

**NOTES ON**  
***THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION***  
**Revelation 1:9-3:22**

By Jack W. Langford, August 1, 2006

**INTRODUCTION**

The last book of the Bible, the incredible book of Revelation, opens with seven brief letters addressed to seven local assemblies in ancient Asia Minor. These letters have long intrigued interpreters of the Bible as to the question of just exactly to whom do they really apply. It is a fact that these letters, at the very beginning of the book of Revelation, would most certainly seem to have significance beyond the seven local assemblies on the western coast of ancient Asia Minor, specifically mentioned as the immediate recipients. The whole book of Revelation is characterized by symbolism. God reveals in this last book of the Bible the awful calamities that will befall the final generation through the use of symbolic language. This same symbolic language is first used in relationship to these seven churches. The churches are spoken of as “Lampstands.” There are “seven Stars” representing angels to each church. And there is a transfigured Christ, awesome in appearance, walking in the midst of the lampstands. Since this is symbolic language, the question remains all the more intriguing. Are these churches, in and of themselves, not symbolic of larger categories of professed believers? Who then, do these letters specifically apply to, beyond those seven local congregations, and for what period of time do they most directly apply??

**TO WHOM DO THEY APPLY?**

On the one hand, it is obvious that the practical truths mentioned in these brief letters can have a wide application to all saints, everywhere and in any age. This would obviously be a secondary application of the truths contained in these letters. However, in search for a specific answer, Bible teachers in general have applied these letters recorded by John to the so-called “Seven Periods of Church History” which have taken place for the last two thousand years. These seven periods of church history are somewhat arbitrarily chosen as the recipients of these letters simply because the word “*church*” is used, and because there is really no other group, in the minds of these teachers, to which the letters can logically apply. It seems like it is a universal assumption that, since the word “*church*” is used, it must apply to what we commonly understand as the present churches composing the “body of Christ” as described in Paul’s epistles.

So then, in the thinking of most fundamentalist expositors, there appears to be no reason to reject this general assumption that the letters apply to Christians during some seven stages of this whole church age in which we are presently living. And they reason, what better way to apply the letters than to divide up the church age into various time

periods that may seem most befitting to the contents of these different messages? Of course, in so doing, the divisions are pretty much left to the imagination and further supposition of the church historians. The vast majority of Bible readers have little precise knowledge of this thing called “Church History.” Church History, I can assure you, is one of the most unappetizing and befuddling subjects anyone can explore. This is primarily true due to the fact that “Church History” is more accurately defined as “The History of Man-Made Apostate Churchanity.” When one reads so-called “Church History” he may wonder, “What in the world ever happened to the vibrant, enthusiastic early congregations of the body of Christ? They seemed to have evaporated!”

## ASSEMBLIES IN THE DAY OF THE LORD

I want to demonstrate in this Bible study that these letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, as found in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:9-3:22), most certainly directly apply to *the saints within the context of the theme of the book of Revelation itself*. Most all conservative Bible teachers see and admit that the theme of the book of Revelation involves the final great tribulation time period, also called “The Day of The Lord.” That there will be a vast multitude of saints in various congregations in that specific time period is likewise recognized by all conservative expositors. When we see that these are the people directly addressed in these letters it will actually enrich our appreciation of what is written to and for them. Likewise it will fit perfectly with the whole theme of the book of Revelation, and not be disconnected into two different and entirely distinct ages. The subject matter in these letters will have a direct application to the saints of the great tribulation time period. Each of these assemblies is a characterization of the different saints and their assembly life in their warfare with the satanic influences of that day. This characterizes their battles in this most climactic time period. All these assemblies have as their immediate anticipation the Lord’s soon arrival in great glory and power to reign on earth. Therefore, these churches all exist at the same time. They are synonymous as to the time period.

## DIFFERENT CHURCHES IN THE SCRIPTURES

The premise that most Bible teachers assume, that the word “church” automatically has reference to the body of Christ today, is not at all accurate. There is, in fact, a wide usage of the word “church” in the Greek Scriptures called “The New Testament.” However, even long before our “New Testament” was written, the word translated “church” was commonly used for the people of Israel.

