

Revelation Lesson 12
John's Great Commission

Revelation 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Here represents one of the most attacked verses in the whole Book of Revelation. Evidently the devil hates what Jesus said right before John is officially commissioned to write to the 7 Churches. The wording: “*Saying I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last:*” and “*which are in Asia*” are largely removed from most modern-day “bible” translations; See the following 10 samples from some of the most “popular” and so called “most accurate” perversions out there in the market today:

1. **New International Version (NIV)** Rev. 1:11 “which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."
2. **New American Standard Bible (NASB)** Rev. 1:11 ”saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."
3. **New Living Translation (NLT)** Rev. 1:11 “It said, "Write down what you see, and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."
4. **New King James Version (NKJV)** Rev. 1:11 “saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,"^[1] and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia:^[2] to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." [See Footnotes in NKJV: 1.) 1:11 NU-Text and M-Text omit I am through the last and. 2.)NU-Text and M-Text omit which are in Asia.]
5. **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)** Rev. 1:11 “saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."
6. **English Standard Version (ESV)** Rev. 1:11 “saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."
7. **Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)** Rev. 1:11 “saying, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."
8. **New Century Version (NCV)** Rev. 1:11 “The voice said, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."
9. **The Message (MSG)** Rev. 1:11 “"Write what you see into a book. Send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea."
10. **The Voice (VOICE)** Rev. 1:11 “[I am the Alpha and the Omega, the very beginning and the very end.][a] Make a book of what you see, write it down, and send it to the seven churches [which are in Asia][b]: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.” [See Footnotes in VOICE: a.) 1:11 Early manuscripts omit this portion. b.) 1:11 Most manuscripts omit this portion.]

Ask your average “Oh-any-Bible's-fine-for-you-to-use” Pastor about comparing Bible versions (or the Bookstore clerk for that matter) and almost to a man, every one of them will compare the most well-

known Bible verse: John 3:16. I don't do that.

I warn people to stay away from the corruptions of God's Word, then I show them Revelation 1:11 in the King James Bible and then in a modern “Funny Book” and show them Jesus' Words have been removed. Even those Bibles (such as the NKJV, Voice and The Amplified Bible) where Jesus' Words “ain't gone” look at the footnotes! Can't you hear Satan all the way from Genesis? “*Yea hath God said?*” What are those footnotes but whispers of doubt telling the reader “This don't really belong in here but we put it in there to please the King James Bible cheaters who are reading this” and then you have the beginning of confusion – And we know who the author of confusion is! That's a fact Jack! Then the poor confused saint wonders why did they do this? I remind folks that Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 “*But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” So, right here we see a Bible that **has** every recorded Word (and has no doubt stirring footnotes) and a bible that **don't** have all of God's Word (or is telling you that they don't belong there)! The King James is God's perfect preserved Word!

Alright, so why the hate piled on this verse? Again, I have the mind of Christ here within the Bible, but I cannot say I know the Devil's mind. However there are a couple of things we observe in this verse, that I'm sure ol' Slewfoot cannot stand!

Saying – Here John again shows us that Jesus Christ's “great voice” which he described like the “blast of a trumpet” is speaking. This is Christ's second time speaking in this important book. So, John is quoting Christ. I cannot help but stress again, if Jesus told the Devil in Matthew 4:4 that man is to live by “*every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” and we've seen so called “bibles” that have removed the very words that came out of the mouth of God, how in good conscience can I as a Christian continue to carry, read, study, preach and teach from such a “HOLEY” bible? I for one cannot and will not! I don't care if you offer me 1 Million dollars to preach a sermon from the NIV, I ain't gonna use no “bible” that don't have “every word”

I am Alpha and Omega, - Now we covered this material back in Lesson 9 when we covered Revelation 1:8. Note again, that Christ is not THE Alpha and THE Omega, He's Alpha and Omega – there's not another Alpha nor another Omega. There's only ONE Jesus. But watch what happens next!

the first and the last – The meaning here is similar to the previous statement made by John in Revelation 1:8. However this time, instead of being “*the beginning and the ending*” Jesus is here described as “*the first and the last.*” Consider the following related to us from the Jewish Teachers or Rabbis in Albert Barnes' Commentary: “*It was common to use the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet to denote the whole of anything, from beginning to end. Thus, it is said, “Adam transgressed the whole law, from ‘Aleph (א) to Taw (ת).” “Abraham kept the whole law, from ‘Aleph (א) to Taw (ת).”*” Such is the first implicit understanding we should gather from this “title” which also serves as another “built in definition” in the King James Bible that Alpha is the first letter and Omega is the last letter respectively in the Koine Greek alphabet.

