

Seven Churches Of Asia

Series of Lessons

1. We are going to study the letters that Jesus wrote “the seven churches of Asia.” (Rev. 1:4, 11).

REV 1:4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;

REV 1:11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

2. A study of these brief letters will greatly enhance our understanding of what Christ expects of the church.
3. We learn what pleases Him and what displeases Him.
4. These letters are found in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.
5. There were many churches in Asia besides the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, but for some unknown reason only seven are addressed in this book.
 - a. The New Testament mentions 3 other churches in Asia.
 - b. There was a church in these places: (1) Troas - Acts 20:5 (2) Colossae - Col. 1:2 (3) Hierapolis (Col. 4:13).
 - c. Ignatius, writing some 20 years later indicates there were churches in Magnesia and Tralles. We do not know if these churches existed at the time of John writing the book of Revelation.
6. It is speculated that these letters were circulated to the other churches in Asia, but we cannot be sure this is true.
7. These letters to the seven churches of Asia reveal that the churches of the 1st century were not perfect.
 - a. They had their strengths and their weaknesses.
 - b. The Lord did not overlook this church, but was fully aware of both their strengths and weaknesses.
 - c. He praised them for their strengths, and warned that they must repent turn away from their sins.
 - d. The fact they were to be praised for some things did not mean He was overlooking the evil in those churches.
 - e. These churches had some or many who were very faithful and they had some or many who were either tolerating or engaging in evil.
 - f. The letters reveal it was possible to be faithful in a church that had many problems and had members that were not living up to the high standard of Christ.
8. These letters have a very similar outline.

- a. There is a salutation and a description of Christ.
- b. There is praise of their good qualities if such existed.
- c. There was criticism of what was wrong with the church and a call to repentance.
- d. There were warnings and exhortations.
- e. There were beatitudes and promises of blessings.

Church At Ephesus

REV 2:1 "To the angel [messenger] of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

1. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write"

a. The identity of the "angel" has been much discussed and there are many interpretations in regard to "the angel."

1) The word "angel" means "messenger" and it can refer to a human or heavenly messenger.

2) Here is best understood as a human "messenger." Jesus would not likely be dictating a letter to John for a heavenly "angel" [messenger]. One thing that may support a heavenly messenger is Revelation 1:20.

REV 1:20 "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

3) Though not stated, it is likely that a human "messenger" had been sent to Patmos about 60 miles from Ephesus.

4) There is zero evidence that the word "messenger" represents the minister of pastor of each congregation. One person did not oversee a congregation and one person would not be responsible for all that is praised or condemned in this letter.

5) The most difficult aspect of this is why the "messenger" [earthly or heavenly] is being praised or rebuked for what was going on in these churches.

6) It is clear in each of the letters that Jesus is addressing the whole church - not merely a person.

b. The church at Ephesus is frequently mentioned in the New Testament, and was a very important congregation in the early history of the church.

1) Paul was forbidden at first to go to Asia. (Acts 16:6).

2) He spent a short time in Ephesus near the end of his 2nd missionary journey - about 52 A.D.. (Acts 18:18-21).

a) Aquilla and Priscilla were left there. (Acts 18:19).

b) They converted Apollos. (Acts 19:24-28).

3) Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus on his 3rd missionary journey about 54-56 A.D.. (Acts 20:31; 19:1-20:1).

- a) Two years of this time was spend in the hall of Tyrannum who may have been a teacher of philosophy or Rhetoric. (Acts 19:9).
 - b) Paul also taught house to house while at Ephesus. (Acts 20:20).
 - c) It is likely that the churches of Asia were established about this time through his extensive teaching. (Acts 19:10).
 - d) The magicians, who pretended to work miracles, burned their book containing the magical formulas as the result of Paul's work in Ephesus. (Acts 19:11-20).
 - e) Paul also caused a great stir among the silversmiths. (Acts 19:23-41).
- 4) Paul left for Macedonia shortly after this uproar. (Acts 20:1).
- 5) At Miletus, near the end of his missionary journey in about 57 A.D, he met with the elders from Ephesus and gave them an important address. (Acts 20:17-38).
- 6) Paul later wrote the church at Ephesus during his 1st Roman imprisonment in about 62 A.D.. (Acts 28:30; Eph. 1:1; 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).
- 7) Paul wrote two letters to Timothy while at Ephesus. (1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 4:12).
- a) 1 Timothy was written about 62-64 A.D. after the 1st Roman imprisonment.
 - b) 2 Timothy was written about 67-68 A.D. during Paul's second Roman imprisonment.

