

# Revelation - Chapter 1

Revelation 1:4

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**J**ohn to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

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## **John to the seven churches which are in Asia:**

Without a doubt, these words seem to say that the book of Revelation was written for the benefit of only seven literal churches existing in John's day (see on verse 11). But is this really the case? Consider the following well-established points which readily and obviously support their broader, more far-reaching application:

1. **Instruction for All Christians** – All the New Testament books, as is the case of all of God's Word, were written for the reproof, correction, and "*instruction in righteousness*" of all Christians, so that they "*may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Though the Epistles were addressed to specific churches existing in Paul's, Peter's, James', and John's day, their counsels and admonitions were naturally and generally understood to be non-exclusive to time and place. Their canonization and widespread recognition in the past as well as today presumes this undoubted time-tested principle.

2. **Written for Anyone Willing to Listen** – Though each of the seven churches of Revelation is addressed by name, at the end of each special message is found the words, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Therefore, those who were to benefit from the seven messages were not only to consist of those of all seven congregations combined, but was to include, as well, every individual "*who hath an ear,*"—that is, those throughout church history who have a willingness to comply with the counsels given (Isaiah 6:9, 10; Luke 8:5-10; see on Revelation 1:3). In other words, every individual who is willing to listen, no matter time or place, is to consider what the Holy Spirit is saying and apply it when and where it is personally relevant.

3. **Reach Beyond The Second Coming of Christ** – Even though this verse makes it appear that God was simply addressing the well-being of Christians in John's day, several phrases and passages throughout

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the book of Revelation plainly reveal its intended relevance to the experiences and needs of God's people from the time of the early church to the second coming of Jesus (1:1, 3, 19; 2:25, 26; 3:3; 6:12-17; 10:6, 7; 11:18; 14:6, 7, 14-20; 15:1; 16:1, 14-17; 19:7-9, 11-15; 22:6, 10, 12). In reality, most of the events brought to view in Revelation are contextually portrayed as taking place far beyond the lifetime of the congregations then existing. In addition, even the seven messages to the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3 contain elements of prophetic fulfillment far beyond the lifetime of the early church. A profound example is found in Revelation 3:10 where the sixth church, Philadelphia, is told it will successfully endure a great time of testing "*which shall come UPON ALL THE WORLD, TO TRY THEM THAT DWELL ON THE EARTH.*" Not only is it plain that this "test" will come as a challenge to ALL the inhabitants of the earth, but verse 11 makes it clear that it will happen just prior to the second coming of Jesus... "*Behold, I COME QUICKLY: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*" Though it must be stated that such evidence does not, in the least, diminish the special relevance the seven messages had to the seven churches of Asia in John's day, it does reveal that God saw that the experiences and needs of the early church would prove to be the experiences and needs of His people throughout church history (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). No doubt, Divine wisdom saw something significant about these seven churches of Asia that would provide special insight to understanding the admonitions and prophecies of the entire book of Revelation which speaks to Christians all the way up to, and including, the second advent of Christ.

4. **Represent Eras of Church History Up to the Second Coming** – It has already been shown, in the previous point, that certain prophecies in the seven messages to the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3 contain elements indicating a broader and more future basis of fulfillment far beyond John's day. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that these messages do not just apply to the people and circumstances of John's day, but to the church in its future experiences as well. With this in mind, isn't it safe to wonder if the ordered portrayal of the seven churches and the seven messages foreshadow a chronological sequence of events during seven successive eras of church history? Understandably, as in the realm of

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science, a theory can only become fact after proper investigation, experimentation, and demonstration. Don't worry...this truth will be more than adequately demonstrated in our study of chapters 2 and 3.

5. **The Number Seven (7)** – Because the number seven (7), in Scripture, indicates totality, completeness, and perfection (other similar words would suffice, such as “sanctification”), we can safely conclude that the churches herein described represent the whole of the matter with God's people of all time, as well as the perfect working of Divine providence in addressing their welfare and purpose in the world (See explanation below regarding the number seven).

**NOTE:** Again, it is important to understand that the above four points do not, in the least, diminish the need to comprehend the literal application of the messages given to the seven churches of John's day as presented in chapters 2 and 3. But these points do help us understand the more important and greater picture which portrays the experiences of God's people and the prophetic winds surrounding them, beginning with the early church and reaching up to, and including, the second coming of Christ.

### **Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come;**

God the Father is referred to here, because the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ are next mentioned in the immediate context (see on verse 5 and Revelation 11:15-17). God is eternal, timeless, and self-existent (Exodus 3:14; Psalm 90:2; Micah 5:2; John 8:57, 58; Colossians 1:17; 1 Timothy 1:17). The Father and Jesus Christ are separate persons but possess all things characteristic of divinity. Therefore, such words can apply equally to the eternal and timeless nature of both (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1; John 10:30; John 17:5; Colossians 2:9).

### **and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;**

That the “*seven Spirits*” refer to the Holy Spirit is indicated by their being mentioned in association with the Father and with Jesus Christ as the source of grace and peace. “*Seven*” is symbolic of the Holy Spirit's perfection and perfect work in man through the “*gifts*” (1 Corinthians 12:4-11/See explanation below regarding the number seven). It's interesting to note that 1 Corinthians 12:29, 30 break the gifts of the Spirit into seven categories of

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ministry. Also, see on Revelation 4:5 and 5:6 for other symbolic portrayals of the Holy Spirit.

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### The Number Seven

The Number of Totality, Completeness, and Perfection.

