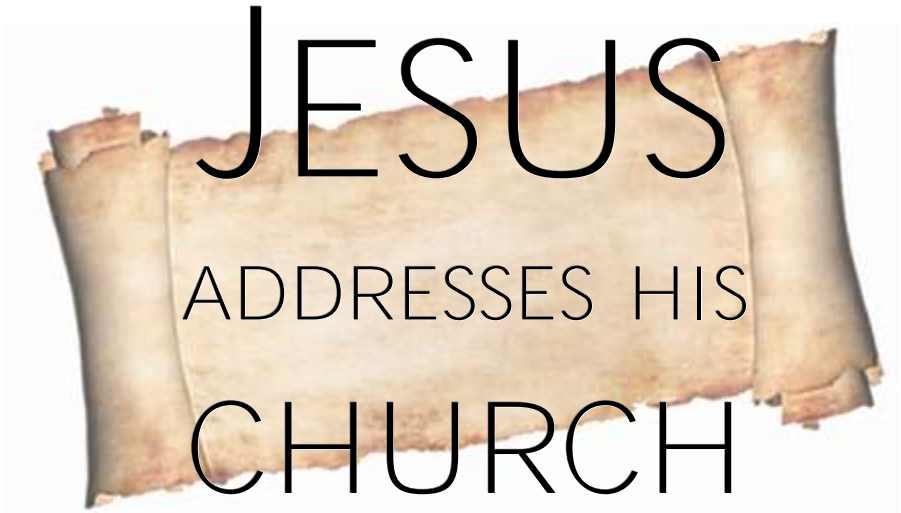


WEDNESDAY EVENING
BIBLE CLASS



JESUS
ADDRESSES HIS
CHURCH

A Study of the Letters to the
Seven Churches in Revelation

By Tanner Campbell

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Introduction to our Study

1. Revelation 1:1-20

Why do you think Jesus is pictured this way?

Why do you think the churches are pictured this way?

2. Why only seven churches?



Read Acts 19:9-10. Does this text suggest that there were more than seven churches in Asia? If so, how?

Colossians 4:13-16 speaks of churches within the immediate area of the seven churches, name them:

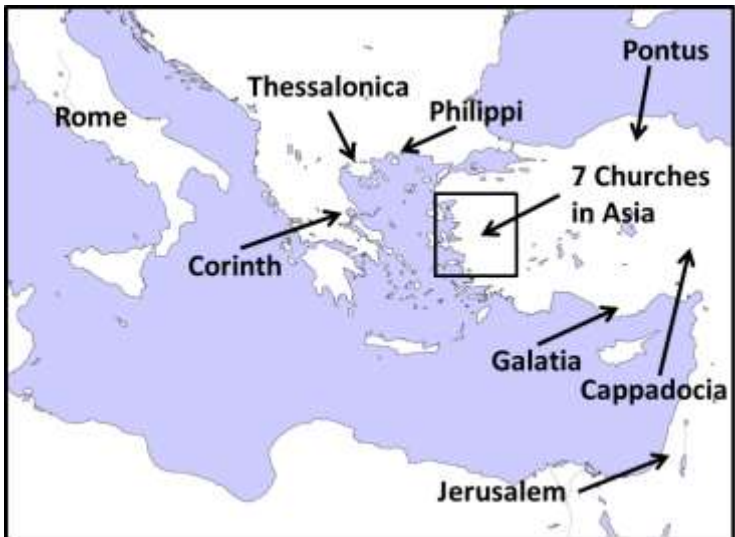
1 Peter 1:1, and the map below, demonstrate how much further letters were meant to travel in those days.



Read Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 23, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

Do these verses suggest that these letters were for a much larger group of recipients?

Consider the map below. Where are the churches in Asia located in relation to other churches of that time?



3. Reason for the letters.

Read Revelation 2:9-10, 13; 6:9-11; 20:4; 7:14; 17:6.

What do all of these verses have in common?

In light of this, what is a possible reason why Jesus wrote to His church?

The book of 1 Peter is closely related to the book of Revelation, in that, they were both written around the same time and deal with the same subject.

Read 1 Peter 5:9. Were the seven churches in Asia the only churches facing the sufferings of that day?

Relate these thoughts back to section 2, on page 1-2.

