

How To Study Revelation

Week 3: To the Churches in Asia Minor (Rev 1-3)

Outlining the Text

- Introduction
 - Introduction and Message to the Churches
 - Rev 1-3
 - Messages publicly addressing the churches in Asian Minor.
 - Prophetic and Circular Letter Literature.
 - The Throne of God and the Lamb
 - Rev 4-5
 - Depiction of the Heavenly Throne Room, God the Father on the throne, and Jesus depicted as a sleighed lamb.
- Three sets of 7 Divine Judgements
 - Seven Seals
 - Rev 6-8a
 - Introduces the four horsemen, the martyred saints, and the final judgment (Day of the Lord)
 - Seven Trumpets
 - Rev 8b-11
 - Judgment in the form of Exodus plagues, the scroll is read revealing the two witnesses before the final trumpet brings forth the Day of the Lord.
 - (Seven Signs)
 - Rev 12-14
 - Interlude to the three sets of seven.
 - The story on the scroll that depicts the cosmic and beastly battle between good and evil.
 - Seven Bowls
 - Rev 15-16
 - Again depicts Exodus plagues concluding in Armageddon and the final judgment on the Day of the Lord.
- Victory for the Kingdom
 - The Fall of Babylon
 - Rev 17-19a
 - The defeat of the prostitute called Babylon
 - The Final Battle
 - Rev 19b-20
 - Jesus's return to lead the final battle with the martyred saints who reign with Him for 1000 years leading the ultimate defeat of the Dragon and Babylon.
 - The New Heaven and New Earth
 - Rev 21-22
 - Depiction of all creation restored to righteousness with God.

Addressing the Churches

- John is instructed to write what he observed and send it to seven churches. (Rev 1:9-20)

- Diversity of the Seven Churches (Grouping the Seven Churches)
 - The Problem of Assimilation
 - Christians were threatened by overt hostility in social society.
 - Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira
 - The Problem Persecution
 - Churches engaged in internal conflict over leadership or the extent to which they should accommodate non-Christian culture.
 - Smyrna, Philadelphia
 - The Problem of Complacency
 - Christians that are comfortable and complacent in prosperous communities
 - Sardis, Laodicea
- Format of Each Message
 - Address from Christ
 - Words of rebuke and encouragement
 - Summons to listen and promise to the conqueror
- Interpretive Views
 - Futurists (Dispensationalists)
 - The seven ages of Church History

2:1-7	Ephesus	Apostolic church	to ca. 100 or 150
2:8-11	Smyrna	Persecuted church	ca. 100-312 (Constantine)
2:12-17	Pergamum	Compromised church favored by empire but judged by Christ	ca. 312-606 (election of Pope Boniface X)
2:18-29	Thyatira	Worldly, lax medieval church dominated by papacy and characterized by superstition and paganism	ca. 606-1500/1517 (Protestant reformation), but also continuing until the tribulation
3:1-6	Sardis	Reformation churches, still too much like the medieval church, more dead than alive	ca. 1517-1750, but also continuing today
3:7-13	Philadelphia	True church, loved by Christ, characterized by revival and missionary activity	ca. 1750-early 20th century, but also continuing until rapture
3:14-22	Laodicea	Lukewarm, apostate, anti-supernatural church	Ca. 1900-tribulation

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- Preterist
 - Will view the messages only for the seven churches or the Church Universal during the 1st century.
- Theopoetic/Theopolitical/Pastoral Prophetic

- Will ask the question, what can we learn from the message to the churches that applies to us today.
- Examine the historical context for the original meaning for the seven churches.
- Finds spiritual truth is timelessly applicable throughout history and into the future.

The Messages to the Seven Churches

- Ephesus
 - Backdrop
 - It was the top Urban center of Arain Minor, located along the coast. It was a hub of commerce and governance.
 - There were many marble columns and buildings, including a theater for athletic festivals and events that could hold 24,000 people.
 - Temples to Artemis (considered one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world) attracted touring worshipers.
 - The city was also known for its temples to Julius Caesar and Domitian, leading to a significant presence of the Roman Cult.
 - The church extended back to the mid-first Century (Acts 18:24-19:41).
 - Message
 - The Ephesians were loyal to God and fought the false teachers and the Nicolaitans.
 - Nicolaitans were a group of people who encouraged Christians to participate in idol worship and cultural practices.
 - The Church was encouraged to remember their first love. Most interpret this as love for one another. They had become rigid in their practice without being loving to their neighbors.
- Smyrna
 - Backdrop
 - It was a famous port city known for its longstanding loyalty to the Roman Imperial Cult (temples to Augustus and Tiberius).
 - The city was a product of urban planning; the streets were stoned and laid in a grid pattern.
 - Smyrna was a cultural center with a library and shrine to Homer.
 - The Christian community was impoverished.
 - Message
 - There was fighting between Jews and Christian Community (Rev 2:9).
 - The slander referenced was a public rebuke of someone. In the case of Christians, the slander would be that they did not participate in the Imperial Cult. This public rebuke could have led to Christian imprisonment or execution for “hatred against humanity.”
 - Jesus promised eternal security from death, not physical. (Rev 2:11)
- Pergamum
 - Backdrop
 - The city was the cultural and administrative center with an extensive library.
 - It had an acropolis with a massive altar to Zeus, a temple to Augustus, and a shrine for Asclepius, the god of healing.
 - Pergamum was the seat for legal proceedings for the Roman proconsul.

