

# Revelation

Notes #2A

7 Churches

Chapters 2 & 3

The letters to the seven churches in the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (chapters 2 and 3) are representative of churches in John's day and prophetically point to the complete historical picture of both the apparent (visible) and the true (spiritual) Church from the time of the Lord's ascension to the end of our present age.

From a historical perspective, it is good to be reminded that there are three overall phases of the Church of God, starting with the ancient sons of Israel coming out of Egypt and ending with the matured sons of God coming into immortality and glory, which is the true Promise Land.

First, there was the **Passover Church**, which was **the church in the wilderness** (Acts 7:38). The sons of Israel, under Moses, were told to apply the blood to the doorposts and come out of Egypt as God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22). At the foot of Mount Sinai in Arabia, they were to receive the law of God into their hearts by hearing directly from the Lord. However, they refused to hear Him and instead chose to send Moses up on the mount lest they die in the presence of God. Consequently, they received the law on tablets of stone instead of on hearts of flesh. Their life before God became one of outward signs and practices, not inward truths that would have led them to walk before the Lord, knowing and pleasing Him. They did not learn the lesson that **faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ** (Romans 10:17). If they had learned this then they would have attained the last two phases of the Church, Pentecost (spirit filled), and Tabernacles (immortality; the true Promise Land).

Second, there is the **Pentecostal Church**. Today, when one applies the blood of Christ to his heart (justification by grace through faith), he is saved and experiences Passover. He is saved by the blood of Christ, passes through the Red Sea in baptism (1 Corinthians 10:2), and comes to Mount Sinai to receive the law (word) of God and experience Pentecost. Whereas Israel failed to receive the law on their hearts by failing to hear, the Christian is given a new heart and an earnest of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14) so that he can hear and partake of the word and grow in it. He doesn't need a Moses to digest the message and give it to him; now he can receive it directly as the spirit of God writes the law on his heart. This is the **New Covenant** (Hebrews 8:7-13).

Thus, a believer becomes part of the **Pentecostal Church**, which was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' final ascension to His Father's throne in heaven. On that day, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Body of Christ as promised by the Lord Jesus (John 14:26; Acts 2:33).

Third, there is the future **Tabernacles Church**. The sons of Israel were to progress from Passover to Pentecost to Tabernacles but they failed at Mount Sinai through unbelief. If they had been willing to hear God directly, they would have had the faith to enter into Canaan shortly after leaving Egypt. Instead, they were filled with unbelief and they were disqualified. Spiritually speaking, Canaan is not about a piece of land on earth but about a **dwelling from heaven** (2 Corinthians 5:2), a redeemed body. By the way, this new body is from heaven not in heaven; it is a body that can traverse both heaven and earth.

Tabernacles is about putting off our mortal corrupt body and putting on immortality in the image of Christ (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 John 3:2). It is about resurrection and transfiguration into a son of God, a son of glory that knows the heart of God and His law and is able to lead the nations into the righteousness of God in the next age, which is called the **Tabernacles Age**. Thus, all who are found worthy of the coming Kingdom on earth will be the Tabernacles Church of immortal, glorified, spiritual **saints in Light** (Colossians 1:12) who are called **New Jerusalem** (Revelation 21, 22), **the dwelling of God in spirit** (Ephesians 2:22).

Interestingly, the **Pentecostal Church** of the last 20-plus centuries seems to be a mirror reflection of the **Passover Church** of Moses and the sons of Israel [i.e., church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38)] that lasted about 10 centuries from the Exodus to the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

<b>Passover Church (Old Testament)</b>	<b>Pentecostal Church (New Testament)</b>	<b>Characteristics of Both</b>
Moses	Ephesus	The <b>Deaf</b> Church
Korah	Smyrna	The <b>Rebellious</b> Church
Balaam	Pergamos	The <b>Paganized</b> Church
Jezebel	Thyatira	The <b>Persecuted</b> Church
Remnant	Sardis	The <b>Remnant</b> of Grace Church
Hezekiah	Philadelphia	The <b>Missionary</b> Church
Captivity	Laodicea	The <b>Captive</b> Church

1. **Moses' church** at Mount Sinai refused to go up the mount to hear from God directly (Exodus 20:18 -21). They preferred to send Moses and let him tell the assembled sons what God said.

