



Magnolia Bible Church Men's Group - Prophecy Series

Lesson #7: Revelation (1/3): Chapters 1 through 3

Thursday, October 20, 2016

We have finally made it to the book of Revelation. If you ask the average American to identify the book of the Bible with the greatest amount of apocalyptic imagery they will tell you Revelation (and they would be correct). As we have seen in the previous six lessons, numerous passages are provided throughout the Bible including fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecies; however, Revelation is in a league of its own.

Revelation was written by the Apostle John while imprisoned on the Island of Patmos in approximately 95-96 A.D. It is quite likely that by this time he was the only Apostle still alive (including Paul) and we know for certain by this time that the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem (70 A.D.). God “preserved” John so that Jesus could reveal to him the tremendous message regarding coming events that provide great comfort to the Believer that Jesus is indeed victorious!

No study (or teacher with a “right” mind) seeks to cover Revelation in three weeks! As an example, one well known Bible study takes a 9-month period to cover this book. However, there are certain divisions within the book that allow us to focus on certain themes and concepts that can be covered in an abbreviated time period. **Figure 1** below provides a three-part outline for Revelation that includes:

- Lesson #1: Focus on Heaven and the Coming King as Judge
- Lesson #2: Focus on Earth and the Coming Calamity with Judgment
- Lesson #3: Focus on NEW Heaven and Earth with the Coming Kingdom as resulting Joy

The Book of Revelation							
Focus	Heaven	Earth					New Heaven & Earth
Divisions	Letters to the Seven Churches 1 3	Opening the Seven Seals 4 6 7	Blowing the Seven Trumpets 9 10	Describing the Seven Signs 13 14	Pouring Out the Seven Bowls 16 17	Destroying God's Enemies 18 19	Making all Things new 20 22
Topics	Coming King	Coming Calamity					Coming Kingdom
	Judge	Judgment					Joy
Place	Aegean Island of Patmos						
Time	About A.D. 95-96						
Author	The Apostle John						

Figure 1: Graphical overview of Revelation

In this week's lesson we focus on the first three chapters of Revelation that contains Jesus' message to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor, the modern-day country of Turkey. The map below in **Figure 2** shows the location of these churches, along with the Island of Patmos where John wrote Revelation.

