

REVELATION PART TWO - CHAPTERS 1, 2, 3

These 3 chapters are the easier chapters to digest in the book of Revelation. John wrote them to the 7 churches that he supervised in Asia (which is now part of Turkey). They were 7 real churches facing real problems as described in Chapters 1 to 3 though this circular letter also covered a lot more about the future. The letter was to be circulated and read aloud to all the churches to:

- a) take note of the problems in their own church;
- b) be aware of the problems faced by other churches;
- c) receive a general message meant for all the 7 churches.

Revelation Chapter 1

1. Revelation 1:1-3
 - a) It tells of real events that must happen soon.
 - b) Revelation 1:3 encourages believers to read and listen to this letter, and to obey all that were written within. God said that all who did so would be blessed. Reading it aloud was necessary to proclaim the truth.
 - c) It is best to read (or listen to) the book of Revelation from the beginning to the end to get a feel of the full message in this book, rather than randomly select a particular chapter you like to read. As we all know, chapter divisions are not divinely inspired but were put in by well-meaning men to help us locate the passages and verses more easily. Unfortunately, some of the chapter divisions were put in the wrong places. So if we read this book one chapter at a time or choose a particular chapter to read, we may get a wrong idea of what God intends to tell us.
2. Revelation 1:4-6
 - a) Christ is the King of Kings, not just a carpenter.
 - b) Christ rules over the kings of the Earth.
 - c) His Kingdom is eternal and is waiting for you and me.
 - d) We have been made kings and priests in His Kingdom too (see 1 Peter 2:9).
3. Revelation 1:7-8
 - a) Jesus will return in such a way that all of us will see Him when He comes.
 - b) He is both the "Alpha and Omega" which means the "Beginning and the End".
 - c) We need to know both the beginning and the ending of God's history.
4. Revelation 1:9
 - a) John was persecuted, and so would the 7 churches be too; hence, the words "patience" and "endurance" were repeated often in this book.
 - b) We must patiently endure while serving our time on Earth in order to enjoy the eternal Kingdom of God.
5. Revelation 1:12-17
 - a) The 7 golden lampstands are signified by the Jewish menorah commonly used by Jews in their worship.
 - b) The Son of Man looked glorious while standing in the midst of the 7 lampstands. John knew that He was Jesus and he fell at His feet. That Man was neither the

Jesus in the manger nor Jesus on the Cross; but He looked glorious and was shining like the Sun. Thus, John wanted the Jews to realise and remember that Jesus is their glorious Saviour as they were under strong persecution by Emperor Domitian.

6. Revelation 1:17-20

- a) Verse 18 - Jesus has the "keys of Death and of Hades", and so we do not have to worry about death.
- b) The 7 stars refer to the 7 angels
- c) The 7 lampstands are the 7 churches.
- d) Some commentators think that the 7 angels refer to 7 pastors but it is not so. It is again the Greek's thinking, in which they do not believe in the spirit world and they also do not believe that there would be any angel watching over every church. The Devil wants us to think that the spiritual and the physical worlds are 2 separate realms, and he hopes that we would think that Satan is only a figment of our imagination.

Revelation Chapter 2

The 7 churches are identified from Chapter 2 onwards. The number 7 is a complete number. All of today's churches can somehow fall into any one category of these 7 churches.

1. Revelation 2:1. Christ walks in the midst of the Church just like God walked in the Garden of Eden.
2. First Church – At Ephesus
 - a) Revelation 2:2-4 – The members in the church at Ephesus worked hard, were discerning and knew how to assess whether the preachers were real or false apostles. Do note that Jesus knows their works but not their doctrines. To assess if a church is spiritually right, we tend to assess if their doctrines are sound; but the phrase "know your works" appeared 5 times in the assessment of the churches by Jesus. This shows that God is more concerned about our works than our words (referring to the doctrinal statements of churches). Good words must produce good works, otherwise they are worthless!
 - b) So, what went wrong with the church at Ephesus? They did everything right but they had abandoned their first love. What is this love referring to? Does it refer to their love for God? Ephesians 1:15 says that the Ephesian church was well known for their brotherly love towards one another at that time when the epistle of Ephesus was written; BUT Jesus had since then assessed that their brotherly love for each other was missing! The 'second-generation' Christians in the church had spent their time discerning doctrines only, and had lost their love for each other. God will measure each of us by our agape love seen through our works. See Galatians 5:14.
 - c) Revelation 2:5 says that the church at Ephesus had to "repent and do the works you did at first", otherwise Jesus would remove their lampstand. Removing their lampstand means to close down the church as it would be pointless for them to preach the love of God without showing love to others because

nobody would believe in the Gospel they preached. Many churches today are preaching love; however, their church goes often go back into the world unchanged. They remain selfish, greedy, self-centred and are unconcerned for others.

