

DEAR CHURCH



AUTUMN
RIDGE
CHURCH

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Dear Church,

Over the next seven weeks, we get to explore what it looks like to delight Jesus while we await his return. Together, we'll learn more about him and discover rewards he gives to faithful followers. We'll find hope in our struggles and encouragement to endure as we navigate life in "Babylon."

How wonderful it will be to engage in this series as a small group. Internalizing these Scripture passages and weekend messages will be much richer with the benefit of having others who can help us remember, understand, and apply what we're learning.

Dear Church focuses on letters from Jesus to seven churches in the New Testament book of Revelation. These letters were written to specific people and address their specific circumstances. However, the underlying principles that Jesus expresses are as essential for us to humbly receive today as they were for our ancestor churches.

Revelation is the only book of the Bible containing a specified blessing for studying it (1:3). May we be faithful to receive all that God's Spirit intends to teach us through His Word.

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Svea Merry
Spiritual Formation Pastor
Fall 2023

USING THE STUDY GUIDE

BRING THIS GUIDE WITH YOU TO CHURCH EACH WEEKEND

There are dedicated places for you to record questions or thoughts from the sermon you'd like to discuss with your group.

BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETS, LOOK THROUGH THE BIBLE PASSAGE MATERIAL AND QUESTIONS

Though completing homework is not required for this study, your discussion will be richer if you've familiarized yourself with the week's passage. The optional personal study will get you thinking about the key points in each passage. While these questions are not intended for small group discussion, they will enhance your understanding and transformational experience.

BRING THIS GUIDE WITH YOU TO YOUR SMALL GROUP GATHERING

Discussion questions are provided for each week. As your group works through these questions, we believe your comprehension and application of this Scripture and its concepts will be greatly strengthened.

There is also a section for you to record your group's prayer requests and other needs as well as a place for you to update prayer requests with God's answers so you can enjoy seeing God working in the lives of the people in your group.

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR PASTOR RICK'S WEEKLY VIDEO

This brief introductory video for your small group gathering will be available just prior to the associated weekend service.



THROUGHOUT THE WEEK, USE WHAT YOU'VE RECORDED HERE TO STAY MINDFUL OF YOUR INTENTIONS

Reviewing what you've written will help you achieve your goals for what you'd like to apply to your daily life and will help you be a great small group member, as you faithfully pray for and follow up on the needs within your group.

DEAR CHURCH: A Study of Revelation 2-3

The Letter...	Text	Sermon Date
To the Church in Ephesus	Rev. 2:1-7	September 23/24
To the Church in Smyrna	Rev. 2:8-11	September 30/October 1
To the Church in Pergamum	Rev. 2:12-17	October 7/8
To the Church in Thyatira	Rev. 2:18-29	October 14/15
To the Church in Sardis	Rev. 3:1-6	October 21/22
To the Church in Philadelphia	Rev. 3:7-13	October 28/29
To the Church in Laodicea	Rev. 3:14-22	November 4/5

AN INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

Revelation is a perfectly named book. It is a letter which “reveals” the power and victory of Jesus Christ in what has been, what is now, and what will be (Rev. 1:19). If we read it only looking for clues about the end of the world, we miss the point of the message. Revelation is ultimately a book of hope for faithful followers of Jesus as we await his victorious return.

John wrote this letter toward the end of the 1st century. John had been banished to Patmos (which is now one of the Greek Isles) as punishment by the Roman government for preaching the good news about Jesus. While “in the Spirit” (presumably deep in prayer and worship), he had a vision, a dream, in which he vividly encountered the risen Lord. In this vision, Jesus showed him many things and instructed him to write down everything he saw and heard. He was told to send the description of this vision to seven churches in the nearby region of Asia Minor.

Through the vivid, symbolic imagery that characterizes Revelation, Jesus had a specific message for each of seven churches. These churches were in key cities in the Roman province of western Asia Minor (modern western Turkey), where Christianity was flourishing at the end of the 1st century. John's messenger likely carried the letter from Patmos to one congregation and then the next until all seven had received the message from Jesus through John.

