

THE  
7 CHURCHES  
*in the book of*  
REVELATION

*The Lord's message to  
7 ancient churches, 7 church ages,  
and the church today*

GARY RAY

# **THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

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The I Am A Watchman ministry desires to equip and encourage believers, reach the lost,  
and see individuals prepared for the return of the King.

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## **ABOUT THIS RESOURCE**

This discipleship resource was prepared by Gary Ray in support of the **I Am A Watchman** ministry (IAmAWatchman.com). Special thanks to Randi Gray for assisting with this project.

The hope is that this resource will help students of the Word see the beautiful and layered truths presented in the Lord's timeless messages to the seven churches noted in Revelation 2-3.

This brief book profiles each of the seven churches—their history, location, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. This book also profiles the significance of the messages to each church, how each message has a prophetic element, and how each message applies to believers today.

This writing includes links to seven teaching videos—designed to complement and enrich your reading on this worthy subject.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gary Ray has served in pastoral ministry for more than 25 years. He is a student of the Word and has a passion for presenting Scripture in ways that are interesting and clear—particularly for those with limited or no church background.

Gary has served as President of the I Am A Watchman ministry since 2019.

### **Other books by this author include:**

- The Discipleship Handbook
- The Story of Jesus
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- Next on the Prophetic Horizon
- What the Post-Rapture World and Church Will Look Like
- Why and How to Preach on Prophecy and Eschatology
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You can request information on these books by writing to [HelpsForTheChurch@gmail.com](mailto:HelpsForTheChurch@gmail.com)

Gary is happily married and lives in the Pacific Northwest with his wonderful wife, children and grandchildren. He is a Watchman for the Lord—and encourages you to be one too. He can be contacted through the email listed above, or via the I Am A Watchman ministry website portal (see [IAmAWatchman.com/contact\\_us/](http://IAmAWatchman.com/contact_us/) )

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**THE LORD'S MESSAGE TO  
THE SEVEN CHURCHES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Lord's message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation may seem dated and mysterious. None of the churches mentioned are in existence today, the names and places are unfamiliar, and the writing is rich in imagery and symbolism. Nevertheless, the Lord's message to the seven churches is timeless and relevant. The Lord's message was important for believers 2000 years ago and is essential for believers today.

Many Bible scholars believe that embodied in Lord's message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, is an application for an actual ancient church, an application for the Church today, an application for the individual, and there is a prophetic application. This book will briefly profile each application for each church.

Profound symbolism and structure are also embodied in the Lord's message to the churches. The book's structure centers on the number seven, which in ancient Hebrew culture, pointed to the divine. Interestingly, the writer of the masterpiece that is the book of Revelation is not the learned Paul, but the humble fisherman John, whose grammar and vocabulary puts his writings at an elementary-school-age level.



## The structure of the book of Revelation

The numerical structure of the Holy Bible has been studied many times over the centuries. However, perhaps, never more provocatively than the works of Dr. Ivan Panin.<sup>1</sup>

Ivan Panin was born in Russia on December 12, 1855. He grew up in Germany and later migrated to the United States—graduating from Harvard University in 1882.

As an adult he converted from agnosticism to Christianity, and in 1890, discovered the phenomenal mathematical designs underlying both the Greek and Hebrew testaments.

Ivan Panin committed the next 50 years to exploring the numerical structure of the Scriptures, generating over 43,000 detailed hand-penned pages of analysis. He found in the book of Revelation (and throughout the Bible) a particular and beautiful system of sevens woven throughout the text. This has come to be known as the **Heptadic Structure**. The number seven, being linked to perfection and the divine in Hebrew culture, makes the Lord's message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation exceptionally marvelous and meaningful. A few of the sevens Mr. Panin saw in the book of Revelation follow:

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<sup>1</sup> Panin, Ivan, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures Scientifically Demonstrated: A Letter to the New York Sun Newspaper* (Nov. 19, 1899): <https://tinyurl.com/bdh5whdc>

## The heptadic structure in the book of Revelation

- Chapters 2-3 presents messages to **seven** churches.
- The messages are given by the one who 'holds the **seven** spirits' and 'walks among the **seven** lampstands.'
- **Seven** Messianic titles are presented to the churches.
- The phrase: "He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" is repeated **seven** times to the churches in the book of Revelation and appears **seven** times in the Gospels.
- The **seven** churches prophetically point to **seven** church ages.
- There may be a tie between the message to each of the **seven** churches in the book of Revelation and the **seven** parables in Matthew 13.

## Additional sevens in the book of Revelation

- |                             |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| - Promises to the overcomer | - Years of judgment  |
| - Seals                     | - Spirits            |
| - Trumpets                  | - Stars              |
| - Bowls                     | - Lamps              |
| - Thunders                  | - Mountains          |
| - Heads                     | - Plagues            |
| - Doxologies                | - "I Am's" of Christ |
|                             | - Horns              |
|                             | - Eyes               |
|                             | - Angels             |
|                             | - Kings              |
|                             | - Crowns             |

### • Seven Beatitudes

- "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear and keep those things..." (Rev. 1:3).
- "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).
- "Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments." (Rev. 16:15)

- “Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9).
- “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:6).
- “Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7).
- “Blessed are they that wash their robes” (Rev. 22:14).

- **7 elements in each message to the churches**

- Name of the Church is presented
- A title of Christ presented
- A commendation
- An expression of concern
- An exhortation
- A promise to the overcomer
- The statement: *“He that hath an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

## A general profile of the seven churches (and symbolic ties)

- **Ephesus** struggled with priorities. They had ‘forgotten their first love’ which is to say, they had neglected to demonstrate proper affection and devotion to their foremost love—Jesus Christ.
- **Smyrna** faced great persecution and oppression. The name of the city has a tie to the word, myrrh, which is a perfume associated with suffering and death. Note that the pleasant fragrance of myrrh is only released when it is ‘crushed,’ and that this correlates to the ministry of the ‘suffering servant’ as presented in Isaiah 53.
- **Pergamum** slipped into compromise. Pergamum is a compound word meaning mixed (in a negative sense) and union. Located in a great pagan center known as ‘The City of Temples,’ this church struggled to remain pure. The Altar of Pergamos, infamous in history, was located there. In time, this church embraced elements of paganism.
- **Thyatira** represents a falling away from truth and profound apostasy. This city had ties to ancient Babylonian mythology, which was marked by violence and sensuality and had a particular ability to pervert spiritual principles. For example, in Babylonian mythology, snake symbols are good (not evil). There

is a chief god, but often this deity is presented as feminine. The son of the king is associated with light and glory, but he, known as Tammuz or later, Baal, comes to power through murder and requires violence from his followers. The ancient Babylonian religious system built on distorted truths.

- **Sardis** was a divided city that perceived itself as better than it was. The word ‘Sardis’ is plural. The city of Sardis had an upper and lower section. Both sections referred to themselves as Sardis. The upper portion of the city sat atop a 1500’ cliff. This rather strong strategic position led city leaders to boast of their invincibility. However, their great wealth) and location did not save them from military conquest (multiple times).
- **Philadelphia** was the youngest of the seven cities noted in the book of Revelation. To this church, Jesus offered only words of commendation and promise. This church was strong, loving, and faithful. In the 14th century, Philadelphia stood alone as the last Christian city in the entire region.
- **Laodicea**, like Pergamum and Sardis, this city is associated with apostasy. This church did not think itself significant as the church at Sardis did—but was comfortable and complacent. This ‘lukewarm’ church was an offense to Jesus and received a stern rebuke from the Lord in Revelation 3:16.

