

# **Bible Prophecy and the book of Revelation, Lesson 1**

## **7 Letters to the 7 Churches, An Introduction**

### **1. In order to study any part of Revelation we need to be introduced to the book as a whole.**

- ✓ This section in Scripture is the only one that explicitly guarantees a blessing to the reader, hearer, and heeder. **Verse 3**
  - ✓ Revelation = unveiling or revealing of what? Of Jesus Christ and what He's doing today and what He's going to do in the future.
  - ✓ Why is it such a standout? Because it focuses on the entire Bible. It is like a lens we look through that helps us pull everything in Scripture together.
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### **2. Revelation has been, historically, a very confusing book.**

- ✓ There is no real reason for this if we use the right approach. There are 404 verses in Revelation, but there are 800 allusions to the Old Testament in it. The more we know about the Old Testament, the more this will make sense to us.
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### **3. This book is written in code, verse 1 These codes are explained somewhere else in Scripture.**

- ✓ Your best friend is an exhaustive concordance and a good literal translation of Scripture. KJV; NASB; ESV; NKJV; HCSB.

### **4. Rules of Bible interpretation:**

- 1) Resist the urge to speculate which is especially important here. This is the worst place to speculate.
  - 2) Best commentary on the Bible is the Bible.
  - 3) If the Bible raises a question that the Bible does not answer, there is no answer.
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### **5. The book of Acts covers about 30 years of the early history of the church.**

- ✓ What we are going to discover is that Revelation picks up where Acts leaves off.
  - ✓ The two most significant chapters for believers in Revelation are Ch. 2 and 3, but they are the ones most ignored and least understood. **Chapter 1:1**. The revelation of Jesus that He isn't just the flannel graph Jesus we see in Sunday School.
  - ✓ "God gave Him"? Can Jesus learn? **Luke 2:52, Mark 13:32**.
  - ✓ "Shortly" is not a time word as in "I'll be there shortly," but a word that describes the events in this book. The vast majority of this book only covers a 7-year period.
  - ✓ It means "With speed;" once it starts, it will happen quickly. "Angel" = messenger; frequently does but doesn't always refer to supernatural beings.
  - ✓ **Verse 2** "He saw..." Remember John sees the things he is writing about.
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- ✓ **Verse 3** Again, you don't find this promised in any other book explicitly.
  - ✓ **Verse 4** Opens like a letter with 7 cover letters.
  - ✓ "7 Spirits before His throne." What is this? It is the O.T. way of alluding to the Holy Spirit. **Isiah 11:1-2, Zechariah 3:9, 4:10.**
  - ✓ **Verses 5-6** 7 titles of Jesus = "faithful witness" = past, "first born from the Dead" = present
  - ✓ "Ruler of the kings of the earth" = future (primary focus of the Revelation) **Verses 7-8.** Who pierced Him? **Acts 2:36** This book takes on a very Jewish flavor after chapter 3. In fact, the Church is not mentioned in the remainder of Revelation.
  - ✓ **Verse 9** Patmos is 10 miles long, 6 miles wide off the Southwest coast of Turkey. John is about 90 years old at this time. **Verse 10** "the Lord's Day;" Sunday.
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- ✓ **Verse 11** Why these 7 churches? There were so many others such as Rome, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The conclusion that I'm going to suggest to you I don't want you to adopt yet. I want you to let it be proven to you from the text itself.
    - 1) These 7 contain the only 7 types of churches that have or ever will exist.
    - 2) These 7 contain the only 7 types of Christians that have or ever will exist.
    - 3) That in the order that you find them they represent the 7 ages of the church from the end of Acts to the Rapture.
  - ✓ **V. 12** What are lampstands supposed to do? Give off light; remember that!
  - ✓ **V. 13** Jesus is dressed like an Old Testament high priest; His job was to tend and replace whatever was not working right. Jesus is in the middle of these lamp stands (churches). Where is He today and what is He doing?
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### 6. **Verses 14 – 16 The only physical description we have of Jesus, and He's not like anything physical!!**

