



# Thoughts, Notes and Answers

## ONE LORD: Eight Churches

**From Patmos to the Heavenly Throne Room in nine easy lessons.**

This term we turn from Jesus' words and actions in Matthew's Gospel to the words of encouragement written for those who follow Jesus some 50 years later, written by another of Jesus' apostles, John. We turn to the opening of the Book of Revelation.

These words were most probably written by John the Apostle while he was in exile (imposed by the Roman authorities) on the island of Patmos, of the coast of modern-day Turkey. By the time we are working on this series all of us will most probably, like John, still be exiled from our Church gatherings by the Covid 19 threat. Two thousand years may separate us, but the full truth is that these words are still vitally significant and totally true in the very different age.

The section of Revelation that we will look at comprises the introductory vision, 7 letters to churches and then a 'dip of the toe in the water' of the main section of the gist of the revelation.

May our Sovereign Lord, Jesus, who is indeed the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, grant to us understanding, encouragement and motivation as we read and study this section of his Word.

*Greg Holmes, March 2020*

### **Program**

Week	Passage	Church	Title	OT
Sun 3 May	Revelation 1:1-20	One LORD	Alpha and Omega	<i>Daniel 7:2-14</i>
Sun 10 May	Revelation 2:1-7	Ephesus:	Lost Love	<i>Genesis 3:16-24</i>
Sun 17 May	Revelation 2:8-11	Smyrna:	Suffering Saints	<i>Isaiah 41:8-14</i>
Sun 24 May	Revelation 2:12-17	Pergamum:	Fornicating Faction (!!!)	<i>Psalms 1:1-6</i>
Sun 31 May	Revelation 2:18-27	Thyatira:	Compromising Christians	<i>Psalms 2:1-12</i>
Sun 7 Jun	Revelation 3:1-6	Sardis:	Sinful Slumber	<i>Hosea 4:1-6</i>
Sun 14 Jun	<i>Bush Church Aid</i>			

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Sun 21 Jun	Revelation 3:7-13	Philadelphia:	Persevering Pillars	<i>Psalm</i> <i>24:1-10</i>
Sun 28 Jun	Revelation 3:14-22	Laodicea:	Prosperous Paupers	<i>Isaiah</i> <i>42:18-24</i>
Sun 5 Jul	Revelation 4:1-11	One Church	Heavenly Host	<i>Isaiah</i> <i>6:1-8</i>

The titles essentially come from **Keener, C The NIV Application Commentary : Revelation** (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000).

**RESOURCES**

Aune, D.E. Revelation 1-5 (Word Biblical Commentary) (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1997)

**Barnett, P, Revelation – Apocalypse Now and Then (Reading the Bible Today) (Sydney South, Aquila, 2001)**

Beasley-Murray, G.R. “Revelation” in Carson, D.A.; France, R.T.; Motyer, J.A.; Wenham, G.J. (Eds) New Bible Commentary (21st Century Edition) (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

Bewes, R. The Lamb Wins! A guided tour through The Book of Revelation (Ross-Shire, Christian Focus, 2000).

**Chester, T. Revelation for You (God’s Word for You) (United Kingdom, The Good Book Company, 2019)**

Dever, M. “Revelation” in Promises Kept : The Message of the New Testament (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2006)

Hendriksen, W. More than Conquerors (London, Tyndale Press, 1940).

Johnson, A.F. “Revelation” in Longman, Tremper III, and Garland, D.E. (Eds) The Expositor’s Bible Commentary - Revised (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1990)

**Keener, C The NIV Application Commentary : Revelation (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000).**

Kistemaker, S.J. Exposition of the Book of Revelation (New Testament Commentary) Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2001).

Morris, L, “Revelation” (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (IVP, Leicester, 1987).

Wall, R.W. Revelation (Understanding the Bible) (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2000).

Wilcock, M. “The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened” (The Bible Speaks Today) (Nottingham, IVP, 1975)

Wright, N.T. Revelation for Everyone (London, SPCK, 2011)

**Also, the outline of Book of Revelation (Part 1) on the Bible Project website. <https://thebibleproject.com/all-videos/>**

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**PLEASE NOTE:**

It is probably worth my while explaining what I attempt to do in these 'notes'. My first work on them is to ensure that you can actually answer the questions. It is easy to ask questions that no-one is able to interpret. I then attempt to give some thoughts of my own on each question and then to bring to bear materials from my reading on the topic. Sometimes these are direct answers to the questions but, also sometimes, they are extra, I hope, relevant ideas.

It proves impossible in these studies to delve into all of the themes and implications of the material and I would encourage all people who lead or indeed do the studies to look more widely than the questions and allow Jesus' words to speak to our minds, hearts and lives.  
(HEAD, HEART, HANDS)

**THE SECTIONS OF THE STUDIES**

It is good to read through the passage for the week at the start of each study. Each of these passages is relatively short so reading them aloud is worthwhile.

**THE TEXT**

These look at the basic ideas in the passage. I would recommend that each week you do these simply to get the flow of the text and its important points.

**CONNECTIONS**

As the heading suggests, these dig deeper into the themes of the passage or look more widely at Scripture. It is probably among these that you need to make some choices. Of course if you decide to have a go at them all I am sure it will be worthwhile.

**IMPACT**

It has been suggested that rather than think about how we apply the Scriptures we should ask how they impact us in our daily lives as Jesus' followers.

These Questions seek to get us to think about this.

*We need to make the rubber of the 'idea' hit the road of our lives, thoughts and actions. - One of the problems in writing 'application' or 'impact' type questions is not knowing where all the individuals in groups etc. are up to. If you can see a better application of the material - DO IT. - The important thing is to relevantly think about the impact the passage has on us.*

**Please note that my answers below are not the only 'correct\*' answers or what you are trying to get to in the study. I have set them out as a guide to my thinking only and an assistance to you.**

*\*They may indeed be incorrect or misguided.*

*These Notes are meant to be the start of the assistance I am willing to give in regard to the studies. If you need anything further DO NOT hesitate to contact me:*

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# Revelation: Some Background.

## The Author

Whilst there has been some discussion about who the author of this letter is (he calls himself John in 1:1), ancient tradition and much modern scholarship has come to the conclusion that the author is John the Elder (named in 2,3 John) who is also the Apostle John who wrote John's gospel.

It is most probable that John was at this time an exiled elder (in both position and age) of the Church at Ephesus (in modern day Turkey) and the letter was written in the 80s or 90s AD. He writes from the Turkish Isle of Patmos, the place of his exile.

## The Literature

The majority of Revelation, though not so much the part we are dealing with here, is what is called apocalyptic literature. It is full of potent symbols, symbolic numbers, mystifying visions and terrifying beings all which combine to demonstrate that God is Sovereign, and Jesus is Lord. We will look a bit more into this style of literature when we move further into the book at some later stage.

## The Message of Revelation

Keener in the introduction to his NIV Application Commentary notes: *"As Billy Graham points out, rather than getting lost in the smaller brushstrokes, debating all the details, we need to step back and catch the majesty of the book's 'grand design.' We can acknowledge ambiguities and uncertainties and even differ from other Christians on some larger end-time scenarios, such as the nature of the Millennium; but the most important applications to our lives today are usually clear. In discussing New Testament teaching about Jesus' return, can we miss the summons to holiness in readiness for Christ's return, one of the most pervasive Second-Coming themes in the New Testament (Mark 13:33–37; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:6–7, 23; Titus 2:12–13; 1 Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 3:14; 1 John 2:28–3:3)?*

*What then is Revelation's message? We mention several points below:*

- *That God is awesomely majestic, as well as sovereign in our troubles*
  - *That Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb ultimately brings complete deliverance for those who trust him*
  - *That God's judgments on the world are often to serve notice on the world that God will avenge his people*
  - *That regardless of how things appear in the short run, "sin does not go unpunished," and God will judge<sup>75</sup>*
  - *That God can accomplish his purposes through a small and persecuted remnant; he is not dependent on what the world values as power*
  - *That worship leads us from grief over our sufferings to God's eternal purposes seen from a heavenly perspective*
  - *That proclaiming Christ invites persecution, the normal state of committed believers in this age*
  - *That Christ is worth dying for*
  - *That a radical contrast exists between God's kingdom (exemplified in the bride, the new Jerusalem) and the world's values (exemplified in the prostitute, Babylon)*
  - *That the hope God has prepared for us far exceeds our present sufferings*
  - *That God's plan and church ultimately include representatives of all peoples*
- Revelation also proclaims Christ's Lordship more explicitly and frequently than some*

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*parts of the New Testament; under normal circumstances we confront opposition not by softening our witness for Christ but by testifying more boldly.”*

## Study 1: Revelation 1:1-20 **ONE LORD: Alpha and Omega**

### **Before You Start**

***What are your impressions of the book of Revelation? What do you expect that you personally, and us as a church, can learn from it?***

Really for discussion.