## The application for the believer and Church today

- The message to the Church at **Ephesus** reminds believers of the importance of demonstrating proper affection and devotion to their first love—Jesus Christ.
- The Lord’s word to the Church at **Smyrna** reminds believers that God can use suffering and opposition to bring about spiritual growth and an increased witness. Though the church of Smyrna suffered terribly under Roman persecution, it was the most vibrant and Great-Commission oriented of the churches.
- The message to the Church at **Pergamum** warns believers not to embrace (become in union with) the things of the world.<sup>2</sup>
- The message to the Church at **Thyatira** reminds believers that the enemy often slyly manipulates, twists, and distorts the truth. Believers are urged to *“Prove all things; Hold fast that which is good [and true].”*<sup>3</sup>
- The message to the Church at **Sardis** reminds believers that a divided city is not a great city, that false pretensions lead to disaster, and that having a reputation for good is not the same as actually being

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<sup>2</sup> See 2 Cor. 6:14

<sup>3</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:21

good. It is the united and faithful church that will be blessed. In evaluating our effectiveness and spirituality, believers must not seek man's assessment but God's. It is God's expectations and standards that believers must strive to meet.

- The message to the Church at **Philadelphia** reminds believers of the importance of love, endurance, truth, and being a witness. To the faithful, Jesus promises a great reward and an escape (the Rapture)<sup>4</sup> from the tribulations that are to come.
- The message to the Church at **Laodicea** is somber and reminds believers that the 'lukewarm' church (and a 'lukewarm' faith) is not acceptable in the sight of Jesus. Believers must trust in the Lord and remember that complacency is detestable to the Father.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 62:1-2; James 2-3

## The prophetic message to the seven churches

Many scholars believe the messages to the seven churches in Revelation prophetically point forward to future periods in the history of the Church. Though there is some dispute on this supposition, one can see that if the message to these churches were different, or if there was a change in the order of the messages to these churches, the supposition would have no support. The unique order, city history, and individual elements of each church's history make the supposition compelling. Noted below is a brief presentation of the prophetic application of the messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation:

- The Church at **Ephesus** is said to represent the age of the Apostles and early expansion of the New Testament Church. There was a mighty beginning, quickly followed by a tendency to neglect to demonstrate proper affection and devotion to their first love—Jesus Christ. This church is said to represent the period from 33—100 AD.
- The Church at **Smyrna** represents the age of persecution, roughly the period from 100—313 AD. Persecution came primarily by the hands of ten notorious Roman Caesars. However, the Hebrew culture views the number ten as being linked to particular and divine structure (i.e., the Ten Commandments) or a God-ordained plan (such as how the book of Genesis is divided by the ten generations between Adam and Noah, and the ten generations between Noah and Abraham).

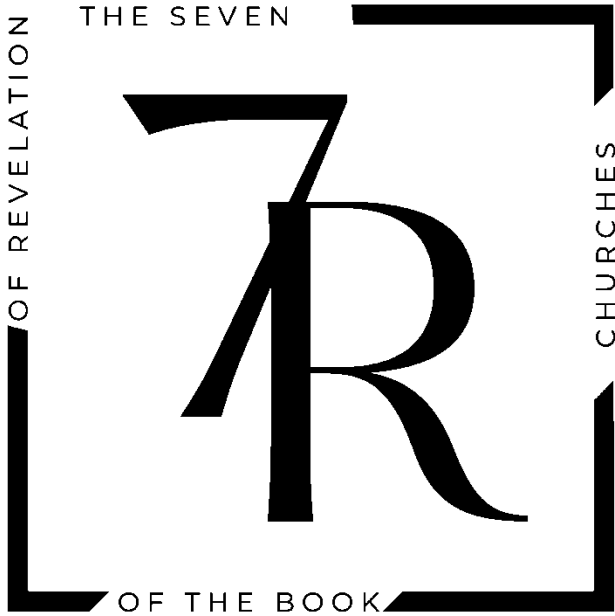


- The Church at **Pergamum** represents the age of compromise. The first 'Christian' Emperor was Constantine. There are questions about the genuine nature of his faith, but his coming to power early in the fourth century does coincide with the reversal of many terrible laws designed to persecute and oppress Christians. This relaxing of prohibitions appears to be a great positive, but the relaxing of these prohibitions coincides with a reduction of passion regarding living out the faith. As pressure on Christians diminished, Christians slid into compromise. The church significantly weakened between 313 – 600 AD.
- The Church at **Thyatira** is said to represent a period of grave apostasy. It points to a period of history (roughly 600–1517 AD) when various aspects of doctrine, practice, and motive became corrupt. The Inquisitions, the Crusades, the development of the political/military arm of 'the church,' the sale of indulgences, the elevation of the clergy, and the embracing of false doctrine took place during this dark time.
- The Church at **Sardis** is said to represent the age of division, false pretention and near death (1517–1648 AD). The Holy Roman Empire fades during this age, and the Protestant Reformation begins. It also represents a time of false pretension as the 16th century Catholic Church saw no need to reform. Though some positive happenings are noted during this age, it is known as a

dark period in church history.

- The Church at **Philadelphia** is said to represent a time of love, spiritual growth, and championing the name of Christ. Between 1648–1900 AD, revival broke out in many places across the globe. There was a hunger for Bible study and a heart to plant churches and establish Bible Colleges, seminaries, and missionary training/sending centers. This period of history marks one of the high points of the Christian Church.
- The Church at **Laodicea** is said to represent the last era for the current form of the Christian Church. Sadly, prophecy notes that there will be complacency, compromise, and egregious apostasy during this period. Two thousand years ago, the Lord sternly rebuked the church at Laodicea for manifesting these characteristics. The church of the last age will suffer the discipline of the Lord as well.

OF REVELATION  
THE SEVEN  
CHURCHES  
OF THE BOOK



## A DEEPER LOOK AT THE SEVEN CHURCHES

**The church at Ephesus – Video Teaching:** Click the link under the graphic below (or click the graphic if you are reading this book as a digital file) to access a 30-minute live worship-hour recording profiling the church at Ephesus. *Note: This video is made possible by **the I Am A Watchman** ministry, a ministry that provides evangelistic and discipleship resources to people in more than 150 nations. The author of this book is the presenter of the teaching.*



LINK: <https://tinyurl.com/2p82f4p6>

### The Church at Ephesus (the location)



## The Church at Ephesus (the history)

- Paul used Ephesus as a base for ministry for three years.
- Ephesus was a grand port city and trade center. It was considered the *center of the world* by many in its day.
- The word Ephesus means *desirable*. The city was founded by Athens about 1000 years before the birth of Christ and was considered the greatest city in the region. Ephesus boasted a population of about 250,000 in the mid-first century AD.
- Aquila and Priscilla<sup>6</sup> ministered with Paul in Ephesus for 18 months. Apollos joined Paul there as well.
- The Apostle John moved to Ephesus in about 68 AD, in advance of the Roman assault on Jerusalem (70 AD).
- According to Eusebius, John spent his later years in Ephesus, where he cared for Mary, the mother of Jesus until her death.
- The temple of the Greek goddess Diana was in Ephesus—it was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world, with 127 iconic columns, each 60' tall.
- Tradition holds that the Apostle Paul appointed Timothy as the first Bishop of the region of Ephesus.

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<sup>6</sup> See Acts 18; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

- Tradition holds that Timothy was martyred in Ephesus.
- In 262, Ephesus was destroyed by the Goths and never rose to its former glory.

### **What did Jesus see in this church?**

The Lord's message to this church begins with these words:

*"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars."<sup>7</sup>*

It is important to note that Jesus *noticed* the work and happenings associated with this church. He knew their practices, their plans, their prayers, and their pain. He was not visible, but he was there, and, as like a father who knows his children well, commended the brethren for specific acts of service and sacrifice. Verse 2 notes a commendation for working hard, for persevering, and for detesting evil. In verse 4 Jesus commends the church for "hating" the [false teachings]... of the Nicolaitans"<sup>8</sup>

### **What are believers today to learn from this church?**

#### **(Scriptural admonitions)**

Noted below are a few admonitions that flow from the Jesus' words to

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<sup>7</sup> Revelation 2:2

<sup>8</sup> A reference to the practice of corrupting church teachings

the church at Ephesus. The church had some fine qualities, but was not perfect. They are commended for some good works, but they were warned not to let the fire in their hearts grow cold. Today, believers have the whole of Scripture to review for guidance, counsel and encouragement. Admonitions which parallel the message to the church at Ephesus—admonitions that apply to the church today, include:

- *“Run with perseverance the race set out before us.” (Hebrews 12:1)*
- *“Do not grow weary in doing good.” (Galatians 6:9)*
- *“Be in the world but not of the world.” (John 17:15-17)*
- *Be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3)*
- *Flee from every kind of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22)*

### **Words of warning**

The Lord extends words of warning to each of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. These warnings are timeless, yet have specific importance to that local community of believers. Today, believers should give serious consideration to the warnings and admonitions Jesus presented to each of the churches (and give particular consideration to the warnings associated to the church of Laodicea, which represents the last church age—the age in which we live). The Lord’s admonitions to the church of Ephesus are noted in verses 4-5:

*“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly,*

*and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”<sup>9</sup>*

The Lord rebuked the church because they had forgotten their first love. Their passion for serving God was waning. Like a ‘frog in a kettle,’ they did not realize how far they had strayed from where God wanted them to be, and they were slow to recognize their need to repent.