Just as Alpha and Omega are a Divine Title or Name of the Lord, so too we find that “The First and The Last” is also. Consider an interesting observation. This “Name” or Title is used 3 times for the Lord in Isaiah. Note: Isaiah 41:4 “*Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.*” Isaiah 44:6 “*Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*” and Isaiah 48:12 “*Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I*

am he; I am the first, I also am the last.”

In relation to this, understand that if you ask Jehovah's Witnesses Who is speaking in those verses from Isaiah, they will say Jehovah is. If there is no other God how then can Jesus declare that He is “also” the first and the last (Revelation 1:11, 17; Rev. 2:8 and Rev. 22:13)? Because He and His Father are One (John 10:30). Jesus' claim to divinity is unimpeachable. There can be no mistaking that Jesus Christ is God. The thing that unnerves Jehovah's Witnesses (and others too) is that since Jehovah (or God) is the first and the last, when then according to Revelation 1:18 when did God or Jehovah die? Having Eternal Life God simply cannot die, for since He is God there can be no doubt that the language here would be naturally understood as implying divinity, and it could be properly applied to no one but the true God and as God, God cannot die for He is Eternal. But, we note, that God came down to earth in the form of a man. That, my beloved as you so well know, obviously was our Saviour Jesus Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses do not like this referencing Jehovah and Jesus as both being “the first and the last.” Well, if somebody does or don't like it, it don't really matter, because this is what God's Word says and that's that. Accept it or reject it.

Think of it like this folks: Jesus either is God in the flesh or not. He cannot be the first thing Jehovah created, just a good teacher/man/holy man or a do-gooder. He's either God or the greatest lying con-artist in the history of mankind. If the Bible declares God is the first and the last and declares Jesus as the first and the last, then God = Jesus. End of story.

By the way, extra rabbit trail (no extra charge) since we're dealing with the Book of Prophecy, recall the Biblical litmus test for a prophet found in Deuteronomy 13:1-3. If the thing spoken doesn't happen, then we are admonished in verse 3 to: “...*not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams...*” Just so you know the Jehovah's Witnesses Watchtower Organization has declared: 1878, 1881, 1906, 1910, 1914, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1921, 1925, 1932, 1935, 1940s, 1951, 1975, 1980, 1986 and by calculations the years 2000 and 2033 must be added though not stated. So we have 18 failed attempts by the Jehovah's Witnesses to set the date for the Return of Christ. (For more on this and to see proof go to: <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/1800s.php>) If they're wrong about this, then I am not to hearken to their words, because the Spirit of Truth is not there. They got this wrong and they definitely have gotten Jesus wrong. May God have mercy on their Souls and save them by the power of the Glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ before it is too late.

We recall that the definite article such as “the” denotes one from among others. Some may describe this as contradictory in its application to God. Such is not the case. Rather what this is pointing to is that in every “first” we experience here on earth, Christ is before it. Likewise, at each “last” here on earth, Christ will be after it. He as God has been before the first “first” and will remain after the last “last.” Among all these, God is singled out as THE first and THE last of all.

Such is the desire of Jews, they want God to be their FIRST and LAST thoughts of each day (according to Deuteronomy 6:7). Hence it is traditional for Jews to say the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41) as their first words when they wake up in the morning, their last words prior to falling asleep at night (Jewish parents teach it to their children to say before they go to sleep at night). Also many Jews attempt to recite it as their final words prior to death. If the Jews who still look for their Saviour to come, recite these words to turn their hearts towards God, what does that say about our first and final thoughts of each day my fellow Christian? Have we made Christ our FIRST and LAST anything today?

and, What thou seest, - Here Christ places the emphasis upon what John sees, but I should stress that

it is not the **only** thing that John is to record, ultimately John will encompass what he sees (Rev. 1:11 our text verse) but also what he feels and hears (Rev. 1:17). In other words he records his Experience overall. This is another reason why I am one of a small band who is adamant that this book was not a mere vision that John the Apostle **only saw** but rather John was a true *Time Traveler* in that when he went to the Throne Room of Heaven (Rev. 4:1) he passed through the time-space continuum to a place where he was **outside of time**.

