

# The Seven Churches



**Pastor's Training School**

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## ANGELS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

It is evident from the contexts of the various Biblical passages in which the word "angel" appears, that the word does not always represent the same idea. In such passages as [Daniel 12:1](#) and [Acts 12:15](#) it would seem that the angel was generally regarded as a superhuman being whose duty it was to guard a nation or an individual, not unlike the jenei of the Arabs. However, in [Malachi 2:7](#) and [3:1](#) (Hebrew) the word is clearly used to represent men. In the New Testament also, there are passages, such as [James 2:25](#) (Greek), in which the word seems to be applied to men. The seven angels of the seven churches ([Rev. 1:20](#)) received seven letters, figurative letters, and therefore it would seem that the seven angels are also figurative and may refer to the seven bishops who presided over the seven churches of Asia. Or the angels may be regarded as the personifications of the churches.

E. J. BANKS —International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

### The Letters to the Seven Churches

Church	Reference	Commendation	Rebuke	Action
Ephesus	<a href="#">Rev 2:1-7</a>	Hard work, perseverance	Forsaken first love	Remember and repent
Smyrna	<a href="#">Rev 2:8-11</a>	Suffered persecution, poverty	None	Don't fear, be faithful
Pergamum	<a href="#">Rev 2:12-17</a>	True to faith	Compromise	Repent
Thyatira	<a href="#">Rev 2:18-29</a>	Love, faith, service	Immorality	Repent
Sardis	<a href="#">Rev 3:1-6</a>	Effective	Superficial	Wake up, repent
Philadelphia	<a href="#">Rev 3:7-13</a>	Faithful	None	Hold on
Laodicea	<a href="#">Rev 3:14-22</a>	None	Lukewarm	Be earnest and repent

This summary of the letters to the seven churches shows us the qualities our churches should seek and those we should avoid.

—Life Application Bible Notes

## Chapter 1

### Notes for 1:1

Revelation is a book about the future *and* about the present. It offers future hope to all believers, especially those who have suffered for their faith, by proclaiming Christ's final victory over evil and the reality of eternal life with him. It also gives present guidance as it teaches us about Jesus Christ and how we should live for him now. Through graphic pictures we learn that (1) Jesus Christ is coming again, (2) evil will be judged, and (3) the dead will be raised to judgment, resulting in eternal life or eternal destruction.

## A Journey Through the Book of Revelation

**In chapter one**, John relates the circumstances that led to the writing of this book ([1:1-20](#)). In chapters two and three, Jesus gives special messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor ([2:1-3:22](#)).

Suddenly John is caught up into heaven, where he sees a vision of God Almighty on his throne. All of Christ's followers and the heavenly angels are worshiping God ([4:1-11](#)). John watches as God gives a scroll with seven seals to the worthy Lamb, Jesus Christ, ([5:1-14](#)). The Lamb begins to open the seals one by one. As each seal is opened, a new vision appears.

As the first four seals are opened, riders appear on horses of different colors - war, famine, disease, and death are in their path ([6:1 - 8](#)). As the fifth seal is opened, John sees those in heaven who have been martyred for their faith in Christ ([6:9-11](#)).

A set of contrasting images appears at the opening of the sixth seal. On one side, there is a huge earthquake, stars falling from the sky, and the sky rolling up like a scroll ([6:12-17](#)). On the other side, multitudes are before the great throne, worshiping and praising God and the Lamb ([7:1-17](#)).

Finally, the seventh seal is opened ([8:1-5](#)), unveiling a series of God's judgments announced by seven angels with seven trumpets. The first four angels bring hail, fire, a burning mountain, and a falling star - the sun and moon are darkened ([8:6-13](#)). The fifth trumpet announces the coming of locusts with the power to sting ([9:1-12](#)). The sixth trumpet heralds the coming of an army of warriors on horses ([9:13-21](#)). In chapter [10:1-11](#), John is given a little scroll to eat. Following this, John is commanded to measure the temple of God ([11:1, 2](#)). He sees two witnesses who proclaim God's judgment on the earth for three and a half years ([11:3-14](#)).

Finally, the seventh trumpet sounds, calling the rival forces of good and evil to the final battle. On one side is Satan and his forces; on the other side stands Jesus Christ with his forces ([11:15-13:18](#)). In the midst of this call to battle, John sees three angels announcing the final judgment ([14:6-13](#)). Two angels begin to reap this harvest of judgment on the earth ([14:14-20](#)). Following on the heels of these two angels are seven more angels who pour out God's judgment on the earth from seven bowls ([15:1-16:21](#)). One of these angels from the group of seven reveals to John a vision of a "great prostitute" called Babylon (symbolizing the Roman empire) riding a scarlet beast ([17:1-18](#)). After the defeat of Babylon ([18:1-24](#)), a great multitude in heaven shouts praise to God for his mighty victory ([19:1-10](#)).

The final three chapters of the book of Revelation catalogue the events that finalize Christ's victory over the enemy: Satan's 1,000-year imprisonment ([20:1-10](#)), the final judgment ([20:11-15](#)), and the creation of a new earth and a new Jerusalem ([21:1-22:6](#)). An angel then gives John final instructions concerning the visions John has seen and what to do once he has written them all down ([22:7-11](#)).