- ✓ **Verses 14-15** Fire and brass are symbols of judgment from the O.T. He is the Judge, and nothing escapes His view.
  - ✓ Brass is a symbol of judgment. Serpent is a symbol of sin. **2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:21** "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
  - ✓ "Voice like many waters" Have you ever been to Niagara Falls? The roar is Deafening, isn't it? **Verse 16** "right hand...seven stars" What are these? This is not up for speculation! **Verse 20**
  - ✓ "two-edged sword" What is this? Word of God; the Word of God comes from where?
  - ✓ "face shining like the sun in all its strength." Ask Paul who was struck down on the road to Damascus at noon with a light brighter than the sun!!!
  - ✓ **Verse 17** – "I heard...I turned...I saw...I fell" What needs to happen to every one of us?
  - ✓ Give us 3 reasons to not be afraid:
  - ✓ "I am the first and the last." He's the forever God.
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- ✓ "I am the Living One and was dead." He cannot be killed or stopped!!
  - ✓ "have the keys of death and Hades" He controls the worst there is. **Luke 16:19.**
  - ✓ **Verse 19** One of the most important verses in the entire book gives us a divinely inspired outline:
    1. "I have seen" = **Chapter 1**
    2. "things which are" = **Chapter 2-3**
    3. "after these things" = signpost or flag to let us know that the ages have changed (Greek = **meta tauta**) from Ch.4 and on, **Verse 20.**
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### 7. Introduction to these seven letters, general characteristics.

There are four levels of meaning and application in each of these letters:

- 1) Local level. There were actually churches of these names with these descriptions/problems in these cities in the first century.
  - 2) All church level. **Rev. 2:7** Written for every church for all time.
  - 3) All hearers level. **Rev. 2:7** If you have an ear, all these letters were written and addressed specifically to you.
  - 4) Mystical level. In the order they are in, they mystically lay out the history of church.
    - ✓ Every letter has a theme and every detail including the name of the church and the titles that Jesus gives Himself within the letter points to that theme.
    - ✓ General structural characteristics. **Revelation 2:7** "He who has an ear" This phrase shows up in each letter, but in the first 3 letters it comes in the postscript before the promise to the overcomer (**Revelation 2:7b**).
    - ✓ In the last 4 letters the phrase comes within the body of the letter.
    - ✓ The last 4 began sequentially, but they exist in parallel.
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- ✓ Another structural characteristic is these 7 letters have 7 sections within each one of them:
  - 1) Church's name.
  - 2) Title or titles Jesus gives Himself.
  - 3) Good News (like a report card). (2 do not have this)
  - 4) Bad News (2 do not have this).
  - 5) Exhortation from Jesus.
  - 6) Promise to the Overcomer.
  - 7) "He that has an ear" phrase.

This means that each of these sections, bearing in mind the 4 exceptions, occurs 7 x 7 times, 7 being the biblical number of completions.

Add to these 7's in Revelation, the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls, 7 heads of both the dragon and the beast, 7 thunders, 7 hills, etc., and we begin to see a theme emerge!

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## **7 Letters to the 7 Churches, An Introduction**

### **Why these Seven churches?**

1. We are going to discover that to understand these churches is to understand any church that has ever existed.
2. We are going to discover that there is some of each of these churches in every church.
3. We are going to see the 7 churches ages described for us here; any other order and it wouldn't work; lay out the history of the church prophetically from the end of Acts to the Rapture.
4. We are going to see that the 7 kingdom parables of Matthew 13 track with the same characteristics of these 7 churches and in the same order.
5. We are going to see that these 7 churches also have similar characteristics to the other 7 churches Paul wrote to in the N.T.
6. We are going to see that each church had a perception of themselves that was inaccurate, and that Jesus corrects.
7. We are going to see that even in the first century the church was having problems; only reliable model was in the church in Acts.
8. We are going to see that some, if not many of our preconceived notions about the church, will be shattered.

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