

Background

This was a very dark period in early Christian history. Persecution was on the rise—both from outside and inside the church. The apostles were nearly all martyred and the remaining Christians were desperate for clarification on the Lord's Second Coming. They thought it was imminent. Paul and Peter and both warned that there will be a falling away first (Acts 20:28, 29, 31; 2 Thes 2:3; 2 Peter 3:17; etc.). Revelation 2 and 3 demonstrates how the apostasy crept into the churches.

Audience

Historical records state that John the Apostle had ecclesiastical authority over Ephesus and the surrounding region. These two chapters speak to seven specific churches along a circular postal route in a circle along the main road in western Asia Minor. Yet there were more branches of the church in Western Asia Minor than these seven. The number seven was probably used for symbolic reasons.

The number “seven” may also be symbolic for “whole”—or a prototype for all Christian churches who fall into temptation and need hope. It is humbling to identify similar characteristics in our own Christian communities and lives. John's *Revelation* was probably circulated among the neighboring churches as well—as there were more than seven branches in that area of Asia Minor—which we saw in Colossians 4:16.

The word “seven / she•va,” also shares the same consonants (which were the only letters used anciently) with the word, “oath / 'she•vu•a.” This relationship adds to its symbolical reading, according to several Jewish and Hebrew scholars (Royal Skousen).

The revealed message within each message demonstrate how well the Lord knows His people—even the Laodiceans' geography. Even though the immediate audience were those saints near Ephesus, yet, as the keys to understand the book were given as part of the restoration—which means we are also the intended audience.

The text gives evidence that the saints knew their ordinances—including some being endowed. Joseph Smith taught that the OT prophets and NT apostles “knew . . . all the ordinances, & blessings were in the Church” (Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 10, also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327-331).

Laodicea lies on the center of a plain, so they built aqueducts to carry water from hot and cold natural springs into storage towers. But as the water is transported, both the hot and cold became more lukewarm. Jesus refers to the saints as lukewarm.

Structure: Reference to Christ—Rebuke—Promise.

These two chapters are organized around a pattern to each of the seven churches: *Reference to Christ—Rebuke—Promise*. They are to the “angel of the church” or “servant / messenger / leader” (KJV, JST, ISV, NR). The Lord first identifies Himself to each church (or branch) by name, and then offers condemnation and/or promises. The messages to each church fall into a pattern with most receiving a message in three or four of the same categories. When the pattern changes, it becomes significant. For example, all seven churches receive divine promises. Five of the seven churches are called to repentance for specific faults—only Philadelphia and Smyrna are not. Many of the phrases to the churches are found previously in the Lord's words from Chapter 1, further identifying the source as God's words. A short summary includes:

1. **Ephesus** (2:1-7): You work hard and cross-examine false teachers—but you lack a love for God and have fallen
2. **Smyrna** (2:8-11): You have been smitten and impoverished and continue to do well even in persecution
3. **Pergamum** (2:12-17): Faithful but some are compromise on too many truths.
4. **Thyatira** (2:18-29): You give charitable service, but have too much immorality
5. **Sardis** (3:1-6): Spiritually dead, repent to walk with God
6. **Philadelphia** (3:7-13): Obedient, steadfast, and I will come and reward them soon
7. **Laodicea** (3:14-21): Lukewarm, materialistic will be cast out, you don't see so repent and come eat with me

The Lord's rebuke is bluntly honest—just as it was in the NT Gospels (and later in the D&C). He condemns them for compromising with paganism, denying Christ, accepting unauthorized leaders, lacking obedience to their covenants, and growing pride and materialism. The Lord's tough rebuke corresponds with his mouth having a two-edged sword (Rev 1:16). However, His rebuke stems from His love. He wants the saints to change or repent while still in mortality so that they will not have to suffer after death. The opportunity to repent and change is a blessing now and in eternity.