- d) Revelation 2:6 mentions about the Nicolaitans which were also mentioned in Revelation 2:15.
 - i. Nobody really knows who these Nicolaitans were, but “Nico” means “overcome” and “laitan” means “layman”.
 - ii. Thus, during that time, Nicolaitans probably referred to those who were ‘overcomers of laymen’. They told others that they were the priests and all the others were just laymen. However, 1 Peter 2:9 says that all believers are priests because we all have the Holy Spirit in us. The Nicolaitans were trying to separate the clergy class from the lay people, and Jesus hated it because they were dividing the Church.
 - iii. Such false doctrine destroys the Church more than anything else. Again, this is Greek thinking which always separate the spiritual workers from the secular workers.
- e) Thus, the biggest problem in the church of Ephesus then was that they had lost their first love, but Jesus commended them for doing right in hating the Nicolaitans in Revelations 2:6.

3. Second Church – At Smyrna

- a) Revelation 2:9-10. It was a poor and persecuted church, but there was no criticism from God about the church at Smyrna except for His advice urging them to hang in there. The “synagogue of Satan” would mean that there was a synagogue whereby the teachings taught were Satanic at that time.
- b) Revelation 2:11. The church was greatly persecuted but it would not be hurt by the second death. The second death refers to the death that would separate man from God (both in spirit and body) permanently.
- c) Though the church at Smyrna was poor and heavily persecuted, they could be assured that they would have eternal life.

4. Third Church – At Pergamos

- a) Revelation 2:13. Pergamos was a place with many temples and full of the seeds of Satanic worship (Satan’s throne); but the church at Pergamos did not deny Christ despite great persecution.
- b) Revelation 2:14. The church, however, allowed the doctrine of Balaam to be practised. Balaam in the Old Testament was a prophet who would do anything for money. He led the children of Israel into sexual immorality, permissiveness and idolatry. Similarly, churches today are having preachers teaching all sorts of sinful doctrines just for money. They are claiming that all your sins were already settled at the Cross, and so you can live in any way you like.
- c) The members of the church at Pergamos ate food offered to idols. Though Christians today have thrown away physical idols, they may still be looking to anything (other than God) to provide them with happiness, security and satisfaction. They see God only as an “idol for the eternal future”, so they hold

on to other gods in their hearts while on Earth, e.g. idols of wealth, health, etc. that they can trust in.

- d) Revelation 2:15. Unlike Ephesus, the Pergamos church even accepted the Nicolaitans. They also separated the clergy class and the laymen causing the laymen to be useless or ineffective Christians.
- e) Revelation 2:17. We are unclear as to what the “white stone” mentioned was. But we do not have to get stuck and spend much time trying to figure out such details.

5. Fourth Church – At Thyatira

- a) Revelation 2:19. Again, the phrase “I know your works.....” is repeated for emphasis.
- b) Revelation 2:20.
 - i. The name, Jezebel, recorded in this chapter, was the same as the most wicked woman named in the Old Testament, who taught sexual immorality and offered things to idols to seek selfish desires.
 - ii. Nowadays, modern churches do not even bring up or oppose issues such as cohabitation anymore, because living together before marriage has become a norm.
 - iii. The same applies to idolatry, where everyone seeks to find their own ways to happiness in all kinds of things other than in God. To them, God is only reserved for eternity. This, again, is the Greek thinking that we are to “find our own happiness in this world and let God take care only of our eternal future”.
- c) Revelation 2:26 says “Keep My works until the end”, and not “keep My words until the end”. It also says, “To him, I give power over the nations”, which also means that just as Adam was given a garden to tend to, we would also be given authority in heaven not to just sit on a cloud and sing forever! It means that we have to prepare for the future even in the midst of persecution in this world. This is the purpose of the Book of Revelation, and it is not for some useless speculation about timing and details of events in the future.