Revelation concludes with the promise of Christ's soon return, an offer to drink of the water of life that flows through the great street of the new Jerusalem, and a warning to those who read the book ([22:12-21](#)). May we pray with John, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" ([22:20](#)).

The Bible ends with a message of warning and hope for men and women of every generation. Christ is victorious, and all evil has been done away with. As you read the book of Revelation, marvel at God's grace in the salvation of the saints and his power over the evil forces of Satan, and remember the hope of this victory to come.

Revelation is a complex book, and it has baffled interpreters for centuries. We can avoid a great deal of confusion by understanding the literary structure of this book. This approach will allow us to understand the individual scenes within the overall structure of Revelation and keep us from getting unnecessarily bogged down in the details of each vision. John gives hints throughout the book to indicate a change of scene, a change of subject, or a flashback to an earlier scene.

[1:1](#) According to tradition, John, the author, was the only one of Jesus' original twelve disciples who was not killed for the faith. He also wrote the **Gospel of John** and the letters of **1, 2, and 3 John**. When he wrote Revelation, John was in exile on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, sent there by the Romans for his witness about Jesus Christ.

[1:1](#) This book is the revelation *of, concerning, and from* Jesus Christ. God gave the revelation of his plan to Jesus Christ, who, in turn, revealed it to John. The book of Revelation unveils Christ's full identity and God's plan for the end of the world, and it focuses on Jesus Christ, his second coming, his victory over evil, and the establishment of his kingdom. As you read and study Revelation, don't focus so much on the timetable of the events or the details of John's imagery that you miss the main message — the infinite love, power, and justice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Interpreting the Book of Revelation

Approach	Description	Challenge	Caution
PRETERIST VIEW	John is writing to encourage Christians in his own day who are experiencing persecution from the Roman empire.	To gain the same kind of encouragement John's first readers gained from the vivid images of God's sovereignty.	Do not forget that most Biblical prophecy has both an immediate and a future application.
FUTURIST VIEW	Except for the first three chapters, John is describing events that will occur at the end of history.	To see in contemporary events many of the characteristics John describes and realize that the end could come at any time.	Do not assume that we have "figured out" the future, since Jesus said that no one will know the day of his return before it happens.
HISTORICIST VIEW	The book of Revelation is a presentation of history from John's day until the second coming of Christ and beyond.	To note the consistency of human evil throughout history and recognize that names may change but the rebellion against God has not.	Be careful before identifying current events or leaders as fulfilling aspects of the book of Revelation.
IDEALIST VIEW	The book of Revelation is a symbolic representation of the continual struggle of good and evil. It does not refer to any particular historical events. It is applicable at any point in history.	Read the book to gain insight into the past, to prepare for the future, and to live obediently and confidently in the present.	Do not avoid the book because it is difficult. Try to understand Revelation within its broader literary context.

Over the centuries, four main approaches to interpreting the book of Revelation have developed. Each approach has had capable supporters, but none has proved itself the only way to read this book. However, the most basic application question for each approach can be summarized by asking yourself, "Will this help me become a better follower of Jesus Christ today?"

**1:1** The book of Revelation is *apocalyptic* (meaning uncovered, unveiled, or revealed) in style. This style of ancient literature usually featured spectacular and mysterious imagery, and such literature was written under the name of an ancient hero. John was acquainted with Jewish apocalyptic works, but his book is different in several ways: **(1)** he uses his own name rather than the name of an ancient hero; **(2)** he denounces evil and exhorts people to high Christian standards; **(3)** he offers hope rather than gloom. John was not a psychic attempting to predict the future; he was a prophet of God describing what God had shown him.

**1:1** Jesus gave his message to John in a vision, allowing John to see and record certain future events so they could be an encouragement to all believers. The vision includes many signs and symbols that convey the essence of what is to happen. What John saw, in most cases, was indescribable, so he used illustrations to show what it was *like*. When reading this symbolic language, we don't have to understand every detail — John himself didn't. Instead, realize that John's imagery shows us that Christ is indeed the glorious and victorious Lord of all.

**1:1-3** The book of Revelation reveals future events, but there is not the gloomy pessimism we might expect. The drama of these unfolding events is spectacular, but there is nothing to fear if you are on the winning side. When you think about the future, walk with confidence because Christ, the victor, walks with you.

### **Notes for 1:3**

Revelation is a book of prophecy that is both *prediction* (foretelling future events) and *proclamation* (preaching about who God is and what he will do). Prophecy is more than telling the future. Behind the predictions are important principles about God's character and promises. As we read, we will get to know God better so that we can trust him completely.

**1:3** The typical news reports — filled with violence, scandal, and political haggling — are depressing, and we may wonder where the world is heading. God's plan for the future, however, provides inspiration and encouragement because we know he will intervene in history to conquer evil. John encourages churches to read this book aloud so everyone can hear it, apply it ("take to heart what is written in it"), and be assured of the fact that God will triumph.

**1:3** When John says, "the time is near," he is urging his readers to be ready at all times for the Last Judgment and the establishment of God's kingdom. We do not know when these events will occur, but we must always be prepared. They will happen quickly, and there will be no second chance to change sides.