CHURCHES

(Rev 2:1–7)

EPHESUS—good works, labor, patience, test false teachers, hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans

(Rev 2:8–11)

+SMYRNA—good works, tribulation, poverty, +

(Rev 2:12–17)

PERGAMOS—hold fast, not denied my faith,

(Rev 2:18–29)

THYATIRA—works of charity and service faith, patience,

(Rev 3:1–6)

SARDIS—works not perfect, Remember what you have received and heard... a few have not defiled thy garments, and they shall walk with me in white

(Rev 3:7–13)

+PHILADELPHIA—good works, set an open door that no man can shut, kept my word, not denied my name, patience, hold fast that none take crown

(Rev 3:14–21)

LAODICEA—lukewarm works, blind and naked spiritually. Buy of me gold tried in the fire... white raiment... anoint thine eyes... as many as I love I rebuke. I stand at the door and knock

JESUS' TITLE

These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks

These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

CONDEMNATION

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember . . . thou art fallen . . . repent

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not

But I have a few things against thee . . . eat things sacrificed to idols . . . commit fornications . . . Nicolaitans . . . Repent . . . I will fight with the sword of my mouth

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee . . . Jezebel . . . seduce . . . fornication . . . eat things sacrificed to idols . . . Repent

Hold fast . . . repent . . . Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee . . .

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not . . .

I will spue thee out of my mouth . . . Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing . . .

PROMISES

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God

Be faithful unto death . . . crown of life . . . He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

He that overcometh . . . keep my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them . . . even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and . . . his angels.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is **new Jerusalem** . . . and I will write upon him my **new name**.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Understanding more about the Seven Cities:

Rev 2:1–7 Ephesus: “Remember from where you have fallen . . . repent” (NR)

- Both apostles Paul and John lived here for a period according to scripture and historical records.
- Ephesus was a port city on the west coast of modern-day Turkey. In 287 BC, Ephesians built a wall around their city that was six miles in circumference. It was one of the three largest cities in Asia Minor (population 250,000 at the time of John).
- Paul’s third mission took him there for three years (Ac 19-20). His converts burned their magic books (worth 50,000 pieces of silver). The silversmith riot over the goddess Diana stunted Christian growth.
- The beautiful Temple of Diana was claimed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
- Ephesian saints resisted the supernatural magi/magicians that saturated the area (remember one tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, see Act 19:13-18).
- The Ephesian Christians tested or investigated the messages of false teachers as heretics who tried to deceive or misrepresent truths (Rev 2:2). They also endured under very trying circumstances.
- Their love for the Lord was waning. Their love had grown cold. Their loss of devotion for the Lord, can also be translated as a divorce. Their strict obedience lost compassion and love of the Lord. The Lord calls them to repent and make a clean break with false attitudes (also Jn 17:21).
- Nicolaitans referred to either an apostate member named Nicolas of Antioch (Acts 6:1-6), or another group of apostates who were in favor of illicit sex and other breaching of God’s laws.
- The Spirit worked with the Ephesians and promised that if the saints were spiritually victorious, the Lord would give them “the right to eat from the tree of life” and live in a paradisiacal place (NIV, Rev 2:7). The Temple of Diana was a tree shrine. This was a perversion of the truth where the tree of life represents the pure love of Christ (1Nephi 112:21-22).

Rev 2:8–11 Smyrna: “I will give thee the crown of life”

- Alexander the Great envisioned a newer bigger city as the region had great natural resources: the sea coast to the west and rich farmland to the east. By the time of the NT, it had a population of 750,000 (many of whom were poor).
- Street of gold, amphitheater, stadium, renowned library, and two temples (dedicated to the mother goddess and Zeus), as was one of the earliest centers of emperor worship)
- Built on a river at the base of Mt. Izmir; it flourished in trade, commerce, and the arts.
- The area was plagued with earthquakes.
- It was the western end of a major east-west Roman road.
- Center of Christian persecution. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was martyred there at age 86—burned in AD 155.
- The saints were persecuted by malicious locals. Jews who came from a “synagogue of Satan,” attacked Christians for “blasphemy.” The rich Jews felt they were above the law.
- The Lord warned them of “ten days” of persecutions (which paralleled Dan 1:12-15). He admonished them to endure to a “fullness” or “ten days”—or else they may lose their reward. He admonished them to endure for the crown of life (garland), usually given to athletes and military triumph—but here, to avoid spiritual death (but not the physical death).
- The saints received no rebuke from the Lord—only God’s praise, “I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!” (Rev 2:9, NIV).

