



# *A Study of Revelation*

Joe M. Easterling – Minister of Discipleship



## *Week Three – Setting the Stage on Earth (Revelation 1-3)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The central theme of the Book of Revelation is that Christ is returning to defeat evil once and for all and establish His eternal reign. Revelation is a book of victory, and the redeemed are revealed as “overcomers” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21, 11:7; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7)

- ◆ Overcome (*nikaō*) – “to conquer”; “to carry off the victory, come off victorious”

#### *The Events of Revelation describe:*

- ✓ The completion of God’s plan for the people of Israel.
- ✓ The final call for salvation among the people of the world.
- ✓ The full-scale attack of Satan on God’s glory, God’s people (Israel), and God’s redeemed.
- ✓ The final judgement of Satan, his angels, and his followers.
- ✓ The permanent restoration of God’s creation to the state in which God desired.

### **CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION**

#### **A. *The Book (1:1)***

- ❖ “Revelation” (*apocalypse*) –
- ❖ “*of* Jesus Christ” –
  - John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 22:18-19

#### **B. *The Writer (1:1-2, 4, 9)***

- ❖ John “bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw” (v. 2).
- ❖ John was a brother and “companion” of the original audience in “the tribulation,” “kingdom,” and “patience of Jesus Christ.” (v. 9).
  - John was exiled to Patmos during the persecution under Domitian (see Matthew 20:20-23).

❖ “signified” means “to show by a sign” (v. 1)

◆ *Why is symbolism used so much in Revelation?*

- It is a kind of “inside code”, only to really be understood by those who know what’s going on (In this case, it’s a sort of “spiritual code” for those who know Christ personally).
- Symbolism is not weakened by time.
- Symbols, like pictures, arouse emotions.
- Symbols are constantly tied to a group/ideology as a whole (Similarly, biblical symbols are constantly tied to the Bible).

**C. *The Readers (1:3-4)***

Revelation was originally sent to “the seven (literal) churches which are in Asia.”

**D. *The Focus (1:4-8)***

❖ **On the Triune God (vv. 4-6)**

❖ **On Jesus Christ about whom the whole New Testament was written (vv. 5-8)**

❖ **On Jesus Christ as the Judge and Ruler (vv. 10-18)**

## CHAPTERS 2-3 – *THE SEVEN CHURCHES*

### ◆ *How each of the seven letters is \_\_\_\_\_?*

Each letter follows a similar pattern:

- A Recipient: To the angel of the church in a given city, write:
- The Author: Jesus (depicted in glory, often in terms from 1:13–18) says:
- “I know” (in most instances offers some praise)
- “But I have this against you” (offers some reproof, where applicable)
- The one who has ears must pay attention to what the Spirit says
- Eschatological promise

### ◆ *How were the letters \_\_\_\_\_?*

The Book of Revelation would have been carried by travelers or (in this case) personal messengers. This is because no public postal service existed—apart from those tasked with carrying messages regarding the official business of the empire.

The letters to the seven churches are \_\_\_\_\_. These letters also bear some resemblance to ancient royal and imperial \_\_\_\_\_. They resemble even more closely the biblical format of \_\_\_\_\_ concerning various peoples (c.f., Isa. 13–23; Jer. 46–51; Ezek. 25–32; Amos 1–2). Some commentators have noted that the churches are each invited to read the others’ mail. Each church is called to hear “what the Spirit says to the \_\_\_\_\_” (note the plural). This would have been somewhat embarrassing to members of the churches addressed most harshly.

### ◆ \_\_\_\_\_ *were the seven churches and \_\_\_\_\_ were they located?*

#### 1) \_\_\_\_\_ (Revelation 2:1-7)

A messenger coming from Patmos—where John wrote—would reach Ephesus first, so Ephesus makes sense as the first letter. Ephesus was also a prominent city in the province: more powerful than Pergamos politically, and more favored than Smyrna for the imperial cult.

2) \_\_\_\_\_ (**Revelation 2:8-11**)

For three centuries Smyrna had been one of the most important cities in Asia Minor. Jesus' message to Smyrna highlights contrasts: the one "who is the First and the Last," who was dead but came to life, speaks to those who are impoverished yet rich, persecuted by those who claim to be Jews but are not, and will, like Jesus, find life in death.

3) \_\_\_\_\_ (**Revelation 2:12-17**)

Pergamum was a famous city that had long prospered. It included between 120,000 and 200,000 inhabitants. The citizens of Pergamum had the foresight to take the lead in joining Rome to defeat the other kings of the eastern Mediterranean, thereby securing for themselves special favor.

4) \_\_\_\_\_ (**Revelation 2:18-29**)

If Ephesian Christians were tempted by rigidity and lovelessness, Smyrnan Christians by persecution, and Pergamos' Christians by persecution and prophets of compromise, economic pressures were inviting compromise on the part of Thyatira's Christians.

5) \_\_\_\_\_ (**Revelation 3:1-6**)

This letter addresses Sardis, a "dead" church.