While these churches were made up of real people in a specific time and place, Revelation's rich symbolism suggests that there is intent in Jesus's choice of seven churches because seven represents the number of completion—a reference to the 7-day model instituted by God in His pattern of creation and rest. This implies that the seven messages are messages for all churches for all time.

Can you imagine what it would be like for our church to receive a direct message from our Lord Christ?! And to have that message shared publicly with nearby churches now and for all time? Each week in this series, we'll get to read what Jesus said to seven other churches. Let's read his words with humility and listen well to what Jesus commends—and what he does not—and encourage each other on, so we may be among the victoriously faithful in the end.

Where were the seven churches? A messenger delivered the letters from the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea to the seven cities indicated on the map.

See Appendix A for more about how to approach Revelation as apocalyptic literature, and Appendix B for tips on how to read all of Scripture in view of literary genre.



WHAT DID

We'll complete one row of this chart each week to help us see and remember the details in each church's letter. Each of Jesus's messages to the churches follow the same format:

	DESCRIPTION OF JESUS	PRAISE FOR THIS CHURCH
Ephesus		
Smyrna		
Pergamum		
Thyatira		
Sardis		
Philadelphia		
Laodicea		

JESUS SAY?

- "To the angel (or messenger) of the church in (a given city), write:"
- Descriptive imagery of Jesus
- "I know..." (to most churches he offers some praise)
- "But I have this against you" (rebuke given to most of the churches)
- "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- Reward awaiting those who are victorious, faithful to the end

REBUKE FOR THIS CHURCH	REWARD FOR THIS CHURCH	
		Ephesus
		Smyrna
		Pergamum
		Thyatira
		Sardis
		Philadelphia
		Laodicea





To the Church in Ephesus

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. ² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶ But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."



Week 1

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCING EPHESUS

It isn't surprising that Jesus's first message is addressed to the church in Ephesus. In its day, Ephesus was the most prominent of these seven cities in Revelation. It was the Roman capital of Asia Minor with a population of more than a quarter-million people. It was situated as a seaport on three major trade routes, making it a bustling center of commerce and culture.

Ephesus was proud of its impressive temples to a variety of gods and emperors, the most notable of which was the temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This temple was supported by thousands of priests and priestesses and a booming business related to goddess worship. Acts 19:32-40 tells of rioting in Ephesus because of the threat to this industry due to Christians no longer participating in it. In addition to Artemis, worship of at least 14 other deities has been documented in Ephesus.

Besides this cultural pressure towards worship of many gods, other practices constantly challenged the believers' sole dedication to God. A 25-foot-tall statue of the emperor stood over the city to remind everyone of their required loyalty to Rome and the requirement to submit to its authority. The city was also known as a center for the occult and black magic. Acts 19:19 depicts new believers leaving magical practices and burning magic scrolls worth about 50,000 days' wages.

Despite this environment of competing religious pressures, the Ephesian church received Jesus's praise for standing firm in the truth of the gospel and not being led astray by false teachers. He specifically mentions the "Nicolaitans," a group which we don't know much about beyond their reference in Revelation here and in 2:15.

The Ephesian church did well to remain so well focused on the truth of the gospel above all else. And yet, the relentless pressures of cultural, racial, and economic diversity eroded this church's foundation of following the Greatest Commandment, leading to Jesus's exhortation to return to love as their priority.

A STATUE OF ARTEMIS >

*Image Credit: Carole Raddato
- CC BY-SA*





1. Read the letter to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7.
2. Fill out the row for this church on the chart on pages 8-9.
3. From what you see in these verses, what specific kinds of challenges did the Ephesian church have to navigate?

4. Their church was founded in love. Glance through Ephesians 1:4-5; 1:15; 2:4; 3:17-19; 4:2; 4:15-16; 5:2; and 5:25 to see this theme woven through their beginnings. Having seen this, what do you think they strived to look like as a love-filled church in their early days?

