

# Introduction to the Seven Churches

5/3/20

In the Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3) the Apostle John wrote to seven prominent first century churches. These seven churches contained typical or representative qualities of both obedience and disobedience that are a constant reminder to all churches throughout every age ( Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; esp. Revelation 2:23). Their order (Revelation 1:11; 2-3) reflects the natural ancient travel circuit beginning at Ephesus and arriving finally at Laodicea.

Each message generally follows a common literary plan consisting of seven parts:

- **(1)** The addressee is given first, following a common pattern in all seven letters: “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write;”
- **(2)** Then the speaker is mentioned. In each case, some part of the great vision of Christ and of his self-identification (Revelation 1:12-20) is repeated as the speaker identifies himself; for example, “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; cf. Revelation 1:13, 16).
- **(3)** Next, the knowledge of the speaker is given. He knows intimately the works of the churches and the reality of their loyalty to him, despite outward appearances. In two cases (Sardis and Laodicea) the assessment proves totally negative. The enemy of Christ’s churches is the deceiver, Satan, who seeks to undermine the churches’ loyalty to Christ (Revelation 2:10, 24).
- **(4)** Following his assessment of the churches’ accomplishments, the speaker pronounces his verdict on their condition in such words as “thou hast left thy first” (Revelation 2:4) or “thou... art dead” (Revelation 3:1). Two letters contain no favorable verdict (Smyrna, Philadelphia) and two no word of commendation (Sardis, Laodicea). In the letters all derelictions are viewed as forms of inner betrayals of a prior relation to Christ.
- **(5)** To correct or alert each congregation, Jesus issues a penetrating command. These commands further expose the exact nature of the self-deception involved.
- **(6)** Each letter contains the general exhortation: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;” The words of the Spirit are the words of Christ (Revelation 19:10).
- **(7)** Finally, each letter contains a promise of reward to the victor. Each is eschatological and correlates with the last two chapters of the book. Furthermore, the promises are echoes of Genesis 2-3: What was lost by Adam in Eden is more than regained by Christ. We are probably to understand the seven promises as different facts that combine to make up one great promise to believers: wherever Christ is, there will be the “overcomers” be.

Revelation 2-3

**Message to Each of The Seven Churches of the Apocalypse (Rev 1:20)**

| Church & Scripture   | Commendation  | Condemnation                                 | Accreditation                   | Promise   |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------|---|
| <b><u>Ephesus</u></b><br><b>(<u>Revelation</u></b><br><b><u>2:1-7</u>)</b>       | Rejects evil, perseveres, has patience                  | Love for Christ no longer fervent            | Do the works you did at first   | The tree of life  |
| <b><u>Smyrna</u></b><br><b>(<u>Revelation</u></b><br><b><u>2:8-11</u>)</b>       | Gracefully bears suffering                              | None   | Be faithful until death         | The crown of life   |
| <b><u>Pergamum</u></b><br><b>(<u>Revelation</u></b><br><b><u>2:12-17</u>)</b>    | Keeps the faith of Christ                               | Tolerates immorality, idolatry, and heresies | Repent                          | Hidden manna and a stone with a new name                            |
| <b><u>Thyatira</u></b><br><b>(<u>Revelation</u></b><br><b><u>2:18-29</u>)</b>    | Love, service, faith, patience is greater than at first | Tolerates cult of idolatry and immorality    | Judgment coming; keep the faith | Rule over nations and receive morning star                          |
| <b><u>Sardis</u></b><br><b>(<u>Revelation</u></b><br><b><u>3:1-6</u>)</b>        | Some have kept the faith                                | A dead church                                | Repent; strengthen what remains | Faithful honored and clothed in white                               |
| <b><u>Philadelphia</u></b><br><b>(<u>Revelation</u></b><br><b><u>3:7-13</u>)</b> | Preserved in the faith                                  | None   | Keep the faith                  | A place in God's presence, a new name, and the New <u>Jerusalem</u> |
| <b><u>Laodicea</u></b><br><b>(<u>Revelation</u></b><br><b><u>3:14-22</u>)</b>    | None  | Indifferent                                  | Be zealous and repent           | Share Christ's throne   |

# Seven Churches of Revelation

— Chapters 2-3 —

- ① Ephesus
- ② Smyrna
- ③ Pergamos
- ④ Thyatira
- ⑤ Sardis
- ⑥ Philadelphia
- ⑦ Laodicea

Island of Patmos: where John received the vision