Rev 2:12–17 Pergamos: “Repent...I will come quickly against you and make war... by the sword of my mouth” (NR)

- Beautiful wealthy city with the second largest library known in the ancient world containing 200,000 volumes.
- Manufacturing center for parchment in Asia Minor. The word “parchment” comes from the name of this city in Greek.
- A center for the imperial cult or “emperor worship” in the region (with three temples dedicated to Caesar).
- City also had temples to Asclepius (Greek god of healing) and healing spas from natural springs.
- Dating from 190 BC, it was also the home to temples dedicated to Zeus or Jupiter, Athene, Apollo, etc.
- City was also known for its silver mines, school of sculpture, woolen textiles, and agricultural abundance.
- The Lord told the Christians: “You remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith” (Rev 2:13, NIV).
- Population at the time of the NT was 180,000—we do not know how many Jews were there (Jews came in 130BC). Gentiles were the church’s main enemy.
- All citizens of Pergamos (except for the Jews) must sacrifice to the “imperial god” (which was one reason the Christians claimed Jewish roots).
- Christians were brought for trial in Pergamos. Antipas was one such—that we hear about here in Rev 2:13.

- Balaam and Balak come from an OT story that was well known (Num 22:4-6; 31:16). It was referred to as spiritual fornication or idolatry (see Acts 20 and 29).
- The offensive weapon the Lord uses is His word (Mt 10:32-33).
- Saints had to deny Caesar and suffer physical death, or deny Christ and suffer spiritual death—here referred to as manna. The hidden “*manna* / what is it?” was hidden in Moses’ Ark and the Covenant. Rabbinic literature often refers to God’s hidden name. We see new names across the Bible (Abram / Abraham, Saul / Paul, Simon / Peter, etc.). The name allows entrance into heaven (D&C 130:11).

Rev 2:18–29 Thyatira: “He will shepherd them with an iron rod” (NR)

- The smallest city, receives the longest letter—calling them to repentance and honoring their love, faith, perseverance.
- The city was built at the junction of two major Roman roads. It was famous for commercial and industrial guilds.
- It was well known for its wool dyeing industry (See Ac 16:14), leatherworkers, bakers, and coppersmiths.
- Worshiped a sun god, *Tyrimnos*/ Apollo, known as the son of god. In contrast to that tradition, only to this church does the Lord use His title: Son of God. It is evidence that He was aware of their culture and community.
- **Jezebel**, the false prophetess, shares King Ahab’s wicked wife’s name. The NT Greek can read, “Jezebel, your wife.”
- Immorality was a problem, but the KJV “cast her into a bed” can also be “into prison.”
- Lydia, the seller of purple, and Paul’s convert, was from Thyatira (Ac 16:14-15).

Rev 3:1–6 Sardis: “Wake up! / Be vigilant” (NIV/NR)

- Sardis received God’s severe rebuke. By trying to be tolerant and not offensive to the pagans, Sardis died spiritually.
- A center for the imperial cult, or Emperor worship. It appears the Christians compromised with them to avoid persecution.
- Sardis glory days were in the 6th century BC, but it was still the regional capital of Lydia. The plane was a fertile agricultural area on the crossroads of major Roman highways. The city was built on cliffs of Mt. Timolus, 1,500 feet above the plane. From its lofty location, the citizens assumed they did not need night guards, but foreigners took the city twice. The Lord’s comments refer to this attitude.
- Locals made woven woolen textiles, dressed in soft leather boots, turbans, and developed a seven-stringed lyre.
- Sardis had a large Jewish population and one of the largest synagogues ever discovered from the time.
- A few faithful Christians were not soiled by sin, and in their white garments still received a reward in God’s kingdom.

