

The Revelation of Jesus Christ – Supplement

Summary of Chapters 2 and 3

The Four “Applications” of the Letters to the Seven Churches

1. Each letter is written to seven churches in John’s day - This is the most obvious meaning
2. The letters also describe situations faced by all churches and can be used by them to understand how they look to God. General lessons include:
 - a. Size doesn’t matter – faithfulness does
 - b. To be well-thought-of by the community at large is not a good indicator of faithfulness (see Luke 6:26)
 - c. Repentance is for churches, not just individuals
 - d. While “good deeds” are done by all, the character of the churches are determined by
 - e. Faithful teaching versus false views of God
 - f. Holiness versus sin
3. Each letter is like a diagnostic test we can use to examine ourselves – we discover that:
 - a. It is easy to distort our understanding of God, of
 - b. Jesus, and of the Gospel, especially
 - c. When we try to please the world
 - d. When we get distracted by things the world
 - e. When we justify things we know are sin
 - f. When we confuse God with other religions
4. Obedience to God is revealed on three levels:
 - a. Having a right knowledge of God
 - b. Having a right attitude toward others,
 - c. Having a proper attitude toward ourselves – neither proud nor self-defeating – and being dedicated to a life of holiness
 - d. Repentance keeps faith fresh
 - e. Perseverance is needed as trials will come to test us
5. The promises are for the Age to Come and include:
 - a. The right to eat from the Tree of Life
 - b. No threat of “the second death” (condemnation)
 - c. The Bread of Life, Innocence, Purity and a new name
 - d. The right to rule with Jesus
 - e. The righteousness of Christ in exchange for sin
 - f. A permanent place in God’s Eternal Kingdom
 - g. Escape from the Wrath of God an eternal punishment
 - h. A place in the Heavenly Jerusalem to come
 - i. A place in God’s family
 - j. A seat beside Jesus in His Kingdom
6. The seven letters reflect periods of Church History – not all agree that this is valid as it involves speculation. If you accept this view, these things must be kept in mind:
 - a. Whether a given view is accurate or not will only be proven by the unfolding of the future, so we cannot be dogmatic in our conclusions
 - b. Suffering for being faithful is common to healthy churches – Smyrna, Pergamum (in better times), Philadelphia; while a good reputation with unbelievers is common to unhealthy churches
 - c. Suffering is not isolated to the early church (consider Christians in Muslim or Marxist areas)
 - d. The refrain, “Whoever has ears . . .” shifts in a way that ties the first 3 and last 4 churches together; I believe this marks “The Great Schism” in 1054 that split the Church into East (“Orthodox”) and West (“Catholic”), though some see it as marking the split of the Reformation and ignore the Eastern Church completely. Either way, the first three would be successive (one following the other) while the last 4 would be concurrent (referring in turn to the Orthodox, the Catholic, the Protestant and the “Last Days Church” (a time when every denomination experiences a ‘falling away’ from the Truth, and no one denomination is “safe” from error – as described by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 “**the** falling away comes first” and 2 Timothy 3:1-3, 4:3-4)
 - e. Pergamum and Thyatira are connected pollution through pagan influences (idolatry and sexual sin)
 - f. Ephesus and Thyatira are contrasted by the presence of the ‘Nicolaitans’ – perhaps ‘worldly’ influence as the name means “victory of the people”

- g. We noted a downward spiral from Pergamum to Thyatira to Sardis that ties these 3 together in a way that may refer to 'state churches'
 - h. Regarding Jesus' coming - Ephesus and Pergamum are warned Jesus will come personally to those churches if they do not repent; Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia each refer to the Rapture – “hold fast until I come”, “I come like a thief” (don't be left behind!), “I will keep you from the time of trial coming on the whole world”; to Laodicea Jesus promises His presence for those who 'let him in'; Smyrna is promised life after suffering and death
 - i. Satan is mentioned in most of the letters to churches where the majority of people are striving to follow Jesus (Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Philadelphia, though not Ephesus); Satan no longer has to bother with Sardis and Laodicea apparently
 - j. Philadelphia and Laodicea both refer to “doors” – one, to Life; the other, to the 'believer's' heart
 - k. If these letters are indeed an overview of Church History, it refers to **trends**, not to churches or denominations. Individual Christians should not be assumed to be false Christians based on their affiliation; nevertheless, some denominations are healthier than others and one should always seek out the healthiest churches possible
 - l. Every Church has a message for overcomers, meaning every church has believers, even those in danger of 'dying' (losing their position in Christ)
 - m. Repentance is health maintenance, needed by all
 - n. Perhaps you see more patterns in the letters
7. With this in mind, here is my own (very rough) view of how these letters describe the Church Age (“the things that are,” mentioned in 1:19):
- a. Ephesus – The New Testament Church –faithful in many ways, devoted to identifying error, but mixed motives threatened her health, with Jesus replaced in importance by religious practices (both Jewish and Greek), secret knowledge and contact with angels
 - b. Smyrna – The Persecuted Church, from 95-315, when Christianity became accepted by the Empire and state-sponsored persecution mostly ended
 - c. Pergamum – The Compromising Church – 315-1054 – Beginning with the Church being recognized and eventually chosen as the state religion and ending with “The Great Schism” between East and West; Multitudes joined the church and brought their pagan practices and morality into the Church (Others see this as the Roman Empire Church, 315-590, ending with the first recognized Pope, Gregory the Great)
 - d. Thyatira – The Contaminated Church - 1054–the Rapture - The Western Church (Roman Catholic and apostate Protestant), with its compromises to pagan thought (note the comparison between Jezebel, who worshiped Asherah (the 'Queen of Heaven') and the Catholic veneration of Mary)
 - e. Sardis – The Dying Church - 1054-the Rapture – The Eastern Church, contaminated by paganism through its use of icons and 'mystery'-centered worship (Others see this as the Protestant Church of 1517-1700, dead because it cared only about proper doctrine. But this view leaves no place for the Eastern Church)
 - f. Philadelphia – The Faithful Church - 1517-the Rapture – Those Churches, cast out of the Catholic Church, declared to be misrepresenting Scripture by Rome and even by other Protestant Churches that are themselves not healthy – the “synagogues of Satan” in 3:9 (Others see this as the Missionary emphasis in the Protestant Church, 1700-Rapture, which ignores genuine Missionary efforts by other churches)
 - g. Laodicea – The Lukewarm Church – The Church across denominational lines in the time leading up to the Rapture and especially during the time of the “False Prophet” and his “One World Religion”, based in the Vatican, which even now is being proposed by Pope Francis and even many Protestant leaders as 'the way of the Future'. The Pope would not be the Antichrist, as Luther said, but the False Prophet