By comparison, the **Ephesus church** stopped hearing God and listened only to the institutional church hierarchy. In both cases, they lost their first love for hearing from the Lord directly. Love is relational and an issue of the heart. If we love someone, we want to hear from that person.

2. **The Korah church** was rebellious when certain Levites desired to be priests, although they were not called by God (Numbers 16:10). They rebelled against the authority of Moses.

By comparison, the **Smyrna church** failed to deal with *those who say they are Jews and are not* (Revelation 2:10). Saying you are something in the sight of God when you are not is the same issue as assuming a calling that is not one's to assume.

3. **The Balaam church** joined itself to paganism through the Moabites by the council of Balaam (Numbers 31:16). This problem extended later when Israel joined the Canaanites, giving them the same idolatrous results. Temple worship was paganized.

By comparison, the **Pergamos church** did not deal with those who *hold the doctrine of Balaam* (Revelation 2:14). They were "married to power."

4. **The Jezebel church** is seen in King Ahab's marriage to Jezebel, the Baal-worshipping princess of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31, 32). It was a time when the true prophets of God and the remnant of grace were persecuted (1 Kings 18:13).

By comparison, the **Thyatira church** did the same thing (Revelation 2:20), for they too were married to Jezebel, the real power behind the throne.

5. **The Remnant church** occurred when a group of 7,000 did not bow the knee to Baal in the days of Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah who was persecuted by Jezebel (1 Kings 19:14 -18).

By comparison, the **Sardis church** was the Remnant of Grace that was persecuted by the Jezebel church. *Sardis* or *Sardius* is a precious stone. Paul speaks of this remnant in terms of the elect, or the overcomers (Romans 11:4, 5).

6. **The Hezekiah church** had enough strength and faith to forestall captivity and death long enough to bring forth his son, Manasseh (2 Kings 18-20). Manasseh was of Judah but named for the son of Joseph. Thus, he represented the repair of the breach between Judah and Israel that would prepare the way for Christ's appearance as Joseph with his robe dipped in blood. Then he sowed seeds of destruction by showing his wealth to the Babylonians. This church ends with the captivity.

By comparison, the **Philadelphia church** was the missionary church that was called to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. The key of David was given to them, along with an open door (Revelation 3:7). This is a direct reference to Isaiah 22:22, which took place in the days of Hezekiah himself. The key of David is Love, and the open door is a door of ministry to the world.

7. **The Captivity church** occurred when Judah was taken captive due to their sin and brought to Babylon. While there, most of the Judahites became too lukewarm to return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. After all, they were getting rich doing business in Babylon. Less than 50,000 returned (Ezra 2:64).

By comparison, the **Laodicean church** was taken captive by **Mystery Babylon**, beginning with the **Federal Reserve Act of 1913-1914**. They too prospered in Babylon but were allowed to remain in their homeland. During this time, they developed the **Prosperity Doctrine** that says their accumulated material wealth is the result of God blessing them. After all, they should be rich as a child of God. However, they failed to realize how blind and poor they were with all their monetary wealth.

### Conquerors of the True Church

However, let us not lose sight of the real heart of the Lord's message to the 7 churches. The message is to the conquerors or overcomers; or rather, it is a message to the church to conquer or overcome. Even in the midst of failure on the part of the visible or apparent church, there has been a true spiritual Church that has conquered and does conquer by the 7 Spirits of God (Isaiah 11:2). Again, each church is representative of one of the spirits.

Ephesus	The Spirit of the Lord
Smyrna	Understanding
Pergamos	Counsel
Thyatira	Knowledge
Sardis	Wisdom
Philadelphia	Strength (Might)
Laodicea	Fear of the Lord

[Special Note: The preceding understanding of the Passover and the Pentecostal churches was derived from commentary by Stephen Jones (God's Kingdom Ministries).

Now, there are a few points that need to be made to provide some clarity on these letters.

1) **Seven** is the number of **completion**; therefore, the letters are a complete picture of Church history and a complete message to all the Church during the entire Pentecostal Age. If we want to know how to conquer/overcome, we need to study all seven letters.

