

Seven churches of Revelation

Intro to this study

I don't know who the writer of study on the seven Gentile churches of Revelation is. I assume it was someone who came out of the Worldwide Church of God many years ago. There is an abundance of good information presented on these Gentile churches, even though it is not here understood that these churches are not only churches existing in past ages, which are types of future churches, but they will be revived or represent future Gentile churches, even up to the era of the church of Laodicea church. One of the main keys to this understanding is that God has blinded most Israelites, and has turned his attention to Gentile churches. Rom 10-11, and will work with them for a thousand years until the fullness of the Gentiles have been fulfilled. If, as this writer admits, the Laodicea church is to suffer the end time (of this age) seven bowls of God's wrath, (Rev.3:14-22) then the Philadelphia church would have existed prior to the Laodicea church. What this means is that all seven Gentile churches listed in Revelation will exist during the end of this age.

Not only that but the messages Jesus Christ sends to these churches are not to Israelite churches, but are specifically to Gentile churches. That is not to say Israelites can't benefit from studying the instructions God gives to these churches. Just because these churches existed in past history does not mean they will not reappear during the end of this age. Not only that but indications are that these churches have quite a long time yet to fulfill their more modern history, as given in Revelation. The question arises: why are there no other churches listed in any parts of the world related to Israelite churches? Can it be God is not dealing with Israel until he finishes with the Gentiles churches? We can find many named Gentile nations that will come out of the millennium in Eze. 38:2-6 who attack the resurrected Israelites. These Gentile nations was not in the first resurrection before the millennium, and since the "rest of the dead" did not live until after the millennium, they have to come from survivors one thousand years back, grown into many nations. So with that in mind I offer you the benefit of the study on the churches of Revelation. R.F.

Seven Churches of Revelation (author unknown)

If there is any portion of Scripture that we should memorize, in addition to the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, it is the Messiah's Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation. The lessons of history, past, present, and future, are given in the seven "love letters," of our Savior. These are our marching orders, encouraging us to have hope, to hold fast, and to endure patiently to the end. We are admonished to repent, and promised that if we heed these messages, and overcome, we will have great reward. This is a study of the prophetic, historical, and spiritual meaning of the letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, emphasizing the last three churches: Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Introduction: He That Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear!

In editorials in the November 1896 and January 1897 Things to Come magazine, E. W. Bullinger discusses the letters to the seven Churches in the book of Revelation. On fourteen occasions the Savior used the words, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." The first six are in Matthew 11:15 (Elijah); Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8 (Parable of Sower); Mark 4:21-23 (candlestick of God's Truth); Matthew 13:43 (Parable of Tares); Mark 7:16 (inward defilement worse than outward defilement); Luke 14:16-35 (Great Supper). These six times were given by Jesus when He was on the earth.

In Revelation, the risen Messiah used this saying eight times (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9). Seven were addressed to the seven Churches of Asia.

Revelation has a slightly different form of speech. Instead of "he that hath ears to hear let him hear," it is "he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches." The last communication from the Savior to men upon earth is to these seven Churches. It came after the destruction of Jerusalem, after the Church had been scattered, and after Paul and all the original Apostles except John had died. The Revelation "He that hath an ear," clause precedes the promise to the overcomer in the letters to the first three Churches of Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos), and follows the promise to the overcomer of the last four Churches (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea).

The theme of the seven letters is the developing apostasy in the Church.

Ephesus, of which Timothy was bishop, had "left thy first love," as Paul said in II Timothy 1:15, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me." Smyrna had not only left its first love, but some in it claimed to be spiritual Jews and were following commandments and traditions of men. In Pergamos, doctrinal heresies of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes were arising, which divided the people into clergy and laity. Thyatira shows the depths of Satan had been reached by some, as Jezebel reigned supreme. In Sardis, another phase of apostasy reveals itself, as the truth barely survives, in name only. Each letter to each Church ends with the warning message, the solemn exhortation to hear what the Spirit is saying (present tense) to the Churches.

One company of Philadelphia does not have this hearing ear. They falsely claim to be spiritual Jews. They say they have received the Apostolic Truth, but actually reject the Savior, and are of the Synagogue (Church) of Satan. Another part of Philadelphia has kept His word of patience. They are given an open door to proclaim His message. As a result, the Eternal will keep them out of the end of this age seven last plagues. Since these two companies are so distinct yet different, Bullinger says every Christian should ask, "To which of these two companies do I belong?"

