

REVELATION 2-3

Judgment begins at “the house of God” (1 Pet. 4:17), so Jesus deals with the seven churches before He deals with the lost world. These churches illustrate the good and the bad in churches everywhere and in every age. If you were looking for a church to join, which of these seven would you select and why?

Ephesus (2:1-7). There is so much good in this church that we are surprised to discover they had left (not lost) their first love. The honeymoon was over (Jer. 2:2)! No amount of separation, sacrifice, or service can make up for your lack of love toward the Lord. The word *Nicolaitans* means “conquer the people.” Apparently a group in the church lorded it over the people and promoted a separation of “clergy” and “laity.” (See Matt. 21:20-27; 23:1-12.)

Smyrna (2:8-11). The name *Smyrna* comes from “myrrh,” which is a bitter herb, a suitable name for a church facing persecution. Would the believers be *fearful* or *faithful* (v. 10)? Suffering can enrich us, even if we think we are poor; and what people think is riches might turn out to be poverty (3:17)! What difference does it make if people slander you so long as you have the Lord’s approval?

Pergamos (2:12-17). These believers held to the faith even when it might have cost them their lives. But they were too tolerant of false doctrine and were in danger of having the Lord declare war on the church. Balaam convinced Israel to compromise with their unbelieving neighbors, disobey the Lord, and indulge in immorality (Num. 22-24). Being willing to die for the faith is no substitute for living the faith.

Thyatira (2:18-29). Verse 19 gives you the impression that all is well in the church, but keep reading! Like the saints in Pergamos, the believers in Thyatira tolerated sin in the church. Idolatry and immorality usually go together, and Jezebel personifies both (1 Kings 16:29-34; 21; 2 Kings 9:30-37). Not everybody in the fellowship was guilty of sin, and the Lord did not warn them. Instead, He encouraged them to hold to the truth and be faithful.

Sardis (3:1-6). This church had a great reputation, but close examination showed that its ministry did not live up to its name. In fact, the church was ready to die! What was the cause? Many of the people were defiling themselves by compromising with sin (2 Cor. 6:14-18; James 1:27). The “Book of Life” contains the names of all living persons; and when a person dies without Christ, the name is blotted out. Believers have their names in the Lamb’s Book of Life and can never be blotted out.

Philadelphia (3:7-13). The name means “brotherly love,” and Jesus had a special love for these people (v. 9). Weak as they were, they were given an open door of service; and the Lord urged them to take advantage of it. When God opens a door for you, nobody can shut it; but you can ignore or neglect it.

Laodicea (3:14-22). This church did not know how bad off it was! It was a working church, but its service was lukewarm. The members lacked spiritual enthusiasm. It was a wealthy church, but it was really poor—and did not know its own sad condition. Worst of all, the Lord was *outside the church trying to get in!* If only one member would yield to Him, the church could be changed.

God’s people must be open and honest with the Lord and humbly submit to His spiritual diagnosis. No church or Christian is so far gone that He cannot bring renewal, but we must be willing to repent and return to Him.

REVELATION 4

A door (1). God will one day open the door, the trumpet will sound, and God’s people will be called to heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Meanwhile, we must take advantage of the open door of service that He gives us (3:8).

A throne (2, 4–5). Revelation is the book of the throne. John saw God the Father on the throne and was so overwhelmed that he had to refer to precious stones to describe what he beheld. Satan may have his throne on earth (2:13), but God’s throne in heaven rules over all and will not be defeated.

A rainbow (3). This emerald rainbow was *around* the throne, a complete circle and not just an arc. It pictures the grace of God (Gen. 9:11–17). On earth, we see the rainbow *after* the storm; but John saw it *before* the storm of judgment came. God gives His people His gracious promise, and they need not fear the coming storm (3:10; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:8).

A choir (6–11). The living creatures represent creation praising the Creator (Gen. 1:28–31), and the elders represent God’s people worshiping Him. When you lose the wonder of the Creator, you cease to become a good steward of the creation (11:18). All of creation praises the Lord while sinful man praises himself and ignores his Creator.