First of all, the Greek word, normally translated “church” in most of our Bibles, is well-known as a compound, collective noun—*ekklesia*. *Ek* [out], and *klesia* [to call], and therefore has reference to a “called out company of people.” The prime definition and its proper synonyms are “*congregation*” or “*assembly*.” Long before the “body of Christ” even came into existence, the word *ekklesia* was commonly used in reference to the people of Israel. When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek language the resulting translation was called the Septuagint (LXX). This translation was made some two hundred years before Christ and was the “Old Testament” of the Greek

speaking world. At least **seventy five times** in that translation this word *ekklesia* was used in various ways for the people of Israel. Most people are totally unaware of this fact. At the time of Jesus Christ, whenever the word *ekklesia* was used of God's people, they automatically thought of the Jewish people. And actually it was a reality that when Christ first said to the apostles, "upon this rock I will build My *ekklesia*" (Matt. 16:18), the apostles merely understood that Christ had reference to those Jews (and some Gentiles as well) who considered Jesus to be the true Messiah of Israel. At that time the apostles were not thinking of the unique group for this age of Grace as revealed later through the apostle Paul. Indeed, even the first assemblies (churches) of Christians, as recorded in the book of Acts, were merely considered a sect of Judaism.

Therefore, in the minds of the saints of the first century there was never a problem in thinking of an application of this word to various congregations of Jewish believers—indeed up until this time it had been nearly the rule. In addition there are a variety of people to whom this word could apply in the Greek Scriptures. They are:

- 1.) ***A civil gathering*** or assembly of any community—see Acts 19:32,39,41.
- 2.) ***Israel***, called out of Egypt and assembled before God in Sinai. Also called "the church in the wilderness." See Acts 7:38 and Hebrews 2:12.
- 3.) The "***general assembly***," or "church of the Firstborn," spoken of in Hebrews 12:23. This appears to be the righteous of all the ages.
- 4.) ***The universal church—the body of Christ*** in this age—see Eph. 1:22,23.
- 5.) ***The local congregations*** of saints in this age of Grace, meeting in different areas. See I Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:13, etc.
- 6.) Some have distinguished references to the mere ***physical gathering*** of professed believers in Christ from the actual mystical body (the saved only). See such references as I Cor. 11:18; 14:23 or III John 10.
- 7.) ***Future assemblies*** of the great tribulation, Day of the Lord time period. These churches will have a distinctive Jewish flavor (Rev. 2-3).

Please keep in mind the reality that the early church, as recorded in the book of Acts and founded on the Day of Pentecost, was first and foremost considered by both the Jewish leadership, and by the secular Roman officials, as merely another ***sect of Judaism***. Eventually, they came to be called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). Even then, they possessed a heavy *Jewish influence*. However, the church did not receive its distinctive identification until gradually and deep into the ministry of the apostle Paul. By the close of the book of Acts the church of Jesus Christ was totally recognizable as a ***separate and distinct entity*** apart from Judaism. This congregation would no longer be observing the Mosaic Law system, but was composed of both saved Jews and saved Gentiles, baptized into one body, and spiritually "one New Man." The total practicality of this truth was not to be realized until the Jewish brethren were liberated from the practice of the Law system through the revelations contained in the book of Hebrews and Paul's prison epistles. Shortly thereafter the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jewish people were scattered all over the earth.

Even so it will be at the close of the age. The present church will have been raptured away according to the distinctive promises to her. God's program with Israel will be revived, and vast numbers will be associated once again with the Kingdom hope of Israel, as in the Gospel ministry of Christ Himself. These assemblies (*ekkllesias*) will once again be heavily influenced by Judaism. They will be suffering persecution under the Antichrist, but anticipating the soon arrival of the Great and only Potentate—the Lord Jesus—King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. These are the people and assemblies referred to in the letters to the seven churches.