5. Jesus was delighted by their deeds, hard work and perseverance, and yet their lack of love threatened the integrity of it all. As we each seek to keep love as a priority, what might you do to rekindle and/or deepen your love for Jesus this week?



1. **Conversation Starter:** What (not who) was your “first love” (i.e. a precious childhood toy, a first car, a pet, etc.)?
2. What did you find most interesting from this passage and/or the weekend message?
3. What challenged you or left you wondering?
4. What impacted how you view Jesus? How about yourself or our church?
5. What’s a next step for you because of what you’ve gained from this Scripture, message, or study?





To the Church in Smyrna

⁸ *"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:*

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

¹¹ *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death."*



Week 2

COMMENTARY

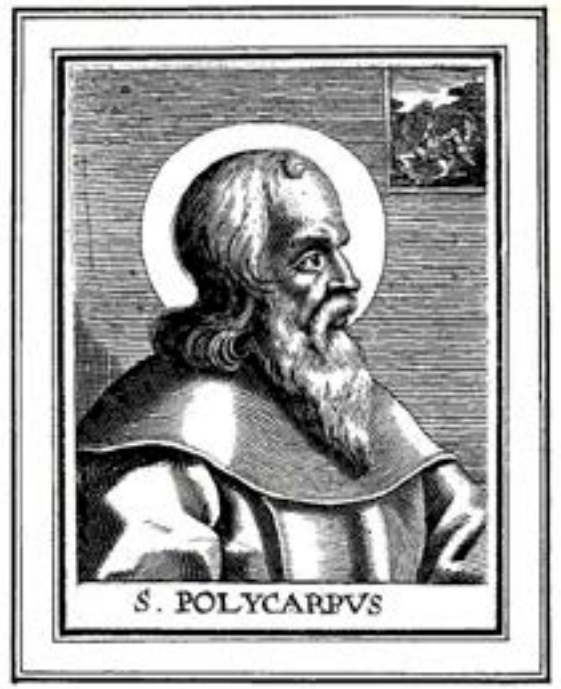
INTRODUCING SMYRNA

Smyrna (modern-day Izmir) was a harbor city about 40 northwest of Ephesus. Though Smyrna was well-regarded in the ancient world for its beauty, its reputation was partly connected with suffering because of its name's similarity to "myrrh," a costly spice used in burial preparations.

The church in Smyrna suffered heavily because of animosity directed at them by the unbelieving Jewish community who collaborated with the Roman government to view Christians as a common enemy to be eradicated. The relentless conflict they faced at the hands of the Jews and Romans exposed them to all kinds of suffering from excessive taxation to execution.

The notable early church father, Polycarp, who was an immediate disciple of the Apostle John, was the bishop of Smyrna in the generation following this letter. He was horrifically tortured and killed because he refused to burn incense to worship the emperor. Polycarp was an actual fulfillment of an example of someone from Smyrna who suffered greatly but remained victoriously faithful to the end.

The letter to Smyrna is one of the two letters that contains only encouragement from Jesus and no corrections. The reminder of him as the one who has conquered death and was brought back to life would have held tremendous significance for the suffering Smyrnans, as it can for us all.



POLYCARP >

Image Credit: Public Domain



1. Read the letter to the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11.
2. Fill out the row for this church on the chart on pages 8-9.
3. What specific difficulties were affecting this church?

4. If you were suffering these kinds of difficulties, how would you have received Jesus’s description of himself and his promised reward for the victorious?

5. Read John 16:33. As you seek to be an overcomer in “Babylon” today, what practical encouragement could this verse give you in specific difficulties you face?



1. **Conversation Starter:** As we anticipate eternity in paradise with Christ, what kind of landscape seems like paradise to you (i.e. a lush, tropical beach, a mountaintop forest)?
2. What did you find most interesting from this passage and/or the weekend message?
3. What challenged you or left you wondering?
4. What impacted how you view Jesus? How about yourself or our church?
5. What's a next step for you because of what you've gained from this Scripture, message, or study?





