

The promises

The promises at the end of each letter point forward to the new creation and the new Jerusalem. It will be a while before we get there but this is a great taste

Ephesus: a new Eden and the right at last to eat of the tree of life, which was lost at the beginning. (Revelation 22:2,14,19)

Smyrna: no danger from the 'second death' that follows physical death. (20:6,14 21:8)

Pergamum: Hidden manna, (as the Israelites were fed in the dinner.) The meaning of the 'White Stone' isn't clear - it may be the invitation to the Messiah's banquet. A new name that is only known to the person who receives it. (19:12, 22:4)

Thyatira: Authority over the nations and the morning star (? The dawning of a new day?) (22:16)

Sardis: To be dressed in white (purity) and be in the book of life, the list of citizens in the kingdom. (20:12,15 21:7)

Philadelphia: Being part of God's dwelling place, the new Jerusalem. (21:2-5, 22-27)

Laodicia: Sit on the throne with Jesus. (22:3)

And us??

Each letter follows a roughly standard format. What do you think Jesus might say to us using this format?

These are the words of him who ... I know your ...

Yet ... I will give you ... Whoever has ears let him hear.

The one who conquers will

Revelation chapters 2 & 3 : seven letters



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Today we look at letters addressed to the angels (messengers) of each of seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor (roughly present day Turkey.)

God has a great purpose for his church, and he looks to see how his church measures up. The Spirit is speaking. All seven letters say that if we have an ear we are to listen.

The number seven suggests that the letters add up to a complete picture of what God is saying. All churches will find themselves here.

Who wrote these letters?

John was told in chapter one to write what he saw. But the real author of these letters is the Spirit or Breath of God. In chapter one John gave us greetings from the seven Spirits (Breaths) before God's throne. Now we see these seven breaths going out to the seven churches.

Each letter begins by reminding us about the Jesus we met in chapter one, Don't forget as you read these letters the encounter that John had with the risen Lord Jesus. He spoke then and he speaks now.

Jesus

The seven letters all start by saying something about Jesus, mostly drawn from chapter one. You may find it helpful to link the descriptions in chapters 2 and 3 to the description of Jesus in chapter 1.

'Son of God' is mentioned for the first time in 2:18. This links to the Psalm 2 quote in verse 27.

'key of David' is mentioned for the first time in 3:7.. This refers to Isaiah 22:22. and Isaiah chapters 36 and 37.

I know ...

We know from chapter one that Jesus walks among the churches. Here we learn that he knows them intimately. He knows their situation. He knows what they are doing. He praises churches when they are doing well, encourages them to keep going in all that is good and warns them when they need to change.

The Conqueror

Each letter closes with a promise to the conqueror (also translated as 'overcomer' or 'one who is victorious.') This is the one who is faithful to Jesus to the end (2:26.)

Jesus is the great conqueror. 3:21 takes us back to his death and resurrection. He is calling these churches to conquer with him and to share his victory.

Remember that Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. It is the church's job to implement that victory. This may mean a similar journey to his.

The challenges

Each of the churches were called to conquer, but they all had their issues and they needed attention. Some details are obscure but we can see the overall picture.

Ephesus: Hard working and persevering through hardships. Good at spotting and dealing with bad teaching and behaviour but not as loving as they used to be. This places the church in severe danger.

Smyrna: A poor church, being attacked by Jews who had not believed in Jesus. Persecution is imminent.

Pergamum: Had stayed faithful through persecution, including the execution of one of their members. A minority of their members were enticing people to get too involved in the worship and behaviour of the pagan culture..

Thyatira: Growing in action, love and faith. But they tolerate a so-called prophet who is leading people into pagan worship and sexual immorality.

Sardis: On the surface a successful church, but really falling short of what is expected. A few people in the church have stayed clean, but not many.

Philadelphia: On the surface a weak church but they have stayed faithful and they need to hold on, Similar opposition to Smyrna.

Laodecia: A rich church, but one which spiritually was poor and failing to see. Big changes were needed.