- The local church had been persecuted, including a leader named Antipas (Rev 2:13).
 - Message
 - Jesus said Pergamum resides “where Satan’s throne is” (Rev 2:13).
 - The church was rebuked for following the teachings of someone named Balaam, who taught eating food sacrificed to idols and practicing fornication (Rev 2:14).
 - Similarities with Balaam in Numbers (Num 31:16).
 - Not eating meat sacrificed to idols would have separated Christians from many social settings, including festivals, markets, and dining rooms.
 - Jesus promised that the faithful would be given “hidden manna.”
- Thyatira
 - Backdrop
 - Thyatira was located southeast of Pergamum and known as a commercial center.
 - It was home to many trade guilds, including potters, tailors, leather workers, shoemakers, linen workers, bakers, coppersmiths, dyers, and wool merchants.
 - Lydia was from Thyatira and dealt in purple cloth (Acts 16:14).
 - Message
 - Jesus commended Christians for their love (in contrast to Ephesus) and endurance (Rev 2:19).
 - The church was rebuked for allowing the influence of someone nicknamed Jezebel, who promoted (and participated in) fornication and eating food sacrificed to idols.
 - Like Jezebel, Queen of Israel, who violently opposed God and promoted “harlotries and sorceries” (1 Kings 18).
 - The fornication was probably sexual and religious, similar to the metaphor used in Hosea (Hos. 1:2).
 - Jesus said that the faithful believers share in ruling over the Nations and will receive the “Morning Star,” which is Christ himself.
- Sardis
 - Backdrop
 - Sardis gained a reputation for wealth from gold, said to have been found in a nearby river.
 - The city prospered from commerce and fertile land.
 - The city had a citadel that gave the impression of being an impenetrable fortress (it was twice captured).
 - There were temples to August and the goddess Artemis.
 - Sardis was devastated by an earthquake in 17 A.D. and rebuilt with Roman help leading to a new temple to the Imperial Cult.
 - The Jewish community was prosperous, influential, and had a supply of ritually clean food.
 - Message
 - The community was told they had “the name of being alive,” referring to how the Christian community appeared to other people (Rev 3:1).
 - Indication of wealth and absence of affliction.
 - Jesus viewed the congregation as dead; this contrasted the spiritual reality with the social perception.

- Sardis lacked vigilance; they were repeatedly told to “wake up” (Rev 3:2-3).
 - Some were called out for “soiled” clothes, while the faithful were depicted as being dressed in white.
 - This reference to sin and righteousness will again be seen in chapter 7.
- Philadelphia
 - Backdrop
 - Philadelphia was a rich agricultural area and was also devastated by the 17 A.D. earthquake.
 - After Rome helped rebuild, the city referred to itself as “Neocaesarea” and later adopted the family name of Emperor Vespasian, calling itself Philadelphia Flavia.
 - The church was small and oppressed by the local Jewish synagogue (Rev 3:9).
 - Message
 - Church members refused to deny Christ.
 - Jesus referred to himself as the one “who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one will open.”
 - This indicates that Jesus has the power to open the door for someone to enter the Kingdom of God and is a paraphrase of Isaiah 22:22.
 - Because of their relationship with the doorkeeper, Jesus had set before them “an open door which cannot be shut” (Rev 3:8).
- Laodicea
 - Backdrop and Rebuke
 - The city was very wealthy. After an earthquake in 60 A.D., they had enough wealth to rebuild the city without Roman assistance.
 - The Christians are told to buy Gold from Jesus refined by fire to be rich. (Rev 3:18)
 - Laodicea was known for producing fine dark wool used in high-quality textiles.
 - Jesus told them they were naked (Rev 3:17-18).
 - The city had an important medical school located in an area known for its eye salve.
 - Jesus told them they were blind (Rev 3:17-18).
 - The nearby town of Hieropolis was known for its hot springs. The water in their aqueducts would have been tepid and unappealing. To get cold water, they had to procure it from Colossae.
 - Jesus told them they were neither hot nor cold, making him sick (Rev 3:15-16).
 - Message
 - The message to the Laodiceans was that they were complacent and weak, and they were not in alignment with the Kingdom of God.
 - There is also a call to repentance and a promise that “when they open the door,” Christ “Will eat with them” and that those who conquer will have a place on Christ’s throne (Rev 3:21; 22:5).