**TWELVE REASONS**  
FOR THE DIRECT APPLICATION TO THE SAINTS  
OF THE FUTURE GREAT TRIBULATION TIME PERIOD

**1.) The *exact Interpretation* Does NOT fit so-called 'Church History'**

It is very important to distinguish between *an application* of the text and the *exact interpretation* of the text. The direct interpretation of the text of Scripture in context may be quite different from an application of the text to different circumstances. An example of an *application* of a text is this common idea that these churches in Revelation are talking about the unfolding of so-called "Church History." As an exact interpretation this idea has many SERIOUS problems—if not impossibilities.

- 1.) What is commonly called "Church History" is primarily the history of "man-made churches" and not the history of the body of Christ.
- 2.) "Church History" is horrible and primarily marked by apostasy and the erection of a gigantic false Christendom.
- 3.) This history has flexible and arbitrary lines of demarcation, depending on the particular historian making the analysis.
- 4.) Only "historians" could possibly know for sure.
- 5.) What could these letters possibly mean to the first generation that knew nothing about so-called "Church History"? Or the second generation? Or the third? etc., etc. It would have no total meaning except to the last generation who could look at the total picture.
- 6.) *This is totally unacceptable* that only the last generation of believers in this Age could fully understand this application. The truth of the matter is—it has only been this final generation that has come up with this interpretation.

**2.) The clear setting is in "The Day of The Lord"—or "The Lord's Day." These two expressions actually say the very same thing. Rev. 1:10; 6:17; 16:14 (1:3; 22:10)**

The immediate context for these seven letters to the seven churches is the fact that the apostle John is transported, by the Spirit of God, forward in time to the specified

“Lord’s Day”—“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (v:10). There is actually nothing in the context that even remotely suggests that this reference is to a specific day of the week. Many have imagined that this is a reference to Sunday as the “the Lord’s Day.” They like to think that John is saying he was in the Spirit on Sunday! Of course, nowhere else, especially in the “New Testament,” is the first day of the week ever called “the Lord’s Day.” That this has reference to a Sunday is another pure invention of man’s imaginary religious tradition. The text very plainly does NOT say this was the “first day of the week.” It may be shocking to many to realize that what has become a common assumption in Christendom cannot be substantiated in the least from the Scriptures. In addition, the church of Jesus Christ is carefully instructed to not religiously observe any holy days—see Galatians 4:10,11 & Col. 2:16.

The “Lord’s Day,” here in context as admitted by many scholars (see as an example, Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, page 42), is a legitimate reference to “(the great and terrible) Day of the Lord” repeatedly spoken of throughout the rest of the Scriptures in addition to this book of Revelation. Walvoord explains that this word in Rev. 1:10 is in the adjective form—*the Lord’s*. In the Hebrew there is no adjective form for “Lord,” and consequently the noun is always used. The Greek expression “is therefore the equivalent to the Old Testament expression ‘the day of the Lord.’” Walvoord says, “On the basis of the evidence, the interpretation is therefore preferred that John was projected forward to the future day of the Lord.” Whatever is revealed to John, as he is supernaturally placed “in the Spirit” subsequent to this positioning in the future Day of the Lord, is to be interpreted as taking place in that specific time period.

From this posture John receives the messages to the seven churches—which would mean churches in “the Lord’s Day” (see reason No 12.). Note especially that in the churches of this present age, such as the Thessalonian assembly, they were not to understand that they were in “the Day of the Lord”—see II Thess. 2:2.

For other examples where a prophet or an apostle is transported in vision to a specific place or future time is best seen in the case of Ezekiel: 1:1; 2:2; 3:12,14; 8:3; 11:1, 24,25; 37:1; 40:2,3 & 43:5. See also Acts 10:10-16 (Peter) and Acts 22:17-21 & II Cor. 12:1-4 (Paul).

Herein, a call to our remembrance, of that unique promise by the resurrected Savior concerning the apostle John, is of vital importance. In John 21:18-23 we have the account of Christ foretelling what would happen to the apostle Peter concerning his death. Then Peter turns and asks the Lord what would happen to that beloved apostle, John. Christ’s words are amazing! He said, “If I will that he remains *till I come*, what is that to you? Follow Me!” In consequence of the Lord’s statement, a report went out that John would not die, but remain till the Lord’s return. However, it is explained that Christ did not say that John would not die, only, “If I will that he remain *till I come*, what is that to you?” In other words, Christ did suggest that John may somehow remain till the second coming of Christ. Now that is exactly what did happen to John in receiving the “Revelation.” John was transported forward in time, by the Spirit of God, to “the Lord’s Day.”