Rev 3:7–13 Philadelphia: “I have placed an open door before you”

- The name in Greek, *Philadelphia*, is translated as “City of Brotherly Love.”
- Built nearly two centuries earlier, it was called the “Gateway to the East,” as the hub of three major Roman roads. The Lord builds on this idea and repeatedly refers to doors or gates.
- The city was known for its many temples, agriculture, especially for grapes and wine production. It became the center for the worship of Bacchus, god of wine.
- The city was also famous for its production of leather goods and textiles.
- The saints received no condemnation, but encouragement. “True” referred to one’s constancy more than authentic. Their “patience” actually is faithfulness or endurance. Christians endure from trust in God and His timing. It allows them to overcome “the hour of temptation” or “time of trial” (Rev 3:10, KJV, NR).

Rev 3:14–21 Laodicea: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”

- Built on a plateau in the Lycus River valley in Asia Minor, it was a prosperous commercial and banking city. They were well known for their woven goods—tunics and carpets.
- Needed a source of water, so they built an aqueduct to bring water from the natural springs a few miles away. The hot and cold springs became lukewarm and bad tasting by the time the water got to the city. They used the water in their textile mill (while ten miles away, Colossae had refreshing cold water). The Lord plays off this with calling them, “lukewarm.”
- Center of learning—including a famous medical school that had a famous eye salve—as well as other arts and culture.
- They were known for their arrogance and self-sufficiency, as demonstrated by their refusal of Rome’s offer to help to rebuild their city after a strong earthquake in AD 60.

Summary of Temple Images (Rev 1-3)

The text is rich in symbolism from the Israelite temples. Earthly temples of God are patterned after the heavenly temple where God dwells in holiness. For example, in the first three chapters, John includes at least eight references to the Edenic and Creation themes from the temple sanctuary and the temple ritual. This pattern of temple symbols continues throughout the Apocalypse.

Verses	Temple Reference
1. Rev 1:6 “made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him <i>be</i> glory and dominion forever”	1. Initiation rites for Aaronic and Levitical men to become priests. Also King’s coronation took place at the temple.
2. Rev 1:12 “golden candlesticks”	2. In the Holy Place, is the menorah or candlestick that represents the tree of life. It stands close to the veil, where the high priest entered once/year to commune with God.
3. Rev 2:7 “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of tree of life which is in the midst of paradise”	3. In Eden, Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree of Life /immortality because they were in a sinful state. But when <i>The High Priest</i> , Jesus, fulfilled His atonement, all are allowed to now partake and return to God’s presence
4. Rev 2:17 “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and [I] will give him a white stone, and in the stone a name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”	4. Hidden manna was in the original “ark of the covenant” (which represented the throne of God). Christ / Messiah restored manna, as the bread of life and feeding thousands. This is symbolized at the first sacrament / Passover when Jesus did not hide the broken bread / <i>afikoman</i> , but said, “this is my body” (Mt 26:26). The high priest carried precious stones with the name of each Tribe of Israel engraved. In heaven, each saint receives a sacred new name on a precious stone.
5. Rev 3:4-5 “not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father”	5. Each time priests served in the temple they would wash & dress in sacred white linen clothes that represented purity (Eccl 9:8; Ezek 10:7). Also, the Lord will record names of the righteous who will receive Eternal Life, but the wicked are blotted out (Psalm 69:28; Philip 4:3).
6. Rev 3:11 “Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.”	6. Israelite Kings and Queens were anointed and coronated in the temple (1 Kings 1:39; 2 Kings 11:13-15).
7. Rev 3: 18 “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and <i>that</i> the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.”	7. The Holy Place and Holy of Holies represented the Garden of Eden and God’s presence. There Adam and Eve were covered from their nakedness in skins, and in the at-one-ment. Baptism by fire purified one to receive God’s gold or celestial blessings. All Levites, priests, and holy temple things were anointed. Traditionally the eyes and organs were anointed too.
8. Rev 3:20 “I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him”	8. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest prepared and then approached the veil before the Holy of Holies to enter His presence (Lev 16). The door was a wide, inviting opening. Jesus taught “knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7).