

September 7, 2010

REVELATION 2 – 3

THE SEVEN LETTERS



Overview

- The seven letters are NOT part of the prophetic, visionary message from 4:1 – 22:5 because they do not follow the same pattern as those cycles, but form their own distinct section.
- They are intended to prepare the churches to receive the prophetic message that is about to begin (4:1)
- Each letter follows a similar pattern: Address → Local Detail → Image of Christ → The Good → The Bad → Call to Repent → Promise to the Conquerors
- Each is addressed to the Aggelos “Messenger” of the church who will read the message aloud (1:3)
- How do we know who conquers? (1 John 5:1-5)

Rev. 2:1-7- To the Messenger of the Congregation in Ephesus

Ephesus- eventual capital of the province of Asia, population~ 250,000 mid-1st century, home to the Temple of Artemis (one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world), church founded by Paul (Acts 18)

Image of Christ: The one who holds the seven stars and walks in the midst of the seven lamps

What did these images mean last week?

How do they relate to this letter?

v. 2- How might they and we test “false apostles”?

v. 6- Nicolaitans- Indulged in pagan sacrificial meat and sexual immorality.

v. 7- To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24

Rev. 2:8-11- To the Messenger of the Congregation in Smyrna

Smyrna- notable for its imperial cult and large Jewish population- a bad combination for Christians!

Image of Christ: The first and the last, who died and came to life

What did these images mean last week?

How do they relate to this letter?

v. 9- Synagogue of Satan- metaphorical reference to the fact that the Jews, as a group, follow Satan’s lies

v. 10- Crown of Life- crowns were issued to victors of athletic competitions. The 24 elders and the woman in Rev. 12 will also be wearing crowns.

Rev. 2:12-17- To the Messenger of the Congregation in Pergamum

Pergamum- Capital of Asia at the time Revelation was written & had a library with over 200,000 books. Religious center for the cults of Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius, hence “**Satan’s Throne**”

Image of Christ: The one who has the sharp two-edged sword

What did this image mean last week?

How does it relate to this letter?

v. 13- Antipas- an early church martyr not mentioned elsewhere in the NT

v. 14- Balaam... Balak- Numbers 22:1 – 24:25- Balaam is asked to curse Israel and can only bless them. But during Num 25:1-5, Balaam is responsible for encouraging sexual immorality/idolatry among the Israelites (Num 31:13-16). What could John’s readers in Pergamum benefit from this sin?

v. 17- Hidden Manna- Ex 16:32-34 a jar kept in Ark of the Covenant- 2 Macc 2:4-8 suggests (with no biblical support) that Jeremiah took the Ark and hid it in Mt. Nebo during Jerusalem’s destruction. The ark and the manna would not be recovered until the Messiah came and restored Israel. 2 Baruch 29:8 says manna would once again come from heaven.

The true NT fulfillment is much greater than the Jewish tradition- in these days of the Messiah, when do we receive “hidden manna?” (John 6:31-35)

White stone, with a new name written on the stone- new name is often a baptismal reference where we receive the NAME of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19-20; Acts 4:12). In ancient times, special stones were passed out as admission tickets to banquets.

Rev. 2:18-29- To the Messenger of the Congregation in Thyatira

Thyatira- A commercial center from where Lydia comes to Philippi and is converted by Paul (Acts 16)

Image of Christ: The Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like fiery burnished bronze

What did these images mean last week?

How do they relate to this letter?

v. 20- Jezebel- wicked wife of King Ahab (1 Kings 16, 19, 21) who introduced Baal worship to Israel.

Brighton: “Jezebel stands for and represents the sin of syncretism, a universalistic belief that all religions are of value and are able to be of benefit before God.” (p. 83)

v. 24- the deep things of Satan- idolatry, worshipping any god that is not the true God revealed in Jesus.

v. 28- The morning star- the last to fade away, most brilliant- Rev. 22:16 = It’s Jesus who brings light into the darkness

Rev. 3:1-6- To the Messenger of the Congregation in Sardis

Sardis- A city living in its glorious past (under the Persian era), an empty shell of former glory

Image of Christ: The one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars

What did these images mean last week?

How do they relate to this letter?

v. 4- white garments- in Revelation often a sign of baptismal righteousness

→ Ask Vicar why baptized babies and pastors wear long white robes!

Rev. 3:7-13- To the Messenger of the Congregation in Philadelphia

Philadelphia- commercial “Gateway to the East,” Near a volcanic plain it suffered many earthquakes. Also had many cultic festivals

Image of Christ: The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David (Isaiah 22:22)

THIS IS A NEW IMAGE! The Key of David is Jesus’ claim to Davidic, Messianic Authority

How does it relate to this letter?

v. 10- The hour of trial- the time preceding the second coming of Christ that will bring tribulation on the whole human race. Mark 13:14- “The abomination of desolation” 13:19- “Those days will be a suffering,” Revelation 16:12-16- Armageddon, 20:7-10- The battle of Gog and Magog. The Lord will see His Church through all trials and suffering- Mark 13:20, Jn 17:14-17; Rev. 7:13-17

v. 12- a pillar in the temple of my God- Gal 2:9, but it’s not just apostles! All believers who conquer will be grafted into the heavenly Temple! Think also about the “members of the body of Christ”

- and I will write on him the name of my God... and my own new name.

What did we just say about being “named” in the book of Revelation?

Rev. 3:14-22- To the Messenger of the Congregation in Laodicea

Laodicea- became the wealthiest city in Phrygia- peculiar religious and cultural observances, known for its medical school specializing in ointments for the eyes and ears (cf 3:18)

Image of Christ: The Amen, the faithful and true witness (1:5), the beginning of God’s creation

Witness = Martur,

The Beginning of God’s Creation- Gen. 1:1, John 1:1-3

The Beginning of God’s NEW Creation- 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15

How do they relate to this letter?

This is by far the harshest letter. How can Jesus speak this way to one of His churches? (3:19)

The Laodiceans are guilty of the most dangerous sin: apathy towards God.

Brighton: “The Lord Christ calls his church to come to him for spiritual wealth- spiritual sight and clothing – that the shame of her sin could be covered with the garment of salvation.” (p. 102).

v. 20- Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

This verse is often used when discussing the conversion of an unbeliever. What in the context of Revelation 2 – 3 shows that to be an *unauthorized* interpretation?

For an *authorized* interpretation, let’s look at John 10:1-5

v. 21- to sit with me on my throne- foreshadowing Chapter 4! So until next week.....