

DAY
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DAY
5

The Churches Revelation 2 & 3

Day 4: The Churches of Sardis, Philadelphia & Laodicea
Day 5: The Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum & Thyatira

I wish you could study one church per day and that I could give you all the historical information about those churches. John knew those churches well. He knew their geography, culture, the way of life in those Rome-controlled cities, the pagan religions of those cities, and problems specific to each city. The exact language used is perfect for each city's history and setting.

We will use this space to give you some big picture perspective on the seven churches, and then guide you for a more careful study of the valuable spiritual lessons they hold.

Instead, you will look at chapter 2 (and four of the churches) today, and tomorrow study chapter 3 (and the three remaining churches). We will use this space to give you some big picture perspective on the seven churches, and then guide you for a more careful study of the valuable spiritual lessons they hold.

To the right, you can see a map of where the churches were located. You can also see the

Island of Patmos where John was exiled. It was used by the Romans as a place of exile. Since he was in exile, John sent Revelation as a circular letter to be read by one of his colleagues as he travelled to the seven churches (1:3).

Second, seven is the number of completeness. There were more than 7 churches in that region, and other churches were significant as well. As John writes his theological-pastoral letter, he wants his readers to know the seven churches are symbolic and representative of all churches. Yes, they are specific churches with specific needs, but they also represent the Church at all times and everywhere.

Third, there is a general pattern for the churches:

- The church is identified.
- Next is, *These are the words...* and then a different description of Jesus who is speaking to the church.
- Next is an encouragement and commendation about what is good in the church (Laodicea is the only church of which nothing good is said).
- Then you hear, "yet" or "nevertheless" and the grievance Jesus has about the church (Smyrna and Philadelphia do not hear any grievance).

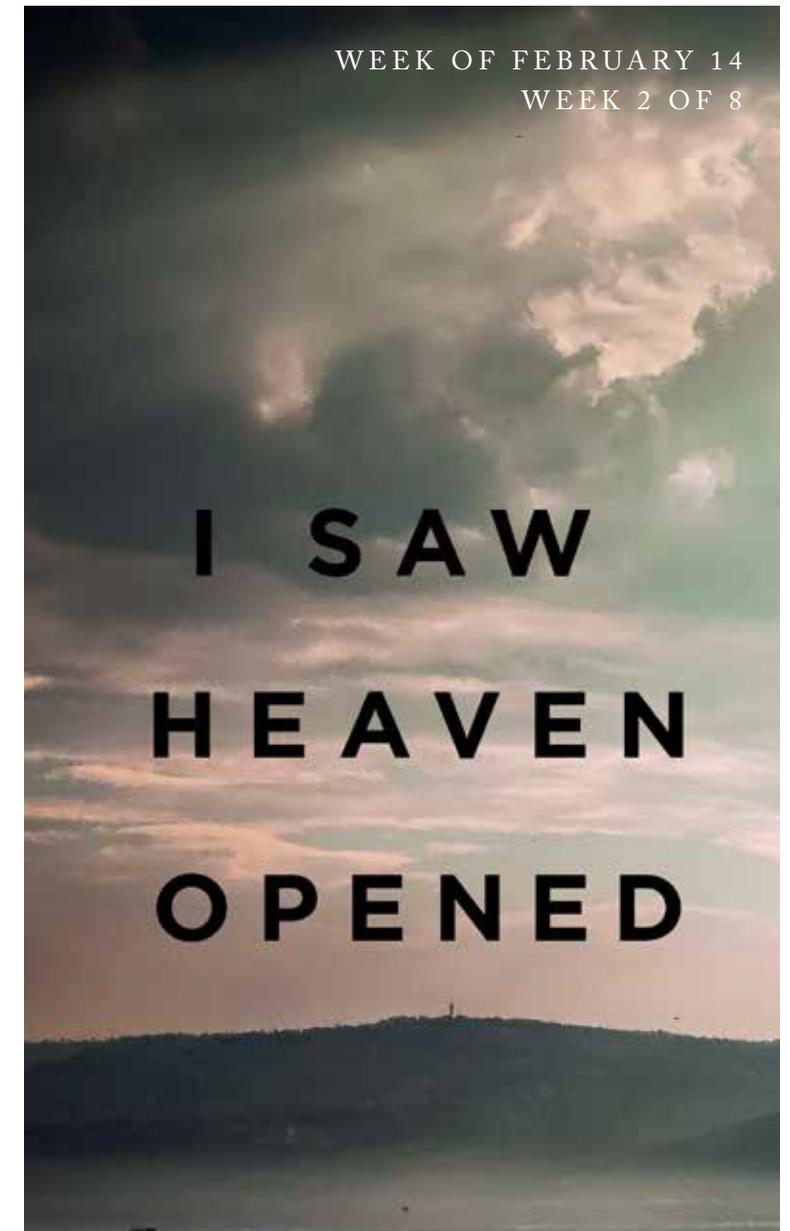
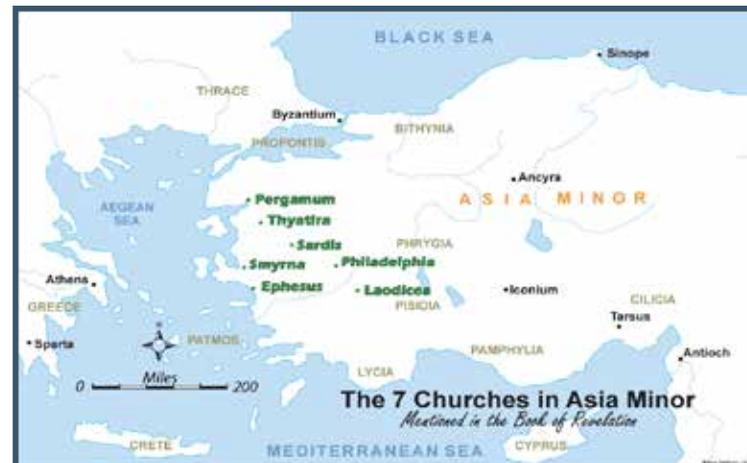
- Every church hears a corrective or a next step from Jesus.
- Every church has the exhortation, "Whoever has ears, let them hear" and the promise for those who are victorious (in some translations "those who overcome").