Believers today should reflect on the Lord’s exhortation to the church at Ephesus, acknowledge wrongs, and return to the right path.

## Summary

- By the year 200 the church was gone.
- By the year 260 the city of Ephesus was gone.
- We do not know how long we have. We should not put off to tomorrow what the Lord calls us to do today. In accordance with the Scriptures, let all believers then...
  - *Seize the opportunity to do good and draw close to God*  
(Eph. 5:16)
  - *Be wise in the way we act (Col. 4:5)*
  - *Repent (1 John 1:9)*
  - *Remember our first love (Mark 12:30)*
  - *Do not grow weary in doing good (Gal. 6:9)*

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<sup>9</sup> Revelation 2:4-5





**THE LORD'S MESSAGE TO**  
**THE SEVEN CHURCHES**

## The church at Smyrna

**The church at Smyrna – Video Teaching:** Click the link under the graphic below (or click the graphic if you are reading this book as a digital file) to access a 30-minute live worship-hour recording profiling the church at Smyrna. *Note: This video is made possible by the **I Am A Watchman** ministry, a ministry that provides evangelistic and discipleship resources to people in more than 150 nations. The author of this book is the presenter of the teaching.*



LINK: <https://tinyurl.com/yckr7tdt>

## The Church at Smyrna (the location)



## The church at Smyrna

The church at Smyrna represents a time of great persecution for the church (approximately 100–325AD). The Lord's word to the Church at Smyrna reminds believers that God can use suffering and opposition to bring about spiritual growth and an increased witness. It is important to note that though the church of Smyrna suffered terribly under Roman persecution, it was perhaps the most vibrant and Great-Commission oriented of the churches.

### The history

- Smyrna was located 42 miles from Patmos
- Smyrna was a large city of 100,000 (it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in Turkey today)
- Smyrna means "bitter." It comes from the word "myrrh." It aptly portends an age of bitter persecution.
- Polycarp<sup>10</sup> was the first Bishop of Smyrna. He was martyred there in 155 A.D.

### What did Jesus see in this church?

Jesus' message to this church begins:

*"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I*

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<sup>10</sup> A prominent disciple of the Apostle John

*know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”<sup>11</sup>*

Early church writings note that it was very difficult for Christians who lived in Smyrna. Many lost jobs and homes because Roman leaders required all citizens to go to a pagan temple and provide a “pinch of tribute” to honor various gods and the god-man, Caesar. Those who refused were punished, and forbidden from securing employment, running a business, or owning property. Yet, in the face of this stiff opposition, the church not only survived, but thrived—a testament to their faith and heart for the Lord.

### **What are believers today to learn from this church?**

#### **(Scriptural admonitions)**

The Lord’s message to the church at Smyrna had a specific application to the people of that time, yet, as with each message to the seven churches, the Lord’s message is timeless. Scholars today can see that elements of the Lord’s message to the church at Smyrna are sprinkled throughout the New Testament. Corresponding verses that have special meaning for believers today include:

- *Run with perseverance the race set out before us (Hebrews 12:1)*
- *Be in the world but not of the world (John 17:15-17)*

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<sup>11</sup> Revelation 2:9b

- *Be sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3)*
- *Flee from every kind of evil (1 Thess. 5:22)*

### **Words of challenge**

To this brave, challenged church, the Lord said:

*“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be...faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”<sup>12</sup>*

As believers today stand in the *last days*, in the time of *birth pangs*,<sup>13</sup> it is important to take the Lord’s challenge to the church at Smyrna to heart. I believe a special reward awaits believers, who in the face of adversity, maintain a positive witness for the Lord. Believers are exhorted to remember...

- *The Lord calls us to “fear not”<sup>14</sup>*
- *You will suffer, but you will not be alone<sup>15</sup>*
- *The suffering will not last<sup>16</sup>*
- *Faithfulness will be rewarded<sup>17</sup>*
- *All must acknowledge wrongs and return to the right path.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Revelation 2:10

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 24:8

<sup>14</sup> See Isaiah 41:10 (and more than 300 other verses)

<sup>15</sup> See Daniel 3:19-27

<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18

<sup>17</sup> See 2 Cor. 5:10, 1 Cor. 3:11-15

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 3:15

### **A listing of the ten Roman Emperors who persecuted the church**

Some scholars correlate the “ten days of suffering” with ten Roman Emperors who coordinated ten particularly harsh waves of persecution. These are:

- *Nero (60 A.D)*
- *Domitian (96 A.D)*
- *Trajan (117 A.D)*
- *Aurelius (180 A.D)*
- *Severus (211 A.D)*
- *Maximinus (238 A.D)*
- *Decius (251 A.D)*
- *Valerian (260 A.D)*
- *Aurelian (275 A.D)*
- *Diocletian (305 A.D)*

The number ten may also refer to the sovereign structure of God’s plan, and may have ties to the ten days associated with the fall Jewish Festivals (which begin with a trumpet call and ends with forgiveness and *all things new*). Though the interpretation is not exceedingly clear, what is clear is that through times of persecution and difficulty, our Savior empathizes with our weakness<sup>19</sup> and will “never leave nor forsake us.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Hebrews 4:15

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 13:5b

## Summary

James writes that believers are to “*count it all joy*” when we encounter trials and “*divers temptations; Knowing...that the trying of your faith worketh patience,*” and that patience leads to a “*perfect work, that ye may be perfect...wanting nothing.*”<sup>21</sup>

Someone once said wryly of the current, complacent, western church: “*The trouble with Christians today is that nobody wants to kill them anymore.*” The statement is shocking, but the student of history can see that Christians tend to be at their best when the pressure is on. This was true for the church at Smyrna, for the church age Smyrna represents, and can be true for the faithful today.

## Remember the following:

- Persecution made the church strong. *It is said, “The branches heaven laden and bowing to the ground—are those bearing the greatest fruit.”*
- Persecution strengthens character and produces spiritual fruit.<sup>22</sup>
- Trials are not to be resisted or avoided as they encourage reliance and obedience.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> James 1:2-4

<sup>22</sup> 1 Peter 1:6-7

<sup>23</sup> Acts 9:15-16

- Persecution and the scattering of the saints broadened the scope and witness of the Church.<sup>24</sup> From this we can see that indeed, God can “...*cause all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*”<sup>25</sup>
- Those who are grounded in their faith will endure to the end...and the ones who endure to the end will be rewarded.<sup>26</sup>
- Be ready for the coming judgment and fear not what “man can do to you.”<sup>27</sup> “Better to be born twice and die once, than to be born once and die twice.”<sup>28</sup>
- Remember your calling: Even in (perhaps, especially in) times of trial and adversity, Christians are not to run, or hide, or isolate. Believers are to remember the words of Jesus: “*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 2 Corinthian 1:3-4

<sup>25</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>26</sup> Revelation 3:21

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 10:28

<sup>28</sup> Attributed to Rev. Chuck Missler

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 5:13-16



A STUDY IN THE  
*Seven Churches*  
OF REVELATION

## The church at Pergamum

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**LINK:** <https://tinyurl.com/yc2mhcky>



## **The church at Pergamum**

The Church at Pergamum was located in a great pagan center known as, “The City of Temples.” Surrounded by evil, this church struggled to remain pure. The Altar of Pergamos, which is infamous in history, was located there. Sadly, in time, this church embraced elements of paganism.