**3.) The whole message of the book of Revelation, from beginning to end, is outlined under and by a series of FIVE “Sevens.”**

These are, (No. 1) the “Letters to the Seven Churches,” (No. 2) the “Seven Seals,” (No. 3) the “Seven Trumpets,” (No. 4) the “Seven Thunders,” and (No. 5) the “Seven Bowls.” Now this series that outlines the whole of the book of Revelation is begun by these “Seven” letters. They are very simply the actual beginning of the series of “Sevens.” These letters are, therefore, a vital part of that very same time period encapsulated by and within that series of “Sevens.”

Each of the “Sevens” gives special characterization to its subject matter during the “Lord’s Day.” “*The Seven Churches*” simply characterize the saints that live during the series of “Sevens” of the book. The “Seven Seals” gives characterization to the unfolding of the time period itself. The “Seven Trumpets” gives characterization to specific judgments that will befall the inhabitants of earth. The “Seven Thunders” will introduce four parenthetical ministries: the Two Witnesses, the Woman and the Dragon, the Beast and False Prophet, and the Lamb with the 144,000. The “Seven Bowls” characterizes the final outpouring of the wrath of God. This is the exact contextual alignment for the “Seven Churches.”

As will be seen in the last of these “12 Reasons” is the fact that all revealed under these series of “Sevens” is specifically stated to be for “the Seven Churches” (Rev. 22:16). In other words the whole content of the book is specifically for the same “Seven Churches” that are spoken of at the beginning of the book.

**4.) Christ is presented before these churches, as he appeared on the mount of Transfiguration, in awesome glory. This is how He will appear at the second coming in great power and glory to rule and reign on the earth.**

**See—**Matt. 17:2; II Pet. 1:16-18; Dan. 7:13,14 & now Rev. 1:13-17

In the whole of the book of Revelation, Christ is not represented as the “Head of the Church which is His body,” as in Paul’s letters. Rather He is presented as the fearsome, majestic sovereign who rules in awesome power—His eyes as a flame of fire, His feet like brass, His mouth as a sharp sword, and His countenance as the sun—see and compare the transfiguration of Christ in Matt. 17:2.

On the Mount of Transfiguration the apostles got a foreview of Christ’s appearance “coming in His Kingdom” glory (II Pet. 1:16-18). This is precisely how Christ is portrayed in the book of Revelation. It is specifically how He appears to the “seven churches.” Consequently, the setting for these letters passes over this whole church age to the future “Day of the Lord” time frame, and pictures Christ as the coming reigning King in great power and glory. Each of these congregations is to expect Him in that capacity. And to each of these congregations is given a specific reminder of one of these glorious aspects of their soon coming King.

**5.) The Judgment and rewards for these saints (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) reflect an endurance through a great time of trial.**

These seven letters when compared together are all taken from one format. In fact they are like a “Form Letter.” Each of them can be outlined in the following manner:

- 1.) the address, as “to the angel of the church of...” with a representation of the author by an aspect of the Messiah in glory;
- 2.) The beginning exclamation, “I know your works;”
- 3.) perhaps a word of compliment;
- 4.) A warning of some fault;
- 5.) A call to repentance;
- 6.) An expression of a reward for endurance;
- 7.) and lastly, the expression “He that has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says.”

So the outline of each letter is basically the same. And the theme is basically the same—their loyalty in service to the Messiah through a variety of different trials.

The judgment of these saints is based on “endurance” and “overcoming” as in a time of great trial. See especially Rev. 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12 & 3:21. This is exactly what was to be expected if this time of trial was the great tribulation period of the Day of the Lord. This is also the way judgment was spoken of by Jesus Christ to those saints that will enter into the Kingdom era. See Matt. 24:13, 45; 25:13, 21 & Dan. 7:21, 22, 25 & 27. Consequently, these are obviously tribulation saints.