4. “To the angel of the church” (2:1)

“Angel” (Greek—Aggelos): a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

This word is used 186 times in the New Testament. 179 times it is translated “angel.” 7 times it is translated “messenger.”

Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52; 2 Corinthians 12:7; James 2:25.

The Church in Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7

1. The City

Ephesus was located 60 miles from Patmos, where John received this revelation. A very prominent city of Asia Minor, Ephesus was influential in trade and religion. It was not the capital of the Roman province of Asia, but it was the largest city with approximately 300,000 people. The city itself was situated at the mouth of the Cayster river, making it the most important trade center that was west of Tarsus. Today, the prominent city of the first century sits as ruins in a swamp five miles inland. The role the city played in religion is critical. Located in Ephesus was the temple of the goddess **Artemis (Diana), the daughter of Zeus, “whom all Asia and the world worship” (Acts 19:27). The temple was named one** of the seven wonders of the world. Within the temple stood the image of Diana that was believed to have come directly from Zeus (Acts 19:35). The temple itself was supported by 127 columns, each 197 feet tall. Ephesus was therefore a significant place of worship for both Greeks and Romans, in **fact, the Romans minted coins with the inscription “Diana of Ephesus.” To give an idea of the prominence of this structure** in the world, Alexander the Great came to it and offered Ephesus the entirety of the riches of his eastern campaign if they would inscribe his name on just one of the 127 columns. **They turned him down, stating, “if we put the name of another god on her temple, it will upset her.”**

2. The Church

Its beginnings are recoded in Acts 18-**20, during Paul’s 2nd** and 3rd preaching journeys.

Challenges that they would face were spoken of from the very beginning of the church at Ephesus.

Acts 20:28-31; Ephesians 4:14-15; 5:6-7, 11; 6:10-13.

3. How does Jesus describe Himself to the Ephesians?

4. What is positive about the church at Ephesus?

5. What did Jesus identify as wrong with the church?

What do you think their first love was?

What would cause them to leave their first love? Consider, for possibilities, the history of the church on page 4.

What does Jesus tell them to do about their problem?

What does it mean to remove a candlestick/lampstand?

How does Jesus feel about the works of the Nicolaitans?

Revelation 2:8-11

1. The City

From the boasting of its inhabitants, it was the most beautiful city in all the world and the pride of the Roman Empire, **they called their Smyrna “the first city of Asia.”** **Smyrna was** located about 35 miles from Ephesus. Although not as prominent as Ephesus economically, it still played an important part in trade, and was close in size to Ephesus. Religion also was most significant in Smyrna. Undoubtedly, it was a major center for emperor worship in the entire Roman Empire. Smyrna got in on the ground floor of Roman worship (and later, emperor worship) when they foresaw the rising power of Rome and decided to erect a temple to Dea Roma (the city of Rome personified as a goddess) in 195 B.C. In 44 B.C., four months after the death of Julius Caesar, a comet appeared in the sky, and was believed by the majority to be a sign that Caesar was now a god in heaven. From that time on, emperors were looked upon in awe, as most people of the east had blurred lines between manhood and godhood, and believed that each emperor was consecrated as a god after their death. At the explosion of this new cult worship, Smyrna was on the scene. They built another temple, this time for the worship of Emperor Augustus in 26 B.C. Following this, they erected another temple for the worship of Emperor Tiberius in 25 A.D. It was truly a dangerous city for the church of Christ, who rejected this false worship. Add to that the heavy population of Jews in the city, and not the kind who worshiped YHWH, but the kind who worshipped the survival of the Jewish nation. They had been against Rome who had set not only the Emperor, but procurators over them, and they had been against the church since Acts chapter 2! Nothing is known about the 1st century church in Smyrna except that which is written in Revelation.

2. How does Jesus describe Himself to Smyrna?

3. What does Jesus know about them?

Why do you think they were “poor,” financially, in one of the most prosperous cities in Asia?

How were they rich?

4. What does Jesus find wrong with this congregation?

5. Who are “those who say they are Jews and are not?”

Consider for your answer: Romans 2:28-29.

6. Who does Jesus name specifically as their persecutor?

7. Give your ideas about the meaning of “ten days of tribulation:”

The Church in Pergamum

Revelation 2:12-17

1. The City

55 miles north of Smyrna, stood a royal city, with riches, education, medicine, and above all, idolatry. The great secular structures of the city was the medical center, and the library.