The Church at Pergamum represents the age of compromise. As noted earlier in this book, the first ‘Christian Caesar’ was Constantine and his rise to power coincided with the reversal of many terrible laws designed to persecute and oppress Christians. Unfortunately, the relaxing of prohibitions coincided with a marked reduction of passion regarding living out the faith. As pressure diminished, the Christian Church slid into compromise and complacency. The period of 313—600 AD saw the church weaken and introduce worldly elements into various aspects of church government, structure, and doctrine. Indeed, compromise found its way into almost every key aspect of church.

The message to the Church at Pergamum warns believers not to embrace the things of the world.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14

## The history

- The city of Pergamum included notable temples to Apollo, Athena, Dionysus, Aphrodite, Asclepeion, and Zeus.
- In Greek mythology, Zeus escaped the wrath of his father by growing up, in hiding, in Crete then Pergamum. This myth lent notoriety to the city.
- Pergamum is located in a beautiful location—near the Caicus River. Owing to its beauty, the site was the seat of power for the kings of Attalia for about 150 years. Pergamum was the capital of the kingdom during the Hellenistic period (281—133 B.C.).
- The city was bequeathed by Attalus, the last king of Attalia, to the Romans to prevent a civil war.
- The religious climate at Pergamum was not conducive to the Christian life. It was said that "Satan's throne" was in the city.<sup>31</sup> While the phrase has received differing interpretations, it almost surely refers to Pergamum being a major center for paganism, especially the imperial cult.
- The Altar of Pergamum seems to be linked to war and destruction. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hitler had the altar transported to Berlin. It was prominent in Nazi ceremonies, later brought to Stalin's Russia,

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<sup>31</sup> See Revelation 2:12

and came to have a tie to the threat of nuclear war in the days of President John F Kennedy.<sup>32</sup>

- The city was a judicial center for the region. Most of the laws regarding oppressing Christians (110-300AD) originated there.
- The Goths decimated the city the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

### **What does Jesus see in this church?**

Jesus' message to this church is loving but stern. His message begins:

*“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. **Yet you remain true to my name. “You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.”**”<sup>33</sup>*

The Lord begins with words of compassion. He acknowledges the hardships associated with living in a place (or time) marked by great evil. In many ways, it seems that Jesus is speaking to the church today. However, the level of oppression the church of the west experiences today pales in comparison to the oppression this church faced.

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<sup>32</sup> Additional information on this is provided in the video link provided on page 39

<sup>33</sup> Revelation 2:13-14 (NIV)

Christians today may lose a job or a promotion—It was common for Christians in Pergamum to lose their homes or lives.

The Lord noticed that some *remained faithful* and *did not renounce their faith*, even in the midst of persecution. To demonstrate specific knowledge of their trials, the Lord references the death of one the leaders in their Christian community—Antipas. Records show that as an older man of influence, Roman authorities arrested Antipas and told him to renounce his faith in Christ—thinking that his renunciation of Christ would lead many younger men to follow his example. Antipas refused. He was beaten. He was given another chance to renounce his faith publicly. Again, he refused. Roman soldiers brought a large, hollow, brass bull into the square. Authorities gave Antipas one last chance to recant his faith—he responded by declaring his love for the Lord. He was thrown into the bull and died as fires were ignited underneath the torture device—slowly heating the metal. His martyrdom strengthened rather than splintered the church. Jesus saw this and commended the church for it.

### **Words of challenge**

Though Jesus commended the church, there were points where growth was both needed and expected. Jesus did not think that pretty good was good enough. He challenged the church (and challenges believers today) to shore up weak points. Jesus' message to the church continues:

*“There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality...“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth”<sup>34</sup>*

The reference to the *teachings of Balaam* links to Numbers 31 and Israel's involvement in sexual sin. This is a dangerous and slippery slope from which believers must flee.<sup>35</sup> Here, the growth and community acceptance of sexual sin is prophesied.

Jesus also exhorted the church by noting he was aware of the acceptance of false teachings:

*“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.”<sup>36</sup>*

Some believe the reference to *the Nicolaitanes* has ties to one of the men chosen to be among the first deacons in Acts 6.<sup>37</sup> An ancient tradition is that the *Nicolas* in Acts 6 became prideful and advanced his own peculiar beliefs and following. His teachings demeaned the ministry and deity of Christ and encouraged the worship of a *snake god of healing*. It is a sad truth that within 65 years of the Apostles choosing a man to serve in a prominent leadership position in the New Testament

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<sup>34</sup> Revelation 2:14b-16 (NIV)

<sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18; Genesis 39:1-13

<sup>36</sup> Revelation 2:15

<sup>37</sup> Acts 6:5

Church, followers of that man's fallen faith would grow and impact a region more than 1100 miles away. Sin, like leaven, grows rapidly. Here Jesus condemns providing a foothold so sin can enter and take root.<sup>38</sup>

### **Admonitions and promises**

Jesus did not warn and run—with his exhortation comes encouragement. The purpose of spiritual reproof and discipline is to prompt improvement. Accordingly, Jesus couples pointing out areas of weakness with a presentation of promises. A brief summary follows:

Jesus' admonition is broad and straightforward. His counsel fits every situation and addresses every need. Jesus simply says: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches...*"<sup>39</sup> In Hebrew culture, there was no distinction between hearing and doing. When Scripture notes that God hears, it means that God both hears AND responds, according to His perfect will. Here Jesus reminds believers that when we *hear* (*which* requires seeking and listening) **and** *do* what the "Spirit saith," (which requires faith and submission), then we will be in perfect step with God.

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<sup>38</sup> Ephesians 4:26-27

<sup>39</sup> Revelation 2:17a



**Regarding God's promises. Jesus said:**

- “*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna...*”<sup>40</sup>  
This promise prompts believers to recount how God miraculously provided for His people.<sup>41</sup> In the story of the exodus, God's provision was just enough (people could not hoard or stockpile), it was never late, it never failed, it met their need, and it was available to all who obediently followed His instruction. The same principles apply to God's people today.
- “*...and I will give him a white stone...*”<sup>42</sup> In Hebrew culture, the giving of a *white stone* signifies an acquittal—being judged free from all charges and protected from future proceedings on the matter. In Roman culture, a *white stone* was a kind of ticket or pass which allowed access to popular and exclusive *games* or events. *White stones* were for the privileged—the wealthy and famous. A *white stone* guaranteed preferred seating and pampered service (such as being served refreshments during the games). The perks, if you will, offered to the privileged 2000 years ago, are the grainy black-and-white version of the vivid color promises God extends to believers. Jesus promises that the faithful will be judged innocent (acquitted of all charges of sin), given access to a wondrous place

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<sup>40</sup> Revelation 2:17b

<sup>41</sup> Exodus 11; Numbers 11; Deuteronomy 11

<sup>42</sup> Revelation 2:17c

(heaven), and will receive a home (a mansion)<sup>43</sup> and seat of honor (at the banquet feast)<sup>44</sup>. There is nothing more we could ask for or need. Yet, Jesus promises more...

- “[And I] will give him...a new name...which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it”<sup>45</sup> The reference to a *new name* refers to our *new start*,<sup>46</sup> *our adoption into His family*,<sup>47</sup> and His ability to make us a “*new creation*.”<sup>48</sup>

### Summary and admonitions

As with all of the Lord’s messages, His words are timeliness—they are living words, piercing bone and marrow,<sup>49</sup> transcending time. His message echoes the theme of many verses written by various writers through the ages, for though those writers used different pens, all drew their words from the same inspired ink.<sup>50</sup> Guided by the Spirit, we can see how verses in the Old and New Testament amplify and undergird the Lord’s message to the churches. The following admonitions are profitable for the believer to consider today:

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<sup>43</sup> John 14:2

<sup>44</sup> Revelation 19:9

<sup>45</sup> Revelation 2:17c

<sup>46</sup> John 3:3; Galatians 2:20

<sup>47</sup> Isaiah 62:2

<sup>48</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>49</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>50</sup> 2 Peter 1:21

- Remember, sin is a slippery slope. Do not flirt with evil: See *Psalm 37:27-29* and *1 Thessalonians 5:22*.
- Be in the world but not of the world. See *John 17:16* and *1 Thessalonians 5:23*.
- Hear the Lord knocking. See *Revelation 3:20a*, *Hebrews 3:15-17*.
- Open the door. “...*If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and sup with him...*” (*Rev. 3:20b*).

