

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

CHAPTERS 2-3

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Welcome to the second part of the study of the Book of Revelation. As we begin, we recommend that you read Chapters 2 and 3. (*Note: All Scriptures are KJV unless otherwise noted.*)

JESUS IDENTIFIES SEVEN CHURCHES

In Revelation Chapter 1, we saw the revelation of Jesus Christ and learned that Jesus is central to the Book of Revelation. As we move into Chapters 2 and 3, we will find the revelation of Christ's churches as Jesus identifies them. These were actual churches in seven real cities located in Asia Minor.

Below is a map of where the seven churches were located in modern-day western Turkey. These churches reveal a progressive picture of the Church from Christ's First Coming to Christ's Second Coming.

Interestingly, the number "7" in the Bible is the number of completion.



SEVEN CHURCHES IN CHURCH HISTORY

As Jesus speaks in Revelation Chapters 2-3, He begins to reveal seven churches, describing them in unmistakable detail and clarity. Each church coincides with a period of church history. These churches, listed below, are historical and prophetic; even their names are prophetic and revealing.

Churches of the Church Age

Church 1. Ephesus - The Church of the First Century

Church 2. Smyrna - The Persecuted Church of the Second and Third Centuries

Church 3. Pergamos - The Church from about 312 A.D. to 500 A.D.

Church 4. Thyatira - The Church of the Dark Ages

Church 5. Sardis - The Church of the Renaissance and the Reformation

Church 6. Philadelphia - The Church of the Open Door for Evangelism and Missions

Church 7. Laodicea - The End-time Church of Apostasy

The Churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea run parallel until the end of the Church Age.

SEVEN STARS ARE SEVEN ANGELS

Revelation 1:19-20 and 2:1 begin to speak of the seven stars and the seven angels. It is important to note that the Greek (angelos) and Hebrew (malak) words for angel can also mean messenger.

19 "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; 20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

Revelation 1:19-20

1 "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

Revelation 2:1

God does not put angels in charge of churches, and He certainly would not address an angel through a letter.

These stars are messengers, as well as servants of God, entrusted with communication from Heaven.

13 "Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger (malak) in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, 'I am with you, saith the Lord.'"

Haggai 1:13

7 "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger (malak) of the Lord of hosts."

Malachi 2:7

25 "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers (angelos), and had sent them out another way?"

James 2:25

In short, the angels in Revelation 2-3 are messengers with a heavenly communication—pastors with a message from Jesus to each church.

SEVEN CHURCHES DEFINED

The seven churches in Asia Minor were chosen because their names contained characteristics of a complete Church Age prophecy. The Church Age reveals who belongs to Christ and who will share eternity with Him in the age to come. Let's look at their characteristics.

Church 1. Ephesus - The Loveless Church

Jesus describes this church as cooling its love and devotion. It is a warning against lessening our love and consecration to God.

Church 2. Smyrna - The Persecuted Church

Smyrna means myrrh. Myrrh is crushed for its fragrance. Jesus had no word of condemnation for this church. It was the only church to have all praise and encouragement.

Smyrna was the church of suffering—terrible suffering. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* tells historically of ten great primitive persecutions of the people of God in the days of pagan Rome.

Jesus said to Smyrna,

8 *“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”*

Revelation 2:8-10

What an unusual coincidence! Jesus mentions ten days of tribulation. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* mentions that there were historically ten periods of extreme suffering for the Church.

Church 3. Pergamos - The Compromising Church

Out of all the seven churches listed in Revelation Chapters 2-3, this church is the one on which I most strongly feel the need to expound in depth.

14 *“But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”*

Revelation 2:14-15 NKJV

Pergamos - The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans

Jesus changed quickly from the Church of Smyrna, the suffering and persecuted Church in which He shows mercy, to Pergamos, where He addressed His anger toward the Church of the establishment.

Who are the Nicolaitans?

God said that He hates their doctrine.

15 *“Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”*

Revelation 2:15 NKJV

The Lord's interest is in the hatred of their doctrine.

“Nicolaitan” comes from a combination of two words: Nikos, meaning one who has conquered, and Laos, meaning people or laity. So, “Nicolaitans” essentially means “conquerors of the people” or “those who conquer the laity.” This is a group or class that exalts themselves above all people—they subjugate people.