To the Church in Pergamum

¹² *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:*

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ *Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: 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. ¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

¹⁷ *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.”*



Week 3

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCING PERGAMUM

While Pergamum did not have the commercial prosperity of Ephesus, it had claims to fame as another intellectual and religious hub. It featured a huge temple to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. As legend goes, Asclepius was given the secrets of healing, even resurrection from the dead, by a magical snake, but he was killed by Zeus before he could share his secrets. His serpent-wrapped staff remains today as the symbol of the World Health Organization (WHO)—an image found in the temple at Pergamum.

Pergamum was one of the few cities to have received from Rome the *ius gladii*, which means the right of the sword. This meant the governor of the city had the right and authority to administer capital punishment. Christians in Pergamum would likely have connected the reference of the sword coming out of Jesus's mouth in verse 16 with his authority over life and death (Rev. 1:18).

This letter's reference to the Old Testament prophet, Balaam, conveys that the church was vulnerable to being enticed into sins, such as idol practices and sexual immorality, that would take them away from God's favor. Balaam was a greedy prophet who was hired to curse the Israelites by their enemies. His story can be found in Numbers 22-24, but Scripture summarizes him saying "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord at

Peor” (Num. 31:16), and in the New Testament, “They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness” (2 Pet. 2:15).

The Nicolaitans are referenced here again, as they were to the Ephesian church, and while we don’t know the specifics about them, it’s safe to say the point is the church in Pergamum was vulnerable to tempting voices in their culture luring them away from their faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’s reward of the hidden manna recalls the daily provision God provided His people in the wilderness (in the days of Balaam).

ASCLEPIUS >

Image credit: Michael F. Mehnert - CC BY-SA 3.0





1. Read the letter to the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2:12-17.
2. Fill out the row for this church on the chart on pages 8-9.
3. Jesus's praise for this church is toward those who've remained true to their faith, despite the challenges of living in an ungodly culture. Read Romans 12:9-21, 1 Peter 3:11-17, and Colossians 4:2-6, and record insights you gain from these verses on living as ambassadors for Jesus in "Babylon" without compromising our faith.
4. The underlying warning in this passage is to avoid letting cultural practices seep in that compromise our goal to follow Jesus and all that he commanded us. Where do you feel vulnerable to compromising your faith because of the temptations of our culture?
5. What strategy could you implement this week that would help you be victorious in following Jesus more closely in all areas of your life?



1. **Conversation Starter:** Where is your favorite place to spend a free afternoon in Rochester?
2. What did you find most interesting from this passage and/or the weekend message?
3. What challenged you or left you wondering?
4. What impacted how you view Jesus? How about yourself or our church?
5. What's a next step for you because of what you've gained from this Scripture, message, or study?





To the Church in Thyatira

¹⁸ *“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:*

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

¹⁹ *I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.*

²⁰ *Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.*

²⁴ *Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, ²⁵ except to hold on to what you have until I come.’*

²⁶ *To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—²⁷ that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father.*

²⁸ *I will also give that one the morning star. ²⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*



Week 4

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCING THYATIRA

So far, each of the churches we've visited faced temptations to compromise their love and faith in Jesus because of various internal and external pressures. Thyatira's temptations likely came from being a city of successful trade and manufacturing.

Commerce in Thyatira, their whole society really, was dominated by powerful trade guilds. These guilds often incorporated required worship of their patron gods—sometimes orgy rituals, frequently feasts sacrificed to pagan gods—into their functions. This meant Christians in Thyatira faced massive social and financial hardship when they stopped worshipping false gods and were ejected from their guilds.

Believers struggling to practice their trade as rejected outsiders would have been highly vulnerable to anyone promising a way of both being in the church and remaining in the good graces of the trade guilds. "Jezebel"—probably not a specific woman but a voice of unholy compromise—was attractive because she was telling people what they wanted to hear.