Fourth, the church is not yet the pure and spotless bride it must be (Ephesians 5:25-27). Sin and compromise in the church is a serious matter requiring urgent action. Jesus makes no excuses for sin in his bride.

The easiest way to study and learn from these seven churches is to make several lists and keep adding to each list as you move through the seven churches.

- Who is Jesus or how is Jesus described?
- What is going right in the churches?
- What has gone wrong in the churches?
- What change does Jesus tell them to make?
- What is the blessing that comes with repentance?

Think about the church in our nation, about our church, and about you in our church... and PRAY.



Sermon: All About Jesus



**DAY
1**

The Challenge of Revelation

Skim/Scan Revelation 13-15

“We are about to enter the strange world of apocalypses. It abounds in weird creatures; columns of fire tumbling in bottomless abysses; angels and demons; visions of heaven and hell; fierce battles between awe-inspiring forces; odd mathematical calculations that disclose the end of the world; and countless other features bound to confuse the modern mind. How can citizens of the 21st century begin to understand such a world?” (Frederick J. Murphy)

It is not easy. Revelation is a hard book to understand. It is challenging because:

- It breathes the words and ideas of the Old Testament in every verse, and most of us are not familiar with the Old Testament.
- It is written in a specific historical and cultural context. Most of us know little or nothing about the time or the Church’s struggles and needs in that time.
- It uses all the features of “apocalypse” and those features are strange and easily misunderstood. Numbers and colors have crucial meaning, which we miss. Vivid and strange images have meaning as well. Many of those images had specific meaning in the first century and most readers miss that meaning.
- Revelation has a lot to say about evil and God’s judgment on evil. In our culture, we don’t know how to understand these things about God. We prefer only a loving God who tolerates our preferences, and not a Just Judge with Kingly authority. The biblical world held together and understood what we don’t.
- There is suffering that must be endured by God’s people. That is not a theme we want to hear, yet it is everywhere in Revelation.
- Understanding is also difficult because many of us already have ingrained ideas about Revelation that relegate most of it to a future that does not involve us. That is a bias-perspective which must be reframed.

