

## The Seven Churches of the Book of Revelation

*Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches ... (Rev 2:7).*

Churches	Strengths	Failures	Instruction	Promises to the Faithful
Ephesus Loveless (Rev 2:1-7)	You work hard, have patient endurance, reject evil, and persevere.	You have forsaken your first love.	Repent and do the good deeds as you did at first.	You will eat from the tree of life.
Smyrna Suffering (Rev 2:8-11)	You endure your suffering and poverty, yet you are rich.	None.	You remained faithful, even when facing prison, persecution, or death.	I will give you the crown of life; you will not be hurt by the second death.
Pergamum (Pergamos) Worldly (Rev 2:12-17)	You show loyalty to Christ and refuse to deny Him.	You tolerate pagan cults, heresies, idolatry, and immorality.	Repent!	I will give some hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on it.
Thyatira Wrong Doctrine (Rev 2:18-29)	You demonstrate love, faith, good works, patient endurance, and show constant improvement.	You tolerate pagan cults, idolatry, and immorality.	Judgment is coming; repent and faithfully hold fast until I come.	I will give you authority over the nations and the gift of the morning star.
Sardis Spiritually Dead (Rev 3:1-6)	Only a faithful remnant of your people kept the faith.	Your community is spiritually dead.	Repent and turn back to Christ; strengthen what little faith remains.	Your faithful will walk with me wearing white and will not be blotted out of the book of life
Philadelphia Spiritually Alive (Rev 3:7-13)	You kept my word and have not denied my name,	None.	I have placed before you an open door, and I will keep you from the hour of trial.	I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God.
Laodicea Complacent (Rev 3:14-22)	None.	You are neither hot nor cold and rely on riches, but you don't realize your spiritually impoverished condition.	Turn away from indifference and repent!	I will invite those who overcome to sit with me on my throne.

### The Acknowledged Trials and Promises of Victory to the Seven Churches

<p>1. The Church at Ephesus</p> <p>Rev 2:1-7</p>	<p><b>Acknowledgment of suffering:</b> <i>I know your activities, your hard work, and your perseverance. [...] I know too that you have perseverance and have suffered for my name without growing tired.</i></p> <p><b>Promised victory:</b> <i>those who prove victorious I will feed from the tree of life set in God's paradise.</i></p>
<p>2. The Church at Smyrna</p> <p>Rev 2:8-11</p>	<p><b>Acknowledgment of suffering:</b> <i>I know your hardships and your poverty and though you are rich, the slander of the people who falsely claim to be Jews but are really members of the synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of the sufferings that are coming to you.</i></p> <p><b>Promised victory:</b> <i>Even if you have to die, keep faithful and I will give you the crown of life for your prize.</i></p>
<p>3. The Church at Pergamum</p> <p>Rev 2:12-16</p>	<p><b>Acknowledgment of suffering:</b> <i>I know where you live, in the place where Satan is enthroned, and that you still hold firmly to my name, and did not disown your faith in me even when my faithful witness, Antipas, was killed among you, where Satan lives.</i></p> <p><b>Promised victory:</b> <i>to those who prove victorious I will give some hidden manna and a white stone, with a new name written on it, known only to the person who receives it.</i></p>
<p>4. The Church at Thyatira</p> <p>Rev 2:18-29</p>	<p><b>Acknowledgment of suffering:</b> <i>I know of your activities, your love, your faith, your service, and your perseverance, and I know how you are still making progress. [...] it is I who test motives and thoughts and repay you as your deeds deserve.</i></p> <p><b>Promised victory:</b> <i>but hold on firmly to what you already have until I come. To anyone who proves victorious, and keeps working for me until the end, I will give the authority over the nations which I myself have been given by my Father, to rule them with an iron scepter and shatter them like so many pots.</i></p>
<p>5. The Church at Sardis</p> <p>Rev 3:1-6</p>	<p><b>Acknowledgment of suffering:</b> <i>I know about your behavior: how you are reputed to be alive and yet are dead. Wake up; put some resolve into what little vigor you have left; it is dying fast</i></p> <p><b>Promised victory:</b> <i>There are a few in Sardis, it is true, who have kept their robes unstained, and they are fit to come with me, dressed in white. Anyone who proves victorious will be dressed like these in white robes; I shall not blot that name out of the book of life but acknowledge it in the presence of my Father and his angels.</i></p>
<p>6. The Church at Philadelphia</p> <p>Rev 3:7-13</p>	<p><b>Acknowledgment of suffering:</b> <i>I know that though you are not very strong, you have kept my commandments and not disowned my name.</i></p> <p><b>Promised victory:</b> <i>Because you have kept my commandment to persevere, I will keep you safe in the time of trial, which is coming for the whole world, to put the people of the world to the test. [...] Anyone who proves victorious I will make into a pillar in the sanctuary of my God, and it will stay there forever.</i></p>
<p>7. The Church at Laodicea</p> <p>Rev 3:14-22</p>	<p><b>Acknowledgment of suffering:</b> <i>I know about your activities: how you are neither cold nor hot. [...] I warn you, buy from me the gold that has been tested in the fire to make you truly rich, and white robes to clothe you and hide your shameful nakedness...so repent in real earnest.</i></p> <p><b>Promised victory:</b> <i>If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side. Anyone who proves victorious I will allow the share my throne, just as I have myself overcome and have taken my seat with my Father on his throne.</i></p>
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## Handout 2: Revelation Lesson 3