**6.) These are mixed assemblies of saved and unsaved.**

The characteristic of “the church which is Christ’s body” is its vital spiritual connection to the Head of the church. In other words the “body of Christ” is not a community of saved and lost. The only way to get into this church is by Jesus Christ. He never adds a hypocrite to it. “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (I Cor. 12:13), and “the Lord added to them daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

In contrast to this, these seven churches are mixed assemblies of saved and unsaved. They are professed believers only. As Christ explained in Matthew 7:21-23 concerning that judgment of some professors just preceding the Kingdom, “I never knew you. Depart from Me.” So it also happens here in these letters. This is indicated in such passages as Rev. 2:5, “remove thy candlestick”; Rev. 2:16, “fight against them”; Rev. 3:1, 3, “but you are dead” and “I will come upon you as a thief”; Rev.3:9, “those who say they are Jews and are not”; and Rev.3:16, “I will spew thee out of My mouth.”

Thus, I say again, this is in contrast to Paul's revelation. In Paul's letters—the judgment of the “church which is Christ's body” is in heaven and only concerns those who are spiritually saved. They will likewise be judged for their works and receive loss of rewards or degrees of blessings. It will only be the translated, resurrected saved who are judged. No one will ever be cast out of the church which is Christ's body.

**7.) Note the evident Jewish characteristics of these assemblies—**

**Rev. 2:9**—“Those who say they are *Jews*, and are not, but are of the *synagogue* of Satan.”

**Rev. 2:14**—“Some hold the doctrine of *Balaam*, who taught *Balac* to cast a stumbling block before the *children of Israel*, and to eat things *sacrificed to idols*, and to commit fornication.”

**Rev. 2:17**—“And I will give some the *Hidden Manna* to eat.”

**Rev. 2:20**—“...suffered that woman *Jezebel*, which called herself a prophetess to teach and to seduce my servants to eat things *sacrificed to idols*, and commit fornication.”

**Rev. 3:9**— “Behold I will make them of the *synagogue* of Satan, which say they are *Jews* and are not, but do lie...”

**Rev. 3:12**—“Pillars of the *Temple*.”

These are all very meaningful truths to the Jewish saints. It reminds them of their ancient historical struggles as a nation chosen of God. It awakens in them a remembrance of those historic conflicts and now in turn, to their present struggles in the great conflict with the antichrist, and in the final preparation for their Messiah.

**8.) Each of the assemblies are expecting the second coming—**

**Rev. 2:5**—(**Ephesus**) “I will come unto you quickly.”

**Rev. 2:10,11**—(**Smyrna**) “Be faithful unto death...and will not be hurt of the second death.”

**Rev. 2:16**—(**Pergamos**) “I will come unto you quickly.”

**Rev. 2:25**—(**Thyatira**) “But hold fast what you have till I come.”

**Rev. 3:3**—(**Sardis**) “Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”

**Rev. 3:11—(Philadelphia)** “Behold, I come quickly.”

**Rev. 3:16—(Laodicea)** “I will vomit you out of my mouth.”

So, these assemblies are all expecting the soon arrival of their King. Therefore they exist synonymously in time. The various letters to the seven churches show the characterizations of the different believers at that time in their expectancy of the arrival of the King. Their expectation is not that of “the church which is Christ’s body.” They are nowhere said to be expecting the Rapture of the church into heaven. Consequently they should never be placed in that category of present-day churches.

**9.) Satan appears to be enthroned on earth as presented later on in Revelation 12:9-11, 17.**

“Satan’s seat” and “synagogue of Satan” show a close proximity to the reign of Antichrist. See, Rev. 2:9, 13, 24; 3:9.

Interestingly enough, because of this statement about “Satan’s Seat” in Pergamos, archaeologists long ago explored the remains of what was called “Satan’s Throne” in ancient Pergamos. In this city of Pergamos the pagan generation, living about a hundred years before John, put the finishing touches on the world’s most spectacular sacrificial alter. It served a complex of several pagan religions for sacrificial purposes. By 1875 A.D. the local Turks were destroying some of the stone work. Thus the German archeologists by 1886 had saved and transported most of this altar, with all its spectacular images of the fighting gods, to a museum in Berlin. There it sits in a tremendous exhibition hall today (see Biblical Archaeology Review, May/June, 2006). It is presumed by the archaeologists that John and then later Christians came to call that alter “Satan’s Throne.”