## The church at Thyatira

**The Church at Thyatira – Video Teaching:** Click the link under the graphic below (or click the graphic if you are reading this book as a digital file) to access a 30-minute live worship-hour recording profiling the church at Thyatira. *Note: This video is made possible by **the I Am A Watchman** ministry, a ministry that provides evangelistic and discipleship resources to people in more than 150 nations. The author of this book is the presenter of the teaching.*



LINK: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9f3rjd>

## The Church at Thyatira (the location)



## **The church at Thyatira**

The Church at Thyatira represents a period of profound apostasy. Thyatira had ties to ancient Babylonian mythology, which was marked by violence and sensuality and corrupted spiritual precepts.

The message to the Church at Thyatira reminds believers that the enemy can masterfully manipulate, twist, and distort the truth.

### **The history**

- Thyatira was located 12 miles southeast of Pergamum.
- Thyatira was a significant city in the days of Alexander the Great.
- Thyatira was a connecting city—originally an outpost that joined three roads leading to Sardis, Pergamum, and Smyrna.
- Thyatira was designed to be the first line of defense for the more prominent coastal cities.
- Thyatira was noted for its dyes and sporting events ('the games').

### **What history reveals**

- The church passionately sought God as it came under increasing oppression and persecution by the Roman government. As oppression grew, the church grew stronger. As pressure increased—so did faith. During this period persecution faded, and as it did, so did a passion for growing in the faith.

- When there wasn't a great call to die for one's faith, many did not feel compelled to *live out their faith* as they had done before.
- The church at Thyatira represents the dark ages for the church (600AD—1517AD). During this time the church slipped into apostasy—many forgot how Satan operates. The things which Satan did in ancient times were repackaged and reintroduced in this age. When heresies were encountered, the church did not recognize them for what they were.
- **What follows is a brief summary of the history of evil activity in this region. Remember, Satan is both ruthless and relentless. Overcoming temptation today does not mean the enemy will not raise his ugly head and try again tomorrow. Remain vigilant.**<sup>51</sup>
  - Far away from Thyatira, and 3000+ years before John wrote the book of Revelation, Nimrod<sup>52</sup> married an evil woman named Semiramis. Nimrod controlled military and political affairs—Semiramis controlled all religious aspects of society.
  - Semiramis considered herself a priestess and established a number of goddess worship and deity cults. In testimony

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<sup>51</sup> 1 Peter 5:8

<sup>52</sup> See Genesis 11

to her impact on the region, an ancient celestial myth suggests the constellations tell the story of a battle in the heavens—and that the constellation Cassiopeia (the queen) is another name for Semiramis, Draco (the dragon) is another name for Nimrod, and that John references this battle in Revelation 12:3-4.

- In general, the mythology surrounding Semiramis represents an anti-truth. For example, in Babylonian mythology, snake symbols are good (not evil). The ‘star of the dawn’ (see Isaiah 14) did fall from heaven, but the mythology teaches that this was an injustice—one that the fallen god will rectify in the end. There is a chief god, but this deity is presented as feminine. In this mythology, the king's son, Tammuz (later, Baal), is associated with light and glory. The son comes to power via murder and requires violence from his followers.
- The ancient Babylonian religion was not just simply another faith—it was an anti-faith—a religious system built on distorted truths. Thyatira struggled to discern truth from error and allowed false teachings to enter the church. A brief timetable of the growth of evil in the region follows:

- **2800 BC:** A 130' tall obelisk honoring Queen Semiramis was erected in Babylon. A city and the prominent region of southern Mesopotamia (Shinar) is named in her honor.
- **1000 BC:** The sensual and violence-based cults associated with Baal, Molech, Astarte, Ishtar, Isis, Artemis, and Ashtoreth can be traced to Nimrod and Semiramis.
- **950 BC:** King Solomon marries wives who introduce Semiramis-linked religious practices to the northern kingdom of Israel.

One of the high priests of Baal in Phoenicia is the father of Jezebel. Israel's King Ahab marries Jezebel. This solidifies Babylonian paganism in the northern kingdom (Israel).<sup>53</sup>

- **840 BC:** Israel falls into grievous apostasy. God sends prophets to beckon His people back to the true faith. Israel fails to repent.
- **722–600 BC:** The northern kingdom (Israel) is invaded and conquered, followed by the southern kingdom (Judah). The armies of Nebuchadnezzar destroy Jerusalem and the Temple.

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<sup>53</sup> See Revelation 2:20-25



- **550 BC:** Persia conquers Babylon. The religious elite relocate the seat of power from Babylon to Pergamum. Occult practices are maintained and cultivated, and in full force when John wrote the book of Revelation.
  
- **600 AD:** Corrupt theology, impacted by ancient paganism, leads to the introduction of misguided doctrine in the Rome-based Catholic Church.
  - 600: Infant baptism
  - 709: Priests are *Fathers*
  - 850: Priests can forgive sins
  - 950: Mandatory seasonal fasting
  - 1079: Celibacy of priesthood
  - 1190: Sale of Indulgences
  - 1215: Transubstantiation<sup>54</sup>
  - 1229: Bible Study/translations forbidden
  - 1439: Purgatory
  - 1530: Traditions are determined to be authoritative (binding as Scripture).
    - Immaculate conception and ascension of Mary
    - Infallibility of Pope

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<sup>54</sup> The belief that when celebrating 'communion' or the 'last supper,' the priest has the makes it possible for the elements (the bread and wine) to literally become the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

### What did Jesus see?

- *“I know your **deeds...**”*<sup>55</sup> Believers must remember that God is aware of everything that happens in our lives. The wise remember the warning of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: *“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”*<sup>56</sup> Note how Jesus expresses his awareness of what was happening in this church:
  - “I know...your **love...**” (Rev. 2:19b)
  - “I know...your **faith...**” (Rev. 2:19c)
  - “I know...your **service...**” (Rev. 2:19d)
  - “I know...your...**perseverance...**” (Rev. 2:19e)
  - “I know...that you are now doing **more than you did** at first.”  
(Rev. 2:19f)

Herein is a great truth: **Jesus notices**. Jesus noticed Zacchaeus in the tree,<sup>57</sup> the blind Bartimaeus who sat begging by the road,<sup>58</sup> the woman with an “issue of blood” whom no doctor could help,<sup>59</sup> and the outcast woman at the well in John 4. All were invisible to their countrymen but noticed by our compassionate Lord. And just as Jesus noticed and was aware of the happenings at Thyatira, the Lord is acutely aware of all

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<sup>55</sup> Revelation 2:19a

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 12:36

<sup>57</sup> Luke 19:1-10

<sup>58</sup> Mark 10:46-52

<sup>59</sup> Luke 8:42-48; Mark 5:24-34

that is happening in your life. The Lord knows and cares<sup>60</sup> about your hopes, fears, and burdens. He promises to help.<sup>61</sup>

### Words of challenge and warning

The word notes: *“The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”*<sup>62</sup> With the goal of admonishing now so He can elevate later, Jesus issued the following statements to the church at Thyatira:

- *“But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual **immorality**...”*<sup>63</sup>

**Application:** Recognize and reject false teachings. Identify and flee from evil. Guard against apostasy and compromise.<sup>64</sup>

- *“Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation unless they repent...”*<sup>65</sup>

**Application:** There are often physical consequences to sinful

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<sup>60</sup> 1 Peter 5:7

<sup>61</sup> 1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 11:17-19

<sup>62</sup> Hebrews 12:6

<sup>63</sup> Revelation 2:20a (NIV)

<sup>64</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:21

<sup>65</sup> Revelation 2:22

behavior. God sees, knows, and holds His people accountable.<sup>66</sup>  
 Forgiveness is possible.<sup>67</sup>

- *“I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart...”*<sup>68</sup>

**Application:** There is no future for those who refuse to turn from sin. God sees and knows all. Judgment on the church will come before the Tribulation period begins.