Like "Balaam" in Pergamum that we studied last week, "Jezebel" recalls wickedness experienced by the Israelites in the Old Testament. The real Queen Jezebel was married to the evil King Ahab. She sponsored 850 false prophets (1 Kings 18:19) and brought Baal worship with her from her homeland (1 Kings 16:31). Jezebel tried to destroy all God's prophets, (1 Kings 18:4), but the great prophet Elijah defeated her false prophets on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). The victory took a toll on him though, and he was terrified Jezebel would kill him (1 Kings 19:2-3).

Elijah later prophesied Jezebel's death as one who had stirred up Ahab to wickedness (1 Kings 21). She continued her evil influence through her son Joram's rule (2 Kings 9:22). Elisha anointed Jehu to replace Joram, who then assassinated Joram, and then went after Jezebel. She tried to adorn herself and entice him, but servants obeyed Jehu's instruction to kill her, and she died a gruesome death (2 Kings 9:30-37).

Jesus's definition of himself as the Son of God in Revelation 2:18 may not seem provocative to us, but it was an extraordinarily powerful statement to the city of Thyatira which claimed Apollo, son of Zeus, as a prominent patron deity. It is possible that describing himself with the mention of blazing fires and burnished bronze was another jab at the city's industries. In that vein, his conclusion of the letter pointing to the authority he gives to rule with an iron scepter and having the right to "dash them to pieces like pottery" (Revelation 2:27) would have continued these pointed jabs.

ST. LYDIA, fresco in the
Baptistry of St. Lydia, Kavala
(Greece)>





1. Read the letter to the church at Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29.
2. Fill out the row for this church on the chart on pages 8-9.
3. This church was praised for some great things in verse 19. Imagine you were visiting this church. Based on only this verse, what would you expect them to be like?

4. How do you reconcile the good things said about this church with the vulnerability they had to being led astray by "Jezebel"?

5. Idolatry (worshiping and trusting in anything other than God) has been a temptation from the beginning. Read 1 Samuel 12:20-24 to see an important reason why God hates idolatry. With this in mind, why do you think Jesus was so passionate in his rebuke of this church?



1. **Conversation Starter:** What kind of good deed do you really enjoy doing to bless someone?
2. What did you find most interesting from this passage and/or the weekend message?
3. What challenged you or left you wondering?
4. What impacted how you view Jesus? How about yourself or our church?
5. What's a next step for you because of what you've gained from this Scripture, message, or study?





To the Church in Sardis

¹ "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

⁴ *Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. ⁶ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*



Week 5

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCING SARDIS

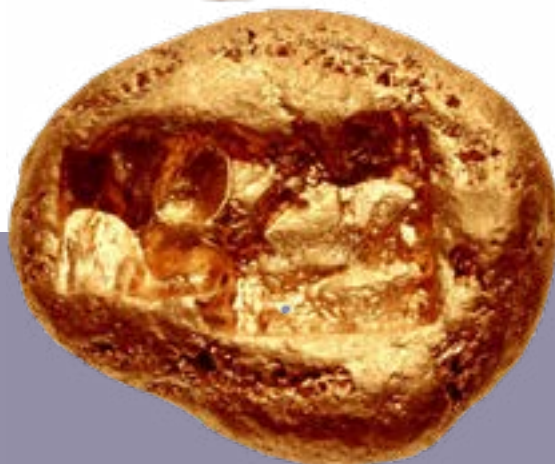
Sardis had a reputation as one of the wealthiest and most powerful cities in the ancient world. It was the capital of the Lydian kingdom in the 6th century BC and held incredible influence over the region. In the time that Revelation was written though, it was a shadow of what had been after being leveled and rebuilt following a devastating earthquake in 17 AD.

The city was home to a significant Jewish community and featured one of the largest synagogues of the era. Ironically, the absence of recorded conflict between the Christians and the Jews in Sardis could have contributed to the complacency of the church. The lack of opposition experienced by this church, in contrast to others like the church at Smyrna, may have lulled these believers into their peaceful slumber.