We all have different ideas about this book, and there have been many, many, many interpretations from almost the time John put his quill down right through to the present.

These studies, of course, look at the least controversial part – the seven letters to the churches in Asia (modern Turkey). However, we do ‘dip our toes’ so to speak into the more spectacular imagery in both chapter 1 and chapter 4.

### **Listen Carefully to Revelation 1:1-20**

#### **The Text**

- 1. Read 1:1-3. What was (is) the process of receiving the message of this revelation?**

God sends his angel to ‘his servant John’ and he wrote it down and certifies that it is eyewitness truth.

Keener (NIVAC): *“A more difficult question... is how the word “revelation” relates to the name “Jesus Christ”(v1a): Does the entire phrase mean “the revelation about Jesus Christ” (a Greek construction called an “objective genitive”) or “the revelation from Jesus Christ” (a “subjective genitive”), or both? .... In the final analysis, however, the original, Greek-speaking audience of the book may not have worked as hard as we do to differentiate the two concepts (the grammar itself does not clarify any difference). The message is from Jesus Christ, but ultimately Jesus is the focus of everything in the New Testament, whether directly or indirectly. His purposes in history also reveal his character and invite us to worship him.”*

Barnett: *“Who was this ‘angel’? I think it was a human messenger from the churches in Asia, who had come to Patmos to tell the revered Christian leader about the grave difficulties Christians were then facing*

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*the the mainland cities. As John reflected in 'the Spirit' on this news from Asia, God gave him the two visions about which he proceeds to write."*

**2. Read 1:4-6. To whom and from whom is this greeting? What is the status of the recipients?**

Specifically, to these seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia (Most Bibles will have a map section which will show you these.).

Though from John's hand, the greeting comes from God himself and from Jesus who are both described, fittingly, in exalted terms.

The recipients likewise are given an exalted description – 'a kingdom of priests.'

**3. Read 1:9-11. How did John receive this revelation?**

From a loud voice on Patmos on the Lord's day.

Behind this thought is the fact that it introduces the theme of persecution and suffering that Christians were going through at that time and in that part of the world. This will be a major background to all of what is written in the rest of the book.

Tim Chester. "Revelation For You: *"It's significant that this takes place as John was worshipping God on the Lord's Day (v 10), for the whole of Revelation can be seen as an extended worship service. Events are punctuated by the songs of heaven. James Jordan calls it "liturgical warfare": "It is the prayers and the faithfulness of the saints before God's eye that set in motion the events in the book. The same is true today."*" (The Vindication of Jesus Christ, pages 31-32)"

**4. Read 1:7-8. What truth do these verses remind us of?**

This reminds us that the Jesus is coming back in power. Coming in judgement.

**5. Read 1:12-20. What do the images imply about Jesus?**

Lots really.

*like a son of man* - see Daniel 7:13-14

*a golden sash around his chest* - possibly priestly dress.

*head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow*, -holiness - deity

*eyes were like blazing fire*.

*bronze glowing in a furnace*, - the word itself is obscure

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*rushing waters* – see Ezekiel 43:2

*held seven stars*, - relates to the seven churches

*a sharp double-edged sword*. – defense and judgement

*like the sun shining in all its brilliance*. – terrible for foes

*First and the Last*. – again Alpha and Omega

*Living One*; - not a mere ghost or a dream.

*dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!* - Resurrection

*the keys of death and Hades*. - judgement and implied salvation.

My comments mostly come from Leon Morris (TNTC)

Lots written about many of the specifics – best to look at the commentaries.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"John presents a sequence of richly resonant images to convey the overwhelming glory of Christ."*

Barnett: *"That Jesus is to be the focus of the reader's attention throughout the Revelation is made clear by the emphasis given to him in the first part of the 'book'."*

## **Connections**

### **1. What do you need to do to be 'blessed' by God (v3)?**

Read God's word and take it to heart.

Hear, Trust, Obey.

Morris (TNTC): *'This is the first of seven beatitudes scattered through the book (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).'*

**Revelation 1:3** Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

**Revelation 14:13** Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

**Revelation 16:15** "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."



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**Revelation 19:9** Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

**Revelation 20:6** Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

**Revelation 22:7** “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”

**Revelation 22:14** “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

**2. Read Matthew 17:1-6 (Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). How does this chapter relate to the picture of Jesus at his Transfiguration?**

Once again here is a ‘shiny’ Jesus – Jesus revealed as he is in glory.

There is more to this one than the dusty rabbi wandering Galilee with his disciples.

**3. Read Colossians 1:15-20. This is another exalted picture of Jesus. What relationship can you see to this chapter of Revelation?**

Again the truth behind the man, Jesus, is revealed – here in cosmic and breadth of power terms all implied by the imagery in Revelation 1

**4. What does the first word of this book, ‘revelation’, mean about what it contains?**

A revelation is something that is revealed.

This is not a work of John’s imagination (or his nightmares) – This is the Word of God revealed both in words and in ‘visions’ to John to communicate to the Christians of his day and of ours.

There are dire warnings at the end of the book about not taking it seriously.

**5. What does this chapter add to the picture of Jesus we see as the wandering Rabbi in Palestine?**

A few of these questions have been moving towards pointing this out.

In the Matthew studies we see Jesus and his disciples, somewhat put upon, argued with, doubted and falsely accused. While Jesus answers strongly and with truth he is still rejected by many.

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One wonders what the Pharisees would have to say to the image of Jesus we have in Revelation 1.

### **Impact**

- 1. Tim Chester. “Revelation For You”: “What aspects of John’s vision of the risen Christ particularly comfort you? Which of them disturb or challenge you?”**

For discussion.

Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’: *“And his message to them and to us is this: grace and peace. In the midst of hostility and pressure, you can know grace and peace because God the Father is Almighty, because God the Spirit is all-present, and because God the Son is all-conquering.”*

- 2. Jesus is Alpha and Omega (beginning and end). How is He your beginning and end?**

For discussion.

I guess this is an enigmatic question – but what I am trying to get us all to think through is our personal relationship to this mighty one depicted in Revelation 1.

For in reality he is talking to you and not just John and the members of the Seven Churches we are about to visit.

Note this comment from Paul Barnett: *“The Risen One directs John to write (v19) what has been revealed to him:*

*What you have seen (= the circumstances of the seven churches: chapters 2-3).*

*What is (= the reality of God the Almighty and of the Lion/Lamb: chapters 4-5).*

*What is to come (= the things which are yet to occur in history: chapters 6-22).*

Before we proceed it is worth noting a few things about the culture and context of the churches who received these messages.

Paul Barnett writes *“How would the authorities have viewed these Christians? As it happens two of the earliest references from non-Christians to the new faith come from about this time and from the very region to which the Revelation was directed. Neither writer is complimentary about Christianity. Tacitus, the great historian of imperial Rome who became Proconsul of Asia c.*

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*AD 110, said the Christians 'hated the human race' and 'were hated' by the society in which they lived (Annal XV44). His friend Pliny was governor of the adjoining province of Bithynia at that time. In a famous letter to the Emperor Trajan Pliny describes Christianity as an 'insanity', a 'contagion .... a superstition' characterized by 'obstinacy and unbending perversity' (Epistle X). It is not too difficult to imagine how the Christians' steadfast refusal to worship Rome and her emperor would have been seen no negatively by these provincial governors."*

## **Some notes on the Letters to the 7 Asian Churches**

Leon Morris (TNTC) writes: *"There is a general pattern to the letters which we may set out as follows:*

- 1. A greeting: 'To the angel of the church in ...'.*
- 2. A title of the risen Christ, usually taken from the description in chapter 1.*
- 3. A section headed 'I know', introducing praise for what is good in the church's record (not in the case of Laodicea).*
- 4. A criticism of the church (not in the case of Smyrna nor Philadelphia).*
- 5. A warning.*
- 6. An exhortation beginning, 'He who has an ear ...'.*
- 7. A promise beginning with something like 'To him who overcomes I will give ...'. In the last four letters the order of 6 and 7 is reversed.*

*A further pattern is to be discerned in the sevenfold arrangement. Churches 1 and 7 are in grave danger, churches 2 and 6 are in excellent shape, churches 3, 4 and 5 are middling, neither very good nor very bad."*

Kistemaker (Hendriksen-Kistemaker):