- *“I will give to...you according to your works”*<sup>69</sup>

**Application:** Know that judgment and reward are coming.<sup>70</sup>

- *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...”*<sup>71</sup>

**Application:** Let His people be quick to hear and quick to follow.<sup>72</sup>

### Words of promise

The Lord closes His message to this church with words to affirmation and promise:

- *“But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan,*

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<sup>66</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:30, 1 Corinthians 5:5

<sup>67</sup> 1 John 1:9

<sup>68</sup> Revelation 2:23a

<sup>69</sup> Revelation 2:23b

<sup>70</sup> Romans 2:6; Revelation 20:12

<sup>71</sup> Revelation 2:29

<sup>72</sup> Hebrews 3:15

*as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.*<sup>73</sup>

**Application:** Do your best to maintain your witness. God rewards the faithful.<sup>74</sup>

- *“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.”*<sup>75</sup>

**Application:** Do not slow down—do not give up.<sup>76</sup> Reward is coming—the faithful will reign with the Lord during the Millennial Reign of Christ.<sup>77</sup>

- *“I will give him the **morning star**.”*<sup>78</sup>

**Application:** These wonderful words reference the glory, reward, and the blessing of being in union with Jesus our Lord and Savior. Believers today have a foretaste of this promise—the Gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>79</sup> On this side of glory, God’s promise means we live in hope, we live so that Christ can live in us, and we live in expectation knowing that we will share in the Lord’s ultimate victory over evil.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Revelation 2:24

<sup>74</sup> 1 Samuel 26:23; Revelation 3:32; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 3:12

<sup>75</sup> Revelation 2:25

<sup>76</sup> Galatians 6:9; James 1:12-22

<sup>77</sup> Zechariah 14:16-21; Revelation 20:7-10; Daniel 7:18-27; Job 26:7; Psalm 149; Isaiah 60:17

<sup>78</sup> Revelation 2:28

<sup>79</sup> Romans 8:9

<sup>80</sup> 1 John 4:9; 1 Corinthians 15:57; Daniel 12:3

## The church at Sardis

**The Church at Sardis – Video Teaching:** Click the link under the graphic below (or click the graphic if you are reading this book as a digital file) to access a 30-minute live worship-hour recording profiling the church at Sardis. *Note: This video is made possible by **the I Am A Watchman** ministry, a ministry that provides evangelistic and discipleship resources to people in more than 150 nations. The author of this book is the presenter of the teaching.*



LINK: <https://tinyurl.com/5n7d4awx>

## The Church at Sardis (the location)



## The church at Sardis

Sardis was a divided city marked by pride and high self-appraisal. The word ‘Sardis’ is plural. The city of Sardis had upper and lower sections—the older section sat atop a 1500’ hill, the newer portion of the city was located at the base of the sheer cliff. Though separated by a relatively short distance, it required more than an hour’s travel time to make the journey between the two sections of the city. Both sections referred to themselves as Sardis.

This rather strong strategic position, particularly for the upper city, led city leaders to boast of their invincibility. However, their great wealth (the legend of King Midas and his gold is said to have come from Sardis) and their strategic location did not save them from multiple military conquests. Historians reference Sardis as a city of false pretensions—they thought themselves better and more secure than they were. This mindset crept into the heart of the church and is reflected in Jesus’ stern exhortation:

*You think that you are [have a reputation for being] alive—but you are dead.”<sup>81</sup>*

The Church at Sardis was evaluating itself against man’s standards, not God’s.

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<sup>81</sup> Revelation 3:1b (NIV)

The message to the Church at Sardis reminds believers that a divided city is not a great city, that false pretensions lead to disaster, and that having a reputation for good is not the same as actually being good. It is the united and faithful church that will be blessed. In evaluating effectiveness and spirituality, believers must not seek man's assessment, but God's. It is God's expectations and standards that believers must strive to meet.

The Church at Sardis is said to represent the age of division, false pretension, and near-death (1517—1648 AD). During this church age, the Holy Roman Empire fades and the Protestant Reformation rises in prominence. It is a time of poor self-assessment for much of the church—particularly the 16th century Catholic Church which saw no need to reform. Stubborn obstinance and a fear of losing control led to a split in the Church. Sadly, within 200 years, the Protestant arm became fractured by the rise of various denominations—some arising out of silly infighting and pride.

### **The history**

- Sardis was an ancient city with notable history. It was located 30 miles south of Thyatira.
- Sardis was one of the oldest cities in the region.
- Sardis was the capital city of the Lydian empire (600 BC).



- Sardis was a well-fortified and wealthy city. Mythical king Midas is said to have ruled from there. Gold was in abundance.
- The name Sardis is plural. The older part of the city rested atop a cliff—the newer part of the city was located below.
- Their wealth and naturally well-fortified location led city leaders to believe they were invincible.
- The historian and theologian Sir William Mitchell Ramsay<sup>82</sup> noted that city leaders betrayed their people by fostering a false sense of self-confidence. The city was overrun in...
  - 549 BC (By the Persians)
  - 501 BC (By the Ionians)
  - 334 BC (By Alexander)
  - 322 BC (By Antigonus)
  - 214 BC (By the Seleucids)

In time the city faded into history—destroyed by wars and earthquakes. It was discovered by archeologists in 1958.

### **What history reveals**

- Just as the city of Sardis was divided and marked by a false sense of accomplishment and security, so too is the *Age* this city and

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<sup>82</sup> Ramsay, W.M., *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (Philologos, 1904)

church represents. Catholic leadership, resistant to calls to return to teachings based on Scripture and engage people in study and worship in the language of the common man (rather than Latin), ushered-in war, great suffering, and an irreparable division within the body of Christ. The split within the church has come to be known as the Protestant Reformation.

- This was a time of false pretension as in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; the Catholic Church saw no need to reform. Sadly, this negative attribute can be seen in the Church today—particularly in the Church of the west. The Church is complacent and prone to wrongfully correlate spiritual strength with large facilities, congregation size, and programs.
- Many churches have been planted in America in the last 50 years (more than in any other country), but sadly, life, outreach, and evangelism levels in churches across America are waning.

### **Words of praise**

Noteworthy is the minimal words of praise for the church at Sardis. It seemed Sardis squandered its many advantages and never realized its potential. Still, the grace of the Lord is evidenced in verse 4:

*“...you have still a **few** names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments...”*

The *few* are the remnant. There is always a remnant—a few who

remain faithful. Though the faithful remnant is not promised prosperity and ease in this life, they are promised a great reward in glory.

The reference to *not soiled their garments* warns against becoming soiled by the things of this ever-darkening world. Jesus prayed that believers would be both united in the faith and a light to the world (a strong witness). The Lord's desire in this matter is clear:

*"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."*<sup>83</sup>

Believers are to be *in the world* as Jesus was in the world, but not be *of the world*, just as Jesus was not of the world. Only by focusing on Christ, and being committed to prayer, study, corporate worship, and fellowship with other believers, can we fulfill the John 17 directive.

### **Words of challenge and warning**

The warnings to this church are four-fold:

- *"You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (3:1b).*

**Consider:** Are you active and growing in the faith today? Do you talk more about what you have done than about what you are doing for

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<sup>83</sup> John 17:15-18

the Lord? Is your reputation before man the same as your testimony before God? These important questions should motivate believers to stay in close fellowship and step with the Lord.

- *“...Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.”<sup>84</sup>*

**Consider:** Is your perception about the vibrance of your spiritual walk aligned with God’s? Your sober assessment must be based on Scripture and insight revealed by the Spirit, not by any man-made matrix. The call is to identify, then strengthen areas that are found wanting.

- *“Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.”<sup>85</sup>*

**Consider:** Satan will try to minimize, degrade, and destroy the progress you make in your spiritual walk. The call is to continually repent and keep moving forward. Guard against the enemy's desire to weigh you down and hold you back by staying active in service, study, and worship. Hold on to and refine the spiritual gift(s) and calling you have received of the Lord.

