

Seven and the Revelation of John

Explanation

The number seven repeatedly occurs in the text of the book of Revelation. To readers living in the first century, an age when the symbolism of numbers was common, the number seven was thought to represent fulfillment or completion. For example, seven days in the week was a complete cycle; the seven wonders of the world embraced the entire scope of human experience; the seven sages were the wisest of all men. In the book of Revelation, it is not improbable that one of the meanings of the repetitive use of the number seven was to assure listeners of the complete and ultimate fulfillment of those prophecies revealed to John. Chart 17-1 lists fourteen occurrences of the number seven in Revelation.

One example of the use of the number seven in the Revelation given to John is the seven churches the text is addressed to. These seven cities in the Roman province of Asia, in modern-day western Turkey, were the most important of western Anatolia. All were near Ephesus, the largest Christian center of Asia, if not of the entire Mediterranean region. From Ephesus, John presided over the church after the death of Peter.

Each branch of the church is criticized for a particular weakness and admonished in various ways. These seven messages at the beginning of the book of Revelation follow a pattern, as chart 17-2 demonstrates. They encourage the early saints to increase in holiness and give promises anticipating the temple themes of the New Jerusalem that appear at the end of the revelation.

Additional information is provided in chart 6-2, “Major Cities of Asia Minor.”

References

- Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).
W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, ed. Mark W. Wilson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994).
Keith Burton, “Numbers,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

The Seven Churches

	DIVINE COMMISSION	RECOGNITION	CRITICISM	ADMONITION
EPHESUS (Rev 2:1–7)	Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write;	I know thy works ...	Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.	Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ...
SMYRNA (Rev 2:8–11)	And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write;	I know thy works ...	and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not ...	be thou faithful unto death ...
PERGAMOS (Rev 2:12–17)	And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write;	I know thy works ...	But I have a few things against thee ...	Repent ...
THYATIRA (Rev 2:18–29)	And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write;	I know thy works ...	Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee ...	But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.
SARDIS (Rev 3:1–6)	And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write;	I know thy works ...	Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee ...	But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.
PHILADELPHIA (Rev 3:7–13)	And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write;	I know thy works ...	Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not ...	hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.
LAODICEA (Rev 3:14–21)	And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write;	I know thy works ...	Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ...	Be zealous therefore, and repent ...

	DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT ABOUT JESUS CHRIST	CALL TO HEAR	SACRED PROMISES
EPHESUS (Rev 2:1–7)	These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;	To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life , which is in the midst of the paradise of God.
SMYRNA (Rev 2:8–11)	These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;	He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death .
PERGAMOS (Rev 2:12–17)	These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;	To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone , and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.
THYATIRA (Rev 2:18–29)	These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.	And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations : And he shall rule them ... even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.
SARDIS (Rev 3:1–6)	These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.	He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment ; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life , but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.
PHILADELPHIA (Rev 3:7–13)	These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; the creation of God; and shutteth and no man openeth;	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.	Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God , and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem ... and I will write upon him my new name .
LAODICEA (Rev 3:14–21)	These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.	To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne , even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.