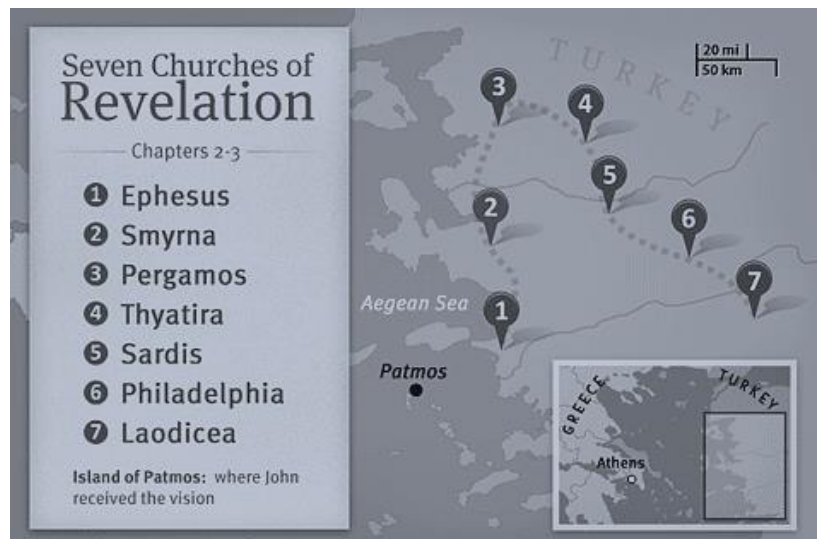


Christ's Letters to His Church

General Characteristics

- The letters are seven separate letters with a direct message from Christ to these individual churches
- They highlight
 - Christ's ministry as the Shepherd of His Flock
 - Christ's awareness of what is happening with each local church individually
 - Christ's Communication to His Church
- The letters are issued in the order that a courier would take to deliver them to the churches
- While containing truth for the church in all times, they were written to seven, literal churches in literal cities
- Structure of the Letters
 - Greeting
 - Revelation of Christ
 - Commendation and/or Complaint
 - Warning or Threat
 - Exhortation
 - Promise



Common Themes

- Christ's Omniscience is clearly demonstrated in every letter as He knows each church's works and situation
- Each letter includes an evaluation of each church's spiritual state.
 - 1st and last churches are the in the worst spiritual state
 - Three in the middle have some who are faithful and some who have compromised their faith
 - Christ has no complaint with only 2 of the seven churches
 - Overall, the church is presented in a weak and spiritually anemic state
- Most letters include commendation (Except for Laodicea)
- Most letters include a rebuke (Except for Philadelphia and Smyrna)
- The progressive nature of sanctification is on display
- A call for faithfulness to Christ in all circumstances

"He who has an ear, let him hear."

- Each letter includes this admonition
- This was a phrase that Christ used while on earth (Matt 13:1-17) in the pattern of the Old Testament Prophets (Isa. 6:9-10, Jer. 5:21, Eze. 3:27, 12:2)
 - The Prophets began their ministries by rationally explaining the call to repentance from God
 - As they ministered, Israel remained cold in their devotion, obsessed with other idols, and unconcerned with the message of the prophets
 - Because of this and by God's direction, the methods used by the prophets changed to telling stories and sometimes bizarre behaviors and object lessons
 - God did this to highlight the effect His word brings
 - Those who persisted in idolatry and hardness of heart still received God's Word, but could not discern its meaning, leading to their judgment
 - Those who had spiritual inclination would realize their desperate spiritual state and repent and turn to YHWH
- God's method of revelation continues to cut as a two-edged sword, enlightening some and blinding others
- The sad reality is that the church, like Israel, became spiritually lethargic and idolatrous
- Therefore, Christ must again institute the parabolic method of divine revelation
- The individuals in the church will either:
 - Be shocked out of their complacency by the vivid symbols and parables in the book and turn to Christ or
 - Continue in their rebellion and unbelief, sinking further in unbelief and reaping the wrath of God
- This helps us to understand that the visions of chapters 4-21 are "developments of straightforward teachings of chapters 2-3"

The Overcomers

- In each letter, Christ promises a blessing for the "overcomers"
- Who are the Overcomers?
 - Are the overcomers a special, more spiritual group of Christians?
 - Can a Christian not become an Overcomer and perhaps lose out on the blessings promised?
 - The overcomers are all who have, by faith, accepted Christ as their Savior
 - I John 5:4-5
 - What they have overcome: the world (which in Revelation stands in contrast to the Kingdom of Christ)
 - What brings victory to the overcomers: Faith
 - The object and content of that faith: Christ

- I John 4:4
 - The Overcomers come “from God”
 - The Overcomers overcome the world through the power of Christ in them
- Rev. 21:7-8
 - Contrast made between those who receive the kingdom and those who are judged.
 - The difference is that the overcomers are God’s children
- John 16:33
 - The world with which believers are in conflict will bring tribulation
 - Believers can take heart, because Christ has overcome the world
 - Great hope comes from understanding that Christ overcomes on the believers behalf
- The Promises Made to the Overcomers are blessings to all believers
 - Eat of the Tree of Life (2:7, c.f . 22:14)
 - Not Hurt by the Second Death (2:11 c.f. 20:11-15)
 - Hidden Manna and a White Stone (2:17)
 - Authority over the Nations (2:26 c.f. 20:6)
 - White Garments, Eternal Place in the Book of Life, Confession before the Father (3:5 c.f. 7:9-10, 13:8 & 20:12-15 Heb. 7:25)
 - Pillar in the Temple of God (3:12 c.f. 21:12-14)
 - A Seat at Christ’s Throne (3:21 c.f. Rev. 20:6, Heb. 4:14-16)
- Revelation, therefore, lays out blessing and cursing (Dt. 30:19-20)
 - Those who, by faith, share in Christ’s victory become overcomers themselves and share in the blessings of the kingdom
 - Those who reject Christ and cling to the kingdom of this world will be met with the curse and the wrath of God

Applying the Letters Today

- _____ on the _____ and _____ of Christ’s _____
- _____ Your _____ at Christ’s _____
- _____ to _____ in Christ’s _____
- _____ Spiritual _____
- _____ Christ’s Future _____ of _____