## **John's greetings and praise to God**

### **Notes for 1:4**

Jesus told John to write to seven churches that knew and trusted him and had read his earlier letters (see **Rev 1:11**). The letters were addressed so that they could be read and passed on in a systematic fashion, following the main Roman road clockwise around the province of Asia (now called Turkey).

**1:4** The "seven spirits" is another name for the Holy Spirit. The number seven is used throughout Revelation to symbolize completeness and perfection.

[1:4-6](#) The Trinity — the Father ("him who is, and who was, and who is to come"), the Holy Spirit ("the seven spirits"), and the Son (Jesus Christ) — is the source of all truth ([John 14:6,17](#); [1John 2:27](#); [Revelation 19:11](#)). Thus we can be assured that John's message is reliable and is God's word to us.

### Notes for 1:5

Others had risen from the dead — people whom the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles had brought back to life during their ministries — but later those people died again. Jesus was the first who rose from the dead in an imperishable body ([1Corinthians 15:20](#)), never to die again. He is the firstborn from the dead.

[1:5,6](#) Many hesitate to witness about their faith in Christ because they don't feel the change in their lives has been spectacular enough. But you qualify as a witness for Jesus because of what he has done for you, not because of what you have done for him. Christ demonstrated his great love by setting us free from our sins through his death on the cross ("freed us from our sins by his blood"), guaranteeing us a place in his kingdom, and making us priests to administer God's love to others. The fact that the all-powerful God has offered eternal life to you is nothing short of spectacular.

[1:5-7](#) Jesus is portrayed as an all-powerful King, victorious in battle, glorious in peace. He is not just a humble earthly teacher, he is the glorious God. When you read John's description of the vision, keep in mind that his words are not just good advice; they are truth from the King of kings. Don't just read his words for their interesting and amazing portrayal of the future. Let the truth about Christ penetrate your life, deepen your faith in him, and strengthen your commitment to follow him no matter what the cost.

### Notes for 1:7

John is announcing the return of Jesus to earth (see also [Matthew 24](#); [Mark 13](#); [1Thessalonians 4:15-18](#)). Jesus' second coming will be *visible* and *victorious*. All people will see him arrive ([Mark 13:26](#)), and they will *know* it is Jesus. When he comes, he will conquer evil and judge all people according to their deeds ([Rev 20:11-15](#)).

[1:7](#) "Those who pierced him" could refer to the Roman soldiers who pierced Jesus' side as he hung on the cross or to the Jews who were responsible for his death. John saw Jesus' death with his own eyes, and he never forgot the horror of it (see [John 19:34,35](#); see also [Zechariah 12:10](#)).

### Notes for 1:8

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The Lord God is the beginning and the end. God the Father is the eternal Lord and Ruler of the past, present, and future (see also [Rev 4:8](#); [Isaiah 44:6](#); [48:12-15](#)). Without him you have nothing that is eternal, nothing that can change your life, nothing that can save you from sin. Is the Lord your reason for living, "the Alpha and the Omega" of your life? Honor the One who is the beginning and the end of all existence, wisdom, and power.



## The vision of Christ

### Notes for 1:9

Patmos was a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea, about 50 miles offshore from the city of Ephesus on the Asia Minor seacoast (see map).

**1:9** The Christian church was facing severe persecution. Almost all believers were socially, politically, or economically suffering because of this empire-wide persecution, and some were even being killed for their faith. John was exiled to Patmos because he refused to stop preaching the gospel. We may not face persecution for our faith as the early Christians did, but even with our freedom few of us have the courage to share God's Word with others. If we hesitate to share our faith during easy times, how will we do during times of persecution?

### Notes for 1:12,13

The seven golden lampstands are the seven churches in Asia ([Rev 1:11,20](#)), and Jesus stands among them. No matter what the churches face, Jesus protects them with his all-encompassing love and reassuring power. Through his Spirit, Jesus Christ is still among the churches today. When a church faces persecution, it should remember Christ's deep love and compassion. When a church is wracked by internal strife and conflict, it should remember Christ's concern for purity and his intolerance of sin.

### Notes for 1:13,14

This man "like a son of man" is Jesus himself. The title *Son of Man* occurs many times in the New Testament in reference to Jesus as the Messiah. John recognized Jesus because he lived with him for three years and had seen him both as the Galilean preacher and as the glorified Son of God at the transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-8](#)). Here Jesus appears as the mighty Son of Man. His white hair indicates his wisdom and divine nature (see also [Daniel 7:9](#)); his blazing eyes symbolize judgment of all evil; the golden sash around his chest reveals him as the high priest who goes into God's presence to obtain forgiveness of sin for those who have believed in him.

### Notes for 1:16

The sword in Jesus' mouth symbolizes the power and force of his message. His words of judgment are as sharp as swords ([Isaiah 49:2](#); [Hebrews 4:12](#)).

### Notes for 1:17, 18

As the Roman government stepped up its persecution of Christians, John must have wondered if the church could survive and stand against the opposition. But Jesus appeared in glory and splendor, reassuring John that he and his fellow believers had access to God's strength to face these trials. If you are facing difficult problems, remember that the power available to John and the early church is also available to you (see [1 John 4:4](#)).