The seven messages to the churches correspond to secular covenant treaties in several aspects. The structure of the letters follows the same general pattern:

- Christ's kingship over the Church
- The individual church's record of faithfulness or disobedience
- Warnings of punishment
- The promises of blessings in response to faithful obedience

Within each letter, there is also a "covenant grant" given to each faith community. It is a commission to conquer, to overcome, and exercise dominion under Christ's lordship (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26-29; 3:5, 12, 21). However, beyond the relationship to the Covenant Lawsuit format of the entire book of Revelation, each of the letters themselves can be divided into the covenant treaty format. The letters are the New Covenant Treaty with the New Israel of the Universal Church (CCC 877); see for example, the pattern in the letter to Ephesus:

1. **Preamble:** Identifying the lordship of the Great King: *The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands* (Rev 2:1).
2. **Historical Prologue:** Surveying the lord's previous relationship to the vassal, especially emphasizing the blessings bestowed: *I know your activities, your hard work and your perseverance. I know you cannot stand wicked people, and how you put to the test those who were self-styled apostles and found them false. I know too that you have perseverance, and have suffered for my name without growing tired.* (Rev 2:2-3).
3. **Ethical Stipulations:** Expounding the vassal's obligations: *Nevertheless, I have this complaint to make; you have less love now than formerly. Think where you were before you fell; repent and behave as you did at first* (Rev 2:4-5a).
4. **Sanctions:** Outlining the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience: *or else, if you will not repent, I shall come to you and take your lampstand from its place* (Rev. 2:5b).
5. **Succession Arrangements:** Dealing with the continuity of the covenant relationship over future generations: *To those who prove victorious I will feed from the tree of life set in God's paradise* (Rev 2:6-7b).

The Covenant Treaty Format isn't the only pattern evident in Chapters 2 and 3 of the letters to the Seven Churches. There is another overall pattern. It is **not** one espoused by the modern literalists that propose the seven churches symbolically represent the seven ages of Church history. There is, however, a very definitely seven-part pattern in the letters that relate to God's plan for salvation history:

1. **The greeting:** repeated seven times ~ *To the angel of the church that is in* (Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).
2. **A title identifying glorified Christ:** it usually comes from the description of Christ or using one of His titles in Chapter 1: i.e., to Ephesus: *Here is the message of the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand* (2:1) or using one of Christ's titles: *Here is the message of the First and the Last* (to Smyrna in 2:8).
3. **A section headed "I know":** introducing praise for what is commendable in the church's record except in the case of Laodicea; i.e., for Ephesus = *I know you cannot stand wicked people* (Rev 2:3).

4. **A criticism of the church:** pointing out the community's failings except in the case of Smyrna and Philadelphia; i.e., Ephesus: *Nevertheless, I have this complaint to make: you have less love for me now* (Rev 2:4).
5. **A warning:** judgment is imminent unless the people repent and turn back to faithful obedience; i.e., Ephesus: *repent and behave as you did at first, or else, if you will not repent, I shall come to you and take your lamp-stand from its place* (Rev 2:5).
6. **An exhortation:** beginning with the statement, *Let anyone who can hear, listen* (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
7. **A promise:** that is an encouragement to persevere in faith. It usually begins, i.e., *those who prove victorious* (Rev 2:7b, 11b, 17), or *To anyone who proves victorious* (Rev 2:26; 3:5, 12, 21).

In the four last letters, there is a reversal of items 6 and 7. Many patterns will continue appearing in the book; some are obvious, but others are not. Another is evident in the sevenfold arrangement of the churches. Churches one (Ephesus) and seven (Laodicea) are in grave danger, churches two (Smyrna) and six (Philadelphia) are in excellent condition, and churches three (Pergamum), four (Thyatira) and five (Sardis), are neither good nor bad.

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### Handout: Revelation Lesson 3

Finally, concerning patterns, the messages to the seven churches also contain a brief outline of the entire prophecy of the book of Revelation. In the previous lesson from Revelation Chapter one, we discussed how the four sections of Revelation following the Preamble in Chapter one are structured in terms of the four sevenfold curse-judgments of the Sinai Covenant in Leviticus 26:18, 21, 24, and 28. The four sets of judgments in Revelation can be identified as follows:

- #1. **Judgement on the False Apostles in Revelation Chapters 1-3:** Heretical teachers teaching false doctrines are exposed, condemned, and excommunicated by St. John and those who are faithful to the true apostolic tradition.
- #2. **Judgment on the False Israel in Revelation Chapters 4-7:** Apostate Israel, which is persecuting the saints, is condemned and punished; the believing faithful remnant is protected from judgment, inherits the blessings of the Covenant, and fills the earth with the fruit of good deeds.
- #3. **Judgment on the Evil King and False Prophet in Revelation Chapters 8-14:** The Beast and the False Prophet wage war against the Church and are defeated by the True King and His army of faithful witnesses.
- #4. **Judgment on the Royal Harlot in Revelation Chapters 15-22:** Babylon the False Bride/Harlot is condemned and burned, and the True Bride celebrates the Marriage Supper of the Lamb with Christ the Bridegroom.