The Epistle to the Church of the Laodiceans shows that it has hopelessly departed from the truth. Apostasy is at its height. There is no faithful company within it. The door is shut and the Lord is on the outside. However, there is hope for His sheep, for they hear His voice and He will come in and sup with them. In the last days, as it was in Malachi 3:16-17, only a few think on His mighty name.

The fourteenth and last time the Savior used the weighty phrase, "He that hath an ear," is in Revelation 13:9, in connection with the Beast from the Sea. At this time, the Churches are no longer present on the earth. Their power has been scattered, verse 7 and Daniel 7:25. None can escape the worship of the Beast, except those whose names are written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

The Savior foresaw how the departure from His truth would increase. Therefore, He sent messages by John to warn these Churches, and us, "to hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." The same two companies exist in the Church

today: those of the Temple of God, and those of the Synagogue of Satan.

"These Epistles to the Seven Churches have a past and also a present, as well as a future interpretation . . . Christianity, today, has woefully degenerated .

. . . The Lord Jesus calls from heaven to all who are thus substituting Religion for Christianity, to "hear" - not what the Churches say to them - but 'what the Spirit is saying to the Churches' " (Ibid.) So perverse are men's thoughts, Bullinger continues in the September 1898 issue of Things to Come, that the average person, in spite of Christ's seven-fold warning, persists in reading these admonitions as if they said "Let him hear what the Church saith," instead of the original inspired message, "Let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

What is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?

In the October 1898 issue of Things to Come, Dr. Bullinger continues to expound his views on the letters to the Churches. He explains how "what the Spirit says to the Churches" is covered in the Apostle Paul's Seven Church Epistles: Romans, Corinthians (I and II), Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (I and II). Seven is the number of spiritual perfection. It was not chance, but divine design, that as John addressed seven Churches in Asia, so also did Paul write letters to seven Churches, giving the Spirit's teaching to the churches. Paul's other Epistles (Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews), were not addressed to specific Churches. James, Peter, John and Jude were general Epistles.

The message of the Seven Church Epistles written by Paul is similar to the messages to the seven Churches of Revelation, written by John. The theme is doctrinal departure.

In fact, departure from the teachings of Paul was the first step to general apostasy from the truth. Contrary to Bullinger, Paul's teaching was no different than that of the Twelve Apostles.

The Spirit is saying to the Churches that we ought to take heed and not turn away from the Truth of the Almighty. We must hold fast to the faithful Word. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches," means that every true believer of every time should apply this message to himself, and be attentive to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The Eternal Hates The Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Twice the mysterious "Nicolaitanes" are mentioned in the Seven Letters (Revelation 2:6, 15). The Savior tells the Church of Ephesus that He hates the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, commending them for likewise rejecting such deeds. He tells those of Pergamos, He hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, who are within the Church. The Church is admonished to repent. Who are these "Nicolaitanes"?

A Nicolaitane, as the Greek shows, means "a follower of Nicolas." Not the deacon Nicolas of Acts 6:5, but an infamous person. The name "Nicolas" comes from two Greek words, nikos, meaning "conqueror" or "destroyer," and laos, meaning "people" or "laity." The original Nicolas was a conqueror or destroyer of the people, Nimrod, who led the post-Flood rebellion against God. The modern St.

Nicolas, or Santa Claus, stems from the worship of the false hero Nimrod who put himself in the place of God and had people worship him as "BAAL," that is, Master or Lord. Some continue to observe December 25, which is a continuation of the Saturnalia, the birthday of Saturn or Nimrod.

"Nicolaitanes" in the Church follow such vain customs, and also institute and practice a corrupt form of Church government based upon conquering the people and keeping them in subjection. Thus, despotism and elite rulership over the "laity" (the ordinary people) is another manifestation of the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. How prophetic for our times, when false shepherds of the Almighty's flock rule the "dumb sheep" with force and cruelty, feeding themselves with rich living while scattering the flock, Ezekiel 34:1-6. Peter warned other elders against this type of Baalism, that they should humbly serve the flock, I Peter 5:1-6. Whereas the Catholic concept is a division of the brotherhood into "priests" and "laity," the Bible concept is a priesthood of all believers, I Peter 2:9, a multitude of gifts in the Church, I Corinthians 12.