[1:17,18](#) Our sins have convicted and sentenced us, but Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades. He alone can free us from eternal bondage to Satan. He alone has the power and authority to set us free from sin's control. Believers don't have to fear Hades or death, because Christ holds the keys to both. All we must do is turn from sin and turn to him in faith. When we attempt to control our lives and disregard God, we set a course that leads directly to hell. But when we place our lives in Christ's hands, he restores us now and resurrects us later to an eternal, peaceful relationship with him.

### **Notes for 1:20**

Who are the "angels of the seven churches"? Some say that they are angels designated to guard the churches; others say that they are elders or pastors of the local churches. Because the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3 contain reprimands, it is doubtful that these angels are heavenly messengers. If these are earthly leaders or messengers, they are accountable to God for the churches they represent.

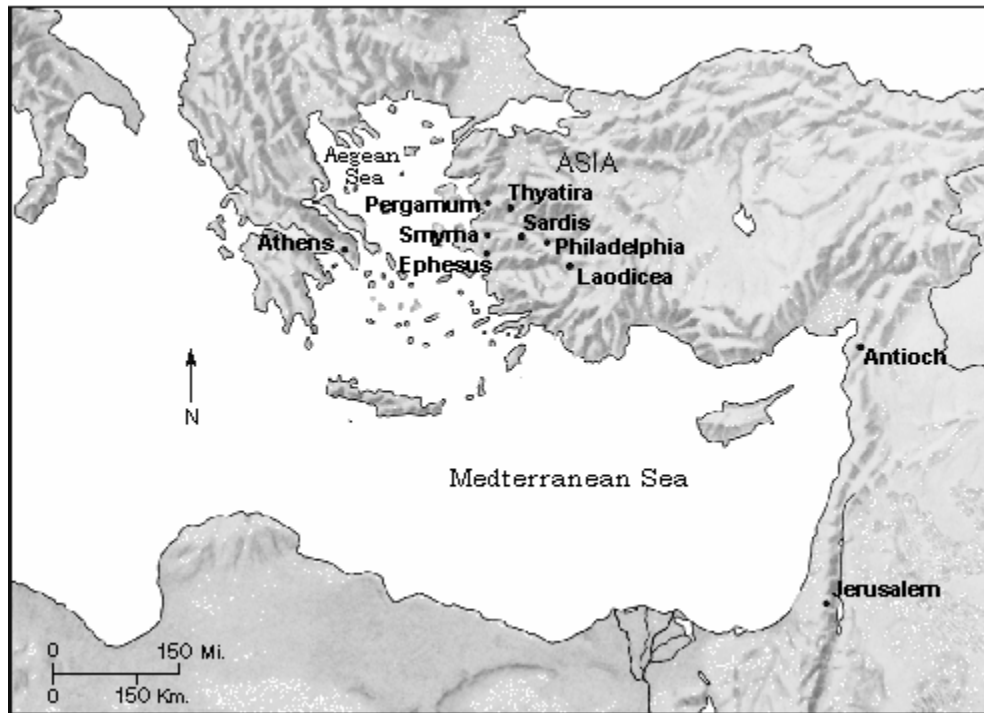
## **Chapter 2**

### **The loveless church**

#### **Notes for 2:1**

Ephesus was the capital of Asia Minor, a center of land and sea trade, and, along with Alexandria and Antioch in Syria, one of the three most influential cities in the eastern part of the Roman empire. The temple to Artemis, one of the ancient wonders of the world, was located in this city, and a major industry was the manufacture of images of this goddess (see [Acts 19:21-41](#)). Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years and warned the Ephesians that false teachers would come and try to draw people away from the faith (see [Acts 20:29-31](#)). False teachers did indeed cause problems in the Ephesian church, but the church resisted them, as we can see from Paul's letter to them (see the book of Ephesians). John spent much of his ministry in this city and knew that they had resisted false teaching ([Rev 2:2](#)).

[2:1](#) The one who "walks among the seven golden lampstands" (the seven churches) is Jesus ([Rev 1:11-13](#)). He holds the "seven stars in his right hand" (messengers of the churches), indicating his power and authority over the churches and their leaders. Ephesus had become a large, proud church, and Jesus' message would remind them that he alone is the head of the body of believers.



Source—Life Application Bible Notes

## The Seven Churches

The seven churches were located on a major Roman road. A letter carrier would leave the island of Patmos (where John was exiled), arriving first at Ephesus. He would travel north to Smyrna and Pergamum, turn southeast to Thyatira, and continue on to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea -- in the exact order in which the letters were dictated.

**2:1ff** Does God care about your church? If you are tempted to doubt it, look more closely at these seven letters. The Lord of the universe knew each of these churches and its precise situation. In each letter, Jesus told John to write about specific people, places, and events. He praised believers for their successes and told them how to correct their failures. Just as Jesus cared for each of these churches, he cares for yours. He wants it to reach its greatest potential. The group of believers with whom you worship and serve is God's vehicle for changing the world. Take it seriously — God does.