**T**he number seven (7) appears to have drawn its essential meaning from God bringing “good” out of chaos in His creation of “heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” in six days, and then “resting” on the seventh—the day designated as the Sabbath and the prescribed cause for the weekly cycle (Genesis 1:1, 2, 31; Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11). Further, it’s interesting to note that the word “created” is used seven times in describing God bringing forth paradise out of that which was “without form, and void” (Genesis 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3; 2:4).

From a not-so-biblical standpoint, yet according to Jewish tradition, the creation of Adam occurred on October 7th, 3761 B.C.—that is, on the first day of Tishri, which is the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar. While it is true, of course, that the foundation of such a tradition cannot be factually proven, there are, for the student of the Bible, hundreds of explicit examples which demonstrate the significance of the number seven in the Word of God. Consider, below, just a handful of them:

**1.** Used 735 times (54 times in the book of Revelation alone), the number seven is clearly and readily found throughout the Bible. If we include the variations of “sevenfold” (6) and “seventh” (119), the total jumps to 860 instances.

**2.** As a whole, the Word of God was originally divided into seven major divisions:

- 1) the Law,
- 2) the Prophets,
- 3) the Psalms,
- 4) the Gospels and Acts,
- 5) the General Epistles,
- 6) the Epistles of Paul, and
- 7) the book of Revelation.

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**3.** Seven pairs of each clean animal were to be brought into the ark (Genesis 7:2, 3).

**4.** There are seven men in the Old Testament who are each designated as a “man of God,” They are:

- 1) Moses (Joshua 14:6),
- 2) David (2 Chronicles 8:14),
- 3) Samuel (1 Samuel 9:6, 14),
- 4) Shemaiah (1 Kings 12:22),
- 5) Elijah (1 Kings 17:18),
- 6) Elisha (2 Kings 5:8) and
- 7) Igdaliah (Jeremiah 35:4).

**5.** Animals were to be at least seven days old before being used for sacrifice (Exodus 22:30).

**6.** There were seven stems on the tabernacle’s lampstand (Exodus 25:37).

**7.** The Jewish people celebrate seven annual holy days in accordance with Old Testament teaching. They begin with Passover and end with the Last Great Day – the day after the Feast of Tabernacles ends. The holy days’ cycle is completed, in 3 festival seasons, by the 7th month of the sacred calendar:

- 1) Passover and
- 2) Unleavened Bread, 1st month;
- 3) Pentecost, 3rd month; and
- 4) Trumpets,
- 5) Atonement,
- 6) Tabernacles and
- 7) Last Great Day, 7th month (Exodus 23:14-17; see also Deuteronomy 16).

**8.** Naaman was told to bathe in the Jordan River seven times to affect a complete cleansing from leprosy (2 Kings 5:10).

**9.** Joshua was commanded to march around Jericho for seven days, and on the seventh day to make seven circuits, and for seven priests to blow seven trumpets outside the city walls – all in order to bring about a sudden and complete victory (Joshua 6:3, 4).

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**10.** There are seven things the Lord hates. They are:

- 1) “a proud look,”
- 2) “a lying tongue,”
- 3) “hands that shed innocent blood,”
- 4) “an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,”
- 5) “feet that be swift in running to mischief,”
- 6) a false witness that speaketh lies,” and
- 7) “he that soweth discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16).

**11.** In Matthew 13, Jesus is quoted as giving seven parables. They are:

- 1) The Sower (Matthew 13:3-9),
- 2) The Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30),
- 3) The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31, 32),
- 4) The Leaven (Matthew 13:33),
- 5) The Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44),
- 6) The Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45, 46), and
- 7) The Net (Matthew 13:47-50).

**12.** Jesus performed seven miracles on the Sabbath Day – that is, on the “seventh day” of the week. They are found in:

- 1) Matthew 12:9,
- 2) Mark 1:21,
- 3) Mark 1:29,
- 4) Luke 13:11,
- 5) Luke 14:2,
- 6) John 5:8, 9, and
- 7) John 9:14.

**13.** Jesus pronounced seven blessings on the righteous in Matthew 5: 3-10. They are:

- 1) “theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:3, 10),
- 2) “they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4),
- 3) “they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5),
- 4) “they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6),
- 5) “they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7),
- 6) “they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8), and

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7) “they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

**14.** Jesus pronounced seven woes on the unrighteous Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23: 13-31. Why? Because:

- 1) they kept people out of God’s kingdom (Matthew 23:13),
- 2) they took advantage of widows (Matthew 23:14),
- 3) they misled men to eternal destruction (Matthew 23:15),
- 4) they were covetous of worldly things (Matthew 23:16-22),
- 5) they refused to show compassion (Matthew 23:23-24),
- 6) they were inwardly corrupt (Matthew 23:25-28), and
- 7) They afflicted the righteous (Matthew 23:29-31).

**15.** In the book of Hebrews, seven titles are used to refer to Christ. They are:

- 1) “Heir of all things” (1:2),
- 2) “Captain of our salvation” (2:10),
- 3) “Apostle” (3:1),
- 4) “Author of salvation” (5:9),
- 5) “Forerunner” (6:20),
- 6) “High Priest” (10:21) and
- 7) the “Author and finisher of our faith” (12:2).

**16.** In the book of Revelation there are seven churches (Revelation 1:4), seven angels to the seven churches (Revelation 1:20), seven seals (Revelation 5:1), seven trumpet plagues (Revelation 8:1, 2), seven thunders (Revelation 10:3, 4), and the seven last plagues (Revelation 15:1).

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