

# The Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3: A Summary

Descriptions of Christ are repeated from Revelation 1:12-20

## Revelation 2:1-7 | Ephesus

- **The City:** Ephesus was a leading free (self-governed) city in the Roman empire. The city was the center for the worship of the fertility goddess, Artemis in Greek or Diana (see Acts 19). As a result, cultic prostitution was prevalent, and the temple offered a lucrative income for artisans.
- **The Image of Christ (vs. 1):** *The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ... This is explained in Revelation 1:20, As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.* This is an image of Christ's authority and power.
- **The Commendation of the Church (vs. 2, 3, 6):** They are diligent in their work for God, and they are discriminating in identifying false doctrine and teachers. They endure and stand strong for Christ and have not grown weary in doing so.
- **The Complaint Against the Church (vs. 4):** Obedience had become solely a duty and was vacant of deep love for Christ and for one another. They endured, but not from passion.
- **The Call to the Church (vs. 5):** Remember how you once loved God and one another, repent of your waywardness and return to loving one another and Christ as you once did.
- **The Promise to the Church (vs. 7):** *To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*
- **Christ the Answer:** Jesus walks among the church and therefore is intimately aware of what is happening. Jesus seeks not an employee-employer relationship, but a personal relationship built on love that informs what we do.

## Revelation 2:8-11 | Smyrna

- **The City:** Along with Ephesus and Pergamum, it was considered one of the “First of Asia”. It was a large city (200,000 people) and was the center of emperor worship. Because of its loyalty to Rome, it too was a free or self-governing city.
- **The Image of Christ (vs. 8):** *The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.* This is a reference to Christ’s divinity, death and resurrection. Christ is the One who sacrificed to make redemption possible.
- **The Commendation of the Church (vs. 9):** Christ knows their afflictions, their poverty (although the city of Smyrna was wealthy) and the slander they endure from Jews who oppose the Way.
- **The Complaint against the church:** This is the only church where no complaint is given.
- **The Call to the Church (vs. 10).** Do not fear the things you are about to suffer. Persecution is coming and some will be thrown into prison for a short time. Be faithful even if that persecution leads to your death. Why? Because Christ will reward you with the crown of eternal life. Smyrna was known as the “crown of Smyrna” for the beautiful skyline that the surrounding hills created.
- **The Promise to the Church (vs. 11):** *The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.* The one who conquers in this life (possibly by dying for Christ) will not be hurt by a second death apart from Christ.
- **Christ the Answer:** The One who knows their afflictions, poverty and slander from other Jews also experienced all those things. He too sacrificed His life and rose from the dead. You are walking in the footsteps of One who knows, understands, and rewards those who model Him.

## Revelation 2:12-17 | Pergamum

- **The City:** Pergamum, along with Ephesus and Smyrna, claimed to be the provincial capital of Roman Asia. It was a city of beauty and wealth boasting a library of nearly 200,000 volumes. It was also a highly religious city with multiple temples to various Roman gods. The primary worship centered on Dionysus, the god of royal kings and Asclepius, the god of healing. Another unique aspect is that Pergamum had been given, by Rome, the power of capital punishment symbolized by a sword.
- **The Image of Christ (vs 12):** *The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.* A reference to the penetrating character of the Word of God or God's truth as it is found in the person and work of Christ and God's holy Word as it reveals Him. It also communicates the authority of Christ to wage war on false teaching and the kingdom of Satan.
- **The Commendation of the Church (vs. 13):** Christ knows the Christians in Pergamum live in a dangerous city both physically and spiritually. The many temples to false gods made this a throne location for the activity of Satan to extend his reach. Yet, the Christians had held fast in their allegiance to Christ and refused to compromise even when some of them were killed.
- **The Complaint Against the Church (vs. 14-15):** Some of the Christians had strayed from the truth and embraced the false teaching of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans. Balaam is a reference to the prophet (Numbers 22-24) who was willing to be bought off to prophecy against Israel. These false teachers, like Balaam and Satan, sought to deceive the people by participating in the local worship practices in the temple of the false gods. Their goal was to lead the Christians astray and from God and into practices that dishonored God.
- **The Call to the Church (vs 16):** Repent and embrace the truth. A failure to repent will bring the sword or wrath of Christ. To those who reject the banquet food of the pagans, Christ promises hidden manna. This is probably a reference to the pot of manna Moses put in the Ark to remind Israel of God's faithfulness and grace. Christ also promises a white stone is difficult to identify. It may refer to some type of stone that was used as an invitation to a pagan worship feast. Here Christ invites them to a feast with Him. Finally, the reference to a new name written on the stone is probably the name of Christ.
- **The Promise to the Church (vs. 17):** *To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'*
- **Christ the Answer:** The Word of Christ can be a tool to battle the kingdom of Satan, or it will bring the wrath of God against those who reject Christ. Which will you choose?