The library was a rival to the world's greatest library of that time, located in Alexandria. When the king of Pergamum attempted to bribe the head librarian in Alexandria to come work for him, the king of Egypt, Ptolemy II, found out about it and imprisoned the head librarian. The king of Egypt also stopped the shipment of papyrus to Pergamum. In response to this, Pergamum developed a new form of **writing material called "parchment" (Pergamena charta)**, made of vellum (specially treated deer skin).

In religion, Pergamum surpassed its rival, Smyrna. It was the seat of state religion in the Roman Empire. The city contained the original temple erected for the worship of Augustus Caesar, built in 29 B.C. Also, Pergamum erected an altar to Zeus, one of the most famous altars in the world, standing 800 feet above the eyes of the citizens of Pergamum, on the hilltop. The smoke on the altar ascended day and night, and was quite a sight to behold. The temple of Asklepios was also a significant part of Pergamum. Asklepios was the Greco-Roman god of medicine and healing. People from all over would come with their infirmities to visit this temple. Many other temples were throughout the city for the worship of Athena (goddess of wisdom), Dionysus (the god of wine), Minerva (goddess of the arts), Apollo (god of light and the sun), and Venus (goddess of love and sex).

2. How does Jesus describe Himself to Pergamum?

3. What troubles did this church face from the outside?

4. What troubles did this church face from the inside?

5. Why is Balaam mentioned?

6. What is the “doctrine of Balaam?”

7. What is the difference between Pergamum and the Ephesus on the subject of the Nicolaitans?

8. Who does Jesus command to repent?

9. What are the dangers of a congregation that tolerates false doctrine?

The Church in Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

1. The City

Thyatira is located 35 miles southeast of Pergamum. It is a smaller city, and not as important politically, religiously, or economically as the cities we have seen so far (which was natural for many cities that are further inland). It was, however, still an important commercial city. As the road system ran through Thyatira, it was coincidentally a gateway to other important cities in Asia, and thus, had to be a defender against enemies wanting to reach the cities of significance. Unfortunately for Thyatira, their location was not suited for defense, geographically, and always needed to be well supplied with good soldiers in order to keep their head above water. It was a city that had to be strong even though it was weak.

Commercially, it was a city of metal workers (especially bronze), weavers, tanners, dyers, potters, cobblers, bakers, etc. Lydia (Acts 16:14-15) was a seller of purple from Thyatira. Those who labored in Thyatira were a part of a trade union. These unions each had their own god that the members worshipped by sacrifices, festivals, eating of sacrificed meats, and sexually immoral practices. In order to buy and sell goods, one must be a part of a trade union, and must live by the principles of the particular union. Usually contained in these principles was confession of the Emperor as their Lord, as well as the practice of immoral rituals. This would have made living, and making a living, very hard on the Christians who lived there, who could not participate in these trade unions.

2. How does Jesus describe Himself to Thyatira?

How does this description relate to the city and the goods that it produced?

3. What does Jesus say He knows about this congregation?

What does “the last are more than the first” mean?

4. Why does Jesus use the name Jezebel? What is significant about that name?

5. What is the difference between the “Balaam” of Pergamum and the “Jezebel” of Thyatira?

6. What did Jesus say He will do to this Jezebel?

7. What is the difference between Thyatira in verse 24 and Pergamum in verse 16?

The Church in Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6

1. The City

Sardis was 50 miles east of Smyrna. Sardis had a name that it was a glorious and invincible fortress. Indeed, Sardis had that appearance, because while some of the city is in the valley at the foot of Mount Tmolus, the glory of the city is built 1,500 feet up on the rocky mount. What a reputation it had, being once the great capital of the Lydian empire and home to Croesus, one of the richest kings in history. But the **city was not as it seemed. It has been described as “more like a robber’s stronghold than an abode of civilized men” (W.M. Ramsay)**. Although it held its reputation of being strong, it was a city that failed time and again to be the unassailable fortress. The impregnable fortress up on the mount that was impossible to scale, was actually very possible, and the Persians came up against the city and took it. Later, the Greeks conquered the unconquerable city, and by the first century, it was in the hands of Rome. What Sardis was when Revelation was recorded, was not what it used to be. Before it was a very wealthy city, where gold flowed on the Pactolus river right up to the door of the city. It was a city reputed for its wool and fruit. But by the first century, it was too isolated from the rest of the world, making commerce and trade difficult. It was a dead city. Add to this the tragedy of 17 A.D. when the city was destroyed by an earthquake. Even though Emperor Tiberius canceled the payment of taxes for Sardis for five years, in order to aid in the rebuilding process, it was still a dead city. Today it remains that way, an uncivilized wilderness that is occupied by only a few Yoruk nomads.