### Notes for 2:2

Over a long period of time, the church in Ephesus had steadfastly refused to tolerate sin among its members. This was not easy in a city noted for immoral sexual practices associated with the worship of the goddess Artemis. We also are living in times of widespread sin and sexual immorality. It is popular to be open-minded toward many types of sin, calling them personal choices or alternative life-styles. But when the body of believers begins to tolerate sin in the church, it is lowering the standards and

compromising the church's witness. Remember that God's approval is infinitely more important than the world's.

[2:2,3](#) Christ commended the church at Ephesus for (1) working hard, (2) persevering, (3) resisting sin, (4) critically examining the claims of false apostles, and (5) enduring hardships without becoming weary. Every church should have these characteristics. But these good efforts should spring from our love for Jesus Christ. Both Jesus and John stressed love for one another as an authentic proof of the gospel ([John 13:34](#); [1John 3:18,19](#)). In the battle to maintain sound teaching and moral and doctrinal purity, it is possible to lose a charitable spirit. Prolonged conflict can weaken or destroy our patience and affection. In defending the faith, guard against any structure or rigidity that weakens love.

#### Notes for 2:4

Paul had once commended the church at Ephesus for its love for God and others ([Ephesians 1:15](#)), but many of the church founders had died, and many of the second-generation believers had lost their zeal for God. They were a busy church — the members did much to benefit themselves and the community — but they were acting out of the wrong motives. Work for God must be motivated by love for God or it will not last.

[2:4,5](#) Just as when a man and woman fall in love, so also new believers rejoice at their newfound forgiveness. But when we lose sight of the seriousness of sin, we begin to lose the thrill of our forgiveness (see [2 Peter 1:9](#)). In the first steps of your Christian life, you may have had enthusiasm without knowledge. Do you now have knowledge without enthusiasm? Both are necessary if we are to keep love for God intense and untarnished (see [Hebrews 10:32,35](#)). Do you love God with the same fervor as when you were a new Christian?

#### Notes for 2:5

For Jesus to "remove your lampstand from its place" would mean the church would cease to be an effective church. Just as the seven-branched candlestick in the temple gave light for the priests to see, the churches were to give light to their surrounding communities. But Jesus warned them that their lights could go out. In fact, Jesus himself would extinguish any light that did not fulfill its purpose. The church had to repent of its sins.

#### Notes for 2:6

The Nicolaitans were believers who compromised their faith in order to enjoy some of the sinful practices of Ephesian society. The name *Nicolaitans* is held by some to be roughly the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for "Balaamites." Balaam was a prophet who induced the Israelites to carry out their lustful desires (see [Rev 2:14](#) and [Numbers 31:16](#)). When we want to take part in an activity that we know is wrong, we may make excuses to justify our behavior, saying that it isn't as bad as it seems or that it won't hurt our faith. Christ has strong words for those who look for excuses to sin.

**2:6** Through John, Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for hating the wicked practices of the Nicolaitans. Note that they didn't hate the people, just their sinful actions. We should accept and love all people and refuse to tolerate all evil. God cannot tolerate sin, and he expects us to stand against it. The world needs Christians who will stand for God's truth and point people toward right living.

#### **Notes for 2:7**

To overcome is to be victorious by believing in Christ, persevering, remaining faithful, and living as one who follows Christ. Such a life brings great rewards (**Rev 21:7**).

**2:7** Two trees were in the Garden of Eden — the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see **Genesis 2:9**). Eating from the tree of life brought eternal life with God; eating from the tree of knowledge brought realization of good and evil. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, they disobeyed God's command. So they were excluded from Eden and barred from eating from the tree of life. Eventually, evil will be destroyed and believers will be brought into a restored paradise. In the new earth, everyone will eat from the tree of life and will live forever.

### **The persecuted church**

#### **Notes for 2:8**

The city of Smyrna was about 25 miles north of Ephesus. It was nicknamed "Port of Asia" because it had an excellent harbor on the Aegean Sea. The church in this city struggled against two hostile forces: a Jewish population strongly opposed to Christianity, and a non-Jewish population that was loyal to Rome and supported emperor worship. Persecution and suffering were inevitable in an environment like this.

#### **Notes for 2:9, 10**

Persecution comes from Satan, not from God. Satan, the devil, will cause believers to be thrown into prison and even killed. But believers need not fear death, because it will only result in their receiving the crown of life. Satan may harm their earthly bodies, but he can do them no spiritual harm. The "synagogue of Satan" means that these Jews were serving Satan's purposes, not God's, when they gathered to worship. "Ten days" means that although persecution would be intense, it would be relatively short. It would have a definite beginning and end, and God would remain in complete control.

**2:9-11** Pain is part of life, but it is never easy to suffer, no matter what the cause. Jesus commended the church at Smyrna for its faith in suffering. He then encouraged the believers that they need not fear the future if they remained faithful. If you are experiencing difficult times, don't let them turn you away from God. Instead let them draw you toward greater faithfulness. Trust God and remember your heavenly reward (see also **Rev 22:12-14**).