## Revelation 2:18-28 | Thyatira

- **The City:** Thyatira was not a large city but hosted many skilled fabric trades. There was an extensive number of trade guilds that in addition to promoting their trades, aligned themselves with a patron deity for worship, feasts, etc.
- **The Image of Christ (vs. 18):** *The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.* The reference to His eyes being “like a flame of fire” and the brilliant reflections of His feet emphasize the indignation and righteous judgment of Christ. He who is pure has authority to judge the impure.
- **The Commendation of the Church (vs. 19):** Jesus knows of their love and faith and service to God and patient endurance as they follow Christ. They are commended for their continual progress in these things.
- **The Complaint Against the Church (vs. 20-23):** They have allowed a false woman prophetess to remain in the church and to continue to have influence. Her character is the same of Jezebel from 1 Kings 16:31-33. In the spirit of Jezebel, she is deceptively leading people astray by engaging in feasts to false gods that included sexual immorality. In response to her rebellion, God is going to bring sickness, tribulations and extend this punishment to her followers (children).
- **The Call to the Church (vs 24-25):** To those who reject the teachings of the false prophetess, God will spare them from the pain to come. They were exposed to the lies and may even in the past embraced them, but their repentance frees them to benefit from the grace of God rather than His wrath.
- **The Promise to the Church (vs. 26-28):** *<sup>26</sup> The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup> and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup> And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* Psalm 2 is invoked to promise that those who conquer through Christ will also rule with Christ. The ‘morning star’ is likely a reference to Christ Himself and possible includes the resurrection.
- **Christ the Answer:** Christ, as the righteous judge, demands that His followers also pursue righteousness. To be In Christ is to be Righteous. In addition, His righteousness gives Him authority to judge all.

## Revelation 3:1-6 | Sardis

- **The City:** Sardis, by its location, served as a primarily thoroughfare for commerce and the Roman military. A temple to Artemis rivaled the temple to Artemis in Ephesus. Sardis was a “city of peace, not the peace won through battle, but the peace of the man who dreams are dead and whose mind is asleep, the pace of lethargy and evasion.” Expositors Commentary, Vol. 12, Page 448.
- **The Image of Christ (vs. 1):** *The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.* The seven spirits are a reference to the Holy Spirit from Isaiah 11:2 (*And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*) Notice the sevenfold description of the Spirit. The seven stars is a reference to the churches and their leadership.
- **The Complaint Against the Church (vs. 1):** They are spiritual zombies. They give the impression of being a follower of Christ but in truth they are spiritually dead.
- **The Commendation of the Church (Vs 4):** A remnant has remained loyal and faithful to Christ, untarnished by sin. This is emphasized by comparing soiled garments with pure and white garments.
- **The Call to the Church (vs 2-3):** **Wake Up** to your condition and deal with it. **Remember** what they have been taught about Christ and re-embrace it. **Repent.** A failure to do these things we mean that they will not be ready when Christ shows up and will suffer accordingly.
- **The Promise to the Church (vs 5):** *The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.* Those who overcome the stains of a pagan community will be rewarded with inclusion in the book of life meaning they will be with Christ in eternity.
- **Christ the Answer:** Christ, through the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, enlivens people to salvation and to daily followership of Christ. A spiritual ‘zombie’ has rejected the work of the Spirit to connect people in communion with Christ. The solution, yield to the Spirit.