*In various ways, chapter 1 is introductory to the seven letters sent to the churches in the province of Asia. Jesus addresses John at Patmos and tells him twice to write letters to the seven churches on the mainland (1:11, 19). He reveals himself as the one who is the First and the Last, who is the living one who suffered death but is alive, and who has ultimate authority over Death and Hades. Also every letter following the address to each church has an opening line that is taken from the description of Jesus that John has recorded, Each of the seven churches presents a different aspect of Jesus' appearance, power, and authority.*

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<b>Church</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Appearance of Jesus</b>
<i>Ephesus</i> (1:16, 13)	2:1	<i>Seven stars in his right hand; the golden lampstands</i>
<i>Smyrna</i>	2:8	<i>First and Last, who died and came to life again (1:17–18)</i>
<i>Pergamum</i>	2:12	<i>The double-edged sword (1:16)</i>
<i>Thyatira</i>	2:18	<i>Eyes as blazing fire; feet as burnished bronze (1:14–15)</i>
<i>Sardis</i>	3:1	<i>Seven spirits and seven stars (1:4, 16)</i>
<i>Philadelphia</i>	3:7	<i>Holding the key (1:18)</i>
<i>Laodicea</i>	3:14	<i>Faithful witness (1:5)</i>

Tim Chester - 'Revelation For You': *"The seven messages are closely linked to the rest of the book. They all start with images from the vision of chapter 1, and they all close with a promise of reward drawn from the rest of the book (2:7 = 22:2. 2:11 = 20:6. 2:17 = 14:1; 22:4. 2:26-28 = 19:15; 22:16. 3:5 = 20:12. 3:12 = 14:1; 21:2, 22. 3:21 = 20:11; 22:3.)"*

## Study 2: Revelation 2:1-7

### 8 Churches: Ephesus – Lost Love.

*“Ephesus was the gateway to Asia Minor. Much of the region’s trade passed through its port. A wide road lined with columns on both sides ran from the city down to the harbour. The refinements and enticements of the empire were on full display in Ephesus—just like the posters that line our streets and the adverts that fill our screens.”* From Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You.’

#### Before You Start

**Discuss what you know of Ephesus from other Biblical material.**

Other than Jerusalem, Ephesus is the most prominent city in the New Testament. It is founded during Paul’s Second Missionary Journey and then visited by Paul at least twice later. (Acts 18, 19, 20) It has the Ephesians letter written to it, it is the location of Timothy’s ministry.

*If Ephesus in the New Testament takes your fancy Reg Piper (a former Senior Minister in Kiama and Bishop of Wollongong) has written a set of 40 (Lenten or others wise) studies on Ephesus. Piper, Reg: Ephesus and the New Humanity (Sydney South, Anglican Press Australia, 2010).*

#### Listen Carefully to Revelation 2:1-7

(You will notice that the first 5 questions of this and the next 6 studies are the same. This is because of the very similar structure (though not content) of these 7 Letters.)

#### The Text

##### 1. Who speaks? How is He described?

Jesus – who holds seven stars (1:16) and walks among the lampstands (1:13)

##### 2. What is ‘known’?

Their deeds, hard work, perseverance (twice), don’t tolerate the wicked, tested false prophets, endured hardships, not wearied.

Hate the Nicolaitan practices (v6)

##### 3. What criticism is there?

Forsaken their first love.

##### 4. What warning is given?

Remember where they came from – Repent

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Or the lampstand goes – the church is lost – I take it.

Hendriksen: *“The threat ‘or else I come to thee and will move thy lampstand out of its place’, was fulfilled. There is today no church in Ephesus. The place itself is a ruin.”*

**5. What promise is given to those who overcome?**

Eating from the tree of life in paradise.

Note Genesis 3:22-23. What had been separated from mankind by impressive security guards will now be made freely available to those who persevere in Jesus.

**Connections**

**1. What is the Ephesians strength?**

Basically, it seems to be endurance through working at their faith.

**2. What does it mean to have ‘forsaken your first love’?**

It is worth noting that this church was more than 40 years old by the time this letter arrived. A new generation has arisen in the normal course of church life who were not from that intense period of the first preaching of the gospel in Ephesus. (See Acts 18, 19 and 20)

Johnson (EBC): *“The speaker’s verdict shows that, however much had been gained at Ephesus by resisting the false apostles, not all was well there. They had “forsaken,” or “let go” (aphiēmi,), their “first love.” This was a serious defect. If uncorrected it would result in their loss of light bearing (v. 5). The majority of commentators take the first love to refer to the original Christian love the Ephesians had for one another. ... Other commentators see the “first love” as a reference to the inner devotion to Christ that characterized their earlier commitment, like the love of a newly wedded bride for her husband. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the letters to the other churches reveal problems of inner betrayal to Christ. Neither view necessarily eliminates the other. Loving devotion to Christ can be lost in the midst of active service, and certainly no amount of orthodoxy can make up for a failure to love one another. “First” love would suggest that they still loved, but with a quality and intensity unlike that of their initial love.”*

I am inclined to the latter view. Although to have lost love for Christ would well issue in loss of love for others.

Either way this is warning for us.

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**3. We have little idea who the Nicolaitans were or what they did.  
However, what practices do you think God hates?**

The first and foremost is the worship of anything in addition to or instead of God Himself.

Morris (TNTC) notes: *“While love is the typical Christian attitude, love for the good carries with it a corresponding hatred for what is wrong. ‘Neither doth he abhor anything that is evil’ (Ps. 36:4, Prayer Book version) is a terrible condemnation. Notice that it is the practices and not the persons which are the objects of hatred.”*

**4. What characteristics of the Ephesian Church should we emulate?**  
Steadfastness, hard work, zeal for the truth.

**Impact**

**1. What about our church is similar to the church in Ephesus?**

For discussion

**2. How can you put the criticisms, praises, and encouragements in this letter to work in your day to day Christian life?**

For discussion.

I suspect the first thing to ask ourselves is the ‘first love’ question.

Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’: *“How can they rekindle this passion?*

*By looking back. “Consider how far you have fallen!” (v 5). They’re to remember the enthusiasm they had when they first became Christians. They’re to remember God’s goodness to them on the cross and in their own experience.*

*By looking ahead. Verse 7 looks forward to John’s vision of the new Jerusalem (22:1-5). If Christians “come out” of the system of the world (18:4-5), where can they go? John’s answer is the new Jerusalem. The lampstands in the tabernacle were designed to look like the tree of life (Genesis 2:9; Exodus 25:31-36). Instead of having their lampstand removed (Revelation 2:5), the Ephesians are “offered the real thing—the tree of life (v 7).”*

For this and the next 6 studies you may want to start a chart like this\*:

CHURCH AT:	Positives	Negatives	Encouragements
<i>Ephesus</i>			

\*A full-page version below.

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***Summary Chart for the 7 Churches in Revelation 2-3***

CHURCH AT:	Positives	Negatives	Encouragements
<i>Ephesus</i>			
<i>Smyrna</i>			
<i>Pergamum</i>			
<i>Thyatira</i>			
<i>Sardis</i>			
<i>Philadelphia</i>			
<i>Laodicea</i>			



## Study 3: Revelation 2:8-11

### 8 Churches: Smyrna – Suffering Saints.

*“Smyrna (now Izmir) had an excellent harbour, flourishing trade and a beautiful city. In AD 26 Smyrna successfully competed against eleven other cities to be the host city for a new temple to deify the Emperor Tiberius. As a result it became a centre of the imperial cult.”* From Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You.’

#### Before You Start

**As a Church are we rich or are we poor? Discuss.**

For discussion.

#### Listen Carefully to Revelation 2:8-11

#### The Text

##### 1. Who speaks? How is He described?

Jesus speaks

He is First and Last (1:17), and died and came to life again (1-18)

Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’: *“Smyrna had been destroyed in the sixth century BC and then rebuilt in 280 BC; it had died and come back to life. Now Jesus writes as the one “who died and came to life again” (v 8).”*

##### 2. What is ‘known’?

Jesus knows their ‘afflictions’ and their poverty.

The word for poverty conveys the idea of ‘nothing at all’.

Barnett: *“Jesus knows of the poverty (v9) of the Smyrnaean Christians, something that was in stark contrast with the visible affluence of the city. In end-times terms, however, they were rich (v9).”*

Hendriksen: *“What a comfort for these persecuted believers to realise that their Lord ‘knows all this’.”*

##### 3. What criticism is there?????

None at all.

Bewes: *“There is no corrective word from Christ to this Church, no apparent defect. In Christianity, suffering, and blessing go together. Smyrna was beautiful.”*

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Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"Unlike the rest of these messages, there is no word of complaint—just pastoral encouragement for struggling Christians."*

**4. What warning is given?**

The warning, if it is one, is not to be afraid in their suffering.

