

Lessons Learned From The Seven Churches

Text : **Rev. 1: 1-5 , 22: 6-13**

INTRODUCTION :

A. More false prophets have made more money off of the Book of The Revelation than any other book of the bible.

1. They take advantage of people's fears and of the general ignorance of the book.
2. People approach the book defeated before they start.
 - a. **Principle :** *In order to achieve success at anything, one must first envision success.*
 - b. Entering a study convinced that you cannot understand pre-programs failure.

B. The Revelation was put at the end of the bible for a reason.

1. One needs to have a general knowledge of the bible before he studies the Revelation.
 2. One especially needs to understand the O.T. prophets before studying the Revelation.
 - a. Many O.T. references appear in the Revelation. One must know them.
 - b. Apocalyptic language has its roots in the O.T. prophets. (*Also used non-biblical*)
 - 1) Daniel (*In order to learn any language, one must*
 - 2) Ezekiel *learn its vocabulary and structure. One learns*
 - 3) Zechariah *these for the apocalyptic language in the O.T.)*
- * c. One too lazy to study the O.T. prophets can't hope to understand John's vision.

C. It's not God's will that the message revealed to John be hidden from Christians.

1. There was a need for using apocalyptic language.
 - a. If the enemies of God read a prophecy of their defeat, they would have used that as an excuse for an attack.
 - b. Hitler was able to get the German people to accept the annihilation of the Jews because he convinced them that the Jews were a threat.
 - c. The Romans needed a common enemy for the same reason Hitler needed one.

*** As we have seen by our study of the seven churches, politics and culture have always affected the church.**

For Example : *Nero wanted the land in central Rome, but needed a way to get it. He burned it and blamed it on the Christians.*

2. The Christians were familiar with God's word so they could understand the message.

I. One must understand the book in the format in which it is written.**A. Apocryphal language is an unfamiliar concept in our age.**

1. No one uses such language today; there is no reason to do so.
2. Dr. Theodor Suess Geisel is the closest thing to an apocryphal written in our time.

B. By understanding how to understand “Yertle The Turtle” we see the principle.

1. Yertle sat on a rock and ruled over a pond. “King of all that I can see.”
 - a. He decided the pond was too small of a kingdom so he stacked 9 turtles.
 - b. Though pleased with that increased view for a while, he soon wanted more.
 - c. He stacked 200 more turtles and was elated until the moon came up.
 - d. As he attempted to make his stack higher it fell over.
2. By his own account, Dr. Suess was telling the story of Adolf Hitler.
 - a. How do we get Germany out of a pond or Hitler from an ambitious turtle ?
 - b. The story itself is the message **not** the individual elements there of.
 - c. If one were to try giving significance to the number of turtles stacked and to each thing Yertle reigned over, he would miss the author’s message.
3. It is the same with the revelation of John to the seven churches; the vision is God’s message, **not** something from each scale on the dragon. (*need background*)

C. John saw a vision which communicated a message to seven specific churches.

1. The churches to which the vision was addressed were real churches.
2. Therefore, the message communicated in the vision applied specifically to them.
3. In general, ALL biblical prophecy has two sets of recipients, **thus**, two purposes.
 - a. Those to which a prophecy is addressed are forewarned about something that pertains directly and specifically to them. (*Noah was forewarned of the flood.*)
 - b. Those who read about the prophecy after it is fulfilled learn lessons about God. (*The universal flood teaches us about the consequences of sin.*)

II. The prophecy contained in the revelation given to John by Jesus through the angel for seven of the churches in Asia were to prepare them for something.**A. There were other churches in Asia but these seven were singled out.**

1. We know of at least two other churches in the Roman province of Asia.
 - a. Paul wrote a letter to the church at Colossae.
 - b. The church at Hierapolis is mentioned in the Colossian letter. **Col. 4: 13**

2. This is an indication of the parochial nature of the warning. (*7 specific churches*)
 - a. God does everything for a reason.
 - b. Possibly, something would affect Laodicea, but not Colossae and Hierapolis.

B. It is the practice of God to forewarn His people of traumatic events.

1. Noah and the flood. **Gen. 6**
2. Abraham warned of destruction of Sodom. **Gen. 18**
3. Jesus warned His disciples about the coming crucifixion. **Matt. 16, 20: 17-19**

C. This event was to come upon them soon. (*Same word used in II Tim. 4:9.*)

1. None of those churches exist today so it had to have happened before now.
2. The book begins and ends with admonitions to prepare for something soon.
 - a. **Rev. 1: 1, 3** **The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,**
3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.
 - b. **Rev. 22: 6-7** **And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. 7 "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."**
3. John was told not to seal the book because the recipients needed to know it NOW.
 - a. **Rev. 22: 10-** **And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.**
 - b. Daniel (**12:4**) was told to seal up a prophecy which came to pass in 400 years.
 - c. Near must be less than 400 years and certainly within the life of the recipient.

III. Jesus evaluated each of the seven churches to assess their preparedness.

A. There is no significance to the order in which they appear. (*not church ages*)

1. They're not listed from best to worst or vice-versa.
2. They're not listed by the category of their problems.
3. They just appear in the order they appear on the Roman postal route.