The reward expressed for the victorious of not being blotted out "from the book of life" (3:5) implies that many in Sardis were close to spiritual death (3:2) and will not see the kingdom. To explore what the Bible has to say about the names of the saved people being recorded in the book of life, see Exodus 32:32-33 (Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3).



Sardis had the first known coin mint; from 7th Century BC >
Image Credit: CC BY-SA 3.0





1. **Conversation Starter:** Are you a night owl or a morning person?
2. What did you find most interesting from this passage and/or the weekend message?
3. What challenged you or left you wondering?
4. What impacted how you view Jesus? How about yourself or our church?
5. What's a next step for you because of what you've gained from this Scripture, message, or study?





To the Church in Philadelphia

⁷ *“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:*

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. ¹³ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”



Week 6 

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCING PHILADELPHIA

The letter to the church at Philadelphia is a delight to read. Despite it being a church of “little strength,” this is the second of the two letters that receive only praise and encouragement from Jesus.

Philadelphia got its name because of loyalty shown between two brothers, Eumenes II and his younger brother, Attalus II. Attalus resisted pressure from Rome to betray his older brother, and so their homeland became known as the “city of brotherly love.”

It was situated on a major thoroughfare connecting it to many key cities. Because of that, it was a city filled with transient merchants and was seen as a location for spreading the Greek language and way of life to the regions beyond.

This city was on the edge of a volatile volcanic range, dotting the landscape with therapeutic hot springs. Many people came to these springs seeking relief and healing. But the same geothermal phenomena that brought prosperity to their city also brought danger.

Philadelphia was particularly vulnerable to earthquakes and its citizens often lived in a state of fear over impending disaster. At any moment, they might need to be ready to leave the city filled with precarious structures and flee to the relative safety of the open country. This ongoing stress they lived with gives us insight into the reference (verse 12) that the victorious people will be able to remain as pillars in the temple of God and never again need to flee their home.

Image Credit: CC BY-SA 2.0

RUINS OF CHURCH OF ST. JOHN in Alaşehir (Philadelphia)





1. Read the letter to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13.
2. Fill out the row for this church on the chart on pages 8-9.
3. Jesus says he knows this church had little strength, but what do you see in this letter that reveals how and why they were strong?

4. For a church that lived under the stress of change and instability, what encouragement do you see Jesus offering to them?

5. In what chapters of your walk with God have you felt like you lacked strength to keep going? How might the promises in verses 11-12 to the victorious ones inspire you to persevere?



1. **Conversation Starter:** Have you ever been in an earthquake?
2. What did you find most interesting from this passage and/or the weekend message?
3. What challenged you or left you wondering?
4. What impacted how you view Jesus? How about yourself or our church?
5. What's a next step for you because of what you've gained from this Scripture, message, or study?





To the Church in Laodicea

¹⁴ *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:*

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

¹⁹ *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

²¹ *To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*



Week 7

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCING LAODICEA

As we've seen all along, each of the seven letters to the churches contain references to either the geography, or the culture of the city, so it is no surprise the references made to the church in Laodicea are rich with significance for this location and society.

Laodicea was a great banking center. When Revelation was written, it was one of the wealthiest cities in the world, creating an atmosphere of independence and self-sufficiency. When it was devastated by an earthquake in 61 A.D., it refused help from the Roman government and was rebuilt using its own resources.

Laodicea also had a thriving textile industry, known for a particularly soft, black wool, and was home to a great medical center famous for the eye and ear ointment it produced. Knowing this helps us appreciate the reference in verse 18 for *"salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see."*

Despite its claims to self-sufficiency, the landlocked city didn't have a reliable water source of its own. An impressive system of water pipes tapped into the cool, refreshing waters of the mountains to the south, and the mineral-rich, hot springs from Hierapolis, the neighboring city to the north. Both the crisp, clean mountain waters and the warm, healing hot springs waters were wonderful at their source, but by the time they arrived in Laodicea, they were no longer hot nor cold and quite unpalatable. Furthermore, these pipes were subject to sabotage by enemies seeking to invade or plunder the city and left Laodicea more vulnerable than they apparently cared to admit.

