

The Seven Churches of Revelation (2:1-3:22)
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I. THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION. The church order in Revelation is an ancient travel route beginning at port of Ephesus & ending at Laodicea.

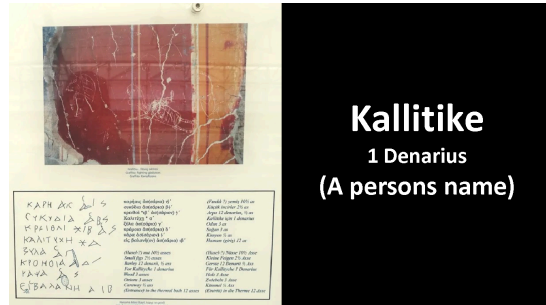
- A. **Ephesus:** Church that abandoned their first love (**Rev. 2:1-7**)
- B. **Smyrna:** Church that was faithful in Persecution (**Rev. 2:8-11**)
- C. **Pergamum:** Church that compromised beliefs. (**Rev. 2:12-17**)
- D. **Thyatira:** church that tolerates false Prophets (**Rev. 2:18-19**).
- E. **Sardis:** The church that was Spiritually Dead (**Rev. 3:1-6**).
- F. **Philadelphia:** The church that Patiently endured (**Rev. 3:7-13**).
- G. **Laodicea:** Church that was active without use (**Rev. 3:14-22**)



II. THE DISPENSATIONAL VIEW

A. **Beliefs:** Dispensational Theology is a relatively new view, about 200 years old, which divides history into multiple eras called "dispensations." This view says in each dispensation, God interacts with His chosen people, the Jewish people, in different ways. The seven churches in Revelation are seen as representing seven distinct ages in human history, culminating in a new heaven and earth. This is a type of "Futuristic" view of Revelation.

B. Dispensational (Futurist) Divisions of History:



1. **Ephesus - Apostolic Church (AD 30-100)** Early Christian church under the apostles characterized by missionary work and spreading the gospel.
2. **Smyrna - Persecuted Church (AD 100-313)** Era of Roman persecution, including notable events such as the Martyrdom of Polycarp and many other early Christians.
3. **Pergamum - Compromising Church (AD 313-590)** Period following the Edict of Milan, where Christianity was legalized by Constantine, leading to the compromises with pagan practices.

4. **Thyatira - Corrupt Church (AD 590-1517)** The Medieval Church, dominated by the rise of the Pope and the Catholic church, marked by widespread corruption and the sale of indulgences.
5. **Sardis - Dead Church (AD 1517-1700)** The Reformation and post reformation period, where the Protestant Reformation led by figures like Martin Luther sought to reform the church, yet some movements became spiritually lifeless over time.
6. **Philadelphia - Missionary Church (AD 1700-1900)** The Great Awakening and subsequent missionary movements, marked by a revival of evangelism and global missionary work.
7. **Laodicea - Lukewarm Church (AD 1900-present)** Modern era characterized by spiritual lukewarmness, materialism, and a general decline in doctrinal purity and fervor.

C. Some Problems with this view:

1. There have been more people martyred for Christ in the last 100 years than all centuries combined. That makes it difficult to see Smyrna as an age in early church history.
2. Many of the evils and shortcomings in these churches are present in history and churches today.¹
3. Revelation is the combination of three Genre's, Apocalyptic Literature, Prophecy and An Epistle to churches in the Asia Minor region. The genre determines the approach to how the section is seen.

a. **Revelation 1:4** John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come



¹ John F. Walvoord *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1966. Pg. 51.

- b. **Revelation 22:20** He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! ²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

III. THE CHURCHES AND CHRIST'S MESSAGE:

- A. The letters are reproof, rebuke and reassurance from Jesus.²
 B. Christ encourages the churches to witness, warns them against compromise, and exhorts them to overcome compromise in order to inherit eternal life.³
 C. Greco-Roman World & Sexual unrestraint. Hold to the teachings of Balaam (Revelation 2:14 cf. Jude 11, 2 Peter 2:15 Numbers 22-24), Tolerate Jezabel (Revelation 2:20 cf. 1 Kings 16:31; ch 18-21 & 2 Kings 9)

IV. REPEATED PHRASES IN THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

A. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."



1. Written 7 times (**Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22**).
2. The Old Testament is alluded to over 400 times in Revelation. These people were familiar with the Old Testament.
3. The concept goes far beyond auditory hearing. In Judaism and early Christianity, it was equivalent to obedience as well. To hear carried with it the unspoken expectation to obey. Jesus is expecting his church to listen, hear and respond to his instruction and correction with total and instant obedience.
4. **Revelation 3:19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.
5. The corrective Christ is a loving Lord and forgiving father and his correction is a sign of our connection

6. **Hebrews 12:6** Because the Lord disciplines the ones he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his sons.

B. "I know your deeds"

1. Written 7 times (**Revelation 2:2, 2:9, 2:13, 2:19, 3:1, 3:8, 3:15**).
2. The Lord wants you to know “He Knows”.
3. Another Jewish concept embedded in Revelation.
4. **“To Know”** means to understand through experience.
 - a. “Adam knew Eve” **Genesis 4:1**
 - b. “Know the LORD” **Jeremiah 31:34**
 - c. “Before I formed you in your mother’s womb, I knew you.” **Jeremiah 1:15**

5. Jesus knows, Jesus has seen, Jesus has witnessed, Jesus has encountered your “good deeds”

C. To the one who Overcomes νικῶ Literally “victorious”.

1. Written 7 times (**Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21**).
2. **Nike:** The Winged personification of “victory”
3. **Athena Nike:** Celebrating Athens victories over Persia and other enemies.
4. **The Olympic Crowns:** Vines and vegetation that withered or “Perished”
5. **Leocadia:** **Revelation 3:21** The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.
 - a. **Co-regency’s of Rome** always failed.
 - i. **Year of the Four Caesars:** In 12 months of 68-69 A.D. it was called “The year of the 4 Caesars” 68-69 AD Servius Sulpicius Galba, Marcus Silvius Otho, Aulus Vitellius and Titus Flavius Vespasianus.
 - ii. **Tetrarchy:** Four men used to rule over the Roman Empire (Failed Miserably)
6. **Philadelphia:** **Revelation 3:11** “I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.”

² Walvoord, pg. 53.

³ G.K. Beale & Davide Campbell *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 2005. Pg.53.