Allow me to explain: In Genesis 1:14-15 it specifies time is measured by the lights shining upon the Earth. On the 4th Day of Creation the greater light (sun) and the lesser light (moon) and the stars and by interpretation the planets were to measure time upon the earth. In 2 Peter 3:8 we are told: *“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”* This explains that our methodology of reckoning time is absent in Heaven for these two methods, 1 day = 1,000 years and 1,000 years = 1 day cancels out the other. If one were deleted then the reckoning would stand. Time dilation (though very minute) has been established by astronauts in the International Space Station in that they are (ever so slightly) **younger** when they arrive back on Earth after spending 6 months or a year in the Second Heaven or Outer Space. But John did better than that, when by the Power of the Holy Ghost and the Authoritative Order of the Saviour, he was caught up into the Throne-Room of God (Rev. 4:1) he came into a place where there was no time. He had traveled outside of it and was thus by the power of the One Who is the First and the Last, Who sees all our ages, showed and allowed John to experience the future. WOW!

write in a book, - Here is John's personal Commission to write down his experience in a book. Many commentators are quick to add here that what is actually meant is “scroll” for these learned men say that's what John actually said but the King James translators brought this wording up to date. Hogwash! You know why I say this? Turn over to Revelation 6:14 and read with me: *“And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”* So, you think John meant a scroll when he wrote book? I think he means what he says and says what he means.

History records that at the turn of the 1st century AD, a kind of folded parchment notebook called *pugillares membranei* in Latin became commonly used for writing in the Roman Empire. This term was used by both the Classical Latin poet Martial and the apostle Paul. As a matter of fact in the early 2nd century, there is evidence that the codex (the early form of a book)—usually of papyrus—was the preferred format among Christians. Many were found in the library of the Villa of the Papyri, Herculaneum and were buried in 79AD some 17 years prior to Revelation being written. The book or codex as it was called then was indeed in use at the time John wrote Revelation. That being the case, the man understood the difference between a scroll and a book. Jesus told him to write it in a book.

Let's go a step further, he wrote it down in a book alright, that book is known to us today as The Holy Bible. Hence John's Great Commission was to pen the record of future history and to complete the canon of Scripture, thus closing the Word of God to mankind.

and send it unto the seven churches – Anytime we come to prophecy, especially when dealing with historical accounts and events and then their application into the future, we must be reminded that prophecy has (at times) layers. Such characteristics of prophecies can be found numerous times in the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Some applied to David, while simultaneously they also applied to Christ. So I often refer to the Cake of Prophecy, the layer of icing and then the cake itself. To gain the most from such passages we ought to look not just for the icing but the whole slice of cake.

One however must be careful not to “read” into a passage what is not there. So it is that we approach this portion of God's Word with caution.

Thus these 7 churches selected by Christ here in verse 11 are worthy of our close examination, we shall do so once we arrive in Chapters 2 and 3. We will look at each individually then. For there is much to understand from each. Opinion in regards to those layers of prophecy if there are even any here is divided. It is normally agreed that the messages to each church have at least 4 applications (these are outlined by Tim LaHaye):

1. The Seven Churches of John's Day – These were literal churches not merely symbolic.
2. The Seven Basic Divisions of Church History – A study of any history will show divisions, dispensations, eras or ages. Such is the case with Church History. Many Prophecy scholars show a parallel between divisions of church history and the 7 Churches:
 - a) The Church at Ephesus – Apostolic Church (30-100AD)
 - b) The Church at Smyrna – Persecuted Church (100-313AD)
 - c) The Church at Pergamos – State Church (313-590AD)
 - d) The Church at Thyatira – Papal Church (590-1517AD)
 - e) The Church at Sardis – Reformed Church (1517-1790AD)
 - f) The Church at Philadelphia – Missionary Church (1730-1900AD)
 - g) The Church at Laodicea – Apostate Church (1900AD-Present Day)

Elmer Towns is one among many who also describe a link between the Kingdom Parables and the seven periods of Church history. He outlines the parallels in his article *The Seven Churches* in the LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible as follows:

- a) The parable of the sower & the church of Ephesus represent the age of the Apostles.
- b) The parable of the evil seed & the church at Smyrna show the full persecution by the enemy.
- c) The parable of the mustard seed and the church at Pergamos reflect the State Church in 313.
- d) The parable of the leaven & the church at Thyatira are the medieval Church's false teaching.
- e) The parable o/t hid treasure & the church of Sardis show the State Church is alive but dead.
- f) The parable of the pearl & the church at Philadelphia show the ideal Church.
- g) The parable of the dragnet & the church at Laodicea reflect the judgment of God to come.

