

REVELATION
REVELATION
REVELATION

REVELATION REVELATION REVELATION

**A LETTER TO THE
SEVEN CHURCHES**



SHADOWHILLS.ORG

REVELATION
REVELATION
REVELATION

This booklet is designed to lead you or your group deeper into the Revelation series. Use this guide as an individual, with your family or group of friends at a coffee shop, or your Community Group.

REVELATION

Main Text: Revelation 2-3

The book of Revelation is a complex but beautiful book with rich prophetic and apocalyptic content designed to comfort and inject courage into the people of God, not to cause fear. Contextually, the church is facing extreme persecution and John who is the writer of this letter is unpacking vivid imagery that show us that things are not what they seem or more than they seem. However, it's also a book of consummation showing us that in the end, Jesus wins.

In these next 7 weeks, we'll unpack John's vision relating to the 7 churches in Asia and the different messages that Jesus reveals regarding each one. While the book is directed at 7 churches, historically, we know that there are more than 7 churches that are preaching the gospel and reaching people during that time. However, 7 is the number in Revelation that represents completion meaning that this is a Word for all of the churches. Our hope is that through this series, the local church will be inspired and encouraged to live faithful for Jesus in this current cultural moment.

Brief Historical Background: The church is facing extreme persecution and has been for three decades. Some important Christian leaders in the church are being martyred. In response, the church is devastated to see what's happening. John who is one of the leaders is banished to the island of Patmos where he pens what he begins to see in his vision. Scholars believe that the letter was written around AD 96.

Important Thoughts and Interpretations: When studying Revelation, a helpful thought to keep in mind is that the book cannot mean to us what it did not mean to them.

REVELATION

DRAWS OUT THREE THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Revelation is a **letter**.

Revelation is written for us but not to us. It's crucial for us to refrain from always reading ourselves into the text.

Revelation is a **prophecy**.

Revelation is a prophecy. It's not only about what's going to happen in the future, it's also about what the Lord is saying to the church in that time. Revelation is not linear, nor is it chronological. The question we should be asking is not what happens next in the book, but rather what does John see next.

Revelation is an **apocalypse**.

Apocalypse means an unveiling created to show us what's really going on in the unseen. In apocalyptic literature, people are represented as animals, historical events, and natural phenomena along with colors and numbers that have meaning. Apocalyptic imagery is meant to inform our minds and ignite our spirits as our mind is informed.

As we dive into the seven churches, we'll see that the message to these churches touches upon a myriad of themes—faithfulness, endurance, perseverance, repentance, and the consequences of compromise.



READING PLAN

We have created a reading plan that helps you follow along with us as we navigate through the 7 Churches in Revelation. Our desire is that you will read ahead on your own to better prepare yourself each week as you attend church.

Week 1: Read Revelation 2:1-7- The Church in Ephesus

Key Themes: Abandoning the love that they once had

Week 2: Read Revelation 2:8-11- The Church in Smyrna

Key Themes: Fear; Suffering

Week 3: Read Revelation 2:12-17- The Church in Pergamum

Key Themes: False worship

Week 4: Read Revelation 2:18-29- The Church in Thyatira

Key Themes: Sexual sin

Week 5: Read Revelation 3:1-6- The Church in Sardis

Key Themes: Superficial faith

Week 6: Read Revelation 3:7-13- The Church in Philadelphia

Key Themes: Persevering, Keeping God's commands

Week 7: Read Revelation 3:14-22- The Church in Laodicea

Key Themes: Lukewarm; Apathy

THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

REVELATION 2:1-7

Action Step | The Church in Ephesus lost sight of their first love. Reflect on your motivation as a follower of Jesus. Do you still serve out of an overflow of what God has done for you? Create habits or practices in your life to prioritize love for God above everything else.

Discussion Questions

Begin by discussing the historical and cultural context of the city of Ephesus. How might the city's characteristics influence the challenges and strengths of the church in Ephesus?

Examine the rebuke concerning the loss of their first love. What does "first love" signify in the Christian context?

How can a diligent and hardworking church still be at risk of losing its first love?

Reflect on the call to repentance in Revelation 2:5. What practical steps can a church take to return to its first love?