The Church of Pergamos proclaimed it had the power to forgive sin and put people in purgatory. They proclaimed the church's priests alone had the power to interpret the Word and will of God. In other words, the priest supplanted the preachers of the Word. Ceremony took the place of the moving of the Holy Spirit. The Church had opened up to the natural order of the world's way of doing things.

The Nicolaitan Church was no longer a company of believers of saved and regenerated souls but a defiled channel through which sacraments and hypothetical salvation were offered. Gone were all the spiritual liberties and endowments of the Christian. Now, the Church was joined to priest-bondage and ceremonialism salvation by ritual. It was now a state-established Church.

Pergamos means "by marriage," reflecting that the Church became married to the world.

4 "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

James 4:4 NKJV

The state-established Church entered the world of being married to the Roman government! Christians were no longer persecuted. They were popular. They became heavy drinkers of the wine of the world of religion and ceremonialism.

The priests of Jupiter, Juno, Venus, and Adonis had all been paid by Caesar, but now their idol-worshipping temples had been turned into churches. They said, "*We no longer worship those pagan idols.*" But they set up idols of saints with the same rituals, bowing down the same way and having temples with the same ceremonies.

Idols were now named after Christian saints they felt were worthy of worship. They made statues of saints. They had them inscribed on their buildings. Their calendars contained certain days to pray to certain saints for certain results.

Temples echoed with sounds of "high church." Persecution was transformed into plush silk, expensive robes, and headdresses of an imperial palace setting.

Constantine supposedly saw a sign in the sky—a shrewd political move for power politics. He declared Christianity to be the state religion.

Was Constantine really saved?

Let's look and see:

- He kept his heathen and pagan superstitions—all of them.
- He planned the worship of Christ to be mixed with the worship of Apollo.
- He had coins minted with a picture of Apollo and the name of Christ.
- He came before the people dressed in gold, studded with gems, and had a golden throne.
- All people would stand in astute reverence.

Thus arose the hierarchy of the Church... "princes of the church." These priest-princes would hear confessions, forgive sins, and offer sacramental salvation (water and wine), and they held great power over the people. This was what God said was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which He hates.

Church 4. Thyatira - The Corrupt Church

The Church became like a whore (a harlot). It continually committed adultery with the nations of the earth in costumes, chains of gold, rituals, and ceremonies. The nations were locked into her seducing religious charms, and only a remnant remained. Faithful servants were put to death (50 million, according to history). Jesus saw it all and prophesied it.

Church 5. Sardis - The Dead Church Resulting in Reformation

There was now reformation out of a dead church system. The Church of Sardis rose up and came out of the dead system of Pergamos and the whore system of Thyatira.

Sardis represents the Church during the Reformation when protestants came out from under the false religious system. Martin Luther nailed his theses to the door of the church, and Christians came out from the whore system of Pergamos and Thyatira. It was the perfect setup for the true Church to emerge again with an open door to evangelize in freedom with missionary endeavors.

America was birthed in 1776 and has been used mightily in missions in addition to experiencing a Great Awakening.

Church 6. Philadelphia - The Faithful Church

Philadelphia was the Church of the Open Door.

Revivals sprang up (Azusa and healing revivals). Missions and world evangelism became focuses.

Church 7. Laodicea - The Apostate Church

Laodicea was the lukewarm church, a nauseating apostate church. This church is rich, and its riches increase its wealth. It had no need for anything.

To the Laodicean Church, Jesus said, *"You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."*

The Laodicean Church period is the only period where Christ insults and scathingly rebukes the Church by essentially saying, *"You make Me sick to my stomach. I will spew you out of my mouth."*

After the 7th church, Laodicea, the Church Age is finished and set aside.

SEVEN REWARDS CHRIST GIVES

Now, there are seven rewards that Christ gives to the remnants of the churches.

Ephesus - The Tree of Life

7 "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."

Revelation 2:7

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned. They were excommunicated from the Garden. They lost access to the Tree of Life.

Jesus never wanted us to lose access to that important tree, but sin took it away from us. God brought it to Heaven and translated it into Paradise. He is now keeping it there for us. In Heaven, we remain youthful, vigorous, life-filled, and alive forever and ever.

22 *“And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth secondhand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: **23** Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. **24** So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”*

Genesis 3:22-24

Smyrna - Escapes the Second Death

Jesus said to the persecuted Church of Smyrna that He will cancel the effects of the second death.

