

Mount Up Wednesday
The Wednesday Night Bible Study Ministry of
East Mount Zion Baptist Church
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The Study of Revelation
Follow Up to the Seven Churches

The scene, thus far, in the book of Revelation, may have seemed tranquil, however in actuality, major events have already taken place. We have been shown a glimpse into the past, from creation to the time of Jesus' first coming (Rev. 12:1-5). Though there were only five brief verses, they made us reflect on thousands of years of history. They took us through the kingdoms, requiring that we infer information that wasn't spelled out in the text. Beginning with the Kingdom of God, which always existed, we recognize that God had already been at work from His throne in the 3rd Heaven. We can say this because "signs "had begun to appear and this could only happen as a result of the handiwork of God.

This first sign, the woman, represents Israel, and her appearance is a symbol that the Kingdoms of this World are in existence (Rev. 12:1). Next, with the revealing of the dragon (Rev 12:3) we saw the Kingdom of Darkness come into being and based on our studies, we know that the Kingdom of Darkness would actually have come before the Kingdoms of the world (Eze. 28:17a). The remainder of the verses in this text, (Rev. 12:4-5) bring us to the point of the gospel, Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Movement is a constant theme in the book of Revelation, therefore as verse five ends in chapter twelve, we are forced to go to chapter one, where we not only find the purpose for which the Revelation is given to us, but we are in a continuation of "time-the thousands of years in which we are currently living." Time began with the creation in Genesis chapter one and continues to today. Time, as we know it, will end with the Rapture.

- *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (I Thes 4:13-18)*
- *Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to*

surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. (1 Thes. 5:1-11)

- *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John (9:4,5)*
- *Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. (Rom. 13:11)*
- *and Christ will shine on you.”*
- *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15, 16)*
- *who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, (2 Tim. 1:9)*

God operates outside of time. He created time and He controls time, therefore He is not bound by time. His **will** has always been that we “make the most of time,” which means living wisely and intentionally for Him. “This is the passion behind all of scripture and it is from this vantage point that the letters to the seven churches were written.

The Lord’s desire is that all would be saved. He desires also that we experience the abundant life that Jesus came to bring. So as we see the letters to the seven churches, we see His admonishments and encouragements to that were all dealing with different circumstances, and all in need of His attention.

One view of looking at the churches is by seeing them all as representing a different “age” in the history of the universal church. Below is a depiction of what that looks like:

	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamum	Thyatira	Sardis	Phil.	Laodicea
Church Age	Apostolic Church	Persecuted Church	Compromised Church	Pagan Church	Dead Church	Missionary Era	Lukewarm Apostate
Reasons	Associated with the early church when the	Linked to the era of intense persecution of	A period where the Church became intertwined	Seen as the “Dark Ages” or the period of Roman	The period of the Reformation	The missionary era of the 18 th and 19 th	The spiritual condition of the modern

	Apostles carried the message.	Christians by Rome	with the state power of Rome.	Catholic dominance and false doctrines prevailed.	and Martin Luther's era.	Centuries, when revivals sparked.	church; the end-time church.
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“The belief that the seven churches addressed in Revelation represent the whole church age is based on seven as the number for “completion” or “whole” in Scripture. It is apparent that the message the Lord conveyed was more than these seven literal churches, many of which did not continue to exist after John received the revelation. They were used as code for the prophecy given to the universal church.

As is typical with biblical prophecy, each church represented a period that would unfold in history. However, these time periods were not consistent or uniform. Some were just a couple of centuries in length and some much longer. A key to seeing these successive ages is to see what happened in a particular period that brought universal change to the church. Also, as with other times in biblical prophecy, these periods sometimes overlapped. There is not always a distinct point at which the change takes place.

Another point some biblical scholars considered is that Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome, the most important churches that gave definition to Christianity, are not mentioned in Revelation. The churches addressed were chosen because of their prophetic significance. As mentioned, although seven literal churches existed when John received the revelation, most were small and seemingly insignificant. Yet they each made a remarkable contribution to the church universal because of how they were used. This should give us the understanding that the Lord loves to use the small, seemingly insignificant person, movement, or church to do great things. So we should treat all as significant, whether they are used this way or not." (Rick Joyner)

Whether you ascribe this theory or not, one thing is clear, chapters one, two and three of the book of Revelation all deal with “time.” And though there are vast years from one letter to the other, the theme of movement is prevalent. In studying this Revelation, it is imperative that we pay attention to the sequence of time from verse to verse and sometimes within a verse. As well as another movement—from kingdom to kingdom.

We are about to experience both as we shift from chapter three to chapter four. Hold on to your seats!