New Testament Churches were pastored by more than one elder, Acts 14:19-23, 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14. God has a "ministry" (service) for all His people, but not all have a pulpit ministry (Babylon Mystery Religion, pp. 112-113).

Those who depend too much on a human spiritual leader, put that leader in place of Christ, and are shunning the true high priest in Heaven.

The Church Eras Teaching

Many modern theologians believe the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 represent seven successive Church eras which begin with the Apostolic Church and end with the Church of the end-time. (1) We believe that the spirit and attitude of the successive seven Churches has been dominant from age to age, and that in this age, the Laodicean spirit and attitude is dominant. (2) We also believe that each of the messages to the seven Churches has meaning for all believers during all times, and that there have always been believers who epitomize one or more of these characteristics. (3) And also, we believe that the seven Churches of Asia represent the true Church, with its wheat and tares, strengths and weaknesses, in the time of the end of this age. All three views of the seven Churches have validity, and they are not mutually exclusive.

The Book of Revelation is prophetic. Prophecy is dual. That means, prophetic patterns repeat themselves throughout history. Acts 2 is a case in point. On the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, Peter referred to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:16-20; Joel 2:28-32).

Yet obviously Joel's prophecy, set in the end time "day of the Lord," Joel 1:15, 2:1-11, 31, has not yet been fulfilled. What Peter was saying was that the Pentecost event was a forerunner, or type of Joel's end-time prophecy.

And so it is with the seven Churches. Seven literal Churches existed at the same time when John wrote Revelation about A.D. 96. Historically, dominant traits of these seven Churches have existed throughout the ages. In these days, different individuals exhibit these characteristics to one degree or another. Belief in Church eras and continuous existence of these typical Churches is not contradictory, but complementary.

End-Time Language to the Seven Churches

Notice the "end-time" language found throughout the letters to the seven Churches:

Ephesus: ". . . repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly . . ." (Revelation 2:5)

Pergamos: "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." (2:16)

Thyatira: "Behold, I will cast her [Jezebel] into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds . .

. . But that which ye have already hold fast till I come." (2:22, 25)

Sardis: "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (3:3)

Philadelphia: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, (the seven plagues of God's wrath) which shall come upon all

the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly . . ." (3:10-11)

Laodicea: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock . . ." (3:20) The book of Revelation is primarily an end of this age prophecy. However, the section on the

letters to the seven churches is prophetic not only of the end time condition of the Church, but

also of its history since A.D. 31.

Looking at the whole Church of God, there are people today who are experiencing the same problems, trials, successes, and attitudes as ALL SEVEN of the Churches of Asia in the First Century A.D. Some are in their "first love." Others have "left their first love," and need to repent and do the first works, like the Ephesian Church. Some are in the corrupt big cities, where every conceivable evil dwells, just like the Thyatira Church. Some are almost "asleep" spiritually, like Sardis, but a few "have not defiled their garments." Some are excited about having a part of walking through the "open door" given to the Church, and are like Philadelphia. And there are others who are "lukewarm," like the Laodiceans, needing to repent and be zealous for the Work. Those in Laodicea who do not repent, who do not become zealous, will not be saved. The unrepentant are of the Synagogue of Satan. Those who allow themselves to get so lukewarm are under a curse from God, and He will have to subject them to the fires of persecution and martyrdom, to see if they really care for Him. You cannot be lukewarm and still be a true believer! "Laodicean" means "judgment of the people," and non zealous people will be sternly judged by the Savior because He loves them, but hates their lack of deeds, and their shameful departure from His truth.

It is useless to label certain organizations or groups of people "Philadelphia" or "Laodicea." Let the Eternal make the determination of each individual. Some have watered down Biblical truth, and preach a newsy or self-proclaimed prophetic gospel instead of telling people their sins. One of the leading sins of Church of God organizations is not condemning rampant sexual immorality. Some, in trying to exalt their organization, have pictured other groups as "Laodicean" and themselves as "Philadelphian." On the other hand, others have downplayed the lessons from the letters to the seven Churches because they themselves have so watered down doctrinal teachings that the term "Laodicean" directly applies to them! Time and again in the letters to the seven Churches, the Savior tells the Churches to "Hold Fast!" Yet most are busily throwing away doctrinal truths they once had.

