

Cultural, Historic, and Geographic Context



Revelation Backgrounds 5a

Seven Letters Intro

Revelation 2-3



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Acts 17:11 (KJV)

These (Bereans) were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are from the Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern. (Clarksville, MD:: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1998).

Unless otherwise noted, images courtesy of the Satellite Bible Atlas and the Pictorial Library of Bible Lands (BiblePlaces.org)



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Seven Letters Topics

- Sevenfold outline
- Applications
 - Personal
 - Historical
 - Prophetic, including the "Church-age" conjecture



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

- Name of the city
- Specific attributes of Messiah
- Praise - "I know..."
- Judgment
- Encouragement
- Promise to the Overcomer
- "He who has an ear..."



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

1. Name of the city
(usually underlying meaning)

(1) "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Ephesus, write: 'Here is the message



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

1. Name of the city
(usually underlying meaning)
2. Specific attributes of Messiah from Chap 1

(1) "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Ephesus, write: 'Here is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven gold menorahs:



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

1. Name of the city
(usually underlying meaning)
2. Specific attributes of Messiah
3. Praise that begins with "I know."
— Except for **Sardis** and **Laodicea**

(1) "To the angel of the Messianic Community in **Ephesus**, write: 'Here is the message **from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven gold menorahs**: (2) "I know what you have been doing, how hard you have worked, how you have persevered, and how you can't stand wicked people; so you tested those who call themselves emissaries but aren't—and you found them to be liars. (3) You are persevering, and you have suffered for my sake without growing weary.



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

1. Name of the city
(usually underlying meaning)
2. Specific attributes of Messiah
3. Praise
4. Judgment → Repent!
— Except for **Smyrna** and **Philadelphia**

(1) "To the angel of the Messianic Community in **Ephesus**, write: 'Here is the message **from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven gold menorahs**: (2) "I know what you have been doing, how hard you have worked, how you have persevered, and how you can't stand wicked people; so you tested those who call themselves emissaries but aren't—and you found them to be liars. (3) You are persevering, and you have suffered for my sake without growing weary. (4) But I have this against you: you have lost the love you had at first. (5) Therefore, remember where you were before you fell, turn from this sin, and do what you used to do before. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your menorah from its place—if you don't turn from your sin!



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

1. Name of the city
(usually underlying meaning)
2. Specific attributes of Messiah
3. Praise
4. Judgment → Repent!
5. Encouragement
 - Except for Pergamum

(1) "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Ephesus, write: 'Here is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven gold menorahs: (2) "I know what you have been doing, how hard you have worked, how you have persevered, and how you can't stand wicked people; so you tested those who call themselves emissaries but aren't—and you found them to be liars. (3) You are persevering, and you have suffered for my sake without growing weary. (4) But I have this against you: you have lost the love you had at first. (5) Therefore, remember where you were before you fell, turn from this sin, and do what you used to do before. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your menorah from its place—if you don't turn from your sin! (6) But you have this in your favor: you hate what the Nicolaitans do—I hate it too.



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

1. Name of the city (usually underlying meaning)
2. Specific attributes of Messiah
3. Praise
4. Judgment → Repent!
5. Encouragement
6. Promise to the Overcomer

(1) "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Ephesus, write: 'Here is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven gold menorahs: (2) "I know what you have been doing, how hard you have worked, how you have persevered, and how you can't stand wicked people; so you tested those who call themselves emissaries but aren't—and you found them to be liars. (3) You are persevering, and you have suffered for my sake without growing weary. (4) But I have this against you: you have lost the love you had at first. (5) Therefore, remember where you were before you fell, turn from this sin, and do what you used to do before. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your menorah from its place—if you don't turn from your sin! (6) But you have this in your favor: you hate what the Nicolaitans do—I hate it too. (7) Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities. To him winning the victory I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life which is in God's Gan-'Eden." '



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Sevenfold structure of each letter

1. Name of the city (usually underlying meaning)
2. Specific attributes of Messiah
3. Praise
4. Judgment → Repent!
5. Encouragement
6. Promise to the Overcomer
7. "He who has an ear..."

