

# John to Seven Churches in Asia

Rev. 1:4  
David Rountree

All seven churches are located in modern-day Turkey previously known as Asia (**Rev. 1:4**).

## Days of Vengeance

1. **Luke 21:20-24.** These are the days of the churches in Asia; the days of the church being persecuted by faithless Israel and Rome (**1:9; 6:2; 13:1-18; 17:1-13**).
2. **Days of enduring.** God rejects his Old Covenant people along with their central city and temple to embrace his New Covenant bride. God promised to use the Roman empire to bring about this judgment destruction (**Luke 21:20-24; Rev.1:7,8; 11:2,7; 17:1-18:24**).
3. **Only preterist** seem to capture the realities of these first century saints.
4. **The words “rapture” or “antichrist”** are never used with the first-century audience in the book of Revelation to offer them hope (a rapture) or to keep them from harm (a persecuting antichrist).

John’s churches were all in the Roman Empire that was not friendly toward Christians until the reign of Constantine in the fourth century. Emperor Nero (reigned 54-68 AD) was the most famous persecutor of Christians blaming them for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD and subjected them to being burned alive.

Notice that the location of all seven churches below are in Rome’s war path to destroy Jerusalem in 70 AD.



## Seven Churches in Asia

What the Spirit says in Revelation he is saying to “churches” (2:7, 11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). The national Old Testament Jewish church does not survive for eternal blessing but is incorporated into the New Testament, new covenant international church.

### 1. Ephesus-Selcuk

Ephesus was the fourth largest city of the Roman empire in the first century. The amphitheater in Ephesus, could hold up to twenty-five thousand people, and was the venue of the angry riot started against Paul and other Christians

by Demetrius, a silversmith (Acts 19:23-41). Since that day it has been the venue for rallies and concerts. Sting, Elton John, and Diana Ross are among those who have performed in it. Over time, Ephesus physically shifted to what is now the small town of Selçuk, as Muslim population—as is 99 percent of Turkey.

## **2. Smyrna-Izmir**

Smyrna (Izmir) is a thriving seaport city, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities of the world, now home to more than four million people. The early church father Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of the apostle John. The modern city of Izmir is filled with Muslims. Maybe only five hundred believers are scattered among about twelve churches. Although many of these churches are historically Catholic or Orthodox, there is a growing number of evangelical Protestant believers as well.

## **3. Pergamum-Bergama**

The ruins of Pergamum sit atop a hill overlooking the modern-day city of Bergama. Pergamum was a principal city of the Roman empire in the first century. Today, few believers and no churches are in Pergamum (Bergama).

## **4. Thyatira-Akhisar**

In the book of Acts, Lydia of Thyatira was a seller of purple cloth and a Christian convert. The ancient coins of Thyatira show a multitude of guilds including linen weavers, bronze workers, potters, and bakers. There is no church in Akhisar and no known believers.

## **5. Sardis-Sart**

Ruins of the largest ancient Jewish synagogue in the world reside here. At the time of John's vision in Revelation, Sardis was one of the wealthiest Roman cities despite having been rebuilt multiple times after devastating earthquakes. There are no known Christians in Sardis (Sart) today.

## **6. Philadelphia-Alaşehir**

We have to look carefully to find any signs of the city's former life. In John's time, this was home city to a synagogue of Satan (Rev.3:9) and to faithful believers who refused to deny Jesus (3:8). Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, is now called Alaşehir, the "city of Allah."

## **7. Laodicea-Denizli**

Ongoing excavations of the city of Laodicea began in 2003. So far, it has uncovered signs of an expansive, wealthy city. Laodicea was built on a major highway and became a commercial and banking center. The churches in Hierapolis, Colossae, and Laodicea were relatively close and seemed to have a relationship with one another (Col. 2:5; 4:16). Laodicea was established along a busy trade route, an ancient path connecting Laodicea to Colossae.

## **What applications can we make?**

- 1. Remember Jesus** – Jesus is described in these letters (**Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:7, 14**). When we study the church and its times in the book of Revelation we must see Jesus, the head of this church who never leaves or forsakes her.
- 2. Beware of falling** – Jesus couldn't make it any clearer: following him requires our all.
- 3. Endure to the end** – The Christian life is one of mountains and valleys.
- 4. Expect God to build his church** – Many Turkish Muslim people are proud of their overthrow of the Christian Byzantine Empire in 1453. Yet God's church is growing.
- 5. We have roots to these seven churches** – What does our being tied to the spread of the gospel through these seven churches do for us or say about our God?
- 6. Jesus means business** – If Jesus warns us, he is coming to help or destroy based on our living, we should see from the example of the seven churches, that Jesus keeps his word.

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*In 2018 Madeline Arthington and a photographer Karrie Sparrow, with the International Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Church, in Central Asia, travel to John's seven churches and recorded their adventure with words and photographs. See: <https://www.imb.org/2018/06/01/what-happened-to-the-seven-churches-of-revelation/>.*