

## The Seven Churches of Asia

The book of Revelation was written by John to “the seven churches that are in Asia” (Rev. 1:4). Thus, this book of apocalyptic prophecy is also a letter. It is very different than Paul’s letters or the other general epistles,



but it is an epistle none the less. While the majority of Revelation deals with “...things that must soon take place” (1:1) and is written in symbolic and prophetic language, there are two chapters that are intensely practical: chapters two and three. These chapters specifically address the then-current situation of the seven churches of Asia. Each congregation is addressed directly by the Lord. They receive a mixture of commendation, admonition, rebuke, and warning. While Revelation was written specifically to these seven churches, the messages they received can be very helpful for us. We can read these and imagine, “what if the Lord wrote a letter to my congregation?” Do we see any traits in these churches that mirror our own? Are we doing things that please the Lord, or is the Lord unhappy with our service? We can rest assured that the Lord knows our works just as He knew theirs. Are we pleasing Him or angering Him?

**Ephesus:** The Ephesian church had much to be commended. They toiled for the Lord, patiently endured hardship, and did not tolerate evil. They tested men to ensure their words were true, and they hated false doctrine. Still, the Lord had something against them. They had left their first love. Commentators debate what this was, but the Lord simply exhorts them to return to the works they originally did. Sometimes Christianity becomes a rut, and we need to return to the simple zeal we had at the beginning.

**Smyrna:** These Christians are commended for enduring tribulation, physical poverty (likely because of their persecution) and the slander of the world. They are encouraged to remain faithful, for they will face more persecution, but they are promised a crown of life if they endure.

**Pergamum:** They were commended for holding fast to Jesus’ name despite persecution. They were rebuked, however, for tolerating an element of false teaching and false practices.

**Thyatira:** Commended for love, faith, service, patient endurance, and growth in works. They were rebuked for tolerating “that woman Jezebel” who was likely a false teacher. Not all of the congregation listened or believed this false teacher, but those who did needed to repent quickly.

**Sardis:** Nothing is commended at Sardis. They had a reputation of being alive but Jesus says He knows they are actually dead. Their works were “not found complete” and thus they are admonished to repent, wake up, and get to work!

**Philadelphia:** No rebuke is levied against this church. The Lord acknowledges and commends their patient endurance, and the fact they had “kept My word” even though they appeared to have “but little power.” They are exhorted to remain faithful and promised deliverance.

**Laodicea:** Another church to which the Lord has nothing to commend. They are harshly rebuked for being lukewarm—a condition that makes the Lord want to “spit you out of my mouth.” They think they are spiritually rich, but the Lord says they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. He exhorts them to repent and return to Him. His harsh words are not from hatred, but He reproves because He loves (3:19).

## “That You May Grow Thereby...”

A weekly Bible reading plan



### Revelation 1-11 A Letter from the Lord

#### Overview

Our reading plan is nearly finished, and we come now to the final book of the Bible: Revelation! As Genesis is a book of beginnings, the book of Revelation is a book about the end. It ends the New Testament; it is the end of direct revelation provided by God; and it tells about the end of this world. In Genesis we saw the beginning of sin; in Revelation we see sin’s defeat and the end of rebellion. But Revelation is also a book of beginnings. The end of this world is not the final end. No, the end of this world only marks the beginning of a fully reconciled existence with God. Revelation looks forward to the time when man’s relationship with God (that was destroyed by sin in the Garden) is restored. It promises the return of the Tree of Life (again, lost in Genesis), and it promises a “new heaven and a new earth.” Revelation is the capstone of the Bible, but more than that it is the summary and conclusion of mortal existence! Between now and eternity, however, there will be hardship for God’s people. And that is the real thrust of Revelation. It is a letter written to seven first-century churches (but by extension, to all churches throughout all time) to exhort faithfulness to Christ despite trials and intense persecution. The enemies of God will work hard to destroy Christians, but because of Revelation we know how the story ends. We know that God and Christ triumph, and we will share in that victory if we will remain faithful in this life.

#### Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Revelation 1  
Tuesday: Revelation 2-3  
Wednesday: Revelation 4-6  
Thursday: Revelation 7-9  
Friday: Revelation 10-11



When you hear the term “apocalypse” you likely think of world destruction. But contrary to common conception, “apocalypse” does not refer to the end of the world. Revelation 1:1 begins with the words, “The *revelation* of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants...” The word “revelation” is translated from the Greek word *apokalypsis*

and it means to uncover, disclose, or reveal. Thus, Revelation is “apocalyptic literature” not because it tells of the end of the world, but because it is a book which reveals unknown truths. It isn’t surprising then to read in Revelation 1:3 that the book is also a book of prophecy. This book is similar (and draws on) Old Testament apocalyptic prophecy like the books of Daniel and Ezekiel. Since the book is apocalyptic prophecy, it is written in highly figurative and symbolic language. Spiritual and eternal truths are conveyed in mortal images, so we must remember that as we read and interpret this book.

#### Outline

- I. Prologue (1:1-8)
- II. The Glorified Christ (1:9-20)
- III. The Churches of Asia (2:1—3:22)
- IV. Things to Take Place (4:1—22:21)
  1. The Judge (4:1—5:14)
  2. Tribulation (6:1—19:6)
  3. The Lord’s Return (19:7-21)
  4. Retribution & Redemption (20:1—22:21)

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