

“Book of Revelation—Part 2”

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BIG SANDY, Texas—At our Bible study on Wednesday night, I continued with a nine-part series about the Book of Revelation. Part 2 was about the 7 Congregations in Revelation 2 and 3.

Mentioned in chapter 1

- Revelation 1:4—The book of Revelation was written by John to seven churches in Asia.
- Revelation 1:11—The Son of God told John to write about the visions (he was going to see) to the seven churches in Asia.
- Revelation 1:12-13—In the midst of the 7 candlesticks was the Son of God.
- Revelation 1:16—In His right hand were 7 stars.
- Revelation 1:20—The 7 stars were the angels of the 7 churches and the 7 candlesticks were the 7 churches.

Brief description

The 7 churches were located in Asia Minor during the era of the Roman Empire (on a major road as part of a mail route).

Historians wrote: “Although the actual churches ceased to thrive in the centuries of Muslim control after the Romans, the archaeological remains of all seven locations currently exist in present-day Turkey.”

Historians also mention that there are three common purposes of the seven churches.

- First purpose—to see the literal needs of the seven congregations.
- Second purpose—to reveal seven different types of congregations throughout history.
- Third purpose—to foreshadow seven different periods of church history.

“Church eras”

Many people among the church of God have heard the theory that the seven congregations are part of seven “church eras.”

For the record, I personally do not like the way many congregations teach the concept of “church eras”—because I find them to be too dogmatic about elevating their personal importance and to be too quick to use their theory to belittle other people.

At this time, I do want to show a pattern among the seven churches—but please do not use the pattern to elevate your importance or to belittle other people.

Notice how scriptures among the last four congregations reveal an urgency toward the return of the Son of God.

■ Revelation 2:25—“But hold fast what you have till I come.”

■ Revelation 3:3—“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

■ Revelation 3:11—“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

■ Revelation 3:20— “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Did you happen to notice the pattern of urgency increasing from the fourth congregation to the seventh congregation?

■ Some people use that information to conclude (1) that only the last four congregations will be active immediately before the return of the Son of God and (2) that only the lessons mentioned to those four congregations are the only lessons applicable to disciples.

I believe that the lessons and rewards from all seven congregations are important.

■ Some people actually go a step further and give all their attention to only one specific congregation (generally the Philadelphia congregation).

I believe that it is a serious mistake to focus upon only the lessons and rewards from the Philadelphia congregation. I that the lessons and rewards for all seven congregations apply to the children of God.

Rebuke and praise

Many Bible students successfully describe the lessons of the seven congregations being applicable to every disciple during their lifetime.

However, some pompous control-freaks like to advertise themselves and their groups as those who are superior over other people. They like to advertise that they are the superior group—often saying that they are the “only” legitimate group.

And what group would they pick to identify themselves?

Notice the following list contrasting how the Son of God dealt with the seven congregations.

- Ephesus—both praise and rebuke.
- Smyrna—only praise and encouragement.
- Pergamos—both praise and rebuke.
- Thyatira—both praise and rebuke.
- Sardis—only rebuke.
- Philadelphia—only praise and encouragement.
- Laodicea—only rebuke.

No one would want to advertise themselves as a group that only received rebuke (Sardis or Laodicea).

Many people might settle for advertising themselves as a group that received both praise and rebuke.

But most people (especially those who want to be better than everyone else) would be thrilled to advertise themselves as a group that received only praise and encouragement.

The choices of that scenario are only Smyrna and Philadelphia. Those who believe that the Son of God will be returning in their lifetime will choose Philadelphia.

Maybe you haven't noticed this before—but those, who boldly identify themselves as the Philadelphia group, often embody the attitude and approach of the Laodicean group.

I am not kidding. Take a peek.

- Revelation 3:17—"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked . . ."

Amazing, isn't it? The pompous people who identify themselves as the Philadelphia group exhibit the Laodicean behavior that they love to criticize.

- Philippians 2:3—"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

Lessons from all seven

Are you preoccupied with only one of the seven congregations? Those individuals who become preoccupied with only one of the seven congregations are missing valuable instructions intended for every disciple.

At this time, I want to remind you to learn the lessons from each of the seven congregations. Notice the following seven descriptions. I recommend that you examine the lessons from all seven congregations.

God wants you to learn the lessons of all seven of the congregations.

- Ephesus—church of lost love.
- Smyrna—church in suffering.
- Pergamos—church in compromise.
- Thyatira—church tolerating apostacy.
- Sardis—church that was dead.
- Philadelphia—church that was faithful.
- Laodicea—church that was lukewarm.

Rewards of all seven

Are you preoccupied with only one of the seven congregations? Those individuals who become preoccupied with only one of the seven congregations are missing valuable lessons about the reward.

If you are preoccupied with only one of the seven congregations, you are probably not familiar with the beautiful rewards mentioned to all seven congregations.

God wants to give you the rewards of all seven of the congregations.

- Revelation 2:7—Tree of Life.
- Revelation 2:11—Avoiding the second death.
- Revelation 2:17—The hidden manna, a white stone and a new name.
- Revelation 2:26-28—Leadership over nations (with a shepherd's rod) and morning star.
- Revelation 3:5—Clothed in white garments, name remaining in the book of life and having your name confessed before the Father and before His angels.
- Revelation 3:12—Being a pillar in the temple of God and having a new name.
- Revelation 3:21—Sitting with the Son of God on His throne.

Listen to all seven

What do the following verses have in common?

- Revelation 2:7
- Revelation 2:11
- Revelation 2:17
- Revelation 2:29
- Revelation 3:6
- Revelation 3:13
- Revelation 3:22

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to all 7 churches.