2. Explain the words of Jesus: “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”

What is the significance of these words to the history of the city of Sardis?

3. What does Jesus identify as the main problem?

4. List the steps Jesus tells them to take:

5. Why do you think Jesus tells them to watch in both verse 2 and 3?

6. What is significant about the color white in verse 4?

Consider Revelation 7:13-14 too!

The Church in Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

1. The City

About 25 miles southeast of Sardis stood the city of Philadelphia (Greek: brotherly love). It was named after its founder, the king of Pergamum, Attalus II (159-138 B.C.). It was due to the kindness and loyalty that he had toward his ailing brother Eumenes II, that Attalus was given the name Philadelphus by his brother, making his name Attalus Philadelphus, meaning Attalus the brother-loving.

The city was located on an important road to the trade routes, and it can be considered the doorway to the trade routes. It was a city of vineyards, and the center of the wine industry. The citizens focused their worship on Dionysus, the god of wine. Like the nearby city of Sardis, it too was devastated by the severe earthquake of 17 A.D. as well as many other earthquakes that are common to that region.

2. How does Jesus describe Himself to the Philadelphians?

What is significant about the key of David?

3. What do you think is the open door that is set before them?

4. What is positive about the church in Philadelphia?

5. Jesus does not count their “little strength” as negative, but rather a part of their positive qualities. What is it about this church that “a little strength” would describe them?

6. What promises does Jesus make to this church?

Why did He make these promises to them?

7. What is the meaning of these images?

“I will make him a pillar in the temple”

“I will write on him the name of My God...”

“...and the name of the city of My God”

“I will write on him My new name.”

Revelation 3:14-22

1. The City

About 40 miles from Philadelphia stood Laodicea, a city **where “there are no extremes, and hardly any very strongly marked features” (W.M. Ramsay). During Roman times, it** was a very wealthy city, located at a junction of three important roads. When a great earthquake destroyed the city in 60 A.D., the surrounding cities received aid from Rome, but Laodicea refused the aid. It was a self-sufficient city, relying on its own riches. Contained within the city was one of the great medical schools of that era. The school was world famous for its creation of an eye powder and ear ointment. Their eye powder was exported over the entire world in the form of a tablet that would be ground up and applied as ointment to the eye (eye diseases were a major concern, especially in Asia Minor)

About 7 miles north of Laodicea was the city of Hierapolis, a great place for a vacation. People came from all over the **world to visit Hierapolis’ wonderful hot springs. 10 miles west** of Laodicea, stood the well known city of Colossae. People also traveled to Colossae in search for a different kind of refreshing water, not hot like Hierapolis, but very cold. As for Laodicea, they did not have the attraction that Hierapolis and Colossae enjoyed. In reaction to this, Laodicea had some of the refreshing hot water from the springs of Hierapolis, 7 miles north, piped into the city. The trouble was that refreshing hot water traveling for 7 miles reaches its destination only lukewarm. And not just lukewarm, but contaminated water, because they failed to make a safe and healthy way for the water to travel. The ultimate result was water entering into Laodicea that was good for nothing, lukewarm and contaminated. If one were to take a drink, they would soon spew it out of their mouth.

2. How does Jesus describe Himself to Laodicea?

Why does He call Himself the “Amen” to them?

3. What is the problem in the church at Laodicea?

4. Jesus said “I could wish you were cold or hot,” contextually, both are considered good for a congregation to be.

Therefore what does He mean by a hot church?

And what about a cold church?

5. Why would He “vomit” them out of His mouth because they are lukewarm?

6. What do the Laodiceans sincerely believe about their state?

What does Jesus say the truth of the matter is?

7. What is the meaning of “I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me?”