- *“I will come as a thief...you will not know [when] I will come to you.”<sup>86</sup>*

**Consider:** Do you live in a state of spiritual readiness? Are you ready for the Lord’s return (the Rapture)? Are there fences to mend,

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<sup>84</sup> Revelation 3:3b

<sup>85</sup> Revelation 3:3a

<sup>86</sup> Revelation 3:3c

messages to share, lost hearts to win, hurting to serve or ministry efforts to support? Live with ‘short accounts before God.’ Be ready, for He will return *as a thief in the night*.<sup>87</sup>

### Words of promise

The Lord’s grace is evident as he closes his messages with words of promises—words of hope for the weary. A summary of His grace-filled statements follow:

- *...Some will walk with Jesus—dressed in white.*<sup>88</sup>

**Application:** It is perhaps best to say that Jesus walks with us, rather than suggest that we walk with Jesus. He meets us where we are, helps us carry our burdens,<sup>89</sup> and *never leaves nor forsakes His people*. When we walk with Jesus, we walk in His righteousness, symbolized here as being *dressed in white*.

- *Some will be called ‘worthy’ (3:4c).*

**Application:** We are not made worthy by what we do—we are made worthy by what Christ has done for us. To be called ‘worthy’ indicates that believe in Christ, have committed to follow Christ, have been forgiven by Christ, and strive to be faithful to our calling in Christ.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Revelation 16:15; Matthew 24:44; 1 Thessalonians 5:2

<sup>88</sup> Revelation 3:4b

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>90</sup> Colossians 1:12; Ephesians 2:4-7

- *“He that overcometh...I will not blot...out of the book of life...”*<sup>91</sup>

**Application:** The true believer will have a pure heart. He or she will not be perfect and may suffer significant failings in life, but will always seek forgiveness and be quick to forgive. The true believer will seek after God, serve God, and bear fruit for God. Judas Iscariot proved himself to be a false follower—curious but not committed to Jesus. The true, faithful, and persevering believer will not be ‘blotted out’ of the ‘book of life.’<sup>92</sup>

- *“He that overcometh...I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels.”*<sup>93</sup>

**Application:** Do your best to ‘finish well.’ Of the more than 400 personal stories in the Bible, less than 25% end well. It’s not about how one begins the race; what matters is how we finish.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Revelation 3:5a

<sup>92</sup> See also John 10:28-29

<sup>93</sup> Revelation 3:5

<sup>94</sup> Hebrews 12:1-3

Pray, Study *And* Be belssed

THE CHURCHES OF REVELATION

# The Church at Philadelphia

**The Church at Philadelphia – Video Teaching:** Click the link under the graphic below (or click the graphic if you are reading this book as a digital file) to access a 30-minute live worship-hour recording profiling the church at Ephesus. *Note: This video is made possible by the I Am A Watchman ministry, a ministry that provides evangelistic and discipleship resources to people in more than 150 nations. The author of this book is the presenter of the teaching.*



**LINK:** <https://tinyurl.com/2p95kbr3>

## The Church at Philadelphia (the location)





## The church at Philadelphia

The message to the Church at Philadelphia reminds believers of the importance of witnessing and faithfulness. To the faithful, Jesus promises a great reward and an escape from “*the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world...*”<sup>95</sup>

The Church at Philadelphia is said to represent a time of love and spiritual growth. Between 1648–1900 AD, revival broke out in many places across the globe. There was a hunger for Bible study and establishing Bible Colleges, seminaries, and missionary training/sending centers. This period of history is one of the high points for the Church.

## The history

- The city of Philadelphia was located about 25 miles (40.2 kilometers) southeast of the city of Sardis (now called Sart).
- The modern Turkish city of Alasehir was originally called Philadelphia. It was founded in 189 B.C. by King Eumenes II of Pergamon (197-160 B.C.). His loyalty to his brother earned him the nickname *Philadelphos*, which means "one who loves his brother." This later became the name of the city.

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<sup>95</sup> Revelation 3:10b

- The church at Philadelphia survived the longest of the seven churches in the book of Revelation. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, this city stood alone as the one free self-governing city in the region.
- Christians in this city were known for their faith, love, and courage.
- This church had a positive reputation in the region for having a strong love for the lost and serving Christ.

### Words of praise and commendation

Their love for each other and love for engaging in the work of Christ led Jesus to lavishing words of praise on this church. What follows is a brief listing on what Jesus commended this church for:

- *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.”*<sup>96</sup> **Application:** The one who holds the *key of David* is referenced in Isaiah 27.<sup>97</sup> The *open door* is linked to Jesus, who is the “*door*.”<sup>98</sup> The open door is the invitation to share in His Kingdom work—work that has eternal value<sup>99</sup>—work that will allow us to share in the final victory.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Revelation 3:7

<sup>97</sup> The role of Eliakim foreshadows the role of Jesus in Rev. 3:8.

<sup>98</sup> John 10:9

<sup>99</sup> Matthew 6:19-21

<sup>100</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:57

- *“I know you have a little strength...[but] **you have kept my word...**”<sup>101</sup>*

**Application:** Little strength, little money, little formal education, little confidence—none are acceptable excuses for not walking by faith and doing our best for the Lord. Always, the Lord meets us where we are, fills the gaps, and ensures we are equipped to do what He calls us to do.

- *“...You have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake and have not grown weary.”<sup>102</sup>*

**Application:** Perseverance and endurance are marks of spiritual maturity. The book of Revelation and Matthew 24-25 note that tough times are coming. Believers must recognize the times in which we live and exemplify spiritual grit to be the overcomer God desires.<sup>103</sup> Note the directives from the books of Romans and James:

- *“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*  
(Rom. 12:12)
- *“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”* (James 1:12)

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<sup>101</sup> Revelation 3:8b

<sup>102</sup> Revelation 2:3

<sup>103</sup> Romans 8:37

- *“You have not denied my name”*<sup>104</sup>

**Application:** This is why the church received the highest words of commendation—this is why the church prospered. Note: Jesus did not commend the church for their buildings or programs—only their resilient faith. Though this directive will become increasingly difficult to follow as the day of the return of the Lord draws near, believers must be committed to stay the course and remain faithful. Note the similar admonitions in Scripture:

- *“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son...be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*<sup>105</sup>
- *“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel...”*<sup>106</sup>

### Words of promise

The words of promise to this church are powerful, and in a sense, are more for people in this age and for those living in the late first century, or those living in the 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the church of the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Revelation 3:8c

<sup>105</sup> Mark 8:38

<sup>106</sup> 2 Timothy 1:8a

century church sees a reborn Israel and an abundance of signs that indicate the return of the Lord is near.<sup>107</sup>

A brief list of the Lord's promises to the church follow:

- *"I am coming **soon**" (3:4b).* Many have charged that the Scripture is in error as the now almost 2000-year-old promise is yet unfulfilled. However, a passage in 2 Peter 2 provides context for the often misunderstood Revelation 3:4 verse:

*"...Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."<sup>108</sup>*

Regarding the imminent nature of the return of Jesus, some suggest the **comma** in John 14.3 provides a hint of the Lord's perspective regarding how long it will be before He returns:

*"And if I go and prepare a place for you (,) I will come again..."<sup>109</sup>*

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<sup>107</sup> Matthew 24

<sup>108</sup> 2 Peter 2:8-9

<sup>109</sup> John 14:3a

The comma is but a breath mark—a small swish of the pen and all will be fulfilled. In the meantime, our directives are clear:

- “*To those who overcome, I will make a pillar in heaven.*”<sup>110</sup>

**Application:** Do not give up. Overcome! “Do not grow weary in doing good.”<sup>111</sup>

- “Be glad and exceedingly joyful, for your *reward in heaven* is great.”<sup>112</sup> **Application:** Keep your eyes on the promises of what will come tomorrow, not the problems of today.