2) Taken as a whole, all the letters together give a prophetic view of the significant circumstances, temptations, and trials that the Church has experienced and will experience in its 2,000-year history. As in John's day, the reproofs, corrections, instructions, and exhortations are for the entire Church while Christ is gone to receive a kingdom. Any Christian with an ear to hear is beckoned to read these letters and heed the Lord's exhortations in order to find and stay on the conquering path into the coming Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. **To him who conquers [overcomes], I will give** (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

3) If the letters are viewed in the order presented, it will be discovered that they represent a chronological order of Church history, starting with Ephesus, the early church, and ending with Laodicea, the modern-day church at the end of our present wicked eon. With the benefit of hindsight, that is, the ability to look back over the last 2,000 years of history, it is easily seen that each church does in fact represent a phase or period in Church history.

4) Although the order of the churches presents a progression in Church history, it does not mean that when one period ended and another started that the dangers the previous church faced ceased to exist. For example, all the churches down through the centuries have faced the same dangers of leaving first love, being persecuted, and being wed to the world. In fact, today there are persecuted churches (e.g., in China) and there are state or national churches.

5) It is possible that as the end of our age nears, we might discern characteristics of each of the churches, at least in remnant form, with perhaps the last four (Thyatira to Laodicea) being more discernable. This does mean that any of them will be holding to these names, but the representative characteristics will be woven into the very fabric of that gathering of the Lord's people. Those who find themselves occupied with the affairs (deeds) of these respective churches are to heed the Lord's warnings if they are to conquer or overcome.

6) Each church period represents a gain or a loss of spiritual truths which were first laid down by our Lord Jesus and later taught by His apostles and held by the early church fathers. For example, the early church was first and foremost in love; it was called first love. As the Lord's people, we are called, above all else, to love one another and to love the Lord. This truth can be gained or lost.

7) As we study the book of Revelation and assign dates or periods of time to the various activities taking place with the breaking of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets, it is possible that we can take each of the seven churches and lay them over a particular period in history. For example, Revelation 10 speaks most directly of the Sardis church of the Reformation, and Revelation 18 speaks most directly of the Laodicean church that has profited most during the rise of modern-day immoral Babylon that has made the merchants of the earth rich.

8) In speaking to each of His seven churches, the Lord Jesus described Himself in seven unique ways that obviously related to His assessment of the particular church. As I considered these descriptors, I began to see that in them the Lord was (and is) actually expressing His heart for His people and how He sustains His church.

The following chart makes the point.

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| 1. | The One who <b>holds the seven stars in His right hand</b> , the One who <b>walks among the seven golden lamp-stands</b> (Revelation 2:1)      | <b>The Love of the Church</b>                  |
| 2. | The <b>first and the last</b> , who was <b>dead</b> , and <b>has come to life</b> (Revelation 2:8)   | <b>The Life of the Church</b>                  |
| 3. | The One who has the <b>sharp two-edged sword</b> (Revelation 2:12)   | <b>The Word of the Church</b>                  |
| 4. | The Son of God, who has <b>eyes like a flame of fire</b> , and His <b>feet are like burnished bronze</b> (Revelation 2:18)                     | <b>The Refiner (Judge) of the Church</b>       |
| 5. | He who has the <b>seven Spirits of God and the seven stars</b> (Revelation 3:1)  | <b>The Spirit of the Church</b>                |
| 6. | He who is <b>holy, who is true, who has the key of David</b> , who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens (Revelation 3:7) | <b>The Power &amp; Authority of the Church</b> |
| 7. | <b>The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning [Origin] of the creation of God</b> (Revelation 3:14)                                | <b>The Amen &amp; Origin of the Church</b>     |

The Lord Himself is our provision for everything He encourages or commands us to be or to do. Simply, He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and everything in between. He is our Love, our Life, our Word, our Refiner, our Spirit, our Power, and our Origin.

9) Whereas the Lord Jesus has seven descriptors relative to His Church, He also has ten descriptors relative to the nations on earth as revealed in Revelation 19:11-16 when heaven is opened for the earth to see Him come His glory. In this vision, Jesus is described in 10 ways.

The number **10** is one of the **perfect numbers**, and signifies ***the perfection of divine order***.

