthfully returning to a position of love. Love is not represented in works, deeds, and gifts; it is an expression of life. Love is not a grand gesture; it is the constant flow of commitment, undisturbed and reliable.

The Church returns to love God by how it represents God in the world. The love of God is the identity of the Church. Jesus told His disciples that the world would recognize them by the attribute of love.

If the Church does not return to a position of love, the candlestick will be removed from its place. Without love, the Church cannot fulfill its purpose, and without purpose, the Church has no place to represent God on earth. It must be removed to make space for a Church that will fulfill its intended purpose.

(Revelation 2:6) – The Church took a stand against the Nicolaitans for apostasy, falling away from God and His principles. God took a stand against Ephesus for falling away from Him and the standard of love.

He That Hath an Ear: **LET HIM HEAR** THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT (important as the Apostolic age closing that the Church would be influenced by the direct/ongoing voice of God and receive the reward of Tree of Life *(living in the eternal presence of God)*).