

Text: Rev 1.19

We start a new series tonight that I am calling “Seven Churches.” This will be a study of the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation.

The book of Revelation is of perennial interest to Christians because it reveals so much about our future. It is also full of symbolism, confusing language, spectacular scenes, and seems like something out of a nightmare or a very fantastic movie (sometimes the same thing).

I taught through Revelation in 2000, 2014, and most recently when we finished up our “New Testament Prophecy” study, in 2022.

So, to be clear, I don’t plan on teaching through Revelation again at this time.

However, the last couple of times through the book, we surveyed chapter 2 and 3 fairly quickly, so this time I plan to go into more detail and focus on the message to those churches as applicable to the Christian church today. And to our church.

Tonight, we won’t get into the first letter to the first church, Ephesus, but set the stage for the next several weeks of Bible study.

Objective: understand the setting and immediate context of Rev 2-3

I. Outline of Revelation (1.19)

Revelation 1.19 is the key verse to understanding Revelation.

A. The bare-bones outline

1. Write the things which you have seen (**represents vision of ch. 1**)
2. Write the things which are (**represents churches of church age**)
3. Write the things which will take place after these things

B. The interpretation

1. The book of Revelation is the product of this writing
 - a. See the blessing of v. 3
 - b. See the command of v. 11
 - c. See repeated commands in ch. 2-3: 2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14

2. Another key phrase in the key verse: “after these things”
 - a. Next occurrence is a vision in heaven, 4.1
 - b. It follows as the vision progresses, 7.9; 15.5; 18.1; 19.1; 20.3

Everything from chapter 4 onward is “after these things”

3. “These things” must then be what precedes chapter 4: that is, chapter two and three, the things that “are” – churches in existence in John’s day
4. And the things John had seen would be the vision in chapter 1 he has already seen (see also 1.12)

II. Circumstance on Patmos (1)

- A. The vision was given to John from Jesus Christ (1-3)
- B. John addresses the writing to the seven churches (4)
- C. John identifies his situation and how he came to be writing (9-11)
 1. John is on Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (9) Status: **a prisoner on Patmos**

Implies that he is “forcibly detained” — experiencing tribulation
 2. John was “in the Spirit” — worshipping? “on the Lord’s day” — Sunday? (10)
 3. John heard a voice telling him to write (10-11)
- D. When John turns to see, he sees a vision of **the glorified Christ** (12-16)
 1. He seven golden candlesticks
 2. He sees one like “a son of man” in the midst: but a fantastic figure
- E. The Son of Man commands John (17-20)
 1. He reassures the frightened apostle (17)
 2. He identifies himself: clearly, this is Jesus (17-18)
 3. The command about what to write (19)

4. The explanation of the candlesticks: they represent the churches (20)
 - a. They also represent the “angels” of those churches
 - b. “Angel” means “messenger”
 - c. Most observers think this is a euphemism to “pastor,” especially considering how the Lord addresses the churches in ch. 2-3)

III. Meaning of the seven churches

A. Two views of these chapters

1. The “**church history**” view: the seven churches represent seven ages of church history
 - a. Rev 2.1-7 — Ephesus, *the backslidden church*, Christ to AD 100
 - b. Rev 2.8-11 — Smyrna, *the persecuted church*, AD 100-300 [Constantine]
 - c. Rev 2.12-17 — Pergamos, *the tolerant church*, AD 300-600
 - d. Rev 2.18-29 — Thyatira, *the tainted church*, AD 600-1500
 - e. Rev 3.1-6 — Sardis, *the Reformation church*, AD 1500-1750
 - f. Rev 3.7-13 — Philadelphia, *the true church*, AD 1750-1950
 - g. Rev 3.14-22 — Laodicea, *the nauseating church*, AD 1950 to Rapture
2. The “**typical churches**” view: the churches of the 1st century are typical of the types of churches that can always be found at any point in church history

B. The reasons for holding the “typical churches” view

1. Nothing in the text indicates any progress through history
2. The command to write was to write about “things that are” – we are still living in the same age, before “after these things”
3. The eras of church history are subjective: depending on the teacher, the dates for these ages vary

4. Some of the supposed eras do not end, but continue parallel to the others (*i.e.*, Thyatira, the tainted church [Roman Catholic] continues to this day) — this makes it not a progression of eras as that era failed to progress

Conclusion:

Which brings us to the messages to each of the seven churches. They represent the churches that existed when John wrote, and they stand in for any churches like them in any era, including our own.

For us, we should think about what the Lord says about these churches. The Lord rebukes sin in these churches and commends righteousness.

- Do we share their sin?
- Do we emulate their righteousness?

That is the message of the churches to us.