

Revelation 2–3: Seven Churches, Seven Stages of Church History

Revelation 2–3, closing on Revelation 3:10 | Sunday, January 4 | Revelation Series

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OVERVIEW

Hal finishes the four applications of the letters and then spends the message on the fourth, the prophetic one. First the formula every letter follows: the church addressed, then attributes of Jesus himself — always the ones that answer that church's particular problem — then a commendation, an analysis, a rebuke, and a promise fitted to their need. Thyatira is the one church with nothing good said about it; Smyrna and Philadelphia are the two with no rebuke, the persecuted church and the missionary church. Then the sequence itself: the Holy Spirit chose these churches for a book of prophecy and even set their order, because they show seven stages of Church history, each naming the predominant — not the exclusive — characteristic of its era. Hal walks them with dates, from Ephesus to the Laodicea we are living in now. He closes on the promise to Philadelphia in chapter 3, verse 10, and on one Greek preposition: ek, out of, not apo, away from.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Revelation 3 — “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” — the word to the church at Laodicea

Revelation 3:10 — To Philadelphia: “I will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole world”

The letter to the Ephesians — Hal's phrase for the Lord's letter to the church at Ephesus — commended for knowledge and for fighting heresy, rebuked for leaving their first love

Revelation — “Those who dwell upon the earth” — a phrase used seven times in the book, and every time of unbelievers

Daniel — Prophecy sealed until the time of the end; many will go to and fro, and the wise shall understand

KEY TERMS

The formula — the shape of every letter: the addressee, the attributes of Christ that answer that church's problem, a commendation, an analysis, a rebuke, and a promise

Believe specifically — Hal's charge that a believer should point at the one promise that fits his situation, rather than believe in general

Eschatology — the study of prophecy

The age of Laodicea — the last stage of Church history, characterised by compromise and apostasy, running from A.D. 1900 until the Rapture

The hour of testing — the hour about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth; Hal says it always refers to the Tribulation

Ek — the Greek preposition in the promise to Philadelphia — out of, not apo, which would mean away from

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer from the message itself. Every answer is in the teaching.

1. What is the formula every one of these letters follows?

2. Why do the attributes of Christ come first in each letter?

3. Which church receives no commendation?

4. Which two churches receive no rebuke, and why?

5. What does Hal say is the most important thing a believer can learn about the promises?

6. What is the second application, and how does Hal apply it to himself?

7. What does Hal call the saddest thing he can think of?

8. What is the fourth application, and why does Hal say it was not seen until recently?

9. Run through the seven stages and their dates.

10. What else began in the Philadelphian period, besides revival and missions?

11. What does Hal make of the preposition in the promise to Philadelphia?

12. Who are “those who dwell upon the earth,” and why does it matter here?

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Jesus opens each letter with the attributes of himself that answer that church's problem. Which attribute of Christ answers what you are up against right now?

2. He commends before he rebukes. Who around you needs to hear what they are doing right before they can hear anything else?

3. Ephesus knew the Word and had fought off heresy, and had still left its first love. How would you know if that had happened to you?

4. The two churches with no rebuke are the persecuted one and the missionary one. What does that suggest about what actually keeps a church healthy?

5. Believe specifically, not generally — one promise, pointed at, when you cannot pray anything else. What promise would you point at this week?

6. If this is the stage of compromise and apostasy, what does faithfulness look like inside it?

MEMORY VERSE

"Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth."

— Revelation 3:10, as Hal reads it in this message