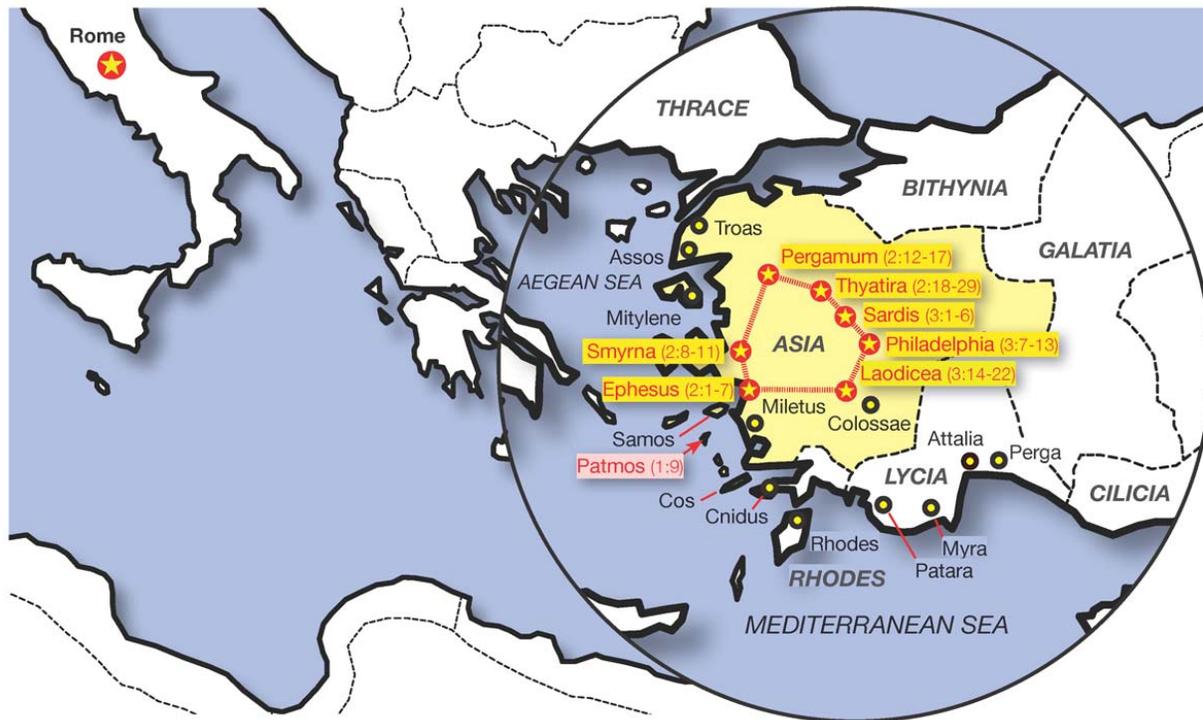


Figure 2: Map showing the Seven Churches identified in Revelation 2 and 3.

In Revelation 1:9-11 we read John's message regarding the central theme and purpose for the book

⁹I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

As we read in Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus had a special message for each church. Historically, there have been three views on the messages given to each church and they are presented below:

- The obvious view is that the messages were specific to issues within each church at that time. Jesus clearly identified their redeeming traits, need for encouragement, and in most cases "areas for improvement".
- The second view is that within each church today and in the past (and possibly the life of every Believer) there are certain characteristics reflected in each of the Seven Churches. This viewpoint certainly causes the reader to sit up and take notice of what Jesus recognizes as worthy and areas where we should be careful and work hard to prevent.

- The final viewpoint is what one might call a “historical perspective” on the message given to the Seven Churches. The concept in this view is that over the past 2,000 years, throughout the Church Age, there have been seven distinct periods that reflect traits Jesus identified in the Seven Churches.

Having studied Church history (at one point extensively) I am convinced there is merit to the third viewpoint and one worth noting. In commenting on the Dispensations of the Church Age, M.R. DeHaan once wrote ¹,

Chapters 2 and 3 give us the history of the Church pre-written from Pentecost to the Rapture of the Church. This history is in seven periods, represented by the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These seven churches represent the successive chronological history of professing Christendom. It is a history of declension, apostasy and progressive decline. The history of the professing Church closes with chapter 3 where Jesus is pushed outside the door. In the first period of history under the figure of the Church of Ephesus we see the Lord in the Church walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, which are the seven churches. In the last days of the Church we see Him pushed outside professing Christendom, typified by the Church of Laodicea, knocking at the door from the outside. He is now outside, having been turned out by the mass of professing Christendom. The door is shut to Him, and the place He should occupy has been taken by social services, the social gospel, banqueting and feasting, bloodless preaching and denial of His deity, atonement, resurrection and coming again. When Christendom shuts the door on earth to Him, something happens in heaven.

Concerning this Church Age point of view it has been suggested that the Ephesus Church Age covered A.D. 33 to 100, the early Church. The Smyrna Church Age covered A.D. 100 to 312, the persecuted Church. The Pergamos Church Age covered A.D. 312 to 590, the political Church. The Thyatira Church Age covered A.D. 590 to 1517, the dark ages or the idolatrous Church. The Sardis Church Age covered A.D. 1517 to 1750, the Reformation Church. The Philadelphia Church Age covered A.D. 1750 to 1925, the missionary Church. The Laodicean Church Age covers A.D. 1925 to present, the apostate Church. When the historical record concerning these various time periods are compared to the descriptions given in Revelation chapters two and three there is an astounding correlation that strongly supports this teaching.

Figure 3 provides a graphic that depicts the Seven Churches as reflected in the Church Age. Additionally, included in this graphic are points of view related to Jesus' Kingdom parables identified in Matthew 13. In studying these seven parables G. Campbell Morgan noted ²:

In our general survey of these parables in this chapter, the Kingdom is viewed in its progress in this age among men. Those spoken to the multitude present the Kingdom process from the human viewpoint. In the second group of parables spoken to the disciples, the same age is in view, but the Kingdom is seen from the divine aspect.

As with the historical view of the Seven Churches, this perspective of Matthew 13 provides us with additional opportunities for application in seeing God's work throughout the Church Age.