### Notes for 2:10

Smyrna was famous for its athletic games. A crown was the victory wreath, the trophy for the champion at the games. If we have been faithful, we will receive the prize of victory — eternal life ([James 1:12](#)). The message to the Smyrna church was to remain faithful during their suffering because God is in control and his promises are reliable. Jesus never says that by being faithful to him we will avoid troubles, suffering, and persecution. Rather, we must be faithful to him *in* our sufferings. Only then will our faith prove to be genuine. We remain faithful by keeping our eyes on Christ and on what he promises us now and in the future (see [Philippians 3:13,14](#); [2 Timothy 4:8](#)).

### Notes for 2:11

Believers and unbelievers alike experience physical death. All people will be resurrected, but believers will be resurrected to eternal life with God while unbelievers will be resurrected to be punished with a second death, eternal separation from God (see also [Rev 20:14](#); [21:8,27](#); [22:15](#)).

### The lenient church

#### Notes for 2:12

The city of Pergamum was built on a hill 1,000 feet above the surrounding countryside, creating a natural fortress. It was a sophisticated city, a center of Greek culture and education, with a 200,000-volume library. But it was also the center of four cults, and it rivaled Ephesus in its worship of idols. The city's chief god was Asclepius, whose symbol was a serpent, and who was considered the god of healing. People came to Pergamum from all over the world to seek healing from this god.

[2:12](#) Just as the Romans used their swords for authority and judgment, Jesus' sharp, double-edged sword represents God's ultimate authority and judgment. It may also represent God's future separation of believers from unbelievers. Unbelievers cannot experience the eternal rewards of living in God's kingdom.

#### Notes for 2:13

As the center for four idolatrous cults (Zeus, Dionysius, Asclepius, and Athene), Pergamum was called the city "where Satan has his throne." Surrounded by worship of Satan and the Roman emperor as god, the church at Pergamum refused to renounce their faith, even when Satan's worshipers martyred one of their members. Standing firm against the strong pressures and temptations of society is never easy, but the alternative is deadly ([Rev 2:11](#)).

[2:13-15](#) It was not easy to be a Christian in Pergamum. Believers experienced great pressure to compromise or leave the faith. (For information on the Nicolaitans, see the first note on [Rev 2:6](#).) Nothing is known about Antipas except that he did *not* compromise. He was faithful, and he died for his faith. Apparently, however, some in the church were tolerating those who taught or practiced what Christ opposed. Compromise can be defined as a blending of the qualities of two different things or a concession of

principles. Cooperate with people as much as you can, but avoid any alliance, partnership, or participation that could lead to immoral practices.

### **Notes for 2:14**

There is room for differences of opinion among Christians in some areas, but there is no room for heresy and moral impurity. Your town might not participate in idol feasts, but it probably has pornography, sexual sin, cheating, gossiping, and lying. Don't tolerate sin by bowing to the pressure to be open-minded.

**2:14-16** Balak was a king who feared the large number of Israelites traveling through his country, so he hired Balaam to pronounce a curse on them. Balaam refused at first, but an offer of money changed his mind (**Numbers 22 — 24**). Later Balaam influenced the Israelites to turn to idol worship (**Numbers 31:16**; also see **2 Peter 2:15**; **Jude 11**). Here Christ rebuked the church for tolerating those who, like Balaam, lead people away from God.

### **Notes for 2:16**

This sword is God's judgment against rebellious nations (**Rev 19:15,21**) and all forms of sin. See also the note on **Rev 1:16** and the second note on **Rev 2:12**.

### **Notes for 2:17**

"Hidden manna" suggests the spiritual nourishment that the faithful believers will receive. As the Israelites traveled toward the promised land, God provided manna from heaven for their physical nourishment (**Exodus 16:13-18**). Jesus, as the bread of life (**John 6:51**), provides spiritual nourishment that satisfies our deepest hunger.

**2:17** It is unclear what the white stones are or exactly what the names on each will be. Because they relate to the hidden manna, they may be symbols of the believer's eternal nourishment, or eternal life. The stones are significant because each will bear the new name of every person who truly believes in Christ. They are the evidence that a person has been accepted by God and declared worthy to receive eternal life. A person's name represented his or her character. God will give us new names and new hearts.

## **The compromising church**

### **Notes for 2:18**

Thyatira was a working man's town, with many trade guilds for cloth making, dyeing, and pottery. Lydia, Paul's first convert in Philippi, was a merchant from Thyatira (**Acts 16:14**). The city was basically secular, with no focus on any particular religion.

### **Notes for 2:19**

The believers in Thyatira were commended for growing in good deeds. We should not feel satisfied when our church only rejoices in the salvation of its members or in the

comfort of gathering for worship. We should grow in love, faith, and acts of service. Because the times are critical, we must spend our days wisely and faithfully.

### **Notes for 2:20**

A woman in the church in Thyatira was teaching that immorality was not a serious matter for believers. Her name may have been Jezebel, or John may have used the name Jezebel to symbolize the kind of evil she was promoting. Jezebel, a pagan queen of Israel, was considered the most evil woman who ever lived (see [1 Kings 19:1,2](#); [21:1-15](#); [2 Kings 9:7-10,30-37](#); and her Profile in [1 Kings 21](#)).

