

churches by taking a clockwise path starting at Ephesus on the Aegean Sea. He proceeded north along the coast to Smyrna, Pergamos, and then slightly east to Thyatira, and headed south to Sardis, Philadelphia, and finally Laodicea.

We can use a trick to find out which cities have ruins worth seeing. It's as simple as just going to the odd numbered ones: Ephesus, Pergamos, Sardis, and Laodicea. The primary reason that the ruins for these cities are now missing is the prevalence of serious earthquakes. In addition, others ended up being taken far away by archaeologists and preserved in museums, some went to be used in other buildings, some were buried and remain buried, and of course others were taken by thieves.

You recall that the book of Revelation, this final book of the Bible sometimes called *the apocalypse*, unveils or reveals Jesus **not** in His humanity as shown in the gospels but instead it reveals Him in His glory. The imagery of Christ in the first chapter of Revelation **is key**. It describes a person of great majesty and power.

Yet despite Jesus having this frightening appearance, His demeanor towards His own is tender and gracious. We learned that we who know Him will receive a perfect, immortal body **like His** that can float through the air, pass through walls, materialize, dematerialize, and even fly through the clouds and beyond.

We visited the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The letters to these seven churches exhibit an interesting seven-part structure. Each opens with Christ naming the church to which it is sent and then drawing parallels to some of His particular attributes. He then **commends** the church for their good works and if necessary urges them to turn from works that do not please the LORD -- warning them of judgment if they fail to repent. He proceeds to give a glimpse of heavenly glory before ending **each** letter with an admonition to pay attention to these words from the Holy Spirit of the LORD.

Since the book of Revelation reveals Christ, let's look at how Christ revealed Himself to the churches and then take a look at the glory that will be ours and is presently His in heaven.

Recall, Jesus holds these messengers to the churches in his right hand and stands in the midst of these churches (Revelation 1:12, 17, 20). As we learned, the number seven often represents completeness. In this case, these seven churches serve as a composite representation of His churches worldwide not only John's time but by application in our day or any other day as well. We shall see that in our study today. He actively supports and empowers them. We're not alone as we serve Him.

As stated previously, this study steers clear of the speculation that these churches represent specific ages of church history. Revelation 22:18-19 specifically warns against adding to or removing from this book. All scripture is for us (2 Timothy 3:16), but all scripture is not to us. We have seen how each of these letters had specific meaning for each church to which it was addressed. But Jesus said that every letter should be sent to each of the churches (Revelation 1:11). Just as each church **then** can learn something from the letters to others, we too can learn from them even today.

For example, Ephesus was the church that **lost its first love**. They focused on doing good works rather than being led by the Spirit of God out of a heart of love. Do we have churches like that today just going through the motions? Sure, this describes many of the mainline Protestant denominations – especially from the reformed branch. Their emphasis is good works and serving others, but they are light on true worship of the LORD and understanding the whole word of God – especially as it relates to prophesy.

Smyrna was the **persecuted** church. While in our country Christians remain nearly free from persecution, that is not the case in the rest of the world. North Korea actively hunts down Christians, kills them or subjects them and their families to harsh punishment. Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, Congo, and China also regularly persecute Christians.

Pergamos allowed **bad doctrine** to slip in and was tolerant of it. Bad doctrine like straying from the Bible and embracing a seeker-friendly bias has infiltrated today's mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Evangelical movements while they still claim to worship Jesus Christ.

Thyatira was an example of a church whose **focus was good works** but allowed **bad doctrine and immorality** into the church. We have a local example of this in Raleigh with Pullen Memorial Baptist Church. Nationally, Unitarian Universalism is another example of a church like Thyatira.

Sardis was **nearly dead** and even their works did not measure up. While **not all the** churches in the following denominations are dead, the Anglican, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church (USA) – PCUSA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and United Methodist Church can all fit into this category.

The church at Philadelphia was one that **honored and pleased the LORD**. Thankfully, many of these godly churches that follow the Word of God still exist across the spectrum of denominations.

Finally, the church at Laodicea had **no fervor for the LORD** but did possess **great riches**. The two richest churches today that claim to proclaim Jesus Christ are the Roman Catholic and Mormon churches. Each has a net worth greater than \$100 billion. Sadly, **while** they embrace the Bible they rely on other books and teaching to drag them far away from what the Bible really says.

Hopefully, you can see that the particular churches in the first century had the same kinds of characteristics and problems that we find in various churches today and have found throughout history. They serve as examples and warnings.

Now let's look at what Jesus said about Himself. To Ephesus Jesus proclaims He is the head of the church who empowers its leaders (Revelation 2:1).

Jesus says to the church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8) that He is timeless. He had no beginning and will have no end (Revelation 1:11-12, 17). He took on the form of a man, died, and was the first to rise from the dead in a glorified body (Revelation 1:18; 2:8).