**5. What promise is given to those who overcome?**

In v10 they are promised the crown of life, then in the 'overcome' phrase they will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Barnett: *"One of Smyrna's emblems was the crown, making very appropriate the promise to the one who overcomes 'I will give you the crown of life' (v10)"*

Morris (TNTC): *"The overcomer will not be harmed by the second death (explained in 20:6, 14; 21:8 in terms of the lake of fire; it seems to mean eternal punishment, the negation of eternal life). Not is an emphatic double negative. The overcomer will certainly not be harmed. The emphasis would be welcome to those who faced the prospect of martyrdom."*

**Connections**

**1. What does I know 'your poverty-yet you are rich' mean? How is that a comfort?**

On first reading it sounds like one of those phrases of cold comfort.

BUT God's comforts are never cold.

Morris (TNTC): *"The poverty of the Smyrneans was extreme. Yet Christ can say you are rich (contrast 3:17). There is a richness in spiritual things which has nothing to do with this world's wealth. Many think that the Smyrneans' poverty was in part due to pillage of their goods by the Jews. Christianity was not legally permitted, which made it easy for Jews or pagans to take action against believers."*

**2. 'Do not be afraid' in verse 10 seems to preface some very scary stuff. Why shouldn't they be afraid? Note Revelation 1:17; Matthew 10:26.**

We encountered this phrase in the Matthew Studies and in Revelation 1:

**Matthew 10:26** "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

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**Revelation 1:17** When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

It is a common theme in Scripture:

*Genesis 15:1      After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "**Do not be afraid**, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*

*Exodus 14:13      Moses answered the people, "**Do not be afraid**. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.*

*Deuteronomy 1:21 See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. **Do not be afraid**; do not be discouraged."*

*1Samuel 12:20      "**Do not be afraid**," Samuel replied. "You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.*

*Isaiah 44:8          Do not tremble, **do not be afraid**.*

*Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?*

*You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?*

*No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."*

### **3. How is this church being slandered?**

It is being slandered by the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna.

This is of course, reminiscent of the way Jesus is treated in Matthew 11-12 and the way he says his disciples will be treated in Matthew 10. In fact, Smyrna's situation is a fairly close fit to what Jesus says about persecution in that chapter.

### **4. Who is the comforter in all this?**

Jesus is the comforter – His Spirit goes with them. They are assured of ultimate victory.

## **Impact**

### **1. What about our church is similar to the church in Smyrna?**

For discussion.

Though I suspect poor but rich is not the description that fits us.

One trusts the opposite is not true. There is certainly a warning there.

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**2. How can you put the criticisms, praises, and encouragements in this letter to work in your day to day Christian life?**

Again, for discussion.

The rich poor thing certainly needs thinking about personally as well as corporately.

Note this story: (Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You') *"It's very possible that one of John's original readers in the church at Smyrna was a young man called Polycarp. In 115 Polycarp became the Bishop of Smyrna, and Irenaeus says Polycarp was a disciple of John. In the middle of the second century, Polycarp was arrested for refusing to burn incense to the emperor. Invited to renounce Christ, he replied:*

*"Eighty and six years I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked. "*

*Polycarp was burnt and, when the fires did not take hold, speared to death. He died "victorious", confident he would "not be hurt at all by the second death" (v 11)."*

## Study 4: Revelation 2:12-17

### 8 Churches: Pergamum – Fornicating Faction.

*“Jesus begins by telling the church at Pergamum that he knows where they live. In other words, he understands the pressures (v 13) and temptations (v 14-16) they face. And “where you live” is also “where Satan lives” (v 13).*

*Pergamum was a religious centre, full of pagan temples dominated by a massive altar to Zeus on the hill above the city. The first ever temple in honour of a living emperor, Emperor Augustus, was built at Pergamum in 29 BC. This may explain the reference to Pergamum being where Satan lives and has his throne (v 13). It also had a temple to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, whose symbol was a snake, echoing Satan (12:9).” From Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’*

#### Before You Start

How should a church deal with those in its midst who obviously sin?

#### Listen Carefully to Revelation 2:12-17

#### The Text

##### 1. Who speaks? How is He described?

Jesus.

He is the one with the sharp double-edged sword.

##### 2. What is ‘known’?

He knows where they live ....

And the character of the place:

It is where Satan has his throne.

Barnett: *“Such is the concentration of emperor-worship in Pergamum that Jesus says that it is where Satan lives (v13).”*

And see the Tim Chester comment above.

Stayed ‘true’ in the face of deadly persecution.

##### 3. What criticism is there?

Some have given into temptation like the Israelites in the desert in the time of Balaam. Morris (TNTC) notes: *“Balaam (see on v. 6) was the man who, after being prevented from cursing Israel, apparently advised Balak, king of Moab that the Israelites would forfeit God’s protection if*

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*he could induce them to worship idols (Num. 31:16)”*

Both the food bit and the sexual immorality could be related to idolatrous practices.

And then there is the Nicolaitans again. It is possible their teaching was a bit like Balaam's.

**4. What warning is given?**

REPENT – turn around.

Otherwise they will understand what the sword (sharp, double edged) is for.

Morris (TNTC): *“The sword of my mouth clearly means the words Christ speaks. This saying is either a comfort and a strength, or else it destroys us.”*

**5. What promise is given to those who overcome?**

Some of the hidden manna and a white stone with a new secret name.

The Manna: Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *“Manna was the food God gave his people in the wilderness. Better than food offered to idols (a symbol of participation in idolatry) is God's feast of manna (a symbol of participation in Jesus). See Isaiah 55:1-2 and especially John 6:31-35.”*

The stone: Morris (TNTC): *“We simply do not know what the white stone signified, though clearly it did convey some assurance of blessing”* and Barnett: *“The white stone may have been a 'ticket' giving admission to the gladiatorial games where, perhaps, Antipas gave his life for Jesus. The faithful will each have such a 'stone' but with his or her own name on it, guaranteeing them access to the presence of God.”*

The name: Keener (NIVAC): *“The new name alludes here to Isaiah 56:5 and especially 62:2, which promises that God will give his people a new name, removing their shame (62:4); this fits the time of the new Jerusalem and new creation (65:15–19). The new name may represent a new description of a person's identity (cf. Rev. 3:1, 5), but in the context of Revelation more likely the hidden name of God (3:12; cf. 2:13; 3:8; Isa. 43:1) and the Lamb (14:1; 19:12–13, 16), which they will bear forever (22:4).”*

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## Connections

1. What is the importance of the double mention of the ‘sword’ (v12, v16)?

Keener (NIVAC): “The image of the “sword” may allude to the Roman government’s *ius gladii*, the right to execute capital punishment, in which case Jesus is reminding Christians that he, not the Roman governor, holds the power of life and death (1:18)<sup>2</sup> Such words would encourage the persecuted (2:13). Yet this letter focuses on false teachers in the church, so the “sword” may refer to the judgment of war, as often in the biblical prophets—but here with reference to the Lord Jesus, who will war against false teachers corrupting his church (2:15–16).”

2. “Where Satan lives”? Discuss where Satan lives in our world and culture.

For discussion.

3. To what sins is ‘Balaam’ tempting the Pergamumites? How do they relate to our culture and lives today?

Compromised values and sexual impropriety.

Very much a 21<sup>st</sup> Century phenomenon as it was a 1<sup>st</sup> Century one.

4. “*The warnings against intimate relations with unbelievers (Ps. 1:1; Prov. 13:20) caution against imbibing the world’s values, not against being with others to promote Christ’s values (Matt. 11:18–19; Luke 15:1–2).*” (Keener) Discuss?

The verses:

**Psalms 1:1** *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.*

**Proverbs 13:20** *He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.*

**Matthew 11:18** *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon.”<sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners’.” But wisdom is proved right by her actions.*

**Luke 15:1** *Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear him.<sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and*

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*eats with them.”*

Discuss!

Keener (NIVAC): *“A warning against assimilation. Although the issue of persecution is central to Revelation, those who emphasize that the book as a whole warns against assimilation with the world are also correct. As one scholar notes, “The Apocalypse of John has pastoral relevance in any context where Christian assimilation into a culture with a non-Christian ethos is an issue.””*

**Impact**

**1. What about our church is similar to the church in Pergamum?**

For discussion.

**2. How can you put the criticisms, praises, and encouragements in this letter to work in your day to day Christian life?**

For discussion



## Study 5: Revelation 2:18-27

### 8 Churches: Thyatira – Compromising Christians.

*“Lydia, the first convert in Philippi, was ‘a dealer in purple cloth’ and ‘from the city of Thyatira’ (Acts 16:14). It was a commercial centre with many trade guilds. Revelation 2:20 talks about ‘the eating of food sacrificed to idols’.”*  
From Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’

#### Before You Start

**In our present circumstances what temptations are there for the church to compromise?**

For discussion.