Jesus' oracle to Ephesus challenges a loveless church; his oracle to Smyrna encourages a persecuted church; his oracle to Pergamos addresses both persecution and compromise; his oracle to Thyatira challenges compromise. But Jesus' word to Sardis summons a sleeping church to wake up.

6) \_\_\_\_\_ (Revelation 3:7-13)

The Philadelphian church had only a “little strength,” but has proved successful in standing in that strength. Although closer in location to Sardis, the Philadelphian Christians’ situation resembles that of their fellow believers in Smyrna, roughly sixty miles to the west.

7) \_\_\_\_\_ (Revelation 3:14-22)

Perhaps the most well-known of the seven letters addresses the church in Laodicea. Laodicea lay in Phrygia’s Lycus Valley, ten miles west of Colossae and six miles south of Hierapolis. Pagan worship, especially of Zeus but also of numerous other deities flourished there.

We know from Acts 13:14–50 and 14:15 that a significant Jewish community lived in and around Laodicea. However, they seem to have blended into Greek culture in many respects. Laodicea boasted great resources but had a poor water supply. Ancient sources state that it was full of sediment, and excavation of the city’s terra cotta pipes reveal thick lime deposits, which suggest heavy contamination. Because Laodicea had to pipe in its water, it grew lukewarm by the time of its arrival.

The point of lukewarm water is simply that it is disgusting, in contrast to the more directly useful “hot” and “cold” water. Jesus thus finds the church in Laodicea to be other than what he desires (cf. Isa. 5:2–6). In today’s English, he is telling the self-satisfied church in Laodicea: “I want water that will refresh me, but you remind me instead of the water you always complain about.”

◆ *To what degree are the messages distinctively to the addressed church, and to what degree should they be read as lessons to all the churches?*

- **There is surely a sense in which each church receives the letter \_\_\_\_\_ to it.**

Commentators have observed how the message to each church resembles what we know of the cities in which the churches existed. This should serve as a reminder of how easily churches can reflect the values of their culture if we do not remain vigilant against those values. To nail this point down, consider the following facts about these churches:

- The two cities that are now completely uninhabited belong to two of the churches most severely rebuked (\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_).
  - The two cities that held out longest before the Turkish conquest are the only two churches fully praised (\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_).
  - The city of \_\_\_\_\_ was later literally moved about three kilometers from where it was in John's day, just as the church was threatened to be removed from its place (2:5).
- **Yet each church also receives the \_\_\_\_\_ book of Revelation.**
    - Like all John's audience (1:3; 13:9; 22:17), each church must "\_\_\_\_\_."
    - Each church is also summoned to "\_\_\_\_\_."
    - Each church shares the \_\_\_\_\_ promised to the other churches.

The basic principle for applying these letters to ourselves and others today thus seems to be: *If the shoe fits, wear it.* In other words, **to whatever degree our lives or churches reflect symptoms analogous to any of these churches, we must take heed to "what the Spirit says to the churches."**

As far as today's church is concerned, the parallels of God's warning to the church and the eventual demise of the city may be coincidence, but they might also illustrate a pattern in history: **The church, no matter how powerless in a given society, is a \_\_\_\_\_ of its \_\_\_\_\_.**

## THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN REVELATION

	Christ	Commendation	Rebuke	Exhortation	Promise
<b>Ephesus (2:1-7)</b>	Holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.	Deeds, hard work, perseverance. Does not tolerate wicked men. Endures hardships. Hates the practices of the Nicolaitans.	Has forsaken their first love	Remember; repent; do the things you did at first.	Will eat from the tree of life.
<b>Smyrna (2:8-11)</b>	The First and the Last, who dies and came to life again.	Suffers persecution and poverty.	XXXXX	Do not be afraid. Be faithful, even to the point of death.	Will receive a crown of life; will not be hurt by the second death.
<b>Pergamum (2:11-17)</b>	Has the sharp, double-edged sword.	Remains true to Christ; does not renounce their faith.	People there hold to the teachings of Baalam and of the Nicolaitans.	Repent.	Will receive hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on it.
<b>Thyatira (2:18-29)</b>	The Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished brass.	Deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance, doing more than at first.	Tolerates Jezebel with her immoral and idolatry.	Repent; hold on to what you have.	Will have authority over the nations; the morning star.
<b>Sardis (3:1-6)</b>	Holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.	deeds; reputation of being alive.	Dead.	Wake up! Strengthen what remains. Remember what you received, obey it, repent.	Will be dressed in white; will be acknowledged before My Father and His angels.
<b>Philadelphia (3:7-13)</b>	Holy and true, holds the key of David.	Deeds, keeps Christ's word and does not deny His name; endures patiently.	XXXXX	Hold on to what you have. I will keep you from the hour of trial coming on the whole world.	Will be pillars in the temple; the name of God of the New Jerusalem, and of Christ's new name will be written on them.
<b>Laodicea (3:14-22)</b>	The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Ruler of God's creation.	XXXXX	Lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. Wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.	Buy from Christ refined gold, white cloths, and eye salve. Be earnest and repent.	Will eat with Christ, will rule with Christ.