Jesus is the Word of God which is sharper than any two-edged sword (Revelation 1:16; 2:12) as He said to Pergamos. Do you remember Pergamos? That was an acropolis (city on a hill) that had a massive library. It was the place that invented parchment as a medium for writing. It's no coincidence that Jesus draws the parallel with this great place of words to His word and its power. He needs only speak the word and His word will be executed. He spoke the world into existence and when He speaks at His second coming, all those opposed to Him will be destroyed.

He tells the church at Thyatira that His eyes are like fire – which speaks of penetrating judgment (Revelation 1:18). He sees all. Nothing can be hidden from Him. His feet of fine brass speak of His power to execute that judgment (I Corinthians 15:25). Notice in each of these salutations, Jesus points back to specific aspects of the description of Him in glory taken from Revelation chapter 1 in this case Revelation 1:14-15.

In Revelation 3:1 Jesus tells the church of Sardis that he has the seven spirits of God. As we learned previously (Revelation 1:4), the *seven Spirits of God* likely refers to the Holy Spirit in all His fullness. The language there (Revelation 1:4-5) also supports the triune nature of God as Jesus has the Holy Spirit in all His fullness. Jesus has possession of the seven stars that represent these seven churches and the complete body of the church (Revelation 1:16, 20).

To the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:14), Jesus describes His faithfulness. *Amen* means *faithful, true, and reliable*. God cannot lie. Jesus is God (Revelation 1:4). He cannot lie (Revelation 1:4). He also stands in eternity past (Revelation 1:11-12, 17) and in the beginning as the creator of all things (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-17).

Let's summarize how Jesus describes Himself. He is:

1. God.
2. Head of the church.
3. Empowers the church.
4. Eternal.
5. Firstborn from the dead.
6. Word of God.
7. Speaks almighty power.
8. Sees all.
9. Creator of all things.
10. Judges with authority.
11. Has the Holy Spirit in all His fullness.
12. Faithful.
13. True.
14. Reliable.
15. Overcame the curse.

With that review and composite view of Christ, let's now look at the composite view of what He has prepared for us.

First He tells us the tree of life will be in the midst of God's heavenly garden and available for His own to eat freely from it (Revelation 2:7).

Then he speaks of a *crown of life* (Revelation 2:10) that we shall receive. This ...*gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our LORD* (Romans 6:23b). The crown refers to the gift of eternal life. He also assures us that any suffering we endure in this life will be limited (Revelation 2:10).

We learn He has *hidden manna, an invitation, and a private, unique new name* reserved for us. Each believer will have a unique and intimate relationship with Him (Revelation 2:17).

His church (called *bride* [Ephesians 5:32]) will rule and reign with Him (Revelation 2:26-27).

Jesus is the morning star. He has given himself to His bride the church (Revelation 2:28).

We shall walk by His side and share His purity and worthiness (Revelation 3:4).

Jesus places great importance in our name. Our purity will be symbolized by the *white raiment* that we will receive. We who confess Jesus Christ as our Savior will in turn remain in His *book of life* and before both God the Father and His angels (Revelation 3:5).

Jesus will demonstrate His love for His bride by compelling the lost to bow before the feet of His beloved – the church (Revelation 3:9).

Much of the rest of the book of Revelation details the coming terrible time of tribulation. Thankfully, Jesus assures His bride that she will not go through that trial (Revelation 3:10).

We will enjoy eternity with Jesus in the glorious city that He has prepared for us called the New Jerusalem. We will have the right and privilege to be there, will be joint-heirs of Christ, and receive a new name (Revelation 3:12).

We will eat with Him and He with us, and we will share with the King of Kings and LORD of LORDS the authority and relationship to God that is His (Revelation 3:20-21).

We should also mention that Jesus ended each letter to these churches with instruction to listen and pay attention to these important words. That **seven-fold repetition** of that message should awaken us to heed and meditate on these letters.

Application

Certainly, life is brief. Death can come suddenly. The LORD has seen fit to give most of us more than average lifetimes, but as I shared with you today, life can be snuffed out in an instant. In my case, the LORD has graciously chosen to give me more time here, but we never know when our time will be up. As Betsy read today, *teach us to number our days*. Each morning we awake, we should thank the LORD for His gracious provision of life.

Today we took a different **perspective** of Revelation chapters two and three to get a better feel for our future Bridegroom and the place He has prepared for His bride. This of course came at great cost. Jesus came to earth, took on human form, shed his blood, and died on a cross that He might redeem those who believe on Him and accept His free gift of grace. Jesus said to His disciples:

John 14

[1] Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

[2] In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

[3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Jesus will come again and take His bride to that glorious place He has prepared for us and give us a **perspective** on life we cannot even imagine.

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)