Jesus' Description Of Himself

1. "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand"

a. "One" here refers to Jesus.

b. The "seven stars" are identified, in this book, as "the angels of the seven churches." (Rev. 1:20).

REV 1:20 "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

1) Note "seven lampstands are the seven churches." (Rev. 1:20).

2) "seven stars are the angels of the seven churches."

2. "the One [Jesus] who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this" - This is Jesus. (Rev. 1:12-15, 16-19).

a. "The seven golden lampstands" are "the seven churches" named in Revelation 1:11.

REV 1:11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

b. Each of these congregations will be addressed in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

c. Each of the seven churches would be able to read what Jesus said to them and to all the other congregations.

- d. There is no evidence these letters were ever separated from the entire book of Revelation.
- e. Those who read these letters could quickly learn what pleases and displeases the Lord.
- f. This is also true of the church today.
- g. We learn what pleases and displeases the Lord; therefore, these letters deserve our special attention.

What Is Right With The Church

REV 2:2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

1. "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance" - The words "I know" mean here that He was fully aware of these things and approved of them.
 - a. They had been taught to be dedicated to good works. (Eph. 2:10).
 - b. They had remained steadfast under persecution.
 - c. Note: The words "I know" are used in a negative sense in some of the letters. (Rev. 3:1, 8, 15).
2. "and that you cannot endure [tolerate] evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles"
 - a. These men probably taught they had been called as true apostles or were the successors to them.
 - b. The false apostles were messengers or teachers of Satan. (2 Cor. 11:13-15).
 - c. They had rightly tried them as they had been taught. (Acts 20:28-30).

ACT 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

ACT 20:29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

ACT 20:30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

- d. We should test false teachers. (1 Jn. 4:1; 2 Jn. 1:9-11).
 - e. Anyone could claim to be an apostle, but only a true apostle could be successfully tested.
 - f. If this book was written about 96 A.D, most or all the apostles [with the exception of John] were dead.
 - g. Those claiming to be apostles could be tested in regard to their teachings and alleged miracles.
3. "and they are not, and you found them to be false" - Their claims were false. They were not apostles and they should be resisted.

Praise

REV 2:3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

1. "and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake"

- a. They are faithfully endured persecution out of loyalty to Christ.
 - b. It was not easy to be a Christian when persecuted, but they had faithfully persevered.
2. “and have not grown weary” - This was a church that kept on serving the Lord even when it was hard to be a Christian.
- a. They knew they had been created for good works. (Eph. 2:10). See Jas. 2:14-17.
 - b. They had been practicing the admonition Paul gave to the church at Galatia (Gal. 6:9, 10), but may have let up in this service based on verse 4.

GAL 6:9 And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.

GAL 6:10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

- c. It is vital that “we do not grow weary” in our perseverance for Christ and “in doing good.”
- d. It is easy to let up and use all kinds of excuses for not doing what the Lord expects and demands.

Criticism - What Was Wrong With The Church

REV 2:4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.'

1. “But I have this against you”
 - a. The Lord sees their strengths and their weaknesses.
 - b. Nothing good or bad escapes the all-knowing and all-seeing Lord. See Prov. 15:3; Heb. 4:13.
 - c. What was wrong must not be ignored, but corrected.
2. “that you have left your first love” - Here are some interpretations of these words.
 - a. Enthusiasm had cooled.
 - 1) The expression “first works,” in verse 2, may give support to this interpretation.
 - 2) They may have ceased to ask, “How much can I do?”
 - 3) They had slowed down in their service to the Lord, and were no longer abounding in the work of the Lord. See 1 Cor. 15:58.
 - 4) Revelation 2:3 may or may not agree with this interpretation. They had “not grown weary.” These words can refer to their perseverance or deeds.
 - b. They were doctrinally sound, but love of the brethren or love for God had cooled.
 - 1) This might have been faithful in their attendance at the assembly.
 - 2) In worship they may have been going through the motions and not worshiping God with enthusiasm from the heart.