The theory that the 7 Churches in Revelation 2-3 are not merely 7 literal churches but also point to periods in Church history seems to have been first presented by Victorinus, a Pastor of a church in a town called Pettau (Modern day Ptuj in Slovenia) and was martyred during the Persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Diocletian in 303AD. Victorinus it seems was not a Premillennialist but rather looked to the events of Revelation as having already occurred and thus was a Historicist.

Though this theory has not been accepted or shared by all Christians the overwhelming majority of Bible scholars agree that the idea is sound. Even Phillip Schaff, who wrote *The History of the Christian Church* accepted this viewpoint. Might or the Majority never make a thing right, you and I both know that. I stand with Oliver B. Greene, Tim LaHaye, Dr. Waite and others in this regard, that the prophetic application of the 7 Churches also points us to 7 periods in Church History.

As a matter of fact, I think there is a reason here that we are given the wording “*Alpha and Omega, the first and the last*” because those titles speak of Christ's domain over time and of being over all that exists within time. These titles being stated and then coming on the heels of such a statement is the listing of the 7 churches, I believe there is a connection there showing – ever so slightly – the relation of the 7 Churches from the first of the Church Age to the last of the Church Age.

Oliver B. Greene pointed out that the phrase: “*Let him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the*

churches” is mentioned to each church. In the first 3 churches: Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos the phrase is made (Rev. 2:7; 2:11 and 2:17) **before the promise to the overcomer**. In the last 4 churches: Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea the command to hear “*what the Spirit saith to the churches.*” is given (Rev. 2:29; 3:6; 3:13 and 3:22) **after the promise to the overcomer**. Hence the 7 churches are divided into 2 groups: 3 churches in the first group and 4 churches in the second group. Jesus had no words of reproof or correction for two churches: Smyrna and Philadelphia. He had no words of commendation to the Church at Laodicea.

Finally, if you observe your handout from Lesson 10, you can trace the 7 churches starting from Ephesus and working in a clockwise rotation, you can follow through until you come to Laodicea. Continuing our look at what these Churches represent prophetically:

3. The Seven Types of Churches That Exist Today. Think about it. We read the Book of Romans right? How about 1st Thessalonians? Well, those were letters Paul wrote to those specific churches in the 1st Century located in Rome and Thessalonica. But we still gain information, doctrinal precepts and applications pertinent to us today at Danieltown or Ridge Memorial or any local New Testament Church. Why cannot the messages of Jesus to those seven churches serve as a warning to us today in our present hour? I think we fail to make such applications because of the nature of the Book of Revelation.
4. The Seven Characteristics That Can Exist in Any Church or Christian Today. This stems from a look to the practical application of the characteristics of each Church. As we observe each church, we can also note that they each show 7 methods of attack that Satan makes on individual Christians or the Church. Hence all the more reason we should follow the admonition to wear the whole armour of God and resist the Devil (Ephesians 6:10-18; James 4:7 & 1 Peter 5:9).

While I believe the 7 Churches were literal and that these messages were to warn them, Jesus instructed John not to seal the book so that we all could read it and could understand it. Hence I also think that all 4 points are valid and that even though I think we're living in the Laodicean age we can have characteristics from all of the 7 churches in effect today. All I can say to that is even so come Lord Jesus.

A final thought on these 7 Churches is seen on our handout. Note that there are (recorded in the Bible) by the year 70AD 34 named Churches in 6 Roman Provinces (States we would call them). So why did Christ select only these 7? I will have a little more on this soon in a future lesson. But ultimately, when we get to Heaven, we will fully understand why.

which are in Asia; - We have already partially covered information pertinent to “Asia” back in Lesson 4 (Revelation 1:4). I will give you some background into the history of this province. Antiochus III the Great was the 6th Ruler of the Selucid Empire and was the Great-Great Grandson of Seleucus I Nicator (who was one of Alexander the Great's 4 Generals who received a portion of his Empire). When the Romans crushed his army at the historic battle of Magnesia, in 190 BC Antiochus III gave up Asia. After the Treaty of Apamea (188 BC), the entire territory was surrendered to Rome and placed under the control of a Attalus III who was a puppet or client king at Pergamos. With no apparent heir, Attalus III of Pergamos having been a close ally of Rome, chose to bequeath his kingdom to Rome. Upon Attalus's passing in 133 BC, Manius Aquillius formally established the region as Asia province.

This area was also known as the Anatolia long before that word came to mean the whole of the modern day nation of Turkey. Next Week we will delve into a small description of each of the 7 Cities.