We have had the debates around abortion, same-sex marriage and of course the whole child abuse debacle.

#### Listen Carefully to Revelation 2:18-27

Morris TNTC): *“The longest of the seven letters is written to the church in the smallest and least important town! The values of God are not the values of men.”*

#### The Text

##### 1. Who speaks? How is He described?

Jesus - The Son of God.

Morris (TNTC): *“This is the one letter to use the title the Son of God, indeed the one place where it occurs in Revelation.”*

Eyes like blazing fire / feet like burnished bronze (see 1:14-15)

##### 2. What is ‘known’?

Jesus knows ‘your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.’

What a commendation!

##### 3. What criticism is there?

There is however a ‘nevertheless’

The problem is the woman ‘Jezebel’ who like the Balaam in the previous letter is leading the Christians astray to idolatrous practices and sexual

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immorality.

Barnett: *“Satan’s deep secrets (v24) ... sound like secret initiatory rites of an immoral religious cult.”*

**4. What warning is given?**

Very stern warnings with consequences to Jezebel and those who follow her.

More positive warnings to those who have not followed her – a simple ‘hold on to what you have (v25) and do Jesus’ will (v26).

**5. What promise is given to those who overcome?**

Rule with Jesus and ....

Barnett: *“The one who overcomes in Thyatira and does Jesus’ will to the end is promised, in the Language of Psalm 2, to share with the Son of God in his kingly rule and authority over the nations (v 26-27). This is the unimaginable rule exercised by those who remain true to Jesus over those who oppress them. It is the triumph of goodness, hoe, and courage in the face of malice and evil and it was exemplified in the manner of Jesus’ own death”*

The morning star.

Morris (TNTC): *“The gift of the morning star might be a further token of triumph. Or it may be a symbol of the Christian’s resurrection. But as Christ is himself referred to as ‘the bright Morning Star’ (22:16) it is likely that it is the presence of the Lord that is meant. Even though this is an unusual way for Christ to refer to himself this seems the best way of taking the words. The ultimate reward of the Christian is to be with his Lord.”*

Interestingly in the OT Balaam did speak (Numbers 24:17ff) of a ‘star’ that would arise from among God’s people and rule the nations.

Hendriksen: *“By and by the tables are going to be turned. At present the world oppresses the church member who desires to keep a clear conscience. By and by the Church member who remains loyal to his Lord is going to rule over the world ... ”*

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## Connections

### 1. Who is Jezebel and what is she doing, and what are the consequences for her and all who 'follow' her?

'Jezebel' seems to be a church member with some 'funny' (not really, just wicked) ideas who is tolerated in the church family but is doing almost irreparable harm.

Keener (NIVAC): *"Like 'Balaam,' this false prophetess receives a nickname undoubtedly not of her own choosing. Jesus' title for her, 'Jezebel,' immediately calls to mind multiple associations. The biblical Jezebel was not a 'prophetess,' but sponsored 850 false prophets (1 Kings 18:19; Josephus, Ant. 8.318); she also sought to take the lives of God's true prophets (1 Kings 18:13; 19:2). She is never accused of literal harlotry, but she sponsored spiritual harlotry by leading Israel away from its God (2 Kings 9:22, where her religious activity is also compared with witchcraft; cf. Rev. 9:21; 18:23). Babylon the prostitute later in this book is probably modeled partly on 'Jezebel,' Thyatira's local embodiment of the larger system of 'Babylon,' because she advocated participation in local civic and commercial life even where they demanded compromise with paganism."*

### 2. What is the problem with 'tolerating' (v20) her?

The 'virus' spreads.

### 3. In v19 what is the contrast here between Ephesus (see 2:4) and Thyatira? What warning and encouragement is there here for us?

Ephesus, we are told, has lost its first love; Thyatira is 'doing more than you did at first'.

Morris (TNTC): *"There is progress in the life of this church, which forms a contrast to Ephesus where the church has just been blamed for having slipped back (v. 4). There is much to commend at Thyatira."*

The warning for us is to look to how we are doing is our church losing its 'love' or powering on.

### 4. Note v25. How do we do this?

'Hold on, Help is on its way'; so sang the Little River Band. This could be seen as a theme of the entire book of Revelation.

However, it seems to me that in order to 'hold on' you need to know what you have to hold on to. For those in Thyatira and for us, as we serve Jesus, it is the truths of the Gospel and God's revelation of himself

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that we need to hold on to.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"The point is clear: people offering 'advanced' teaching can sound impressive, but Christians are to remain faithful to the gospel."*

**Impact**

**1. What about our church is similar to the church in Thyatira?**

One hopes we can see reflections of ourselves in v19.

Holding on requires effort.

**2. How can you put the criticisms, praises, and encouragements in this letter to work in your day to day Christian life?**

For discussion.

Prayer and Bible Reading are always a great start to 'holding on.'.

## Study 6: Revelation 3:1-6

### 8 Churches: Sardis – Sinful Slumber

*“The city of Sardis was surrounded on three sides by cliffs, so its residents felt their city was impregnable. It seems the church suffered from the same complacency. Jesus has to wake them up (Revelation 3:2). Jesus says nothing to commend the church. Not that the church is without people who commend it: it has “a reputation for being alive”. “It’s a lively congregation,” we might say, “with a full program, healthy budget and impressive website”. But in reality it was dead (v 1). Christ says: “I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of God” (v 2). The same idea appears in 2 Corinthians 4:2, where Paul talks of carrying out his work “in the sight of my God”. What matters is not impressive rhetoric or a glossy image but authentic service in God’s sight.”*

From Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’

#### Before You Start

**How easy is it to ‘fall asleep’ in our Christian lives?**

For discussion.

What does ‘asleep’ mean? Can you be ‘half asleep’?

#### Listen Carefully to Revelation 3:1-6

Keener (NIVAC): *“This letter addresses Sardis, a ‘dead’ church (3:1). Jesus’ oracle to Ephesus challenges a loveless church; his oracle to Smyrna encourages a persecuted church; his oracle to Pergamum addresses both persecution and compromise; his oracle to Thyatira challenges compromise. But Jesus’ word to Sardis summons a sleeping church to wake up.”*

#### The Text

##### 1. Who speaks? How is he described?

Jesus.

Who holds the seven spirits of God

And the seven stars.

Morris (TNTC): *“The seven spirits of God may denote the Holy Spirit (see on 1:4), and the form of expression seems to show that Christ gives the Spirit. The seven stars are the ‘angels’ of the churches (1:20) and they appear here in Christ’s control. After this reminder of the dignity of the risen Christ there is a sharp condemnation of the church at Sardis.”*

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**2. What is 'known'?**

Their deeds are known.

By reputation they are 'alive' –

Barnett: *"It is significant that no hint is given in this letter of either external oppression or of internal compromise through false teaching. We would expect that, in these circumstances, the Sardian Christians would have attracted the commendation of Jesus. But this is not the case. In point of fact no church is so sharply rebuked as the church at Sardis. Despite their 'reputation for being alive' the reality was that they were 'dead'(v1)."*

Hendriksen: *"Sardis enjoyed a good reputation but it did not deserve this reputation."*

But what Jesus knows is that they are in fact - dead.

Jesus sees beyond reputation and the glossy exterior.

BUT note also v4 – Jesus also 'knows' the faithful ones.

**3. What criticism is there?**

'You are dead' – seems comprehensive enough.

**4. What warning is given?**

Wake UP - Remember, hear, obey repent.

Bewes: *"There is a way back from dead formalism -for a church or for an individual. It is the way taken by the Prodigal Son of our Lord's parable. Remember .... Repent (v3). Can you remember those early days of enthusiasm for the things of God, for the Church, for prayer and the Bible? Let the memory trigger you into turning around in repentance. It means a U-turn."*

If they don't Jesus will come.

Morris (TNTC): *"Remember (mnēmoneue) is a present imperative with the meaning 'bear in mind' (rather than 'recall'). What is rather 'how' and refers to the manner of their hearing of the gospel, while received and heard point to its derivative nature. Obey (better 'keep', as RSV) is present imperative and enjoins a continuing activity, while repent (aorist) is urgent. If the church does not watch, Christ will come to it like a thief. This proverbial expression for unexpectedness (Matt. 24:43; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10) is further emphasized with you will not know at what time I will come to you. This is not a reference to the second coming, which will*

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*take place whether the Sardians are watchful or not. But Christ comes in many ways and this is clearly a limited coming in judgment on unrepentant sinners. Their fate is none the less fearsome because left undefined."*

**5. What promise is given to those who overcome?**

They will be dressed in white and their names stay in the book of life and they are acknowledged before the Father.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"Those who acknowledge Christ now will be acknowledged by Christ when he returns (Revelation 3:5-6; Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8)."*

**Connections**

**1. What is the problem with their reputation? What warning is there here for all churches?**

All talk but no walk.