Hold Fast Admonitions to the Seven Churches

Ephesus: ". . . thou hast left thy first love . . . repent, and do the first works . . ." (Revelation 2:4-5)

Pergamos: ". . . thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith . . ."

. " (2:13)

Thyatira: "But that which ye have already hold fast till I come." (2:25)

Sardis: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die . . . hold fast, and repent . . ." (3:2-3)

Philadelphia: ". . . hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (3:11) These verses tell us that one of the themes of Jesus Christ's message to the Seven Churches was to hold fast to the truth and not water it down. This is a message for today!

Removal of the Candlestick

Each of the seven Churches is like a seven-stemmed candlestick. They are called the seven golden candlesticks, Revelation 1:11-20. The Church is to illuminate the world, Matthew 5:14-16. If a Church does not do this, it is good for nothing, and the Savior removes the candlestick. Ephesus lost its first love, so

Jesus removed its candlestick. Ephesus today is in ruins! And so it is with Laodicea, the Church for which there was nothing good to say.

Ephesus

"I know thy works."

"Thou hast left thy first love."

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent."

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

Laodicea

"I know thy works."

"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot."

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

When John wrote Revelation in the late 90s A.D., the Ephesus Church had sadly departed from

the truth. Most had already apostatized, and more would soon. Only a zealous few like John,

Polycarp, and Polycrates would hold fast to essential truths, such as the annual Passover on the

14th of Nisan. The time of the twelve Apostles and "the big push" of spreading the true gospel

was over. Apostasy and corruption were firmly entrenched. To compare the Ephesus and

Laodicea Churches in a favorable light is to justify the departure from truth in these last days.

Seven Churches: Then and Now

Let us compare the first century A.D., status of the Seven Churches of Asia, with their current condition. Historical facts illustrate spiritual principles.

City Then Now

Ephesus "First City of Asia," great Candlestick removed, total ruins, Temple of Diana, excellent harbor. harbor filled up.

Smyrna One of oldest cities in the world, Large, modern, city of Izmir, Turkey, excellent harbor, rival to Ephesus exports famous Smyrna figs, woolen and Pergamos. cloth, "City of Life."

Pergamos Most illustrious capital city of Modern Turkish town of Bergama, Roman province of Asia; Homer in the valley below the Acropolis, and Herodotus studied and

wrote has a population of 20,000 and has at its great library of 200,000 vols., steady flow of

tourists which rivaled Alexandria. A royal city, huge hill 1,000 feet up from valley, seat of Babylonian religion.

Thyatira Manufacturing city of laborers, Modern Turkish town of Akhisar, organized into unions or guilds, population of 30,000 produced brass, bronze, metals, and royal

purple cloth.

Sardis Rich capital of Lydia, inventors of Miserable village of Sart, a heap of coined money, rich soil. ruins, "City of Death."

Philadelphia Numerous earthquakes, citizens Christian stronghold in the midst accustomed to fleeing, of Moslems. "City of God."

Laodicea Rich farming country on Lycus Long deserted, most of stones have River, banking center, large marts have been removed to nearby villages. It's markets controlled

mostly by Jews, is the most desolated of all the seven. It was so wealthy that in A.D. 60 when

cities were destroyed by earthquake, it refused Roman aid. Famous black wool cloth and eye

salve. Hot springs and limestone deposits at nearby Hierapolis; close to Colossae.

Meaning Of the Names of the Seven Churches In the Bible, names have great significance. According to A History of the True Religion by A.N. Dugger and C.O. Dodd, pages 250-251, Taylor G. Bunch's The Seven Epistles of Christ, and A Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names, by J.B.

Jackson, the following chart shows the meaning of the names of the seven Churches of Asia:

Ephesus Desirable; having relaxed, let go; full purposed Smyrna Death, or myrrh, a pleasant odor.

Pergamos High and exalted, union through marriage

Thyatira Sacrifice of nearest and dearest; odor of affliction; a daughter.

Sardis That which is left, those escaping.

Philadelphia Brotherly love, faithful remnant.

Laodicea Judgment of the people; righteous judgment; people's rights.