[2:20](#) Why is sexual immorality serious? Sex outside marriage always hurts someone. It hurts God because it shows that we prefer to satisfy our desires our own way instead of according to God's Word, or to satisfy them now instead of waiting for his timing. It hurts others because it violates the commitment so necessary to a relationship. It hurts us because it often brings disease to our bodies and adversely affects our personalities. Sexual immorality has tremendous power to destroy families, churches, and communities because it destroys the integrity on which these relationships are built. God wants to protect us from hurting ourselves and others; thus we are to have no part in sexual immorality, even if our culture accepts it.

[2:20](#) In pagan temples, meat was often offered to idols. Then the meat that wasn't burned was sold to shoppers in the temple marketplace. Eating meat offered to idols wasn't wrong in itself, but it could violate the principle of sensitivity toward weaker Christian brothers and sisters who would be bothered by it (see [1 Corinthians 8](#) and the note on [Romans 14:2](#)). Jezebel was obviously more concerned about her own selfish pleasure and freedom than about the needs and concerns of fellow believers.

### **Notes for 2:21**

Jezebel was unwilling to repent. "Repent" means to change our mind and direction from following our way to following God's way, from sin and its disastrous consequences to God and eternal life. In his mercy, God has given us time in his mercy to decide to follow him. Only our stubborn willfulness stands in the way.

### **Notes for 2:23**

We cannot hide from Christ; he knows what is in our hearts and minds, and still he loves us. The sins we try to hide from God need to be confessed to him.

### **Notes for 2:24, 25**

The "deep secrets" of Satan were either false teaching advocated by heretics, or secret insights by so-called believers "guaranteed" to promote deeper spiritual life. We should hold tightly to the basics of our Christian faith and view with caution and counsel any new teaching that turns us away from the Bible, the fellowship of our church, or our basic confession of faith.



### Notes for 2:26, 27

Christ says that those who overcome (those who remain faithful until the end and continue to please God) will rule over Christ's enemies and reign with him as he judges evil (see also [Psalm 2:8,9](#); [Isaiah 30:14](#); [Jeremiah 19:11](#); [1Corinthians 6:2,3](#); [Revelation 12:5](#); [19:15](#); [20:3,4](#) for more about God's judgment).

### Notes for 2:28

Christ is called the morning star in [Rev 2:28](#); [22:16](#), and [2 Peter 1:19](#). A morning star appears just before dawn, when the night is coldest and darkest. When the world is at its bleakest point, Christ will burst onto the scene, exposing evil with his light of truth and bringing his promised reward.

## Chapter 3

### The lifeless church

#### Notes for 3:1

The wealthy city of Sardis was actually in two locations. The older section of the city was on a mountain, and, when its population outgrew the spot, a newer section was built in the valley below.

[3:1](#) The "seven spirits of God" is another name for the Holy Spirit. The seven stars are the messengers, or leaders, of the churches (see [Rev 2:1](#)).

[3:1](#) The problem in the Sardis church was not heresy, but spiritual death. In spite of its reputation for being active, Sardis was infested with sin. Its deeds were evil and its clothes soiled. The Spirit has no words of commendation for this church that looked so good on the outside but was so corrupt on the inside.

### The Names of Jesus (Revelation)

Reference	Jesus' name	Reference	Jesus' name
<a href="#">Rev 1:8</a>	The Alpha and the Omega	<a href="#">Rev 5:5</a>	Root of David
<a href="#">Rev 1:8</a>	Lord God	<a href="#">Rev 5:6</a>	Lamb
<a href="#">Rev 1:8</a>	The Almighty	<a href="#">Rev 7:17</a>	Shepherd
<a href="#">Rev 1:13</a>	Son of Man	<a href="#">Rev 12:10</a>	Christ
<a href="#">Rev 1:17</a>	The First and the Last	<a href="#">Rev 19:11</a>	Faithful and True
<a href="#">Rev 1:18</a>	The Living One	<a href="#">Rev 19:13</a>	Word of God
<a href="#">Rev 2:18</a>	Son of God	<a href="#">Rev 19:16</a>	King of kings
<a href="#">Rev 3:14</a>	Witness	<a href="#">Rev 19:16</a>	Lord of lords
<a href="#">Rev 4:11</a>	Creator	<a href="#">Rev 22:16</a>	The Morning Star
<a href="#">Rev 5:5</a>	Lion of the tribe of Judah		

Scattered among the vivid images of the book of Revelation is a large collection of names for Jesus. Each one tells something of his character and highlights a particular aspect of his role within God's plan of redemption.

### Notes for 3:3

The church at Sardis was urged to obey the Christian truth they had heard when they first believed in Christ, to get back to the basics of the faith. It is important to grow in our knowledge of the Lord, to deepen our understanding through careful study. But no matter how much we learn, we must never abandon the basic truths about Jesus. Jesus will always be God's Son, and his sacrifice for our sins is permanent. No new truth from God will ever contradict these Biblical teachings.

### Notes for 3:5

To be "dressed in white" means to be set apart for God and made pure. Christ promises future honor and eternal life to those who stand firm in their faith. The names of all believers are registered in the book of life. This book symbolizes God's knowledge of who belongs to him. All such people are guaranteed a listing in the book of life and are introduced to the hosts of heaven as belonging to Christ (see [Luke 12:8,9](#)).