Remember from our Matthew studies the warning in the little parable about the demons and the empty house (Matthew 12:43-45.) Those at Sardis had what looked like a 'clean house' but ....

The warning is against complacency.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"Sardis had a reputation for bad character, and it seemed that, despite their good image, the church had compromised with the culture of the city. G. B. Caird calls the church "the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity" (A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine, page 48). Is your Christianity inoffensive? If so, Jesus says to you, "Wake up!"*

**2. Remember! (v3) Calls the reader to do what specifically?**

Morris (TNTC): *"Remember (mnēmoneue) is a present imperative with the meaning 'bear in mind' (rather than 'recall')."*

As a church the background we (and the church as Sardis) need is there, the gospel has been revealed to us, the nature of obedience is clear. We need to wake UP, and do it.

**3. Read Romans 13:11-12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11. What is the antidote to sleepiness?**

Keener (NIVAC): *"All the churches are invited to learn from Jesus' warnings to the others (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), and the exhortation to "watch" or "wake up" (3:2) applies to all (16:15; cf. 1 Thess. 5:2). We*

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*can apply this to everyone, for we must all be ready for the Lord's return or judgment. But we should apply the point of the text most securely where analogies are closest, so that the warning to "wake up" is especially relevant to sleeping churches—that is, to those that are guided more by their culture than by Jesus' voice or any sense of future reckoning before him."*

**4. At this stage let's consider what "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (v6 in this one) means and how do we do it?**

Of course, this phrase is repeated in each of the 7 letters.

It is not an uncommon warning in the Scriptures.

Matthew 11:15 (Again a link to our previous studies in Matthew);  
Matthew 13:9; Matthew 13:43; Mark 4:9; Mark 4:23; Luke 8:8  
(these are all about parables); Luke 14:35; Revelation 13:9;  
Revelation 22:17 (Not exactly these words – but relevant).

Also note Ezekiel 12:2; Isaiah 6:9–10; Jeremiah 5:21.

It is important to note that 'churches' is plural. The quite obvious implication being that all of these letters were to be read to each of the seven churches and thus, through the preserving work of the Holy Spirit, be passed down to us and our church.

**Impact**

**1. What about our church is similar to the church in Sardis?**

For discussion.

I trust we are more about v4 than v1b. – But we need to be honest and the Wake Up Call is relevant to us all.

**2. How can you put the criticisms, praises, and encouragements in this letter to work in your day to day Christian life?**

For discussion.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"Is your Christianity inoffensive? If so, Jesus says to you, "Wake up!"*



## Study 7: Revelation 3:7-13

### 8 Churches: Philadelphia – Persevering Pillars

*“It seems the Christians in the church at Philadelphia have been excluded from Jewish community life. Jesus says the local synagogue belongs to Satan. The leaders of the synagogue may be ethnically Jewish, but they are no longer the true people of God (Revelation 3:9; see 2:9). The church in Philadelphia is said to have “little strength” (3:8). In other words, it is small, unimportant and poor. But, despite its weakness, it has remained faithful.”*

From: Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’

#### Before You Start

**Discuss what are the main challenges to us persevering as Christians.**

For discussion.

I think one of the strongest is the everyday humdrum of life that in so many ways contradicts what it means to be Christian.

(Significantly, I wrote the previous sentence before the COVID 19 restrictions hit us. It is worth give very thoughtful consideration to what additional pressures the isolation, stress and uncertainty have applied to us not just in our normal lives but also in our Christian walk,)

#### Listen Carefully to Revelation 3:7-13

#### The Text

##### 1. Who speaks? How is he described?

Jesus.

He is holy and true.

Morris (TNTC): *“Holy denotes connection with deity (cf. Isa. 40:25; Hab. 3:3). It is used widely throughout the New Testament. True (alēthinos) is not often applied to people, either in the New Testament or elsewhere. It indicates that Christ is completely reliable.”*

And he holds the key of David.

Morris (TNTC): *“... Probably it is admission to the city of David, the heavenly Jerusalem, that is in mind, and this Christ alone gives or withholds.”*

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**2. What is 'known'?**

Their deeds which result in the 'open door' (remember Jesus has the keys).

That they have 'little strength' but still have withstood persecution

**3. What criticism is there????!**

As at Smyrna – none.

Instead they are assured that the Jews who are involved in their persecution will one day “fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.”

Barnett: *“Punishment by the Roman authorities for failure to participate in the emperor-cult appears to have arisen as a direct result of Jewish complaints and reports to the local officials.”*

**4. What warning is given?**

More a reminder than a warning. Jesus says – ‘I am coming soon.’

They are to hold on to what they have so they can keep their ‘corona’ (not the beer, not the virus but their Jesus given ‘crown’).

Hendriksen: *“Notice that divine protection – ‘I will also keep thee’ – and human exertion – ‘hold fast to that which thou hast’ – go hand in hand.”* (Hendriksen uses the King James Version.)

**5. What promise is given to those who overcome?**

Well “I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”

Barnett on being made a pillar: *“by analogy with the time-honoured practice of dedicating a commemorative pillar in a temple in honour of a local citizen, Jesus will make the one who overcomes ‘a pillar in the temple of God’ ... ”*

Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’: *“Jesus will include his people (Revelation 3:11-13). The Christians were excluded from Jewish community life. But Jesus will make them part of a new temple in a new Jerusalem. They will be pillars—and no one can budge a pillar!*

*Today Christians can often feel they are left out—of friendships, peer groups, office banter; or missing out—on possessions, sex, success,*

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*promotion. But whatever we miss out on, Jesus promises much more in return (Luke 18:29-30)."*

**Connections**

- 1. What does it mean, 'to persevere'?**
- 2. "I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name." (v8) What does this have to say to us about the Christian's strength?**

Keener (NIVAC): *"That the Christians have little power (3:8) counts in their favor before God; power is easily abused, but weakness often leads to dependence on God's power. Although theologians debate some of the more radical proposals of liberation theologians, one insight of liberation theology clearly draws on the biblical perspective: God's special concern for the broken. God promises to live with and embrace especially the broken and humble, just as he is far from the proud and self-sufficient (Ps. 51:17; Isa. 57:15; 66:2; James 4:6). Each of us comes from a different background, some with more advantages and some with less, but God judges us not on what power we start with, but on what we do with what he has given us."*

Tim Keller says of Jesus: *"He did not come strong to bring judgment; he came weak to bear judgement."*

- 3. Note v11. What warning and encouragement is there in this verse (and v12)?**

Keener (NIVAC): *"Despite Jesus' praises for the Philadelphian Christians' perseverance to this point, however, "it's not over till it's over." They must continue to hold fast what they have (3:11), that is, to continue to keep the message that demands their perseverance (3:10), lest their persecutors seize from them their crown (3:11; cf. 2:25). The "crown" is a victor's wreath appropriate to overcomers (see comments on 2:10, where the crown of life contrasts with the second death in 2:11), and losing it means roughly the same as the warning to the preceding church: exclusion from the kingdom (3:5)."*

- 4. What is it that is attractive about being 'a pillar in the temple of my God'? What will happen there?**

Keener (NIVAC): *"That Christians will participate eternally in God's temple indicates that we will always live in his presence (cf. 21:3, 22-25). Revelation is full of allusions to the heavenly temple: the ark (11:19), the tabernacle (15:5), the altars of incense and sacrifice (6:9; 8:3-5; 9:13),*

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*the sea (4:6; 15:2; cf. 1 Kings 7:23–25, 39, 44)—and of course the lampstands (1:12–13; 2:1, 5). Because throughout Revelation heaven appears as a temple and the primary focus of its activity is worship, we also recognize that our function in God’s temple will include worship. Never are we as close to our eternal destiny as when we are glorifying God by worship or by inviting others to recognize his greatness. Of course, worship is not merely what often passes for it in our churches; we can easily mistake a sense of awe in majestic hymns or a sense of excitement in familiar praise choruses for worship, while ignoring the true object of worship to which such songs summon us. Worship involves recognizing God’s and Christ’s true identity and work (cf. 5:9–10, 12), so that we are in awe of not merely sublime sounds but of the Lord himself. When we know what God is truly like, we cannot withhold the honor due him.”*

**Impact**

- 1. What about our church is similar to the church in Philadelphia?**
- 2. How can you put the criticisms, praises, and encouragements in this letter to work in your day to day Christian life?**

## Study 8: Revelation 3:14-22

### 8 Churches: Laodicea – Prosperous Paupers

*“The city of Laodicea was famous for three things. First, it was a banking centre. With that wealth came a spirit of independence. When the city was devastated by an earthquake in AD 61, it refused imperial help. Second, it was a medical centre famous for its eye ointment. Third, it was a clothing centre famous for tunics made from local black wool.”*

From: Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’

#### Before You Start

**Discuss, again, what it means to be rich and to be poor.**

For discussion/consideration.