(1) "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Ephesus, write: 'Here is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven gold menorahs: (2) "I know what you have been doing, how hard you have worked, how you have persevered, and how you can't stand wicked people; so you tested those who call themselves emissaries but aren't—and you found them to be liars. (3) You are persevering, and you have suffered for my sake without growing weary. (4) But I have this against you: you have lost the love you had at first. (5) Therefore, remember where you were before you fell, turn from this sin, and do what you used to do before. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your menorah from its place—if you don't turn from your sin! (6) But you have this in your favor: you hate what the Nicolaitans do—I hate it too. (7) Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities. To him winning the victory I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life which is in God's Gan-`Eden." '



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Seven Layers of Application

1. Personal (he that has an ear...)
2. Local assembly (to the assembly at Ephesus)
3. All seven assemblies (hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies)
4. All congregations throughout history (again "assemblies" and "write the things to come")
 - We know that all seven types of churches existed in the 1st century

Possible additional parallels:

5. Pauline letter counterpart
6. Matthew 13 parable counterpart
7. Church Age Theory



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Pauline Letter Counterpart

- Paul also wrote to seven cities (Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica)
- The themes in each of Paul's letters seem to broadly parallel the Seven Letters of Revelation
 - Ephesians 4:17-32 parallels Jesus' words to Ephesus
 - Eph 4:14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.
 - Smyrna - Philippians - Joy through suffering
 - Php 1:29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake / Php 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.
 - Pergamum - Corinthians - Married to the world
 - 1Co 5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans
 - Thyatira - Galatians - Religious externalism themes
 - Gal 1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel
 - Sardis - Romans - Don't know they are dead / don't walk the talk
 - Rom 3:10-12 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; (11) no one understands; no one seeks for God. (12) All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."
 - Philadelphia - Thessalonians - praiseworthy fellowships
 - 1Th 2:19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?
 - Laodicea - Colossians - Lukewarm/told to exchange letters
 - Col 3:2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.



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Kingdom Parable (Mat 13) Counterpart

- Jesus also gave seven parables in Matthew 13
- The themes in each parable seem to broadly parallel the Seven Letters of Revelation
 - Ephesians - Four soils - identify believers from unbelievers
 - Smyrna - Tares and the wheat - Suffering by the children of the wicked one
 - Pergamum - Mustard Seed - Becomes something it was never intended to be; the birds of the air (ministers of Satan) can nest inside
 - Thyatira - Woman with Leaven - Only letter/parable that mentions a woman
 - Sardis - Treasure in the field - a few in Sardis will have treasure in heaven
 - Philadelphia - Pearl of Great Price - A pearl is an item of adornment
 - Laodicea - Dragnet - spew/cast out the unwanted



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Church Age Theory

- Ephesus - Apostolic - 70-170
- Smyrna - Persecuted - 170 -311
 - 311 edict of toleration ended official Roman persecution
- Pergamum - Compromised/Licentious (married to the world) - 313 - 606
 - What Satan couldn't destroy by persecution, he tried to destroy by erosion from within
 - Edict of Milan 313 legalized Christianity - Constantine the Great mixed his prior paganism with his new "faith"
 - Became state religion under Constantine II - went from pacifist to conquering
- Thyatira - Papal (Catholic) Church - 606- Present
 - Boniface II first universal Pope in 606
 - Tolerate Jezebel - pagan/non-biblical practices infiltrate
 - Medieval period
- Sardis - Protestant Church - 1517-Present
 - NAME (deNOMination) that they are alive but are dead
- Philadelphia - Missionary/Faithful - 1750-Present
 - Tends to be "the church I attend"
- Laodicea - Comfortable/Lukewarm - 1900-Present
 - Short sermons in comfy chairs
 - Conforms to society, which is fickle
 - Tends to be "the church anyone I don't agree with attends"



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Conclusion

The seven letters are the most relevant part of Revelation for the 21st-century believer

Align our views with Jesus' expectations

The most important takeaway for each letter is to check our personal behavior (not whether another conjecture is true)



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References

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