## The obedient church

### Notes for 3:7

Philadelphia was founded by the citizens of Pergamum. The community was built in a frontier area as a gateway to the central plateau of Asia Minor. Philadelphia's residents kept barbarians out of the region and brought in Greek culture and language. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 17, and aftershocks kept the people so worried that most of them lived outside the city limits.

[3:7](#) The key of David represents Christ's authority to open the door of invitation into his future kingdom. After the door is opened, no one can close it — salvation is assured. Once it is closed, no one can open it — judgment is certain.

### Notes for 3:10

Some believe that "I will also keep you from the hour of trial" means there will be a future time of great tribulation from which true believers will be spared. Others interpret this to mean that the church will go through the time of tribulation and that God will keep them strong in the midst of it. Still others believe this refers to times of great distress in general, the church's suffering through the ages. Whatever the case, our emphasis should be on patiently obeying God no matter what we may face.

### Notes for 3:11

Christians have differing gifts, abilities, experience, and maturity. God doesn't expect us all to be and act the same, but he does expect us to "hold on" to what we have, to persevere in using our resources for him. The Philadelphians are commended for their effort to obey ([Rev 3:8](#)) and encouraged to hold tightly to whatever strength they have. You may be a new believer and feel that your faith and spiritual strength are little. Use what you have to live for Christ, and God will commend you.

### Notes for 3:12

The new Jerusalem is the future dwelling of the people of God ([Rev 21:2](#)). We will have a new citizenship in God's future kingdom. Everything will be new, pure, and secure.

### The lukewarm church

#### Notes for 3:14

Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities, known for its banking industry, manufacture of wool, and a medical school that produced eye salve. But the city had always had a problem with its water supply. At one time an aqueduct was built to bring water to the city from hot springs. But by the time the water reached the city, it was neither hot nor refreshingly cool — only lukewarm. The church had become as bland as the tepid water that came into the city.

#### Notes for 3:15

Lukewarm water makes a disgusting drink. The church in Laodicea had become lukewarm and thus distasteful and repugnant. The believers didn't take a stand for anything; indifference had led to idleness. By neglecting to do anything for Christ, the church had become hardened and self-satisfied, and it was destroying itself. There is nothing more disgusting than a halfhearted, in-name-only Christian who is self-sufficient. Don't settle for following God halfway. Let Christ fire up your faith and get you into the action.

#### Notes for 3:17

Some believers falsely assume that numerous material possessions are a sign of God's spiritual blessing. Laodicea was a wealthy city, and the church was also wealthy. But what the Laodiceans could see and buy had become more valuable to them than what is unseen and eternal. Wealth, luxury, and ease can make people feel confident, satisfied, and complacent. But no matter how much you possess or how much money you make, you have nothing if you don't have a vital relationship with Christ. How does your current level of wealth affect your spiritual desire? Instead of centering your life primarily on comfort and luxury, find your true riches in Christ.

#### Notes for 3:18

Laodicea was known for its great wealth — but Christ told the Laodiceans to buy their gold from him (real spiritual treasures). The city was proud of its cloth and dyeing industries — but Christ told them to purchase white clothes from him (his righteousness). Laodicea prided itself on its precious eye salve that healed many eye problems — but Christ told them to get medicine from him to heal their eyes so they could see the truth ([John 9:39](#)). Christ was showing the Laodiceans that true value was not in material possessions, but in a right relationship with God. Their possessions and achievements were valueless compared with the everlasting future of Christ's kingdom.

### **Notes for 3:19**

God would discipline this lukewarm church unless it turned from its indifference toward him. God's purpose in discipline is not to punish, but to bring people back to him. Are you lukewarm in your devotion to God? God may discipline you to help you out of your uncaring attitude, but he uses only loving discipline. You can avoid God's discipline by drawing near to him again through confession, service, worship, and studying his Word. Just as the spark of love can be rekindled in marriage, so the Holy Spirit can reignite our zeal for God when we allow him to work in our hearts.

### **Notes for 3:20**

The Laodicean church was complacent and rich. They felt self-satisfied, but they didn't have Christ's presence among them. Christ knocked at the door of their hearts, but they were so busy enjoying worldly pleasures that they didn't notice that he was trying to enter. The pleasures of this world — money, security, material possessions — can be dangerous, because their temporary satisfaction makes us indifferent to God's offer of lasting satisfaction. If you find yourself feeling indifferent to church, to God, or to the Bible, you have begun to shut God out of your life. Leave the door of your heart constantly open to God, and you won't need to worry about hearing his knock. Letting him in is your only hope for lasting fulfillment.

**3:20** Jesus is knocking on the door of our hearts every time we sense we should turn to him. Jesus wants to have fellowship with us, and he wants us to open up to him. He is patient and persistent in trying to get through to us — not breaking and entering, but knocking. He allows us to decide whether or not to open our lives to him. Do you intentionally keep his life-changing presence and power on the other side of the door?

### **Notes for 3:22**

At the end of each letter to these churches, the believers were urged to listen and take to heart what was written to them. Although a different message was addressed to each church, all the messages contain warnings and principles for everyone. Which letter speaks most directly to your church? Which has the greatest bearing on your own spiritual condition at this time? How will you respond?