#### Listen Carefully to Revelation 3:14-22

#### The Text

##### 1. Who speaks? How is he described?

Jesus, still.

He is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.

Morris (TNTC): *“This is the one letter in which the titles of Christ are not drawn from the description in chapter 1. They stress his faithfulness and his authority. The Amen reflects ‘the God of truth’ (lit. ‘the God of Amen’, Isa. 65:16) and is reinforced with the faithful and true witness (cf. 1:5). This reliability stands in sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of the Christians in this city. Ruler (archē) combines the thoughts that Christ has the supreme authority over creation and that he is the origin of created being (cf. John 1:3; Col. 1:15–18).”*

##### 2. What is ‘known’?!??

Being lukewarm (neither cold nor hot)

Repeated four times.

That is the basic problem.

Barnett: *“Like its counterpart in Sardis the church of Laodicea does not appear to have been troubled either by the external pressures of the emperor-cult nor by the distractions caused internally by false teachers. The problem in Laodicea was that the quality of church life did not match the church’s high opinion of itself. The church at Laodicea was mediocre, as lukewarm and vomit-inducing as the water from the hot springs in*

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*nearby Hierapolis.”*

**3. What criticism is there?**

Then, v17, ‘You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.’

They are making false and extravagant claims about themselves.

Including their claim of self-sufficiency.

They are self-deluded.

Given the city’s reputation for banking, eye salves, and wool garments the condemnation “poor, blind and naked” is even more chilling.

Wilcock (BST): *“‘If only you were cold or hot!’—what more terrible condemnation could there be of a church’s condition, than that the Lord would prefer even a cold Christianity to the sort he actually finds in her?”*

**4. What warning is given?**

Jesus is going to spit them out of his mouth.

Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’: *“Jesus is saying, in effect, I feel sick when I think about your church.”*

But there is counsel – v18

Morris (TNTC): *“For this threefold deficiency the remedy is in Christ. From him they should buy gold refined in the fire (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7), real wealth. White clothes should be seen against the city’s reputation for making clothing from black wool. Nakedness was in the ancient world the ultimate humiliation (cf. 2 Sam. 10:4; Isa. 20:4; Ezek. 16:37–39; Nah. 3:5; etc.), while contrariwise to be clothed in fine clothing was to receive honour (Gen. 41:42; Esth. 6:6–11; Dan. 5:29). The putting of salve on the eyes may allude to the fact that there was a world-famous remedy for sore eyes which came from Phrygia and may have been especially associated with Laodicea. Christ alone gives real sight (cf. John 9:39).”*

So v19. – Note that they are still seen as those Jesus loves.

Then (v20) Jesus is there waiting for their repentance.

Forgiveness and fellowship are still possible. (No social-distancing here – if they repent.)

Hendriksen: *“Even Christ Himself cannot stand them. An emotion, a feeling, is here ascribed to the Lord which is not predicated of Him anywhere else in the Good Book.”* And in a later paragraph: *“Even*

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*though the Lord is thoroughly disgusted with this church because it fails in its duty as a light-bearer, nevertheless there is grace here: wonderful, tender love and admonition."*

**5. What promise is given to those who overcome?**

Nothing less than sharing the throne with Jesus and a seat at the heavenly banquet.

Wilcock (BST) *"Should the church even yet be deaf to his appeal, he addresses himself to its members one by one, for 'when Christ says if any man ... he is appealing to the individual. Even if the church as a whole does not heed the warning the individual may. And to any in the Laodicean church who give evidence of this hoped-for repentance, he promises in verses 20 and 21 perhaps the most majestic reward of all, a seat at the divine banquet and a place on the throne of heaven."*

**Connections**

**1. What is the problem with lukewarm water? With lukewarm Christians?**

They are neither one thing nor another.

Emphasized by repetition in the text.

**2. What is the warning for all ages in v17? And what is the antidote? (v18 see Isaiah 55:1-6)**

Being deluded into thinking one is self-sufficient, independent, have all I need.

The antidote is Christ and it is offered without cost and without purchase limits.

The temptation is only subtly different in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the antidote is still the same – Jesus (clothed in his Word).

**3. Note v20. In this context what is this verse about? Note v19.**

This verse is often used to depict Jesus 'knocking on the door of a person's heart' so that they might become Christian. While the image is attractive and to a certain extent true, it is not what it means in the context here.

Here Jesus is knocking on the door of a 'lukewarm', self-absorbed Christian and asking them to repent.

Barnett: *"It is to this church, perhaps the least attractive of the seven, that Jesus makes his gracious promise to the members. 'I stand at the door and knock' he says ... 'if anyone opens .... I will go in and eat with*

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*him.' Jesus will give to this church and indeed to all others that ask, what it cannot give to itself, namely the qualities of faithfulness and love, which will make it worthy of his name."*

**4. What great privilege does v21 offer?**

Morris TNTC): *"The throne signifies royal honour, and a place with Christ is the highest honour conceivable for a Christian. This is emphasized by likening it to the way Christ is enthroned with the Father (cf. 22:1, 3). 'Just as I overcame' is important. Christ overcame by the way of the cross and this set the pattern for his followers (cf. 12:11). They face grim days. But let them never forget that what seemed Christ's defeat was in fact his victory over the world. They need not fear if they are called upon to suffer, for in that way they too will conquer."*

**Impact**

**1. What about our church is similar to the church in Laodicea?**

Not too much, I hope.

But the warning is there and we are not immune to the virus of 'lukewarmness' and self-sufficiency.

For discussion.

**2. From Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You' *"Which of the seven churches is the closest match to you and your church? Based on his words in Revelation 2 – 3, what might the risen Christ say to your church?"***

An extra question and an interesting exercise.

Bewes: *"'I'm looking for the perfect church,' someone was reputed to have said to the celebrated Baptist preacher, C. H. Spurgeon. – "Well, when you find it," replied Spurgeon, "let me know. But don't join it – or you'll spoil it!"*

**3. How can you put the criticisms, praises, and encouragements in this letter to work in your day to day Christian life?**

For discussion

Hendriksen: *"The epistles describe conditions which occur not in one particular age of Church history, but again and again."*

Note these words from Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"Often in New Testament letters, theology is followed by application. In the*



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*case of Revelation, the application comes first. The words to the seven churches are specific words of application for their situations. Each word ends with a call to be victorious (or overcome, ESV). The rest of the book equips us to overcome as it reveals heaven's perspective on history. But this big picture is applied to the specifics of the "battlefield" of each church in the word to that church. The churches are to remain faithful to Jesus in the face of opposition, false teaching, the attractions of wealth and the desire for social acceptance. The switch from one specific congregation to "the churches" at the end of each message indicates that each message is for all churches. .... Your address is in the "CC" line."*

### **JESUS AND HIS PROMISE TO THE CHURCHES**

Against the pretentious claims of Domitian Caesar and his local provincial representatives the risen Christ addresses his churches in Asia in the following terms. He is the First and the Last who died and came to life, the Son of God with flaming eyes and feet of burnished bronze, the I AM who searches mind and heart, the Holy ONE, the True One with the key of David, the Faithful and True Witness, and the Beginning of God's creation. He has fought and won his great battle in crucifixion and resurrection: now he is seated in triumph with this Father on his throne. How petty and small the merely human emperor is next to this majestic figure.

He calls his churches to repent of lovelessness, of mediocrity, of false teaching and of godless behavior. Repeatedly he exhorts their members to resist the extreme pressure to bow the knee to the emperor and the gods in the worship of the pagan temples in the cities. ... On each occasion he encourages them to conquer, to win through, as he has, against powerful opposition. To those who do triumph against these forces he promises the fruit of the tree of life, deliverance from the second death (=hell), and a sharing in his rule over the nations. These great promises are expanded upon in the vision of the New Jerusalem in chapters 21-22.

**Barnett, P, Revelation – Apocalypse Now and Then  
(Reading the Bible Today) (Sydney South, Aquila, 2001)  
p64-65**

## Study 9: Revelation 4:1-11

# 8 Churches: One Church – Heavenly Host

### Before You Start

#### What do you imagine Heaven to be like?

Now there is a question.