11 *“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.”*

Revelation 2:11

Death is an enemy that was never intended for man. It came from our first parents' sin and was never in God's plan. Jesus is saying to His Church that the second death will not affect those who accept, serve, and trust Him.

The second death is a spiritual death. We die physically, but the second death is spiritual. Not being hurt by the second death is the ability to live forever. With physical death, we are raised from death in resurrection. When spiritual death is done away with, we live forever. It is a reward to the faithful.

Pergamos - Hidden Manna, a White Stone, and a New Name

17 *“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.”*

Revelation 2:17

God fed them with manna from Heaven.

God said man was cursed to eat bread by his sweat (work). Thistles and thorns came from the ground.

19 *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”*

Genesis 3:19

In Heaven, there is no more curse. Harvest is never for thorns, briars, and brambles. We have heavenly manna.

We also see the mention of a white stone and a new name. This new name is given to us by God.

Our names are written on our High Priest Jesus' heart, on His breast. We are cared for in a beautiful world, as Jesus loves and keeps us.

Thyatira - Power over Nations

26 *“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: **27** And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. **28** And I will give him the morning star. **29** He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*

Revelation 2:26-29

This is the promise to the Church that we shall rule and reign with Christ in glory. The world has never known righteous rule. It had seasons of peace for a little while under David and Solomon, where they conquered their foes and enemies, but it was short-lived.

Here, we see Jesus giving us power over nations: The power to rule and reign with Jesus triumphantly.

Sardis - White Raiment and Name in the Book of Life

5 *“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.”*

Revelation 3:5

Clothed in white raiment is a reference to the resurrection of the dead. Jesus is giving us a pure, white, sinless character in Glory. In the life to come, we are given a pure, white, spotless, and stainless character. God will make us anew.

In Heaven, we will have restored what we lost here on Earth: The weak will be made strong, and the sick and infirmed will be made well. The blind will see. The dying will be given life.

Philadelphia - Pillar in the Temple and the Name of God

12 *“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, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”*

Revelation 3:12

We will have a position and place of assignment in the beautiful Holy City, the new Jerusalem. It will be such a blessed position. There will be assignments in this vast city. Some will rule over ten cities, some five cities. All are going to be busy serving. What we do now will determine many eternal things.

12 *“He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. **13** And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. **14** But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, we will not have this man to reign over us. **15** And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. **16** Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. **17** And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. **18** And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. **9** And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.”*

Luke 19:12-19

Laodicea - Sit with Christ on His Throne

This is a depiction of the highest reward one can think of.

21 "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."

Revelation 3:21

SUPREME COURT IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Imagine visiting Washington, D.C., and going to the Supreme Court building—such a stately and intimidating place. Now, imagine being a justice on the Supreme Court, the highest court in the United States, and being chosen to judge our nation's most significant and complicated issues. It is a place of honor.

Just think... We deserve dust and ashes, but we will be exalted to be fellow heirs with Jesus, helping Him rule His Kingdom and sitting with Him on His throne. We are even going to judge angels.

1 "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?"

I Corinthians 6:1-3 NKJV

THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S REWARDS

We have read and heard of the rewards that Jesus promised the seven churches. Jesus is establishing an expectation of what we will experience in Heaven! First, He promised a crown of life; our hands will reach out to receive it.

There are promises made by Jesus Himself that will never fail. God has them laid up for the saints of God.

Like Moses and Abraham, each of the seven churches in Revelation had a profound assurance that these rewards were real.

Moses

24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 5 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Hebrews 11:24-26

Moses believed there was something greater and finer for him to rule over than the dirty and dingy Egypt. Although it was the greatest civilized empire of the day, he turned it down. Moses had respect for a greater reward.

Abraham

8 *“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. **9** By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: **10** For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”*

Hebrews 11:8-10

Abraham confessed he was a pilgrim and stranger on the earth. But God had prepared a heavenly eternal city for him.

KEPT FROM TRIBULATION (HOUR OF TRIAL)

As we close our review of Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, let's look at a promise made by Jesus to the faithful Church of Philadelphia:

10 *“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. **11** Behold, I am coming quickly. Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”*

Revelation 3:10-11 NKJV

Jesus will translate us out before the Tribulation period that comes upon the whole world. He will take us up secretly before the great trial breaks forth upon the entire world. Great judgments and terrible calamities will come upon the whole earth and the unbelieving world.

HE THAT OVERCOMES

To finish, notice that the rewards are linked with those who overcome.

Ephesus

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