

# Christ's Letters to the Seven Churches

## *A Review of Revelation 2-3*

In chapter 1 we learned that the risen Christ appeared to the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos 65 years after His death and resurrection. Jesus had a purpose for John—to record His final words to the Church. The book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Himself given to John which John passed on to the churches and ultimately to us. Chapter one is the Preface or Introduction to the book (1:19 – “the things which you have seen”). Chapters two and three are letters written to seven churches (1:19 – “the things that are”). Chapters four to twenty-two describe the future (1:19 – “those [things] that are to take place after this”). The churches in chapters two and three were seven literal churches that existed in Asia Minor at the end of the first century. Jesus commended them for the things they were doing right, but condemned them for the things they were doing wrong.

### 1. **Pergamum: The Compromising Church (2:12-17)**

**Revelation 2:12-13 – “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know where you dwell... [your works]... where Satan's throne is.'”**

Jesus comes to every church every Sunday.

Jesus knows every member and what they have done.

“I know your works; I know where you live; I know what you think.”

**Satan's throne.** Emperor worship was common in Pergamum (and elsewhere in the Roman empire). This required the citizens to profess that “Caesar is Lord.” If you would not do this, you were either persecuted or executed. There was also a giant altar to Zeus in Pergamum that Jesus may have been referring to.

**Revelation 2:13 – Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you...**

Although there were many things this church was doing right, it was nevertheless compromising morally.

Who was Antipas? Antipas was ordained by the Apostle John to be the Bishop at Pergamum during the reign of Domitian. He was executed because of his faith in Christ around A.D. 92 by being placed in a brass bull and roasted to death.

**Revelation 2:14 – But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.**

God hates false doctrine!

Balak encouraged Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel and intermarry with them—a great sin of moral compromise against the will of God.

**Revelation 2:15 – So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.**

The Nicolaitans promoted a lifestyle of self-gratification and indulgence. This involved a lot of loose living and sexual immorality.

Many in the church in Pergamum had fallen to the temptation of sexual immorality.

2. **Thyatira: The Tolerant Church (2:18-29)**

**Revelation 2:19-20 – I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.**

Who was Jezebel? In the Old Testament, Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab, a Phoenician queen, an idol worshipper. She corrupted the nation of Israel and her husband.

We do not know if this was the actual name of a woman in the church in Thyatira, but she was behaving in a manner like Jezebel. She had a corrupting influence in the church.

The church and its leaders were condemned by the Lord because it was tolerating the false teachings and evil behavior of this woman.

3. **Sardis: The Dead Church (3:1-6)**

**Revelation 3:1 – I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.**

Sardis was the ancient capitol of Asia Minor. It was an old and dying city. The church, likewise, was dying.

A church can say, “We’re all about Jesus and the Bible,” but actually be spiritually dead.

Jesus may remove His Spirit and power from that church, if it does not repent.

4. **Philadelphia: The Persevering Church (3:7-13)**

**Revelation 3:10 – Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.**

Jesus, here, is promising to keep believers completely separated from the Tribulation by the Rapture.

This was more than just a promise to the ancient church in Philadelphia.

**Revelation 3:13 – He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

The “hour of trial” is described in Revelation 6-18, the seven-year Tribulation period.

The only way for the Church to be kept from the very time of the test itself is for the Church to not be there. [The Church will be “caught up” and removed by the Rapture – 1 Thess. 4:17.]

**Revelation 3:11 – I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.**

It is through the Rapture that He is going to come and take His followers out of the world before this time of testing. The Tribulation will be a time of testing for the earth-dwellers, those who have an earthly perspective and are hardened in their rebellion against God.

The Rapture is imminent; it could occur quickly, at any moment.

The Second Coming has 7 years’ worth of signs that precede it.

5. **Laodicea: the Lukewarm church (3:14-22)**

**Revelation 3:15-16 – I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.**

Jesus sees beneath the surface and knows exactly what is going on.