B. Each church had strong points and weak points.

1. **Ephesus** was a church that had lost its love. (*Honeymoon is over*)

- a. Doctrinally pure
 - b. Resisted all false teachers
 - c. They tolerated no evil in their midst.
- * Nothing else is of value without love. (Cf- **I Tim. 1:5, John 13: 34**) (*remove lamp*)*
2. **Smyrna** was a church under pressure. (*Gold in the fire*)
- a. Persecuted by both Romans and Jews.
 - b. They were very poor because of the persecution, but loved by God.
 - c. Some were already being killed there. (*Polycarp was killed there.*)
- * They were not told things would get better, ... just be faithful unto death.*
3. **Pergamum** was the powerful church with feet of clay. (*Saints by Satan's thrown*)
- a. This church had the most difficult place to exist.
 - b. They stood fast in the face of extreme external pressure. (*Antipas was martyred*)
 - c. They compromised with their own members who strayed. (*Nicolaitans, Baalam*)
- * They learned that standing against the sins of others did not excuse their own.*
4. **Thyatira** was willing compromise to have peace. (*Jezebel's pleasure palace.*)
- a. They were an active and growing church.
 - b. They had a false teachers in their midst, but were unwilling to confront her.
 - c. While reaching new members, they were losing others to "Jezebel." (*no discipline*)
- * They learned that hell is too high a price to pay for peace.*
5. **Sardis** was known as the going and growing church. (*Zombiville – living dead*)
- a. They were the church that other congregations wanted to be like. (*working dead*)
 - b. They had embraced their culture. (*Were told to get out of their comfortable rut.*)
 - c. The brethren in Sardis were told to wake up , face reality and change.
- * They learned that judgment is based on reality, not reputation.*
6. **Philadelphia** was what Sardis was reputed to be. (*The land of Opportunity*)
- a. This church had been faithful in the face of all opposition.
 - b. It had not compromised within or without. (*Door opened – increased opportunity*)
 - c. The church in Philadelphia was the only one which was not chastised.
- * They were just told to "keep on keeping on" and protect their crown.*
7. **Laodicea** was the church that made Jesus sick. (*Just ordinary*)
- a. Many today are contented to be like Laodicea ... typical ... average.
 - b. This is the only church about which Jesus had NOTHING good to say.
 - c. They had a great self image, but Jesus was repulsed by them.

** They learned that external circumstances are above all deceptive. Look w/in.*

IV. From the letters to the 7 churches we learned that God is active in His church.

A. To each of the churches He wrote “I know your deeds.”

1. He was aware of their actions.
 - a. Their good
 - b. Their bad
2. He was aware of their motives and their efforts. (*Not just their achievements*)

B. Congregations are dependent upon Jesus for their success. (*He's not hands off*)

1. Jesus is the one who gives and who removes lampstands. (**Rev. 2: 5** ... Ephesus)
2. Jesus is the one who opens and closes doors. (**Rev. 3: 8** ... Philadelphia)
3. Jesus rewards or punishes based upon the performance of His servants.
 - a. Remember the parable of the talents :
Matt. 25: 29- For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.
 - b. God rewards effort, not achievement.

C. God knows everything that goes on in this congregation.

1. He knows what you have done and have tried to do. Reward
2. He knows everything you could have done, but didn't. Accountable

D. Each person and each congregation stands before God individually.

1. You will never be punished for what someone else did, said or taught.
2. Those whose robes were white were not judged with those who sinned.

E. As we study these congregations, we learn how God responds to us.

1. We can be the kind of congregation (*Christian*) that He will bless.
2. We never want to be the congregation (*Christian*) that Jesus will spit out.

IV. Wonderful rewards are promised to those who “overcome.”

A. As each of these churches faced different opposition so do each of us.

1. Some are pulled by family ties.

2. Some are ensnared by the ambitious and cares of this world.
3. Others are drawn by the lusts of the flesh or the fatigue of old age.

B. Whether collectively or individually God is aware of each of our victories.

C. Jesus has promised to reward those who OVERCOME

1. A crown of life ... Victory over death
2. Not hurt by the second death ... not be separated from God
3. Hidden manna ... that which sustains life
4. White stone ... verification of vindication (innocence, victory)
5. The morning star ... Jesus Himself (**Rev. 22: 16**)
6. Jesus confess us before God and the angels ... accepted as friend of Jesus
7. Name not erased ... Citizenship assured , security
8. Give white clothing ... made to be pure, cleanse of sin, righteous
9. Given a new name ... given a new status
10. Name of new Jerusalem written in us ... Declared a citizen of Heaven
11. Name of God and of Jesus written on us ... Accepted in family as theirs
12. Made a pillar in the temple of God ... honored by God
13. Rule over the nations ... evaluated over the wicked (Those who oppressed)
14. Set on Throne with Jesus ... Be a joint heir with Jesus

CONCLUSION :

A. All of these rewards are for overcomers.

B. Have you jointed the battle with Jesus ?

II Tim. 2: 1-2 If we endure, we will also reign with Him;
If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

INVITATION :

Lesson Text :**Revelation 1: 1-5**

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, **2** who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw. **3** Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, **5** and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—

Revelation 22: 6-13

6 And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true”; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. **7** “And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.”

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. **9** But he said to me, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.”

10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. **11** Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. **12** Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

