

LESSON 4

LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA (PART 1)

Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament are letters written to churches and individuals. All are expressions of the Lord's love and care for His people. In Revelation 2 and 3, we find seven letters from Jesus to congregations in Asia Minor. Revelation was originally addressed to seven churches in existence then.

1. What purposes do these letters to the churches serve?
2. What seven elements do most of the letters share?

EPHESUS: THE CHURCH WITH HEART TROUBLE (2:1-7)

The first words of the letter are the salutation, and the letter continues with a description of Jesus. As the letter continues, the Ephesian church is commended.

3. Why might this congregation have been addressed first?
4. What two facts did the description of Jesus in 2:1 reflect?
5. What must the symbolism of Jesus' removing the lampstand in verse 5 mean?
6. What was Jesus' three-fold remedy for heart trouble, according to verse 6?
7. Who were the Nicolaitans, and what doctrine did they teach?

SMYRNA: THE POOR CHURCH THAT WAS RICH (2:8–11)

The letter to the church in Smyrna has no condemnation and therefore contains no warning or threat. Only one other congregation received no condemnation. This lack of condemnation does not mean that the two churches were perfect. However, the lack of condemnation does mean that most, if not all, of the members were serious about their Christianity and that, as a whole, they were striving to please God.

8. What is the history and culture of the city of Smyrna?
9. What does the Greek word translated “poverty” in 2:9 mean?
10. To whom did Jesus refer when He spoke of “those who say they are Jews and are not” (2:9)?
11. What is the significance of the number ten in the context of the tribulation mentioned in verse 10?
12. What connection could exist between the persecution of the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia and the fact that the majority of their members met the Lord’s approval?

PERGAMUM: THE CHURCH IN SIN CITY (2:12–17)

Pergamum was the third city in which Christians were addressed by Jesus. This congregation faced special problems. Jesus called Pergamum the place “where Satan’s throne is” and “where Satan dwells” (2:13). This city desperately needed Christ.

13. In what ways was Satan enthroned in the city of Pergamum?
14. What was “the teaching of Balaam” (2:14)?
15. What was the meaning behind Jesus’ promise in verse 17?

THYATIRA: THE CHURCH WHERE JEZEBEL WAS A MEMBER (2:18–29)

Thus far in the chapter, Jesus had addressed congregations in the three most prominent cities in Asia Minor. Thyatira was a city of some wealth, but in the days of the early church, most people thought of it as an insignificant rest stop on the road from Pergamum to Sardis. Thyatira may have been unimportant to writers in the first century, but it was important to Jesus. The letter to Thyatira is the longest and most instructive of all the letters. Jesus is interested in all the peoples of the world.

16. What do we know from early writers about the city of Thyatira?
17. What six things did Jesus find to commend in the church of Thyatira?
18. Who was Jezebel (2:20), and what does she seem to have taught?
19. What would be the nature of the punishment inflicted upon Jezebel's children (2:23)?
20. What is "the morning star" of 2:28?