Dugger and the Church of God, Seventh Day, taught Church epochs or eras.

Dugger said that the period of the Sabbath Baptists in America from 1620 to 1789 was the latter part of the Sardis period (page 251).

J.T. Williamson in the April 1, 1924, Bible Advocate said, "to properly describe the conditions of this Church, from Christ's first advent until His second coming, this entire period of time [of the New Testament Church] is subdivided into seven periods . . . the 'Church of God' in each of these seven periods of time, like a lamp or candlestick illuminates the life of Christ (light to the world) The first period or Apostolic age is called 'Church of Ephesus,' . . . [because] it would be the most desirable period of the Church when Christ and the Apostles were in it" He goes on to divide Church history into seven periods, based on the seven Churches.

The true Church is not a powerful political organization, exerting influence among world governments. Instead, we are to "Come out from among them, and be ye separate," II Corinthians 6:17, not being of the world, John 17:9-16, but as Ambassadors for Christ, doing the work of God to spread the gospel, never compromising with the world's evil ways.

The true Church was prophesied to be small, persecuted, and scattered, Daniel 11:33-35, 12:7; Mark 14:27; Luke 12:32; John 15:20, 16:32; Acts 8:1; II Timothy 3:12. The many would depart from the faith once delivered and be deceived into a false Christianity, Matthew 24:4-5, 7:13-14; Mark 7:7, 13; Revelation 12:9. "God's true Church is the collective body of individuals, called out from the ways of this present world, who have totally surrendered themselves to the rule of God, and who, through the Holy Spirit, become the begotten sons of God (Romans 8:9) The true Church is not some politically organized denomination which one joins, or becomes a member of, in order to be saved' . You can't join the true Church; only God can put you into it by His Spirit," I Corinthians 12:13 (see True History of the True Church, p. 5).

The Church is the body of Christ, a spiritual organism, with the Messiah as the living active head, Ephesians 5:23, 32. Those who are called, repent, and are baptized, become part of the spiritual body of Christ when they receive His Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38. The true Church of God is continually guided into truth as God reveals it, and admits mistakes when it is proven wrong, John 16:13. When a Christian ceases to grow, the Holy Spirit ceases to live in him.

Mass Departure from Truth Predicted The New Testament is full of predictions that the first century church would largely fall away from the revealed truth, Acts 20:29-30; II Timothy 4:3, 4; II Thessalonians 2:3; Titus 1:16; II Peter 2:2; Jude 3, 19; I John 2:18-19; II John 7; III John 9-10. The messages to the seven churches continue this theme:

(R.F. Of course; most of Israel was, and is, blinded Rom. 10 & 11. That is why God has turned to Gentile churches.)

Ephesus: Found false apostles to be liars, but didn't give up. In later period, there was a general leaving their first love of the truth.

Smyrna: Faced tribulation 10 days, some cast into prison. They recognized the blasphemy of those of the Synagogue of Satan.

Pergamos: Lived where Satan's seat was, Antipas was martyred, wrestled with false doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes.

Thyatira: Allowed "Jezebel" to teach and seduce true believers to commit fornication; some went into the "depths of Satan."

Sardis: Almost died out, except for the true name.

Philadelphia: Had to face those of the Synagogue of Satan, and those trying to shut the open door before it.

Laodicea: A lukewarm, compromising, Church about which there was nothing good to say.

The letters to the seven Churches gives us encouragement that Christ walks in the midst of the candlesticks (Churches), and that down throughout its history, the true Church has always wrestled against false teachers.

Rewards to Overcomers

Also, it is very encouraging to read the seven messages to the Churches and note that those who overcome are promised great rewards:

Ephesus: Eat of the tree of life, Revelation 2:7

Smyrna: Crown of life, not hurt by second death, 2:10-11

Pergamos: Eat of hidden Manna, receive white stone with new name, 2:17

Thyatira: Power over nations, rulership with rod of iron, morning star,
2:26-28

Sardis: Clothed in white raiment, name not blotted out of the Book of Life, name confessed before the Father and His angels, 3:5

Philadelphia: Spared from hour of temptation to come on all world; pillar in God's Temple and will remain there; write on him, name of God, name of city of Laodicea: Sit on Christ's throne with Him, 3:21
We will receive our designated reward, IF we overcome!