### Revelation 3:7-13 | Philadelphia

- **The City:** The city was constructed on a plateau in an area prone to earthquakes. Because of that, most of the people chose to live outside the city. An emperor cult was prominent similar to many Roman cities in the region.
- **The Image of Christ (vs. 7):** *The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.* Christ is holy and genuine (lacking no falsehood) who has the key or authority to grant salvation just as was prophesied.
- **The Complaint Against the Church:** There is no specific complaint leveled against the church.
- **The Commendation of the Church (vs. 8-10):** They are not a people who hold great position of power in the city, yet Christ has opened a door of opportunity for them that not even Satan can shut. Even though they are not a strong people, they have kept God's Word and remained faithful to Him. Because of their faithfulness, Christ promised to be their Warrior Advocate who will protect them from the false Jews.
- **The Call to the Church (vs. 11):** Christ's promise to return is meant to harden their steadfastness.
- **The Promise to the Church (vs 12):** *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.* While the area was prone to earthquakes which caused building to fall, Christ would make them into a temple with pillars that will not fall. In tradition, honored people would have their name inscribed on the column of a temple. Here, Christ writes His name on His people. Those who appear to have little power will be shown honor.
- **Christ the Answer:** Christ is the One with the power and authority to open opportunities for the church. In addition, because He is holy, the people of God act as the temple of God where the indwelling presence of Christ is found.

### Revelation 3:14--22: Laodicea

- **The City.** The city was in the fertile Lycus valley with the main Roman road going right through the city. The wealth of the city came from a glossy black wool they produced and banking. In addition to being a wealthy city, it also had a famous school of medicine. Specifically, they were known for producing an eye ointment that cured eye defects. One commentator noted that there was nothing exceptional about Laodicea saying, "They did not zealously stand for anything". A six-mile-long aqueduct brought water to the city. The water came either from a hot spring and cooled along the route or from a cooler source and warmed on the way.
- **The Image of Christ (vs. 14).** *The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.* Amen is meant to communicate a finality. Jesus is the faithful and true witness. He sees through all lies and deceptions and judges as a personal eyewitness. Being Creator gives Him this right.
- **The Complaint Against the Church (vs. 15-17).** Like the city's water supply, they have no passion for God. They zealously stand for nothing. Their complacency, spiritually lazy and indifferent attitude toward Christ made them useless to the kingdom. Not only did they demonstrate an indifference to Christ, they professed an ignorance to their problem.
- **The Commendation of the Church.** There is not one.
- **The Call to the Church (vs 18).** Gold purchased from Christ was refined by fire and that refining fire in their lives would kindle a passion for God. It is difficult to be indifferent when suffering for Christ. Instead of the black wool of the city, Christ invites them to acquire white garments that reflect their holiness in Him. Finally, He offers a salve for their eyes that will bring spiritual clarity. The three items, corresponding to Laodicea itself, are a call to turn fully to Christ.
- **The Promise to the Church (vs. 19-21).** <sup>19</sup> *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* <sup>20</sup> *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* <sup>21</sup> *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.* The discipline of the Lord is not to be viewed as hate but as disapproval of their behaviors and choices. In truth, Christ's discipline is an act of love intended to bring repentance and a renewed zeal for God. Additionally, to the one who repents and conquers their lukewarmness, they will share in Christ's reign in the future kingdom.
- **Christ the Answer.** While they are not pursuing Christ, Christ is in truth pursuing them. If your faithfulness has lapsed, turn to Him and allow Him to renew you. If you have been simply pretending to know God, Christ stands ready to redeem.