Let your impressions run wild.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"Before us is a door standing open in heaven (4:1). We can step through and see reality in a new light. But this perspective changes everything. We can't live in the same way once we've stepped through the open door of heaven. Our world is not a fiction. But neither is it reality—at least, not the full picture. It is a reality full of fictions. Nothing is what it seems. It is a world in which we are blind to the truth. What matters is not what really matters. Those with power are not what they seem to be, and their power is not as significant as it appears. We think we are free, but we are slaves.*

*You need to decide whether you're going to step through the open door with John. If you're willing to have your world turned upside down, then read Revelation 4."*

### Listen Carefully to Revelation 4:1-11

#### The Text

Bewes: *"Eternity. These next two chapters (Revelation 4 and 5) are given to prepare the reader for what lies ahead. We are taken behind the scenes of all that exists and happens. We come to the very center of all power, and peer into eternity itself."*

#### 1. 4:1. Where are we now? Who speaks? What is his invitation?

Strictly here we are standing on the doorstep looking into 'heaven'

The speaker is the same one who speaks in 1:10 (More on this below)

He invites John to 'Come on down ...' (well Up).

Keener (NIVAC): *"The 'open' door in heaven (4:1) signifies what openings in heaven often signify, namely, God's revelation (11:19; 15:5; cf. Ezek. 1:1; Mark 1:10; John 1:51). John does not have to force his way into heaven, as some of his contemporaries thought they did; he is invited, in language that recalls God's call to Moses to receive his revelation: 'Come up here' (Rev. 4:1; cf. Ex. 19:20, 24; 24:12; 34:2) recalls the Bible's first throne vision (Ex.*

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*24:10–12; cf. also 19:24)."*

**2. What is central to the heavenly scene?**

The Throne and the One who sits on it.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You': *"What John sees is a throne in heaven: "There before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it" (v 2). Everything revolves around this throne. God and his reign (symbolised by his throne) are at the centre of the created world. John describes concentric circles of worshipping beings expanding out from the throne. The word "throne" occurs 19 times in chapters 4 – 5. Humanity is on the periphery. At the centre is the throne of God surrounded by the worship of heaven. We are not the centre of the world nor even of our own lives. God is at the centre. Nevertheless, the seven lamps which are the seven churches (1:20), are "in front of the throne" (4:5). The people of God are in his eye line."*

Bewes: *"God's throne speaks to us of eternity. Every other throne can be shaken – but never that of God. His throne is permanent and secure. He lives for ever and ever v10). The praise of the living creatures is ceaseless. This is the great reassurance of the prophecy. God is in control."*

**3. What impression do you get of this place?**

It is a place of great splendor and great power.

Keener (NIVAC): *"THE GREATNESS OF GOD. One seeking to digest or communicate this chapter should not bog down in the details of most of its background, important as they are for understanding the details of John's portrait. One should instead place all the details (expounded in the context of their primary Old Testament background) in the broader perspective of their function—to reveal the greatness of God's court, hence, his own greatness. Thus, they also reveal a striking contrast with the pretense of the earthly ruler's arrogant pomp. The text invites us to worship, today no less than at its first reading in Ephesus. It also invites us to relinquish our fear of human grandeur, which pales before the majesty of the eternal God with whom we have become intimate."*

**4. What song is sung (said)? (v8c and v11) And what can we learn about praise from it?**

Two really – together they look like this:

"Holy, holy, holy  
is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come" ....

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“You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they were created  
and have their being.”

This is true praise – Prayer acknowledging the greatness of God.

Barnett: *“Worship is the expression of agreement by the people of God about the truth of God.”*

**[As an extra now read Chapter 5 and answer the same questions.]**

*“Chapter 4 is like the scenery of a stage. In chapter 5 the drama begins. John sees a scroll with seven seals in the right hand of the One on the throne (Revelation 5:1). What it contains we are not told. Perhaps it is God’s plan for the restoration of the world. “But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it” (v 2-3).”* From: Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’

**1. Where are we now? Who speaks? What is his invitation?**

We are still standing with John looking into the heavenly throne room. Here is God on the throne and he has a scroll.

A mighty angel speaks (again with a loud voice 1:10; 4:1) with a question (the plot thickens) - *“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”*

This angel asks this awesome assembly for someone to come and open the scroll.

But no one is found – it seems

But a command is given - *“Weep no more; behold, ... ”* (ESV)

**2. What is central to the heavenly scene?**

The Throne and the One who sits on it is still central but the focus now shifts.

To a Lion, no wait a minute it is a Lamb (a slain Lamb).

He is described as *the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed* – But he looks like a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain.

*And also he had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

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Standing in the centre of the throne.

Tim Chester, 'Revelation For You' *"Nothing could be more subversive. Instead of the mighty beasts of imperial power, we have a lamb. Instead of a victorious general, we have one who has been slain. Instead of the power, glory and wisdom of empire, we have the weakness, shame and folly of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5)."*

**3. What impression do you get of this place?**

It is a place of great splendor and great power.

And now it is a place of great DRAMA.

Pregnant with expectation.

**4. What song is sung (v9-10; 12 and v13-14)? And what can we learn about praise from it?**

Is it significant that in chapter 4 the words are said and here they are sung? I wonder.

A number really – together they look like this:

*"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased men for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.  
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth."  
In a loud voice they sang:  
"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!"  
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!"  
"Amen,"*

Barnett: *"Worship is the expression of agreement by the people of*

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*God about the truth of God.”*

And we wait with bated breath ...

### **Connections**

**1. Look at 1:10. What does this voice now say? Why is it significant that it is the same voice?**

John's 'revelation' is all of a whole. The vision in v1 is introduced by the same 'person' and now he is the one who invites John into heaven.

The seven letters to the churches have each given us glimpses of personal involvement in this heaven through the promises to those who overcome.

**2. Re-read v2, 3 and note Isaiah 6:1–5; Ezekiel 1:4–28; Daniel 7:9–14. What sort of place is God's throne room? What description of God do these passages give?**

In fact there is very little actual description of God himself. Daniel and Ezekiel describe a man-like being.

Isaiah can only describe the train of his robe and Jeremiah describes the floor so we know where he was looking.

Morris (TNTC): *“Ezekiel has an account of God on his throne (Ezek. 1:26–28), a passage to which this shows resemblances, though John's account is marked by greater reserve. He uses suggestion rather than description to convey the majesty and unfathomableness of God. In particular he frequently refers to the worshipping host of heaven. God is usually made known to us by contact with those who know him rather than by direct vision.”*

Barnett: *“With due reverence and in obedience to the second commandment no description of the Enthroned One is give, merely the colourful impression of a majestic presence.”*

**3. Who might the 24 elders be?**

Keener (NIVAC): *“The twenty-four elders around the throne (4:4), like other worshipers in heaven (4:7–9; 5:11–14), illustrate the appropriate response to God's glory: worship (4:10–11; 5:8–10, 14). While their literary function in this sense is difficult to dispute, their exact identity does not share the same accessibility. Some regard them as angels, others as Old Testament saints. But most likely they represent all believers.”*

Barnett: *“That they sit on thrones, are dressed in white and wear crowns*

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*show us that they have been victorious in loyalty to their God despite enormous opposition during their lifetimes.”*

*“Because crowns were appropriate to victors or “overcomers” in athletic competitions, their crowns may signify that these are Christians who have persevered to the end, as each of the letters to the churches demands. But crowns were more often “golden” when won in games sacred to a deity, and most often golden when worn by priests approaching a deity.”*

**4. And what are the ‘four living creatures’ all about?**

Morris (TNTC): *“As Swete puts it: ‘The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate Nature. Nature, including Man, is represented before the Throne, taking its part in the fulfilment of the Divine Will, and the worship of the Divine Majesty.’”*

**5. In earthly terms does this sound like a workable sort of place, really?**

Tim Chester, ‘Revelation For You’: *“In Revelation 4:1 John says: “After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’” John is showing us a different reality, or rather, a different version of our reality. It’s as if we’re seeing reality from the other side. We’re being flipped inside out. We’re given the view from above in addition to our view from below. The normally unseen world that exists side by side with the seen world becomes visible in John’s vision.”*

**Impact**

**1. From this passage what is the heavenly ‘church’ all about?**

WORSHIP

**2. Barnett: “Worship is the expression of agreement by the people of God about the truth of God.” Discuss**

**3. Make a summary about what churches should and should not do, say and profess from these letters. What makes a ‘good’ church?**

Now is the chance to use your summary chart of the 7 churches.