¹ M.R. DeHaan, *Revelation*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1956, pages 16-17.

² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord*, Fleming H. Revell Company, New Jersey, 1953, page 43.

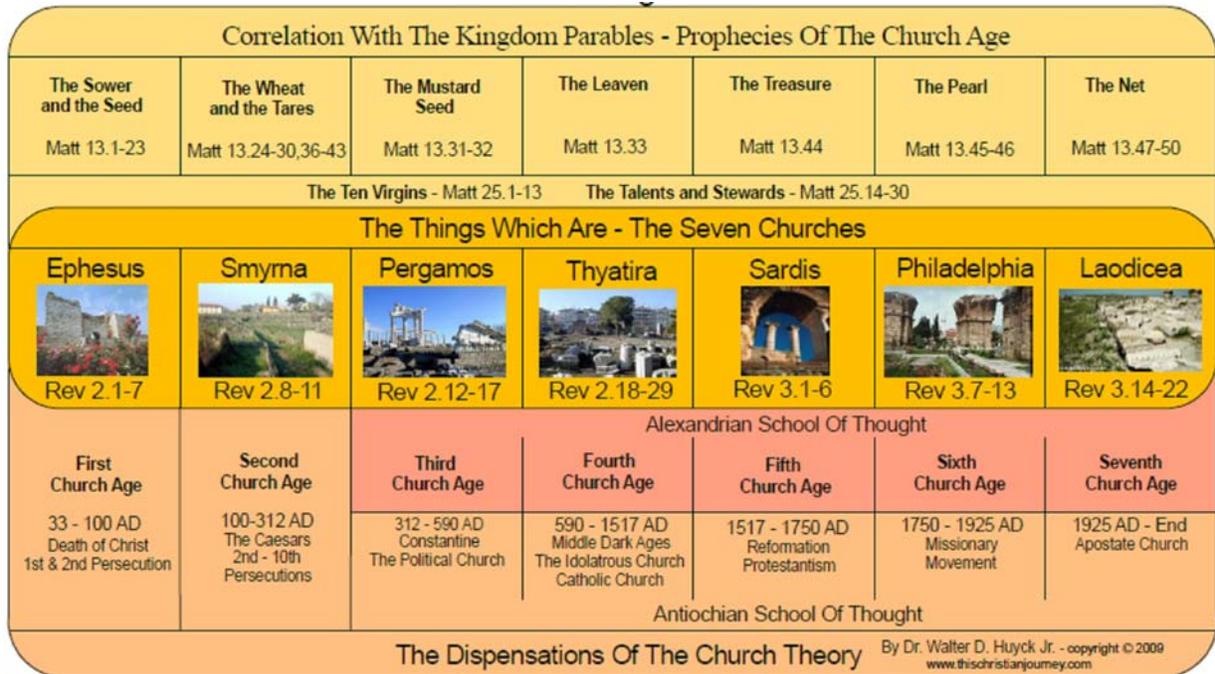


Figure 3: The Church Age Chart (prepared by Dr. Walter Huyck)

It has been noted by some that after Revelation 3 the church is no longer mentioned until Revelation 22:16, although even in this last reference Jesus was referring to the message given in Revelation 1. The viewpoint held by many that the absence of the word “church” in Revelation 4 – 21 is clear evidence of a pre-tribulation Rapture. Although I hold to this viewpoint, I do not think the absence of the word “church” is reason enough to hold to the Pre-tribulation view. However, I do hold to the position that the primary focus of the Tribulation Period is to restore Israel to her rightful position as recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. As stated multiple times in this series, one’s viewpoint regarding God’s “finished or unfinished” work with Israel has profound implications on how End Time prophecy is perceived.

Questions for Consideration

- Next to each of the Seven Churches identify the “good” and “bad” identified in Revelation 2-3.

Church	Good Characteristics	Bad Characteristics
Ephesus		
Smyrna		
Pergamos		
Thyatira		
Sardis		
Philadelphia		
Laodicea		

- Of the Seven Church listed, with which one do you most identify? Explain reasons for your association and, if appropriate, identify ways you can be *commended for the good* and *avoid condemnation for the bad*.