For every study in this series pray, “Lord, open the eyes of my heart. Teach me your ways.” Be patient on this journey.

**DAY
2**

The Old Testament in Revelation

Skim/Scan Revelation 16-19

There are 404 verses in Revelation. At one count, there are at least 518 Old Testament references and allusions in those verses! Some interpreters see a lower number, while others believe there are even more Old Testament connections. Eugene Peterson says we have no business reading the 66th book in the Bible until we have read books 1 through 65. As I have studied Revelation, I have looked at hundreds of these Old Testament connections.

It is also interesting that John NEVER provides an exact quotation from the Old Testament. He has “near” quotes, many allusions (or references) that would have been easily seen, and a creative joining together of multiple Old Testament passages in a new idea.

The Old Testament has soaked its way into the mind and heart of John. He uses it instinctively, almost effortlessly. He uses it creatively as an inspired interpreter and arranger of Old Testament meaning in light of Jesus Christ and the final years of the 1st century. John is a prophet. One author describes Revelation as the Climax Prophecy. John has surpassed the prophets of the Old Testament.

Here are several examples from Revelation, chapter 1. Look up each Old Testament passage to see how John has applied those passages.

1:1: Daniel 2:28-29
 1:4: Zechariah 4:10-14 (this passage also shapes Revelation 11)
 1:4: Exodus 3:14 (I am who I am, or I am who I will be)
 1:5: Psalm 89:27, 29
 1:5: Isaiah 43:10-13 (Jesus as the true witness)
 1:7: Daniel 7:13; Zechariah 12:10 (John often creates a mash-up of multiple Old Testament passages in one verse)
 1:12-16: Daniel 7:9-12; 10:4-6 (shape his vision of Jesus)
 1:18: Isaiah 22:20-24

You will get a strong immersion in the Old Testament if you take the time to look up the references which will be provided throughout this study. For John, Jesus Christ truly is the fulfillment, the deepening, and the true surpassing-completing of the entire story of God in the Scriptures.

Read through Revelation with a sense of awe and appreciation.

**DAY
3**

Understanding the Numbers of Revelation

Skim/Scan Revelation 20-22

Today is an overview about the numbers of Revelation with some examples. We will highlight and explain important numbers in the daily devotionals to come.

3 is the number most associated with God’s nature and perfection.
4 is the number for scope and comprehensiveness. After seven, it is the most often used number in Revelation.
6 is the number that falls short of completeness.
7 is the number of completeness (not perfection).
8 is the number of renewal or a new beginning.
10 stands for “the entirety” of a thing.
12 refers to a complete divine arrangement.
Multiples of numbers and numbers **squared** continue the original meaning of a number, only to striking levels.

Here is a list of some of the numbers and how John uses them:

There are 3 rounds of 7 judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls).
 The 3 rounds of 7 are broken into sets of 4 and 3. The first 4 judgments affect the four parts of the world (6:3-8; 8:7-12; 16:2-9).
 There are 7 trumpets blown by 7 angels.
 There are 7 plagues in the 7 bowls.
 There are 7 churches.
 There are 7 blessings (1:3 [2 in this verse]; 4:13; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7; 22:14)
 7 times the nations, peoples, language, and tribes are talked about.
 The word *Jesus* is used 14 times, or $7 \times 2 = 14$.
 The word *Christ* is used 7 times.
 The word *Lamb* is used 28 times or $7 \times 4 = 28$.
 The words *God* and *Lamb* occur together 7 times.

And this is just a small sampling of how John uses numbers to convey theological truth throughout Revelation. We will alert you to important numbers in each chapter.

Revelation is a magnificent spiritual-theological work.