### **A final promise:**

- “*...they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.*”<sup>113</sup> **Application** What wonderful news it is that in Christ we find forgiveness. We are covered by His blood<sup>114</sup> and by His grace are made holy.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Revelation 3:12a

<sup>111</sup> Galatians 6:9

<sup>112</sup> Matthew 5:12

<sup>113</sup> Revelation 3:4

<sup>114</sup> 1 John 1:7

<sup>115</sup> 1 Peter 1:16



"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,  
"who is, and who was, and who is to come," the Almighty.

Revelation 1:8

## The church of Laodicea

**The church at Laodicea – Video Teaching:** Click the link under the graphic below (or click the graphic if you are reading this book as a digital file) to access a 30-minute live worship-hour recording profiling the church at Laodicea. *Note: This video is made possible by the **I Am A Watchman** ministry, a ministry that provides evangelistic and discipleship resources to people in more than 150 nations. The author of this book is the presenter of the teaching.*



LINK: <https://tinyurl.com/4nk9zp6a>

### The Church at Laodicea (the location)





The city of Laodicea, like Pergamum and Sardis, is associated with apostasy. This church did not think itself significant as the church at Sardis did—but was comfortable and complacent. This ‘lukewarm’ church was an offense to Jesus and received a stern rebuke from the Lord in Revelation 3:16. Their wealth and prosperity contributed to their lack of reliance on God. The lesson here is that our security needs to be anchored to the Lord (Psalm 62:1-2), and our faith must be ever growing and active (James 2-3).

The Church at Laodicea is said to represent the last era for the current Church Age. Sadly, prophecy notes there will be complacency, compromise, and egregious apostasy during this period. Certainly, the warnings to this church apply to the church today.

### **The city of Laodicea**

- Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities. It was a center for banking, and in a spirit of pride, was the only city in the region that did not request Rome’s help in rebuilding after a devastating earthquake in 62 AD.
- Laodicea was noted for its ‘miracle eye salve’ and bathhouses.

## Pronouncements

- Jesus is the *Amen* (V.14). The use of the title, *amen* introduces the truth that this is the last message to the last church. It also indicates that the prophetic application for this church points to the characteristics of the last church of the age, the age in which we live.
- He knows your deeds (V.14), a reminder that the watchful eye of God is aware of all we do, plan, and hope for.

## Words of concern and admonition

- *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”*<sup>116</sup>

**Application:** A spirit of complacency is detestable to God. Here it is strongly rebuked. Believers should be mindful of this fact and pray that complacency will not be found in our lives or His Church.

- *“You say, ‘I am rich....and do not need a thing.’”*<sup>117</sup>

**Application:** As is often true in human nature, the believers at Laodicea trusted more in their resources than in their God. The

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<sup>116</sup> Revelation 3:15-16

<sup>117</sup> Revelation 3:17a

more gold they had, the less faith they thought they needed. Let your faith, and your confidence, be in things unseen.”<sup>118</sup>

- “*You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*”<sup>119</sup>

**Application:** It is important to see ourselves as God sees us. The reference to poor and naked must have been startling to a people who considered themselves rich and mighty. Also, the reference to *blindness* must have been surprising as the city was known for its salve, which was said to greatly help with eye problems.

- “*I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*”<sup>120</sup>

**Application:** This unpleasant word picture is designed to communicate God’s strong displeasure. Sometimes we justify bad or lax behavior by stating, “*Well, I am better than Mr. Jones.*” We are to remember we are to judge ourselves according to the precepts of God, not man. When we judge ourselves according to early standards, we are vulnerable to making incorrect assessments. Like many believers today, the Laodiceans judged themselves wise, rich, and worthy of God’s applause. Jesus’ strong rebuke was for them, and for us.

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<sup>118</sup> Hebrews 11:1

<sup>119</sup> Revelation 3:17

<sup>120</sup> Revelation 3:16

- *“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear...”<sup>121</sup>*

**Application:** This admonition reminds us there is that which is *good*, and that which is *best*. God desires His people pursue what is best. The Lord desires His people invest their lives in things that have real and lasting value.<sup>122</sup>

- *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”<sup>123</sup>*

**Application:** Let us be wise and heed the warnings rather than receive the discipline. Let us learn from the testimonies in Scripture and believe that God is true to His Word. He is good and he is just. He loves to reward but will discipline whom He loves. If Scripture states that fire is hot, believe it is so—do not feel compelled to touch it just to make sure. Strive to be strong, to be faithful, and to finish well for the Lord. And if you find yourself under the strong but loving discipline of the Lord, remember this verse from Hebrews 12:

*“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of*

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<sup>121</sup> Revelation 3:18

<sup>122</sup> Matthew 6:19-24

<sup>123</sup> Revelation 3:19

*righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*<sup>124</sup>  
(Hebrews 12:11)

### **WORDS OF PROMISE**

The Lord concludes His message to the churches with a word of invitation and promise. We read:

*“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*<sup>125</sup>

The words are clear and beautiful. The Lord is knocking, inviting, and promises to help believers overcome. And as if that were not enough, a great and eternal reward in glory is promised to the faithful. *Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

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<sup>124</sup> Hebrews 12:11

<sup>125</sup> Revelation 3:20-22

**SUMMARY:**

**The application for the believer and church today is noted below.**

- The message to the Church at Ephesus reminds believers of the importance of demonstrating proper affection and devotion to their first love—the Lord Jesus.
- The Lord’s word to the Church at Smyrna reminds believers that God can use suffering and opposition to bring about spiritual growth and an increased witness.
- The message to the Church at Pergamum warns believers not to embrace (become in union with) the things of the world.<sup>126</sup>
- The message to the Church at Thyatira reminds believers that the enemy often slyly manipulates, twists, and distorts the truth. Believers are urged to *“Test all things and hold on to that which is good [and true]”*<sup>127</sup>
- The message to the Church at Sardis reminds believers that a divided city is not a great city, that pride leads to disaster, and that having a reputation for good is not the same as actually being good. It is the united and faithful church that will be blessed.

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<sup>126</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14

<sup>127</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:21

- The message to the Church at Philadelphia reminds believers of the importance of love, endurance, truth and being a witness. To the faithful, Jesus promises a great reward and an escape from *“the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world...”*<sup>128</sup>
- The message to the Church at Laodicea is somber and reminds believers that a ‘lukewarm’ church (and a ‘lukewarm’ faith) is not acceptable in the sight of the Lord. Complacency and compromise must not be words that describe our spiritual walk with the Lord.

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<sup>128</sup> Revelation 3:10

## LINKS TO FOLLOW-UP VIDEO RESOURCES

**What it means to be a watchman:** This video teaching presents the biblical foundation for the term Watchman. Drawing primarily from Ezekiel's 33, this teaching notes the particular heart, focus, and work of a watchman. The *I Am A Watchman* ministry team believes that at this a crucial time in history, God is calling both men and women to serve as spiritual watchmen. <https://vimeo.com/259965426>

**How to be saved / The gift of salvation:** This teaching video profiles the need to be saved, what God through Christ has done to make salvation possible, and what individuals must do to receive God's precious gift. God's greatest desire is that His people know Him and enter into relationship with Him. The link to this teaching is noted below: <https://vimeo.com/260646426>

A link to brief video noting what it means to be ALL IN for Christ is noted here: <https://vimeo.com/404108266>

A seven-part video teaching on Bible Prophecy (and a book on Bible Prophecy) can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/rr2u5yu2>

A link to brief video prompting individuals to ask the question, *Am I ready for the Rapture* is noted here: <https://vimeo.com/416528766>

A three-part teaching on Apologetics titled, *Reasons To Believe* titled, (and a book by the same title) can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/4utw9vnh>

A seven-part video teaching on the seven churches in the book of Revelation can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/ja8yd7z>











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He is a lifelong learner, knows and appreciates the grace of God, and enjoys speaking and writing about what God has done and what He is going to do.

The Lord's message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation is mysterious and powerful. It is true the timeless words had special meaning to specific churches 2000 years ago. It is also true the letters to the seven churches embody prophetic messages for seven church ages, and relevant guiding principles for believers today. My prayer is that you are blessed by the words in this book and the links I've included to seven worship hour teachings on this important topic.