**I will spit you out of my mouth.** Jesus was warning of severe consequences: judgment and discipline. It's not okay to be lukewarm!

The neighboring community of Colossae was known for its cool, refreshing water and Hierapolis was famous for its health-giving hot springs. But when water was brought in from these communities, it was lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, neither refreshing nor health-giving.

6. **What happens after Jesus' letters to the seven churches? Things to come (Rev. 4-22)**

**Revelation 4:1 – After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”** (Cp. 1:19)

This is Jesus calling John to come up to heaven so that He [Jesus] can show him [John] what was going to take place in the future, seeing the events on earth from a heavenly perspective.

Revelation chapters 4-22 focus on literal future events.

Does 4:1 refer to the Rapture? Is it symbolic of the Rapture? No, it's John moving from earth to heaven, not the Church.

The word “church” is used 20 times in the book of Revelation, 19 of those in chapters 1-3. The Church, the Bride of Christ, does not appear again until Revelation 19:7. The twentieth occurrence of “church” is in 22:16.

The Church is gone and not mentioned throughout chapters 4-18. [There are believers in Christ, people of God, in the Tribulation period, but they are not Church believers; they are Tribulation believers. The Church will be removed at the Rapture.]

7. **How should we read (interpret) the book of Revelation?**

- a. **The Preterist View** – the events described in Revelation have already happened in the past. Revelation is primarily about the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- b. **The Historicist View** – Revelation depicts the events between the First and Second Coming of Jesus. It is a panorama of the current Church Age. There is no consistency of interpretation with this view.
- c. **The Idealist View** – Revelation is timeless and does not depict real people or real events. It spiritualizes the message of the book. It shows the ongoing battle between the Church and the world. It does not give concrete meaning to the symbols.
- d. **The Futurist View** – Revelation 4-22 refers to the prophetic future. Chapters 4-18 deal with the Tribulation Period. Chapter 19 deals with the Second Coming of Christ. Chapter 20 deals with the Millennial Kingdom and the Great White Throne Judgment. Chapters 21-22 set forth the Eternal State.

The outline of the book provided in Revelation 1:19 supports this view.

Revelation 1:3 calls the book “prophecy.”

The book deals with real people and real events yet future: two prophets; 144,000 Jewish evangelists; the Antichrist; the false prophet; the great multitude of believers; the unfolding of judgments.

8. **When we get to Heaven, will we see God with our own eyes?**

There are some passages in the Bible that seem to indicate that we won't see God: Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:15-16.

However, John saw God the Father in Revelation 4:2.

In our current, unglorified state here on earth, no one can see God in His full essence and live. But in our glorified, perfected state in heaven, we will see the localized presence of God on His throne.

9. **Will you see God someday in heaven with your own eyes?**

You can know for certain that you will go to heaven when you depart planet earth. What must you do?

Romans 10:13 – “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

God wants to have a personal relationship with you of salvation and transformation in which the Holy Spirit comes to live in your life. When you ask Jesus to come into your life and be your Savior, your dead spirit will be made alive, regenerated—you will become co-eternal with God; you will live as long as God lives because God lives within you from that point on.

**Revelation 22:17 – The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.**

God sent Christ to the cross to die for your sins; the sinless Son of God took the wrath of God against your sins on the cross, rose from the dead to give you the gift of eternal life. He invites you, by faith, to put your trust in what He's done for you. You get into heaven and will see God face-to-face because of what Jesus did for you.

Dear God,

I admit that I have rebelled against You; I have broken Your laws and disobeyed Your commands. I have sinned against You. I want to turn from my sins to You. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins as my Substitute and that He rose victorious over death from the grave. I now accept Your free gift of salvation. Lord Jesus, please come into my life and forgive me of my sins. I want You to be my Savior and my Lord.

Thank You for forgiving me of my sins! Thank You for coming into my life and making me a part of Your family! Thank You for being my Savior!

I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!

The John Ankerberg Show, June 23, 2017 (JASHOW.ORG)

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