

# The Last Days

## An In-Depth Study of Biblical Eschatology

### The Revelation of Jesus Christ

#### Revelation 2-3 Introduction

#### Applications of the Letters from Jesus to the Seven Churches in Asia

**Practical Application:** The letters were specifically written to the seven existing historical churches to convey a practical and personal message from the Lord Jesus Christ (via John).

**Perennial Application:** The many characteristics of each individual church throughout church history are described in one or more of the letters to these seven churches.

**Personal Application:** The many characteristics of each individual Christian throughout church history are described in one or more of the letters to these seven churches.

**Prophetic Application:** The order that Christ presented the letters to the seven churches represents a chronological unfolding of church history from the day of Pentecost to the Rapture of the Church, as indicated by the following table:

Church Letter	Description	Dates (A.D.)	Key Phrase
Ephesus	Apostolic Church	< 100	“you have fallen”
Smyrna	Persecuted Church	100 – 313	“tribulation ten days”
Pergamum	Imperial Church	313 – 590	“the doctrine of Balaam”
Thyatira	Papal Church	590 – Rapture+	“that woman Jezebel”
Sardis	Reformed Church	1517 – Rapture+	“you are dead”
Philadelphia	Missionary Church	1730 – Rapture	“open door”
Laodicea	Apostate Church	1900 – Rapture+	“you are lukewarm”



## The Seven Design Elements in Each of the Seven Letters

- † The church name in the phrase: “*To the angel of the church in \_\_\_\_\_ write:*”;
- † The following contents are included, if appropriate: a **description of Christ** \*, a **commendation**, a **concern**, an **exhortation** and a **comfort** \*\*; and
- † The closing: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”  
This phrase addresses people who wish to know the truth Matthew 11:15, 13:9,43, Mark 4:23, Luke 14:35, Rev.13:9

### Notes:

- \* The purpose of the description of Jesus Christ was to authenticate the message and to illustrate the primary characteristic of Jesus most important for the particular church to be able to hear the encouragement and/or correction Jesus had for them.
- \*\* The comfort for each church was in the form of a promise to all the “overcomers”. People cannot overcome the world on their own. The first, primary and only way to overcome is through salvation gained by believing and trusting in the shed blood of Jesus Christ 1 John 5:3-5, Revelation 12:11a. However, once spiritually and eternally saved, a Christian can begin to overcome life’s issues on earth by dedicating themselves to their witness for Jesus and by loving Jesus more than their earthly life Revelation 12:11b.

### “Write what is now” – Revelation 2-3

## Revelation 2–3 *Letters from Jesus to the Seven Churches in Asia*

### The Letter to the Church at Ephesus (2:1-7) [Apostolic Church]

**EPHESUS** [*desirable*; no present day equivalent] In the first century, Ephesus was a very prominent commercial city. Ephesus was the principal line of communication and travel between Rome and the eastern provinces, because of its great harbor, as well as four major trade routes and the Cayster River running through the city. The city had an immense theater Acts 19:28-31 that was 495 feet in diameter and held 25,000 people, and a Temple of Diana (a Roman goddess, equivalent to the Greek goddess Artemis Acts 19:24-35), which was one of the seven Wonders of the Ancient World. During his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, Paul established the Ephesian church Acts 19:1-41. By tradition, later pastors were Timothy 1 Timothy 1:1-3, Tychicus and John (who pastored at Ephesus until he was arrested). According to historians, John returned to Ephesus after his release from Patmos.

**2:1** *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden*

**lampstands:** **2** *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.* **3** *You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.* **4** *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.* **5** *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.* **6** *But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* **7** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*

**description of Christ:** Jesus was in the midst of the churches, holding them in His hands <sup>John 10:28, Revelation 1:13,16</sup>.

**commendation:** Works (deeds) are very important to Jesus <sup>Ephesians 2:10, James 2:26</sup>. The church at Ephesus was excellent at discerning and persevering, as well as testing the teachings of the church leaders <sup>1 Thessalonians 5:21</sup>. They (and Jesus) hated the actions of the Nicolaitans <sup>v.15</sup> (2 Greek words: *nike*: victory and *laity*: people), possibly followers of Nicolas ('conqueror of people') <sup>Acts 6:5</sup>: a false teacher and immoral apostate <sup>Matthew 7:15</sup>.

**concern:** Their "first" (*protos*: first in importance) love for Jesus <sup>Deuteronomy 6:4-5, John 14:23-24</sup> grew cold <sup>Matthew 24:12</sup>.

**exhortation:** The Ephesians were firmly warned to remember, repent and repeat or their lampstand <sup>Exodus 25:31-40</sup> (the church <sup>Revelation 1:20</sup>: holder of the light from burning oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit) would be removed.

Repentance is a common theme throughout the Gospels <sup>Matthew 3:2, 4:17</sup> and these letters <sup>v.2:16,22, 3:3,19</sup>.

**comfort:** Those who overcome were promised access to the tree of life (the promise of heaven <sup>Revelation 22:1-2,14</sup>). God prohibited Adam & Eve from returning to the tree after they were expelled from Paradise <sup>Genesis 2:8-9, 3:22-24</sup>.