This obviously served as a fitting setting for the warnings and admonitions that the Lord has for that future generation of believers who will indeed witness the enthronement of Satan on earth in the Antichrist himself.

**10.) The assemblies are admonished in the classical Hebraism—“He that has ears to hear, let him hear”—Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, & 22.**

Note that Christ spoke this very same way to the Jewish audience of His day as He offered The Kingdom of Heaven to them—Matt. 11:15; 13:9,43; Mk. 4:23; 7:16; Lk. 14:35. In addition Christ augmented this gospel through the twelve apostles He had chosen, and sent them out with careful instructions to only go to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-15).

Actually, the book of Revelation presents the same setting where multitudes are again being presented “The Gospel of The Kingdom” but now on a grand worldwide

scale. This will be done under the ministry of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (12 thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, see Rev. 7). Whereas in Christ's day the message was through the twelve apostles to Israel, so it will be done in this "day of the Lord" through the 144,000.

Those who respond to this message in this future time frame will form congregations who will be challenged in their obedience by the same exhortations.

**11.) The special blessings to these saints are all Hebraisms from the Hebrew Scriptures, and are understood as blessings in preparation for the Kingdom Reign of Messiah.**

*Rev. 2:7*, "I will give to eat of the tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

*Rev. 2:10*, "I will give thee the crown of Life."

*Rev. 2:17*, "I will give some of the hidden Manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone..."

*Rev. 2:26*, "I will give him power over the nations."

*Rev. 2:28* "And I will give him the morning star."

*Rev. 3:5* "I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life."

*Rev. 3:12* "I will make him a pillar in the Temple of God."

*Rev. 3:21* "I will grant to sit with Me in My Throne."

**12.) The whole context of the Book of Revelation is FOR the Seven Churches!**

❖ *IN SUMMARY*

The whole book of Revelation concludes with the following words as it pertains to the subject at hand, "*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you THESE THINGS IN THE CHURCHES*"—*Rev. 22:16*. In other words, the contents of the whole book of Revelation is specifically **FOR** the CHURCHES enumerated in the first three chapters.

It has been observed by another that proof of the above statement is surely demonstrated by the fact that characteristics spoken of about the Seven Churches are indeed repeated throughout the whole book of Revelation on behalf of the saints that will be in the time period of The Day of the Lord. In this regard note the following—

**Ephesus**— "Patience" (2:2), see also Rev. 14:12.

"Overcome" (2:7), see also Rev. 15:2 & 21:7.

"Tree of Life" (2:7), see also Rev. 22:14.

- Smyrna**— “Tribulation and Poverty” (2:9), see also Rev. 13:16,17.  
“Second Death” (2:11), see also Rev. 20:6, 14 & 21:8.
- Pergamos**— “Satan’s Throne” (2:13), see also Rev. 13:2.  
“Killed” (2:13), see also Rev. 6:9, 10; 13:10 & 20:4.  
“New Name” (2:17), see also Rev. 19:11, 12.
- Thyatira**— “Rule with Rod of Iron” (2:27), see also Rev. 19:15.  
“Morning Star” (2:28), see also Rev. 22:16.
- Sardis**— “Garment...Walk in White” (3:4), see also Rev. 7:14.  
“Blot Out Name” (3:5), see also Rev. 20:15.
- Philadelphia**—“Not Deny My Name” (3:8), see also Rev. 6:9 & 7:13-17.  
“New Jerusalem” (3:12), see also Rev. 21:2.  
“New Name” (3:12), see also Rev. 19:11,12.
- Laodicea**— “Eat with the Lord” (3:20), see also Rev. 19:9.

Thus we can observe that the characteristics of each of the Seven Churches are the identical characteristics given about the saints throughout the rest of the book. Indeed, this would demonstrate beyond any shadow of a doubt that the Seven Churches of Revelation are the professed believers that exist through The Day of The Lord.

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