Compare the challenges faced by the church in Ephesus to contemporary churches. In what ways do churches today struggle with maintaining a fervent love for Christ amidst busyness and service?

Share personal strategies for keeping one's love for Christ vibrant and central in the midst of daily responsibilities.

Take time to engage in prayer. Pray for each other, your church, and personal renewal in your love for Christ.

SERMON NOTES

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

REVELATION 2:8-11

Action Step | Many of us live in fear and it stops us from living our full potential as Jesus followers. As the Church of Smyrna awaits persecution Jesus reminds them to persevere and to press into the faith that they have in Jesus. What parts of your life have you given over to fear? Make it a priority this week to create habits in your life such as Bible study, prayer, and counsel to overcome your fear with God's promised protection.

Discussion Questions

Begin by discussing the historical context of the city of Smyrna. How might the socio-political environment of Smyrna have influenced the challenges faced by the church?

Reflect on the attributes of Christ revealed in this passage. How does His identity as the "First and the Last" and the One who "died and came to life" provide comfort and encouragement to the persecuted church?

Discuss the challenges faced by the believers in Smyrna, particularly the persecution mentioned in the passage.

Explore Jesus' call to not fear what they are about to suffer and what he promises if they endure. How might forewarning impact the resilience and preparation of believers in the face of impending trials?

Compare the experiences of the church in Smyrna to the challenges faced by Christians today. In what ways does this passage offer encouragement and guidance for contemporary believers enduring persecution or difficulties in their faith?

Discuss practical ways believers can overcome challenges and remain faithful in the midst of adversity.

Take time to engage in prayer, lifting up any specific challenges group members may be facing. Ask God to remind you in seasons of fear or despair that Jesus has already won the battle for us.

SERMON NOTES

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

REVELATION 2:12-17

Action Step | Jesus rebukes the church concerning the toleration of those promoting compromise with pagan practices, urging believers to remain faithful in the face of external pressures. Think of ways that you might grapple with the tension between remaining faithful and accommodating cultural or societal pressures. Someone once said that “anything you place before God becomes an idol.” Identify those things and turn to Jesus as the only reason for satisfaction and hope.

Discussion Questions

Begin by discussing the historical and cultural context of Pergamum. How might the prevalent idolatry and political significance of the city have influenced the challenges faced by the church?

Reflect on the image of Christ introduced as the One with the sharp two-edged sword. How does this symbol represent both judgment and discernment, and what implications does it have for the church in Pergamum?

Dive into the specific issues of compromise mentioned in the passage. How does the church in Pergamum struggle with accommodating false teachings and practices?

Explore the urgency in Christ's call to repentance. What does it mean for a church or an individual believer to repent in the context of compromising beliefs?

Compare the challenges faced by the church in Pergamum to contemporary issues of compromise within the Church. In what ways do believers today grapple with the tension between remaining faithful and accommodating cultural or societal pressures?

Take time to engage in prayer, asking for God's guidance and strength to resist compromise and to uphold biblical truths, even in the face of external pressures.

SERMON NOTES

THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

REVELATION 2:18-29

Action Step | The church in Thyatira had a tolerance issue. Sexual sin was the norm and even accepted within the church. This is another reminder that every human is broken and in need of a realignment back with the gospel. Jesus' stern call to repent is a call for all of us. What are things in your life that make it easy for you to fall into sexual sin or temptation? Identify and eliminate them. Make it a priority to find someone spiritually mature to keep you accountable.

Discussion Questions

Begin by discussing the historical and cultural context of Thyatira. How might the economic and social environment of the city have influenced the challenges faced by the church?

Discuss the symbolism of "Jezebel" in this passage, representing false teachings and immoral practices. How can the church discern and address sin within its midst without compromising love and grace?

Notice Jesus' call to repentance for those who have tolerated sexual sin or who are living in it. What does this reveal about the balance between grace and accountability within the Church?

Discuss instances in which tolerance might lead to compromising essential Christian values.

Discuss the call to "hold fast" and the promise to those who overcome. How can believers actively guard against the dangers of tolerance while maintaining love and unity within the church?