The scene on earth, as given to John while *in spirit*, often revealed much chaos among the nations on earth. However, John saw the King of kings coming to lead the nations out of chaos and establish divine order on earth.

1. Called **Faithful & True** [in righteousness judges and wages war]
2. Called **The Word of God**
3. Name written: "**KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS**" [on robe & thigh]
4. On a **white horse**
5. His **eyes are a flame of fire**
6. On His head are **many diadems**
7. Clothed with a **robe dipped in blood**
8. From His mouth comes **a sharp sword** [strike nations]
9. He will rule them with a **rod of iron**
10. He treads the **wine press of the fierce wrath of God**

These will be taken up later in the study of Revelation; however, they are presented here to make the point that the Lord is described in various ways depending to whom or to what it applies. The most personal descriptors relate to His Body, to which He is all and in all.

10) As stated already, the 7 churches were literal assemblies in John's day, located in the area of present-day Turkey. However, many believe that they also represent seven ages or periods

or developments of Church history, starting at Pentecost 33 AD and extending to our day. The names of the churches characterize the nature of the original assemblies as well as the period of Church History. The meanings of the names as well as the character of the churches vary a bit among commentators; these are presented in the following charts.

Church	Meaning	Period
1. Ephesus	“Desirable”; “Relaxation”	33-64 AD
2. Smyrna	“Bitter” or “Myrrh”	64-313 AD
3. Pergamos	“Married to Power”; “A Tower”	313-529 AD
4. Thyatira	“Castle of the Goddess”; “Unworn in sacrifices”	529-1517 AD
5. Sardis	“Precious Stone, Remnant”; “Renovation”	1517-1776 AD
6. Philadelphia	“Brotherly Love”	1776-1914 AD
7. Laodicea	“Power of the Laity”; “Judgment of the people”; “People’s opinion”	1914-ff AD

Church	Characteristics
<b>Ephesus</b>	<b>Declension:</b> They let go of or relaxed in the love that they had in the beginning. They were doing many good things outwardly, but their works were not motivated by love and inwardly their hearts had left first love.
<b>Smyrna</b>	<b>Persecution:</b> They were severely persecuted, even unto death during the time of the Ten Great Persecutions ( <b>Diocletian</b> ). They were not removed from their trial but were exhorted to remain faithful unto death.
<b>Pergamos</b>	<b>Worldliness:</b> They became wed to the world under the leadership of <b>Constantine</b> , no longer persecuted but now embraced by the world system and wed to it. The church became a tower in the world, a prominent place.
<b>Thyatira</b>	<b>Corruption:</b> They were unworn in sacrifices which were perpetually repeated in the Sacrifices of the Mass (Roman church). Salvation was by works and through the church. Superstition prevailed. The church took the place of Christ. The Bible was a closed book to the masses.
<b>Sardis</b>	<b>Deadness:</b> They revived the great Christian doctrine of justification by faith, not by works. The Word of God became the authority in matters of faith and salvation. The Bible became an open book to the masses. This is the period known as the <b>Reformation</b> . However, the reformers did not go far enough in their reforming or bringing back the truths of the Word of God. The love of God seemed to be absent in their gospel. They did not shun the clergy-laity hierarchy (Nicolaitanism). Protestantism came out of the Reformation; but it did not complete the work of the Reformers. They had a name for success but to the Lord their works were dead.
<b>Philadelphia</b>	<b>Faithfulness:</b> They searched the Scriptures and saw the Church, the Body of Christ, with Christ the Head in heaven and His Body indwelt with and governed by the Holy Spirit. Every Christian was seen as a member of the Body of Christ, brothers and sisters in Christ—“brethren.” The Body was to hold to a love for one another.
<b>Laodicea</b>	<b>Unfaithfulness, Lukewarm:</b> They considered themselves the judge of what is right, so they set aside the Word of God as the truth of God by which to live. They are rich and in need of nothing, not even in need of their Master who is outside the door of the church. He is no longer the Head. He is owned by them in name only. The Lord rejects this. While in Babylonian captivity they have become wealthy off the Babylonian system and instead of seeking God they trust their wealth, their strength, their systems, and the laws of man.