

The Seven Churches

Revelation 2:1-3:22

Episode 6

October 21/22, 2020

**I. The Meaning**

a. “Seven”

i. Seven is the number indicating completeness- M so seven churches = "all the churches"

ii. EW Bullinger: “Sheva” - - from “Savah” (sabah) the same root as “Sabbath.”

iii. The Churches are both literally Historical and Typical (forming a composite picture of the body of Christ).

b. The messages to the churches go beyond the task of revealing the historical context. Each letter contains exhortation to action that transcends the context and carries a message for the church today: This applies to the loveless church of Ephesus, the persecuted church of Smyrna, the compromising church of Pergamum, the corrupt church of Thyatira, the dead church of Sardis, the faithful church of Philadelphia and the lukewarm church of Laodicea.

c. **Literal Historic Churches**



d. **Symbolic/ Prophetic Ages of the Church**

i Adherents to the futurist school and the historicist school have called attention to certain parallels between individual letters and successive periods of church history, from John’s day until the end. They conclude that the seven letters present a panorama of the history of the church.

ii. This belief as held today does not deny that at the same time the churches are also historical and representative [typical].” Lahaye, 36

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| Ephesus (2:1-7) | Apostolic Church (AD 30-100) |
| Smyrna (2:8-11) | Persecuted Church ( AD 100-313) |
| Pergamum (2:12-17) | State Church (AD 313-590) |
| Thyatira (2:18-29) | Papal Church (AD 590-1517) |
| Sardis (3:1-6) | Reformed Church (AD 1517-1790) |
| Philadelphia (3:7-13) | Missionary Church (AD 1730-1900) |
| Laodicea (3:14-22)  | Apostate Church (AD 1900- ) |

e. **Analogies:** By analogy, these churches illustrate typical challenges faced by the church of every age. Together, they form a composite of the successes, challenges, failures and victory of the church. Situations or stages that every church goes through to some degree.

i. Dogmatism, Legalism, and Ritualism (lovelessness)

ii. Persecution (and faithfulness in that persecution)

iii. Compromise (Syncretism)

iv. Corruption

v. Stagnation

vi. Faithfulness and Witness (Revival)

vii. Lukewarmness

**II. Context:** The book of Revelation was composed and sent to seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia at some point between A.D. 69 and 96 in order to encourage them with the assurance that, despite all the forces marshaled against them, victory was theirs if they remained loyal to Christ. -M

a. Each Church has a Historical Context (“Sitz in Leben” or “Situation in Life”)

b. Location, history, economics, evangelization, culture, etc.

c. Background - Changing Situation for Early Christians

i. Accepted as Jewish Sect. Animosity with Jews Protection from Romans

ii.Nero (54-68)**:** Fire in 64 A.D.Christians persecuted as scapegoats

iii. Domitian (81-96)Emperor Worship; Revelation written

**III. General Outline of the Letters** (Not always in this exact order)

***a. Greeting and address*** to the angel of a specific church

***b. Christ Composite***: A reference to Christ by way of the vision of Chapter One.

i. Together, these descriptions rebuild the composite picture of Christ in the first chapter. This may be an indication that our knowledge of Christ is only partial if one local congregation is separated or disconnected from unity in the body of Christ.

ii.Likewise, in the other elements, the church will not fully understand who she is until she understands who Christ is in His fullness, or until she understands the whole picture of the challenges and promise facing her. (John Calvin: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say true and sound wisdom, consists of two things: knowledge of God and of ourselves.” (ICR 1.1.1)

***c. Situation*:** Usually begins with the words **“I know**…” shows that God is omnipotent: (2:23 I … all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.)

***d. Evaluation*:** Rebukes or commendations: *“Nevertheless, I have this against you…”*

***e. Instruction*:** The Lord’s instruction. Usually begins with “**I will…**”

***f. Warning*:** What will happen if the church does not repent and change.

***g. Promise for “Overcomers*: “To him who overcomes” or similar wording**

i. “Overcome” In Greek “nikonti” from the root “nikos.”

1. It means “overcome,” “victory,” “conquer,” “win the verdict.”

2. Nike, was the Greek goddess of victory…therefore

3. Nike Shoes, sportswear etc. “Just Do It.”

ii. Q?:What does John mean? What is to be overcome?

1. For John it has a very specific meaning: From I John 5:1-5NIV 1 John 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 *Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God*.

2. A: To keep the faith

a. “Belief” in Greek “pisteuo.” One of the most important words in the New Testament. It is often translated as “believe” but it means much more than mental or intellectual acceptance or verbal assent.

i. Content: What are the claims, facts and data?

ii. Confirmation: Accepting the data as true.

iii. Conviction: The content becomes real, relevant, or personal.

iv. Commitment: Trusting and acting on that knowledge (believing *into*)

***h. Exhortation to listen*** (For example: Revelation 2:29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.)