- 3) Nothing in this letter suggests this, but it is possible.
- c. The loyal spirit of defense of the truth had bred an attitude of intolerance and spite toward those in error.
- 1) They were to hate false doctrine, but not those who taught it.
 - 2) They were to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and seek to restore the fallen with “gentleness” if at all possible. (Gal. 6:1).
 - 3) This interpretation again is possible, but nothing in this letter suggests this was what is meant by the words “that you have left your first love.”
- d. The words “that you have left your first love” more than likely refer to their love for God or one another or perhaps both.
- 1) We are not to just love God, but we are to love Him with all our being. (Matt. 22:37-39).
 - 2) We are not just to love brethren, but we are to love them as Jesus loved us and more than our own lives. (Jn. 13:34,35; 1 Jn. 3:16).
 - 3) Verse 5 seems to suggest that leaving their “first love” meant they had slowed down in their “deeds.”

Admonition And Threat

REV 2:5 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.

“Remember”

1. “Remember therefore from where you have fallen” - They are admonished to “remember” from whence they had fallen.
2. They had fallen from their place of favor with God and His Son.

Repent

1. They are instructed to “repent and do the deeds you did at first.”
 - a. This indicates they had slowed in their deeds and perhaps had stopped some.
 - b. The words “not grown weary” [2:3] may reference their perseverance for Christ, that is, their willingness to suffer for Him. It may not refer to doing good. (Gal. 6:9).
2. “or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent” - Unless they repented they would cease to be the Lord’s church.
 - a. A serious problem existed with the church there.
 - b. It was serious enough for the Lord to threaten them with the removal of their “lampstand.”
 - c. Unless they repented they would cease to be His church.

Coming Of The Lord

1. The coming of Jesus probably refers, not to the second coming, but to His visitation of God's judgment upon them.
2. "Coming" does not always refer to what we refer to as Christ's second coming.
 - a. It refers to His birth. (Lk. 1:26-35).
 - b. It refers to Christ becoming King. (Matt. 16:28).

MAT 16:28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

- 1) "Coming in His kingdom" was an invisible coming.
 - 2) It was fulfilled when Christ was coronated as King not long after that, and in the lifetime of some of them.
 - c. It refers to Christ invisibly coming into the heart of the sinner. (Jn. 14:23; Gal. 4:6). See Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; Rev. 3:20).
 - d. It refers to Christ's invisibly coming into our presence when we partake of the Lord's Supper. (Matt. 26:29).
 - e. It refers to Christ's invisible presence in the assembly. (Matt. 18:20).
 - f. It refers to Christ invisibly coming to discipline backsliders. (Rev. 3:16, 19). See Heb. 12:6.
 - g. It refers to Christ's visible second coming. (Heb. 9:28; Acts 1:11; Rev.1:7)
3. It can refer to God's judgment coming upon men or even those claiming to be God's children.

Additional Comment On What Was Right

Praise

REV 2:6 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.'

1. "Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans"
 - a. Note they "hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans."
 - 1) This group is mentioned here and in Revelation 2:15.

REV 2:15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.'

- 2) Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Clement of Alexandria in the second century said they taught and practiced self-indulgence.
- 3) Most think they were like the false teachers described by Jude. (Jude 4).

JUD 1:4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

- b. They hated “the deeds of the Nicolaitans.”
 - 1) The word “hate” suggests they had absolutely no tolerance of them.
 - 2) They did not “hate” the men, but hated their “deeds.”
 - 3) The church at Pergamos sadly tolerated them. (Rev. 2:15).

c. Who are the Nicolaitans?