## The Letter to the Church at Smyrna (2:8-11) [Persecuted Church]

**SMYRNA** [*myrrh*; Izmir, Turkey] Smyrna was a beautiful city known for science/medicine. The city was called the 'Crown of Asia', because of the many pagan temples, including one for Zeus, and other magnificent buildings around Mt. Pagos. Smyrna was destroyed in about 600 B.C., but rebuilt by Alexander the Great/Lysimachus around 300 B.C. As a result, it was a matter of great pride to the citizens that their city had died and rose to life again. The city of Smyrna was a center for Caesar worship, which was required for all citizens. This regulation led to a bishop of Smyrna named Polycarp to be martyred about A.D.155.

**2:8** *To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.* **9** *I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.* **10** *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.* **11** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.*

**description of Christ:** The phrases “the First and the Last” <sup>Revelation 1:17, 22:13</sup> and “who died and came to life again” <sup>Romans 6:9, Revelation 1:18</sup> both refer to the genuine Messiah who was and is the firstfruits <sup>1 Corinthians 15:20-23</sup>. These eternal truths directly confronted the people’s pride in their city dying and being raised <sup>Revelation 13:3,12</sup>.

**commendation:** They were wealthy in God’s economy <sup>Matthew 6:19-21</sup>, in spite of their worldly poverty <sup>James 2:5</sup> (*ptocheia*: having nothing at all), which resulted from their “afflictions” (*thlipsis*: persecution, tribulation or a pressing together) from cultural Jews who were really spiritual pagans <sup>Romans 2:28-29</sup> being used by Satan (perhaps represented by Zeus, the temple of Zeus [the synagogue of Satan <sup>Rev.3:9</sup>] and the priests of Zeus).

Rejecting Satan/devil is another common theme in the Gospels <sup>Matthew 4:10</sup> and the letters <sup>v.2:13,24, 3:9</sup>.

**concern:** none!

**exhortation:** Jesus urged them to be strong in the multiple, but finite (“ten days” <sup>Daniel 1:12</sup>) persecutions to come (see below), because faithfulness would gain them the crown of life <sup>Matthew 10:22, 1 Corinthians 9:25</sup> (eternal life).

The name “Smyrna” had significance relevant to their history, because myrrh was crushed and used as a perfume <sup>Psalms 45:8, Proverbs 7:17, Song of Songs 3:6</sup>; an anointing oil for priests, the temple and the temple implements <sup>Exodus 30:22-33</sup>; and for embalming <sup>John 19:38-42</sup>. It was one of the 3 offerings to Jesus in His 1<sup>st</sup> Coming: gold, frankincense and myrrh <sup>Matthew 2:9-11</sup> (symbols of His kingship, priesthood and suffering/death), but myrrh will not be part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming offering <sup>Isaiah 60:4-6</sup>.

The 10 great persecutions by Roman Emperors may have been what John was referring to:

Nero 54-68, Domitian 81-96, Trajan 98-117, Marcus Aurelius 161-180,  
Severus 193-211, Maximinus 235-238, Decius 249-251, Valerian 253-260,  
Aurelian 270-275 and Diocletian 284-305

**comfort:** Overcomers are promised they will not go to hell (the spiritual and eternal death) <sup>Revelation 20:6, 11-15, 21:8</sup>.

## The Letter to the Church at Pergamum (2:12-17) [Imperial Church]

**PERGAMUM (or Pergamos)** [*mixed marriage; Bergama, Turkey*] Pergamum was a great religious center (Caesar worship) and the provincial capital of the Roman province of Asia. The city had temples to Caesar and several Greek gods: Zeus, Dionysus, Athena and Asklepios (serpent god of medicine and healing). Pergamum was also a cultural center, with an incredible library, second only to the one in Alexandria, Egypt and a center for psychiatric medicine. (Pergamum: neuter form of the name, Pergamos: feminine form)

**2:12** *To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.* **13** *I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives.* **14** *Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.* **15** *Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.* **16** *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.* **17** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.*

**description of Christ:** The “double edged sword” <sup>Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 1:16</sup> symbolized the judgement of Jesus, countering the Roman law claiming authority over life and death (*jus gladii*: “Right of the Sword”).

**commendation:** The church at Pergamum remained true to Jesus, even though they lived in a society controlled by Satan, which may refer to the altar to Zeus <sup>v.9</sup> or to the temple for Asklepios (known as “Asklepios the savior”), the god of healing and the god of Pergamum. Antipas (“against all”) was a “faithful witness” <sup>Revelation 1:5, 14:12</sup> (*martyr*) for Jesus, but he was martyred (church tradition says he was burned to death inside a bronze bull).

**concern:** Some church members were embracing the impure compromises suggested by Balaam to Balak (“eating food sacrificed to idols” <sup>Acts 15:20, 1 Corinthians 10:18-21</sup> and “sexual immorality” <sup>Romans 13:13, 2 Peter 2:15</sup>), with emphasis on enticing the Jews into immorality <sup>Numbers 22-25</sup>. Others followed the “teaching of the Nicolaitans” <sup>v.6</sup>.

**exhortation:** They were told to repent, which is the Christian’s pathway to spiritual cleansing <sup>Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:9</sup>.

**comfort:** The overcomers will receive “hidden manna” (Is this the wilderness manna <sup>Exodus 16:4-5,31-32</sup>, the manna in the ark <sup>Exodus 16:33-34</sup> or communion bread <sup>Matthew 26:26</sup>? No, it is Jesus. <sup>John 6:32-35,50-51</sup>) and a “white stone” (athletic prize of victory or jurist ballot of acquittal) with a “new name” noting a special status <sup>Genesis 17:3-8, 15-16</sup>.

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