

## The Revelation of Jesus Christ

In Revelation 1:19, the Lord tells the apostle John, “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.” In Chapter 1 John faithfully records his stunning vision of the glorified Lord, what he “has seen.”

The “things that are” refer to the present. Chapters 2 and 3 are letters addressed to the church, both in John's present time and ours. More about that later.

Chapters 4 through 19 chronicle the seven year tribulation. They are not necessarily in chronological order and they pause several times to introduce various personages having an important role in the end times. They end with the Lord Jesus returning to Earth as a conqueror and defeating his foes.

Chapter 20 describes the millennium in which the Lord's victory bears fruit in a thousand year reign of peace and justice. It terminates in a final brief convulsion of rebellion by Satan and his followers, the last conflict ever between good and evil.

Chapters 21 and 22 conclude the book of Revelation, the Holy Bible, and history itself with the entrance of a new heaven and earth – the anointing of the most holy place foretold in Daniel 9:24.

So we see the book of Revelation divided into four periods:

2-3: Our present time of *indeterminate* length – the Church period. Remember the stopped prophetic clock of Daniel?

4-19: A fixed *seven year* span encompassing the worst suffering the human race has ever seen. “*And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved*” (Matt. 24:22).

20: A fixed *thousand year* time of the most perfect government the human race has ever seen. “*He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore*” (Micah 4:3).

21-22: An *eternal* state after the completion

## Chapter 2:1-11

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of the fullness of time.

This week we will look at the Lord's messages to the seven churches. These can be viewed four ways:

1. They addressed actual conditions in those assemblies at the time of writing. There is no reason to doubt this.
2. They contain teaching and warnings for assemblies of any era. This challenges us to recognize ourselves in the varied descriptions of the churches and seek correction where needed.
3. They have words aimed at specific individuals within the assemblies; 2:24 for example. This reminds us that church groups, even when corporately corrupt, can include true believers.
4. The seven churches are prophetic pictures of the progress of the whole church through various phases of revival and decline. This view normally assigns these divisions:

**Ephesus:** The first century church.

**Smyrna:** The church under persecution by Roman emperors.

**Pergamum:** The church mixed with the world (allied with Constantine).

**Thyatira:** Idolatry entering the church; the era of Roman Catholic dominance.

**Sardis:** The slumbering church, but with signs of life; the awakening of the Reformation falling into the lifeless ritual of national churches.

**Philadelphia:** The church experiencing the great revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Laodicea:** The smug, lukewarm “country club” church.

Not all churches everywhere fit into this scheme. A Chinese house church, for instance, resembles Smyrna far more than Laodicea.

The messages follow a parallel form. Each begins with a depiction of the Lord in keeping with the content of the letter, followed by “*I know* (something about the church)”. Toward the end, a reward is promised to the one who conquers, or

overcomes. And all contain the sentence, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” May that be us!

The many words of admonition, combined with the picture of the Lord in judicial robes in the previous chapter, can give a harsh impression. Why does the Lord direct these criticisms and corrections to His church? The answer is in Ephesians 5:25-27: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* He cares deeply about the condition of His bride.

To continue the analogy of marriage, read 2 Peter 5:7: “*Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way.*” Who understands better than the Lord Jesus? In 1:13 and 2:1, He does not gaze sternly from afar at the lampstands representing the churches but stands *in the midst* of them – in the midst of us – as promised in Matthew 18. As He says seven times: He *knows us*. And He loves us. What's more, it's worth noting that He sends his appeal to the churches through John, the gentlest of overseers, who calls his charges his “*dear children.*”

## Notes on 2:1-11

**2:1** Founded as a colony by the ancient Greeks, Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman province of Asia Minor and a major commercial hub for the Mediterranean (a position it later lost as its harbor silted in). It was famed in the Roman World for its temple to Artemis (Diana), the background to the vivid events of Acts 19.

**2:2** Here the Lord commends the assembly for their perseverance and rejection of false doctrine. There is an echo of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians written 30 years earlier. It, unlike many of Paul's letters, makes no mention of any specific error within the assembly. But Ephesians 1:15-22 and 3:14:21 are earnest prayers for the believers at Ephesus to have the “*eyes of their hearts*” opened to comprehend their entirety of their inheritance in Christ. Is it possible that Paul was fanning the

spiritual embers that even then were beginning to cool?

**2:4** The forsaken love may be love for each other, love for neighbors, or spiritual fervor in seeking and serving the Lord.

**2:5** Removing the lampstand signifies that the Lord will somehow withdraw the testimony of the Ephesian assembly. History records a strong church at Ephesus some decades after Revelation so we may reasonably hope they did repent.

**2:6** Nicolaitanism was an early heresy about which little is known. The word may refer to followers of someone named Nicolas, or may combine the Greek words for conquest (Nike, the goddess of victory) and common people (laos). Many commentators see Nicolaitism as a non-scriptural encroachment of a clergy structure in contrast to the priesthood of all believers.

**2:7** The word “conquer” or “overcome” is the same as in 1 John 5:5: “*Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*” The blessings promised to the “victor” in this message and others are given to any true believer.

**2:8** Smyrna was located between Ephesus and Pergamum on the western coast of Asia Minor and ranked with them among the major cities of the province. Christian history remembers it as the site of the martyrdom of Polycarp by a mixed mob of pagans and Jews. Polycarp was an early Christian leader who was likely a disciple of John's.

The description of Jesus as He who died and came to life would bring particular comfort to those in Smyrna suffering violent persecution. “*We who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh*” (2 Cor. 4:11)

**2:9** Note the contrast with Laodicea (3:17). Here the Lord tells the Smyrneans they are rich in their poverty, but He tells the Laodiceans they are poor even while they consider themselves rich.

**2:10** The ten days may be literal, or figurative of ten years, or a succession of ten Roman emperors.