- 1) They are mentioned twice in the book of Revelation. (Rev. 2:6, 15).
- 2) It is believed they believed it was permissible to eat things offered to idols and encouraged idolatrous worship.
- 3) It were charged with denying God as Creator of the world, and attributing its existence to other powers.
- 4) It is also believed they promoted immorality and other forms of lawlessness.
- 5) We are not certain about the origin of this sect.

2. “which I also hate” - The Lord hated “the deeds” of the Nicolaitans.

Exhortation And Promise

REV 2:7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

1. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” - Everyone is to listen to this message that Jesus gave through the Spirit. They were to hear and learn from the message Jesus gave to each of the seven churches.

a. “He who has an ear” - Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mik 4:9, 23; Lk. 18:8; 14:35.

b. See John 3:34;14:26; 16:13-15. Christ and the apostles were guided by the Holy scriptures.

2. “Tree of Life”

a. “The tree of life” was originally in the garden of Eden. (Gen. 2:9).

GEN 2:9 And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; **the tree of life** also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

b. After the fall of Adam and Eve, they were driven from the garden and separated from “the tree of life.” (Gen. 3:22,23).

GEN 3:22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from **the tree of life**, and eat, and live forever"--

GEN 3:23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

3. “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life”

- a. "The tree of life" is now located "in the Paradise of God."
- b. It is a kind of tree located "on either side of the river." (Rev. 22:2).

REV 22:2 in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

"Paradise of God"

- The word "paradise" is of Persian origin and means "a park, a garden, a pleasure ground."
 - It can be applied to any place especially prepared for comfort and enjoyment.
3. "which is in the Paradise of God."
 - a. The word "Paradise" only occurs a three times in the Testament. (Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7).

LUK 23:43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

- 1) We know from John 20:17 that Jesus had not ascended into heaven on Sunday, but He said the thief would be with Him in Paradise "Today."
- 2) This means "Paradise" as used in Luke 23:43 is not heaven.

- b. The word "Paradise" is used again in 2 Corinthians 12:4.

2CO 12:4 was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

- 1) The word "Paradise" here does not denote heaven where God dwells.
- 2) John 3:13 makes this clear.

- c. It is used of heaven in Revelation 2:7.

REV 2:7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

- 1) The word "Paradise" denotes a place of happiness and of pleasure.
- 2) It can be used for either Abraham's bosom or heaven depending on the context.

- d. It is used to refer to the abode of the righteous spirits. (Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:2).

- 1) It is used in Luke with the same meaning as "Abraham's bosom." (Lk. 16:23,25).
- 2) "The third heaven" also refers to "Abraham's bosom." (2 Cor. 12:2).
- 3) It is not heaven, that is, where God dwells.
- 4) No one but Jesus has gone to heaven except Jesus. (Jn. 3:13).

JOH 3:13 "And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man.

5) Peter emphasized on the day of Pentecost that it was Christ who had ascended into heaven and the body of David was still in his tomb.

ACT 2:27 Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.

ACT 2:28 'Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.'

ACT 2:29 "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

ACT 2:30 "And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne,

ACT 2:31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.

ACT 2:32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

- 6) The argument of Peter would be very weak if David himself was in heaven.
- 7) By deduction we must conclude that the spirit of David was in Abraham's bosom along with the spirit of Abraham and other righteous spirits.
- 8) The bodies of the righteous and the bodies of the wicked will be raised when Christ comes again that is called "the last day." (Jn. 5:28, 29; 6:39, 40, 44).
- 9) Those who believe the righteous go directly to heaven have the righteous doing the following things.

1. They go to heaven before the judgment at the end of time. (Matt. 25:31-36; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12).	3. They then must return to earth to be judged.	5. They then ascend back to heaven following their resurrection. (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
2. They enjoy heaven before the resurrection for a short or long time.	4. They return to be raised from the grave and receive a new glorified body. (1 Cor. 15:51-58).	6. All this is not supported by scripture.

c. In Revelation 2:7 it [Paradise] refers to heaven - the abode of God. (Matt. 6:9).

- 1) "The tree of life" is located in Paradise, that is, heaven. (Rev. 2:7).
- 2) "The tree of life" is in heaven and is a kind of tree. (Rev. 22:2, 14).

REV 22:2 in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

REV 22:14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.

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