Revelation Chapter 3

6. Fifth Church – At Sardis

- a) Revelation 3:1. The phrase “I know your works” is being emphasised again.
- b) Revelation 3:2. No record of sin was mentioned except that they were a dead church; one that was not alive because there was totally no works! Many churches today are very careful about sins and they have strong doctrines too, BUT they have ZERO works of agape love! Their works were seen as “incomplete before God” or “not perfect” in the NKJV.
- c) God wanted them to wake up because they could not even see their problems.

7. Sixth Church – At Philadelphia

- a) Revelation 3:7-8 say “I know your works” again. This church had very little power, but God told them that He had the keys and could open the door for

them. The church was using whatever little power they had through this opened door. They used all opportunities given to them to do good works. Though it was only a tiny church, yet they pleased God, which was similar to the poor and persecuted church in Smyrna. This church, too, was not criticised by God. We may have the wrong idea of success because big churches do not necessarily mean that they are successful in the eyes of God.

- b) Revelation 3:12-13 mention about the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to Earth. It is the New Earth. God told them that He would make those who overcome, a pillar in the Temple of God. This is a reminder to us that God is preparing for us a New Heaven and New Earth that we could look forward to.

8. Seventh Church – At Laodicea

- a) Revelation 3:14-18. The phrase “I know your works” is repeated here in verse 15.
- b) The Laodicea church thought that they were rich because they were physically rich.
- c) There was no real visible sin of immorality or idolatry BUT they were lukewarm. God said that He could handle the hot and cold churches, but he would spit out the lukewarm Laodicea church. There were lots of hot springs outside Laodicea, but when the water flowed over a long distance into Laodicea, the water became lukewarm and might even be contaminated, and people did get sick when they drank such water and vomited.
- d) Many modern churches just wanted to be deemed “a balanced church” and do not want to be too complacent or too fanatical for God; and they have become proud of themselves.
- e) Revelation 3:18. God says that He wanted them to buy real gold refined in fire from Him so that they could be truly rich. God wanted them to buy eye salve from Him so that they might also see their truly poor state.
- f) Revelation 3:20. This verse is used very often in evangelistic sermons and is really being used out of context. This message is for people within the Church, and not those outside the Church. God wants to have fellowship with them and not just around them. The problem was that the church at Laodicea did not want to be too carried away. They did not want to let God rule their lives or else people might view them as being too holy. They wanted to be seen as “balanced” Christians, having a bit of the world and a bit of God, which would make them acceptable to all people. BUT God wants to sit on the throne of our hearts.
- g) Revelation 3:22. The Kingdom of the New Earth in future will have thrones where we will sit with God to rule.

Therefore, in this letter to the 7 churches, God has lessons meant for all of us

1. To see His likes and His dislikes.
2. God looks for works, unfortunately we prefer doctrines.

3. God wants us to be all out for Him, but we prefer to have one foot in the world and another in God's Kingdom.

From Revelation, Chapter 4 onwards, it will be tougher to comprehend because symbols begin to appear.

Some commentators say that the 7 churches represent the 7 ages of the church history. However, this cannot be so. It is good to note their views as follows:

1. Church at Ephesus – likely to be churches during early apostolic time
2. Church at Smyrna -- likely to represent the persecuted churches during Roman times
3. Church at Pergamos – likely to represent the churches during Constantine time (which was being accepted by Emperor Constantine)
4. Church at Thyatira – likely to represent the churches in the dark ages.
5. Church at Sardis – likely to represent the churches in the Reformation period
6. Church at Philadelphia – likely to represent the churches during the Mission Movement
7. Church at Laodicea – likely to represent the present day churches whereby all the churches are so lukewarm.

But this cannot be the interpretation because the biggest church today is in China and not USA or Europe. The church in China is about 80 to 100 million strong in numbers but they are presently undergoing heavy persecution. It is clear that different churches today are at different stages and this letter could not be meant for USA and Europe only where churches are lukewarm now.

Finally, we must note that God's glasses are very different from ours. It is important to know how God assesses our spiritual state be it our church or us as individuals. .