ROMAN AQUADUCT >

*Image credit: Le plombier
du désert- CC BY-SA 4.0*





1. Read the letter to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22.
2. Fill out the row for this church on the chart on pages 8-9.
3. This church felt they were rich and claimed they didn't need a thing. How does self-sufficiency threaten a healthy spiritual life for a church and for an individual?

4. Some of these words of Jesus may sound a bit harsh, but as he says in verse 19, his rebuke is motivated by love for the purpose of disciplining (i.e. training for improvement) the ones he loves. Read Hebrews 12:4-11. What hardships are you facing now that might be evidence of God's loving work of training in you?

5. Reflect on Jesus's invitation in verse 20 in the context of what he's said to the Laodiceans and to all of the seven churches that we've explored over the course of this study. If Jesus were standing in front of you, saying this directly to you right now, how would you respond to him?



1. **Conversation Starter:** Do you prefer hot coffee/tea or iced coffee/tea?
2. What did you find most interesting from this passage and/or the weekend message?
3. What challenged you or left you wondering?
4. What impacted how you view Jesus? How about yourself or our church?
5. What's a next step for you because of what you've gained from this Scripture, message, or study?

READING REVELATION

Revelation is the Bible's prime example of a genre known as apocalyptic literature. Sections of the books of Daniel and Ezekiel also contain apocalyptic writings, and it was a style of writing not uncommon in the ancient world.

While we may think "end of the world" when we hear the word "apocalypse", what that word really means is "to unveil" or "to reveal." Hence the name, Revelation. What is revealed in this book (letter) is what Jesus showed to John in a dream concerning things "seen, what is now and what will take place later" (Rev. 1:19).

When reading Revelation, always keep in mind that it is a man's description of dream. And like many dreams, it is filled with bizarre imagery and symbolism. John, as instructed in the dream, wrote down this vision from Jesus to share with seven specific churches. When reading the rest of the book, we must remember that any meaning we derive must remain grounded in what Jesus intended for them to hear first.

Revelation is rich with symbolic references to the Old Testament, and so to comprehend its meaning, we must study it through this historical lens. If there is a code to be cracked, so to speak, in Revelation, it is probably more about seeing how this vision expands our understanding of the Old Testament, rather than trying to figure out when this era of history will end.

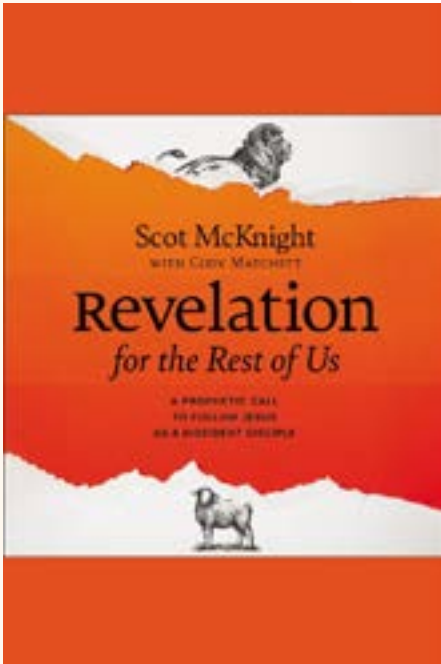
Theologians disagree over the meanings of many of the symbols and descriptions in these scriptures, but what we can all take from Revelation is that...

Though we live in a broken world now, our Lord Jesus's victory over evil is guaranteed. This truth gives us confident hope as we anticipate our future with him in paradise.