This is the same general pattern found in the first four letters themselves:

- #1. **Ephesus:** Judgment on the False Apostles (Rev 2:1-7). The conflicts of all seven churches are evident in the struggles of this church against the heresy of the Nicolaitans: *...those who were self-styled apostles and found them to be false* (Rev 2:2b).
- #2. **Smyrna:** Judgment on the False Israel (Rev 2:8-11). The Smyrnaeans are suffering from the opposition of *the slander of the people who falsely claim to be Jews but are really members of the synagogue of Satan* (Rev 2:9b).
- #3. **Pergamum:** Judgment on the Evil King and False Prophet (Rev 2:12-17). Pergamum was experiencing persecution and temptation from the first century counterparts of the Old Testament King Balak of Moab and his false prophet Balaam, who threatened the newly created nation of Israel just before they took possession of the Promised Land—but filled with the Holy Spirit, God’s true prophet, Phinehas, prevailed and saved Israel (Num chapters 22-25). The newly created New Covenant Church—the new Israel faced the same threats at Pergamum.
- #4. **Thyatira:** Judgment on the Royal Harlot (Rev. 2:18-29). At Thyatira the leader of the heretics, who entices God’s servants into idolatry and fornication, is named “Jezebel.” It is the same name as the idolatrous and immoral queen of ancient Israel whose story is told in the books of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings.

After the fourth letter to the seven churches, the cycle begins over again. But this cycle refers back to the Preamble and the vision of the Son of Man in Revelation Chapter 1, and the order is chiastic, that is, in reverse order. Notice the letter order and the repeat; the bold emphasis is added to help find the repetitions.

#### **The Chiastic Pattern in the First Vision and the Letters to the Seven Churches:**

**A-1.** (1:14-15a): *his eyes were like a burning flame, his feet like burnished bronze...*

**B-1.** (1:16): *out of his mouth came a sharp sword, double-edged...*

**C-1.** (1:17-18): *It is I, the First and the Last [literally **the Alpha and the Omega**]. I am the Living One. I was **dead** and look—**I am alive** for ever and ever, and [literal = Amen] I hold **the keys** of death and of Hades.*

**D-1.** (1:20): *The secret of **the seven stars** you have seen in my **right hand**, and of **the seven golden lamp-stands**, is this...*

**D-2.** Ephesus: (2:1): *the one who holds **the seven stars** in his **right hand** and who lives among **the seven golden lamp-stands**...*

**C-2.** Smyrna (2:8) *Here is the message of **the First and the Last** [literally = **Alpha and the Omega**], who was **dead**, and has **come to life** again.*

**B-2.** Pergamum (2:12): *Here is the message of the one who has the **sharp sword, double-edged**...*

**A-2.** Thyatira (2:18): *Here is message of the Son of God, who has **eyes like a burning flame**, and **feet are like burnished bronze**...*

Then the symmetrical structure breaks for some reason. It would have been expected to pattern the Laodicean preamble after B or perhaps even A. Whatever the reasons, the pattern changes. Compare with chapter one:

**D-3.** Sardis (3:1): *Here is the message of the one who holds the seven **spirits of God**, and **the seven stars***

**C-3.** Philadelphia (3:7): *Here is the message of the holy and true one, who has **the key** of David, so that when he opens no one will close, and when he closes, no one will open.*

? Laodicea (3:14): *Here is the message of **the Amen, the trustworthy, the true witness**, the **Principle of God's creation***

The pattern breaks with Laodicea; the only church with no virtues to recommend it. The connection to Chapter one may be in verses 5 (emphasis mine): ... *and from Jesus Christ, **the faithful witness, the First-born from the dead, the highest of earthly kings**. He who loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood* (Rev 1:5). The Hebrew word “amen” is an acrostic for the Hebrew phrase, “God is a trustworthy King” (*The Jewish Book of Why*, vol. I, page 152). Christ, who is God, is indeed the highest of earthly kings. The message to the Laodiceans is from “the Amen” (Rev 3:14), from God the trustworthy king.

The repetition of the patterns is reinforced by other points of similarity. There is a parallel between Smyrna and the Philadelphia. Both churches struggle with the “synagogue of Satan,” and there may be a link between the “seven lampstands” of Ephesus and the “seven Spirits of God” of Sardis. In Chapter four following the letters, in the vision of the throne in the heavenly Sanctuary, John says: ... *and in front of the throne there were **seven flaming lamps burning, the seven Spirits of God*** (Rev 4:5).

The ancients loved patterns and repetitions. In Scripture, patterns and repetitions serve as what we would indicate in bold type or underlining for added emphasis. These are only a few of the “patterns” in this amazing book of divine revelation. As you continue to study the Book of Revelation, watch for patterns and repetitions as well as being mindful of Old Testament references.

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