Explore the promises given to those who remain faithful in Thyatira. How do these promises inspire hope and assurance for believers facing challenges and temptations?

Take time to engage in prayer. Ask for God's guidance, discernment, wisdom, and the strength to remain faithful in the face of temptation.

SERMON NOTES

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

REVELATION 3:1-6

Action Step | The church in Sardis struggled with an outward appearance of righteousness. It was all about how they looked on the outside and Jesus called their faith dead. Have you become overfamiliar with Jesus? Actively listen to the Holy Spirit this week and evaluate ways in which your faith has become dead. Maybe you need to prioritize sharing your faith or serving in the local church.

Discussion Questions

What characteristics of the church in Sardis are highlighted in Revelation 3:1-6, and how do they relate to the overall message?

In verse 2, the passage talks about works that are incomplete in the sight of God. How can we discern whether our actions are genuinely aligned with God's will and not just outward displays?

According to Revelation 3:3, what role does repentance play in the life of a believer, and how can we cultivate a spirit of repentance in our small group?

In verse 6, the passage mentions those who have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. How can we actively listen to the Holy Spirit in our lives and collectively as a small group?

How can the lessons from the church in Sardis in Revelation 3:1-6 be applied to our present-day church communities and individual walks of faith?

Take time to respond in prayer. Ask God to draw out the areas in your life where you have become complacent in your faith and ask him to give you a renewed sense of love for others.

SERMON NOTES

THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

REVELATION 3:7-13

Action Step | Take time to identify and meditate on the "open doors" that God may be presenting in your life this week. Consider areas where you can actively participate in God's work and align your actions with His purpose.

Discussion Questions

In Revelation 3:7-13, the church in Philadelphia is commended for their faithfulness. What specific qualities or actions of this church stand out to you, and how can we incorporate them into our own lives and group dynamics?

The passage mentions an "open door" that no one can shut. How can we discern and embrace the opportunities that God presents in our lives? Share instances where you have witnessed God opening doors.

Consider the promise of protection for the faithful in Philadelphia. How does the assurance of God's protection impact our perspective on facing challenges and opposition in our lives and as a community?

Reflect on the idea of enduring patiently. In what ways can we cultivate patience in our journey of faith individually and collectively, especially when faced with difficulties or delays?

In verse 11, there is a call to "hold fast" to what we have. How can we create a culture of mutual accountability within our small group to help each member hold fast to their faith and commitments?

Take a moment to pray. Ask God to give you opportunities to practice your faith and thank him for using you to further his kingdom.

SERMON NOTES

THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

REVELATION 3:14-22

Action Step | Commit to a thorough self-examination of your spiritual condition. Identify areas of spiritual lukewarmness, complacency, or self-sufficiency that may hinder your relationship with God. Evaluate whether your faith is just a checklist or if its genuine.

Discussion Questions

Laodicea is described as lukewarm in Revelation 3:14-22. In what ways can spiritual lukewarmness manifest in our lives today, and how can we guard against it individually and as a small group?

Reflect on the image of Jesus standing at the door and knocking in verse 20. How can we actively open the door of our hearts to Christ on a daily basis, and what impact does this invitation have on our relationship with Him?

The Laodicean church is rebuked for its self-sufficiency. How can we cultivate a humble dependence on God in our personal lives and as a small group, seeking His guidance and strength in all aspects?

Discuss the concept of discipline and rebuke mentioned in verse 19. How can we approach accountability and correction within our small group in a loving and supportive manner, fostering growth and spiritual maturity?

Consider the call to be zealous and repent in verse 19. How can we encourage and support one another in maintaining a fervent and repentant spirit, acknowledging that growth in our faith is an ongoing process?

The passage concludes with a promise to the one who overcomes. What does overcoming look like in the context of the challenges presented to the Laodicean church, and how can we encourage each other to persevere in our faith journeys?

Take time to respond in prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to reignite your passion for Christ and to create a habit of repentance.

SERMON NOTES

HELPFUL READING & RESOURCES

Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation by Darrell W. Johnson

Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation by Nancy Guthrie

Revelation Sermon Series: The Village Church, Flower Mound, TX

The Book of Revelation: bibleproject.com



 @thehillslv  @shadowhillschurch