

## “The Seven Churches” (2:1 - 3:22)

### NOTES

1. As you read these two chapters, notice the basic pattern which emerges and how each “letter” deviates from it or adheres to it:
  - i. Address
  - ii. One or two titles for Jesus
  - iii. Commendation
  - iv. Criticism
  - v. Counsel
  - vi. Command: “He who has ears...”
  - vii. Promise to overcomers.
2. **EPHESUS** - Ephesus was the largest city in the province of Asia. It was known for its commerce, tourist industry, and major temples. The Christian Church in Ephesus at this time was probably the largest and most influential in the world. Paul, Timothy, and John (the author) ministered there.
  - a. The Nicolaitians, according to tradition, embraced false teachings such as: Jesus was not both divine and human, matter is evil and spirit is good, if one was a Christian one was free to do immoral acts.
3. **SMYRNA** - A prosperous coastal city which boasted the largest public theater in the region. The Jewish population persecuted the Christian Church. One of the famous Christian martyrs of the 2nd century, Polycarp the bishop of Smyrna, was burned to death (the Jews broke the Sabbath to collect the wood!).
4. **PERGAMUM** - The political capital of Asia, so it would have had temples to Caesar and to Rome. Also, people flocked to the temple to Asclepius, the god of healing, with the hope of a miraculous cure.
  - a. Balaam (2:14) King Balak of Moab hired the pagan prophet Balaam to accuse Israel. Balaam advised the Midianite women to seduce the Israelite men into idolatry and fornication (Numbers 25:1-2, 31:16).
5. **THYATIRA** - A manufacturing, blue-collar city where practically everyone belonged to a trade or craft guild. Pagan practices, drunkenness, carousing, and even orgies were not rare.
  - a. Jezebel (2:20) A pagan princess who became queen of Israel and encouraged Jews to practice idolatry and immorality. Thus, a fitting nickname for the false prophetess of Thyatira.
6. **SARDIS** - Once a rich and glorious city, but now a decaying city which never recovered from a devastating earthquake. Its location on a mountainside made it virtually impregnable, but it had been overtaken several times because of unvigilant guards.
7. **PHILADELPHIA** - A prosperous little commercial center that was also vulnerable to earthquakes. A Jewish synagogue here taunted the Gentile Christians.
8. **LAODICEA** - the richest city in the district, known for its banks, linen industry, and medical school. The city had no water supply of its own, which made it vulnerable to attack, so its politicians specialized in appeasement.

- a. Lukewarm (3:16) In one direction from Laodicea were hot mineral springs. In another direction were icy cold fresh water springs. But by the time the water reached Laodicea, the waters either lost their heat or freshness - and were just "lukewarm."
9. Some believe that the seven letters also prophesy the history of the church from John's times onward:
- i. Ephesus - the apostolic church (30-100 AD)
  - ii. Smyrna - the persecuted church (100-313 AD)
  - iii. Pergamum - the state church of imperial Rome (313 - Middle Ages)
  - iv. Thyatira - the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages
  - v. Sardis - the Reformation Church
  - vi. Philadelphia - the missionary church of the 19th & 20th centuries
  - vii. Laodicea - the complacent, rich modern church

### QUESTIONS:

1. Summarize the message Jesus gives to each church. What does this reveal about each church's character?
2. Imagine Jesus came to you personally with a message like the seven. What would he say to you personally about "I know where you live" (2:13) and "I know your deeds?" (2:2, 19). Which of the seven churches are you most like?
3. Apply the previous question to your church. Which of the seven churches is it most like?
4. How can you (or your church) go about acquiring one or more of the traits Jesus recommends, such as love, faith, resistance to false teaching, etc.?

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Go back and chart what Jesus says about the strengths of weaknesses of each church. Then come up with a summary statement which describes the character of each church.
2. Throughout these letters, look at what Jesus says about:
  - a. Suffering (Why did the churches have to suffer? How are they to respond?)
  - b. The Kingdom
  - c. Patient endurance
3. Compare the title Jesus gives Himself in the beginning of each letter to the rest of the message. Is each title appropriate? Do the same with the promise to overcomers in each letter.