

INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE OF REVELATION: Revelation 1:19

“Write the things which you saw,
the things which are,
and the things which are about to happen after these things.”

Chapter 1
Chapters 2–3
Chapters 4–22

FLOW OF REVELATION 2–3

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| 1. Letter to the church at Ephesus (that lost its first love) | 2:1-7 |
| 2. Letter to the church at Smyrna (undergoing persecution) | 2:8-11 |
| 3. Letter to the church at Pergamos (tolerating Balaamism) | 2:12-17 |
| 4. Letter to the church at Thyatira (letting elder’s wife teach heresy) | 2:18-29 |
| 5. Letter to the church at Sardis (that has become dead) | 3:1-6 |
| 6. Letter to the church at Philadelphia (that is faithful under persecution) | 3:7-13 |
| 7. Letter to the church at Laodicea (that is Lukewarm) | 3:14-22 |

LITERAL FIRST-CENTURY CHURCHES, NOT PROPHETIC TIME PERIODS



The churches are in a clockwise circuit—a logical route for John to travel from Ephesus as he would check on the churches.

4 The rapture was imminent in John’s day. How could it also prophesy a 2000-year interval? (“Let your ‘Yes’ be yes and your ‘No’ be no.”)

5-6
7

Revelation gives no hint that these are anything but the literal seven churches to whom John had ministered until his exile on Patmos.

EACH CHURCH WAS TO HEAR THE LETTERS TO THE OTHER CHURCHES

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

COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE SEVEN LETTERS

COMMONALITIES

- Each starts by addressing the angel of an individual church,
- Then each speaks of Jesus knowing the works of each church,
- Then each offers a practical exhortation and/or warning (including urging them to heed)
- Each concludes with a promise to those who become overcomers (rewardable believers).

DIFFERENCES

Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis receive praise and rebuke. Smyrna and Philadelphia receive only praise; Laodicea receives only rebuke.

WHO OR WHAT IS THE *ANGEL* OF EACH CHURCH?

The Greek word *aggelos* (pronounced *angelos*) means *messenger*. Often, the messenger is non-human, what we call an *angel*. However, the word merely means messenger. Compare the word *evangelize* = *to proclaim a good message* (*eu* means *good*; *aggelizō* means *to proclaim a message*). For the use of *aggelos* as a human messenger, cf. Luke 7:19 and 24.

It hardly makes sense for Jesus to have the apostle John write letters to angelic beings. The literal rendering of the Majority Text of Rev 2:20 should establish that the messenger is human: “But I have against you^{singular} [the *aggelos* of the church at Thyatira] that you permit your wife, Jezebel...” [Matthew 22:30 says that angelic beings do not marry]. I would argue that the messenger of each of the seven churches would be its teaching elder. Remember that the apostle John (who calls himself and elder in both 2 John and 3 John) rebukes Diotrephes for overstepping his authority as one of the elders of a church. Diotrephes may well have been the teaching elder at his church, but the messenger was to function as a team player within the elders of a church.

EACH CHURCH CONSISTED OF BELIEVERS

Jesus calls each group a church, a body of believers.

He does not tell any that they need to believe (not even to Laodicea in Revelation 3:20).

What will be evaluated at the *Bēma* Seat? Works of believers. Jesus promises reward to all overcomers. In each case, He says, “I know your works.” He then discusses the quality of their works and encourages them to overcome so they will be rewardable.

LAODICEA: REVELATION 3:14-22

Jesus, the Amen, faithful witness, and creator addresses Laodicea’s messenger (3:14)

He knows that the messenger’s works are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, so He is about to vomit him (3:15)

Laodicea’s water supply came from Hieropolis (*Hieron* = *temple*; *polis* = *city*)

It left Hieropolis hot, suitable for a hot mineral bath.

It arrived lukewarm with a strong mineral stench

Laodicea had no odor-free cold water for drinking.

This church of believers (figuratively) made the Lord sick to His stomach

They claimed to be wealthy, needing nothing, but were desperately needy (3:17)

The city was a banking center and even minted its own coinage.

The earthquake of AD 60 and Laodicea's refusal of assistance from Rome
Laodicea regarded itself as rich, though cash-strapped, even in AD 71-72

(Remember: I date Revelation between AD 71 and 72)

It is human nature to think, "If I am self-sufficient in life, surely He must be impressed with my life. Why would I not be self-sufficient in my Christian walk also?"

They (as needy believers) should buy from Him pure gold to cure their poverty, white clothes to cover the shame of their nakedness, and eye-salve so they might see (3:18)

The pure gold appears to speak of living by faith—crucible imagery (cf. 1 Peter 1:7)

White clothes refer to good works (Rev 19:8, cf. 2 Cor 5:3, 9f)
And it was given to her [the bride] that she should be dressed in fine linen bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. [Rev 19:8]

If indeed also having been clothed, we will not be found naked... Therefore also we aspire, whether being at home or being away from home, to be pleasing to Him. For we all must appear before the Bēma Seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body, in accord with the things which he did, whether good or bad. [2Cor 5:3, 9f]

Eye-salve so they may see: Vision is often used figuratively for understanding truth.

He applies family discipline to His beloved (children), so they must repent & be zealous (3:19)

The word translated chasten is *paideuō*. A common word for a child is *paidion*. This is appropriate family discipline (not child abuse). Note that it is loving discipline from Jesus Christ being applied to ones who are part of His family.

He stands outside the place where they are assembled as a church, requesting to be welcomed, so He might have table fellowship with any of them (3:20)

What this verse does not mean: It is not saying to invite Jesus into the heart to get saved.

This verse does not use *eiserchomai eis*... [note the repeated *eis*].

Eiserchomai eis... would be translated *come into*.

Rather it uses *eiserchomai pros*...

Eiserchomai pros... would be translated *come in_to*.

As an example of *eiserchomai eis*... see Matthew 8:5, Coming into Capernaum.

For *eiserchomai pros*... see Mark 6:25, She came in [the banquet room] to the king.

The meaning of come in to him and sup with him and he with Me.

The overcomer will sit with Jesus on His throne as Jesus overcame and now sits on the Father's throne (3:21)

Thrones speak of ruling. The Father rules in heaven over all creation. The Father has invited Jesus to join with Him. However, He will receive His own right to rule over the Millennium and will sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

Hebrews 10:11-13 describes part of this and is in keeping with Revelation 3:21:
And every [Levitical] priest stands day-by-day performing service and regularly offering the same sacrifices which are never able to take away sins. But He Himself having offered one sacrifice on behalf of sins has sat without-interruption at the right hand of God waiting until His enemies are put as a footstool of His feet [at which time He will sit on David's throne ruling over the Millennium].

We studied Romans 8:17 in context, where all believers are heirs of God, but believers who suffer with Christ [by boldly standing up for Him] because they walk by the Spirit, will be joint-heirs with Christ, the one with the firstborn inheritance rights.

In Revelation, overcomers are highly rewardable believers.

Laodiceans [& others] should hear what the Spirit says to the 7 churches (3:22)