Recommended Resources for Reading Revelation

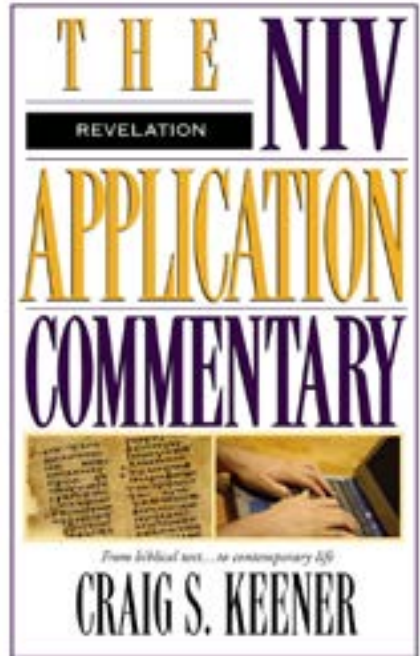
Revelation for the Rest of Us

If you'd like to continue studying Revelation, we recommend Scot McKnight's book on how Revelation informs our life as believers in "Babylon."



Revelation (The NIV Application Commentary)

For a practical, yet in-depth, commentary, Craig Keener's volume in the NIV Application Commentary series is quite good.



B READING THE BIBLE IN VIEW OF GENRE

Revelation may be the book most obvious to read in view of its genre, but the whole Bible deserves to be read this way. Here are some tips on how to approach each genre of Scripture:

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

- Focus on the historical context, characters, and events.
- Pay attention to the cultural and social norms of the time.
- Watch for theological themes and lessons illustrated in the narrative.

POETRY:

- Understand that authors expressed honest feelings, and their thoughts are descriptive rather than prescriptive.
- Look for “parallelism” (conveying the same idea twice in different ways) and/or recurring patterns.
- Commentaries or study Bibles may add additional insights into things, such as when a poem was originally written as an acrostic or other literary tricks.

PROPHECY:

- Know that prophecy can be fulfilled both in an immediate and a future context.
- Interpret prophecy in view of the historical background of the audience to whom it was originally addressed.
- Watch for Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament pointing to Jesus.

WISDOM LITERATURE:

- Focus on insights into human behavior, morality, and reverence for our Lord.
- Understand these verses to be principles, not promises. They point to realities that are generally true, but not necessarily inevitable outcomes in every case.
- Recognize there are many different literary devices (i.e. analogy, allegory, etc.) and writing styles.

LETTERS (EPISTLES):

- Consider the historical and cultural context of the letter's original recipients.
- Determine what specific issues the author intended to address.
- Seek to apply practical instruction, theological teachings, and guidance on how to live as a follower of Jesus.

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE:

- Expect vivid imagery and symbolism that may be an allusion to something else.
- Use caution with interpretations because the symbolism may not be knowable with certainty (like most dream interpretations).
- Look for the overarching message of hope and God's ultimate victory.



IDEAS FOR SMALL GROUPS WITH CHILDREN

Children benefit from seeing you prioritize spiritual growth and spending time in community with other Jesus followers. Groups with little kids have additional considerations to work out, but it is well worth it!

Some tips from successful small groups with young children:

- Hire babysitters from church who are raising funds for upcoming mission trips or camp opportunities.
- Consider inviting an older couple missing or wishing for grandkids to enjoy sharing Bible stories and snuggles with your little ones.
- If your children are school-aged or in daycare, consider meeting over a weekday lunch hour while they're occupied.
- Include your children for part of your meeting time and talk through the material on their level with them before dismissing them to play. (Bonus - this is a great warm-up for grown-up discussion.)
- Meet at a playground or park, so children can play while the adults talk nearby.
- There is a possibility for groups to meet at ARC on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening while the kids are in children's programming. Space is very limited, but if you're willing to be accommodating and flexible, so are we!
- Occasionally meeting on Zoom after kids go to bed might be useful on weeks when other options don't work.

RESOURCES

Autumn Ridge Website

All the materials for this and previous studies are at:
<https://autumnridge.church/small-groups/>

You can also scan the QR code to see previous small group studies.



Subscribe to the *Church is Messy* podcast



During Fall 2023, as we're working through the *Dear Church* series, if you have questions about any of this content that you'd like Pastors Rick and Svea to address on the podcast, send your question to podcast@autumnridge.church.













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