REVELATION 5

The scroll (1) represents the title deed to creation, for Jesus Christ alone is the rightful Heir (Ps. 2:8; Heb. 1:2). Satan offered Him the whole world in return for one act of worship (Matt. 4:8–10), but Jesus won the right to receive the scroll when He gave Himself on the cross. Have you placed the scroll of your life in His hands?

The Lamb (5–6) is Jesus Christ who was slain as a sacrifice for sin (1 Pet. 1:18–20); He is both Lamb (John 1:29) and Lion (Gen. 49:8–10), the Savior and the Sovereign. He is also the Root of David, for He existed before David and brought David’s kingly line into being. As Lamb, Jesus offers salvation; as Lion, He judges those who reject Him. Marvel at the many aspects of His person and work!

The incense (8) represents prayer (Ps. 141:1–3). For centuries, God’s people have been praying, “Thy kingdom come”; and those prayers are about to be fulfilled. Saints on earth do not pray to or through the saints now in heaven; our praying is to the Father and through the Son. But the prayers of God’s people play a vital part in God’s governing of the world.

The worship (9–14). He is worthy of our worship, not only because He is Creator (chap. 4) but even more because He is our Redeemer. See how the circle of praise grows until every creature worships Him. Heaven is a place of worship, so begin to get ready now to join in the praise!

REVELATION 6

The world ruler (Antichrist) begins his conquest of the nations by peacefully taking control (vv. 1–2). He has a weapon but no ammunition; and men are saying, “Peace and safety!” (1 Thess. 5:1–3). Satan usually declares peace before he declares war, so beware his offers.

Soon the world is at war (vv. 3–4), and suffering results from famine and plagues (vv. 5–8) and cosmic disturbances (vv. 12–17). Jesus said these things would happen (Matt. 24:4–13).

The martyrs are seen “under the altar” because that is where the blood was placed (Lev. 4:7; 17:11). Death for Jesus’ sake is not waste; it is sacrifice and worship. They pray not for personal vengeance but for God’s glorification and vindication. When it appears that God is not working as you think He should, be patient and let Him do His will in His time.

REVELATION 7

When the storm starts to get worse, John sees two groups of people and takes courage. Why? Because he realizes that God is at work even in the midst of tribulation.

God has His servants who will proclaim His message and honor His name (vv. 1–8). We are not told what these sealed Jews will do, but we assume they will point people to the Lord. Times of tribulation give opportunities for witness (Matt. 24:14).

Apparently the 144,000 Jews will be sealed at the beginning of the Tribulation; and at the end, a great multitude of saved Gentiles will be seen (vv. 9–17). The day of the Lord will bring judgment and destruction, and it will also result in the saving of people. In wrath, God remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2). When you experience trials, ask God to use you to win others to the Savior even in the midst of troubles.

Trials do not last forever. One day, you will come out of tribulation and experience the gracious comforts of God. Wait and be faithful, and He will see you through.

REVELATION 8–9

Incense at the altar (8:1–4). The silence in heaven is the lull before the storm (Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7). Even the heavenly hosts stop their worship as they contemplate the awesome judgments about to fall. But those judgments are the answer to the saints' prayers (5:8), "Thy kingdom come!" Do not stop praying!

Fire from the altar (8:5–9:12). The world will not come to the altar for forgiveness (9:21), so the altar sends forth judgment. Heaven and earth are struck as the trumpets sound, and the bottomless pit belches out demonic creatures to torment mankind. Rather than repent, people will try to commit suicide; but they will not be able to die (9:6). They will continue in their sins: occult practices, murder, immorality, and thievery (9:20–21), all of which sound very contemporary.

A voice from the altar (9:13–21). God has His legions ready to be released at the right time, and torment will be replaced by death. Men have wanted to die, so God will send His servants to do the job. One-third of mankind will be killed (9:15), which means that half of the world's population is now dead (6:8)! The world must make a choice: life or death (Deut. 30:19). Are you offering them the gift of life in Jesus Christ?

¹Wiersbe, W. W. 1997, c1991. *With the word Bible commentary* . Thomas Nelson: Nashville