

Christ in Prophecy
“The Seven Churches of Revelation: Introduction”

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Introduction

Dr. Reagan: The words of Jesus are quoted throughout the New Testament, but did you know that the only Scripture that He wrote directly is contained in the book of Revelation in the form of seven letters to seven churches. All of which were located in the area we know today as the nation of Turkey. What did these important direct letters from the Lord say and what is their relevance to you and me today? Stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our blessed hope! I'm Dave Reagan, founder and director of Lamb and Lion Ministries. Welcome to our program, *Christ in Prophecy*. Over the next few weeks, we're going to take a look at chapters two and three of the book of Revelation. These chapters contain seven remarkable letters that Jesus wrote to seven churches some 65 years after His death, burial, and resurrection. We will examine each letter in detail, and consider what it meant to the people it was written to and what it means to you and me today. But first, I want to present a sweeping overview of the letters in order to give you a feeling for their context. If you have a Bible handy, get it out, turn to Revelation and follow along as we study these remarkable letters.

The seven letters are found in chapters two and three of the book of Revelation. But let's begin by taking a look at chapter one in order to lay the proper foundation for our consideration of the letters. As we begin with chapter one, let's consider the name of the book. It's not the "Book of Revelations" - plural. There are many revelations in it, but that's not its name. If you have a copy of the authorized King James Version, you will note that the title is stated as The Revelation of John. That title is also incorrect. The proper title is the one contained in modern translations, The Revelation to John. It is not John's revelation. It is the revelation, or unveiling, of Jesus Christ that was given to John by God the Father through Jesus. John refers to it in chapter one, verse 9 as the testimony of Jesus.

Now, who was this John? He does not clearly identify himself. But the testimony of all the early Church fathers is that this was the Apostle John. All he says about himself is that he was, *"a brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and perseverance which are in Jesus."*

It's interesting that John says he was a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos. His imprisonment there is one of the clues to the dating of the book, because around 95 AD was the time when the Roman Empire began to severely persecute the Church. This happened because the Emperor declared Caesar to be god, and every person in the empire was required once a year to go before a Roman magistrate and declare "Caesar is Lord." No Christian could do that, and therefore, Christians were considered enemies of the empire. The result is that they became the target of terrible persecution.

John tells us something very interesting here now in verse 10. He states that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day when all this occurred. I don't think John is referring to Sunday here. I think he's referring to what the Hebrew prophets called the Day of the Lord, which was a term for the End Times. So, I believe that John is telling us that in the Spirit, he was catapulted forward to the Day of the Lord, to the End Times, and given a preview of what will happen when the Church Age comes to a close.

John was about 95 years old when this book was written. He was the only apostle left alive. The thing that you need to keep in mind is that by the time this book was written, the persecution of Christians had become so terrible that it is evident from the book of Revelation that many were wondering if the Church would really continue to exist. They were beginning to have second thoughts, wondering if Jesus really was who He said He was. Wondering if Jesus really cared for them, wondering if He really meant it when He said, *"Upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."*

The Church needed encouragement, and that's really one of the main purposes of this book. It is designed to give encouragement and comfort to those who are suffering terribly. For that reason, the book of Revelation has always been a book that has given tremendous comfort to anyone going through persecution or suffering. Whether it be individual, family, or national in nature. The book begins therefore with a tremendous vision of Jesus Christ the Glorified One. He is victorious over death and the Heavenly Glory which He surrendered when He came to earth has been restored. John sees Jesus resurrected and glorified. Keep in mind that this is 65 years after the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. Jesus has returned to give the Church a second touch, a touch of encouragement. He has returned to say, "Yes, I care. I love you, I know what's going on. I'm walking among you."

John proceeds to describe Jesus in His glorified form. He sees Jesus dressed as a Priest, because that's what Jesus is now. You see, He is our High Priest before the throne of God, our Mediator before God. John sees Jesus with white hair, which indicates his wisdom. And his eyes, and feet, and voice, are all presented as symbols of judgment because all judgment has been given to Him by the Father. He has stars in His right hand which are the angels, or messengers of the Churches, showing that He cares for those Churches and for their pastors. He's walking among seven golden candlesticks which we're told in verse 20 represent Churches, they represent all the Churches. And through this image, the Lord is trying to give to John and the Church the message that He is walking among them, that He cares about them, that He loves them. He is not some distant and impersonal God who is aloof and uncaring.

John is so overcome by this glorious vision of His resurrected and glorified Lord that he falls at Jesus' feet as if he were dead. Jesus responds with one of the most comforting scriptures or statements in all of the Word of God. In verse 17 He says, *"Do not be afraid, John. I am the first and the last, and I am the living one. I was dead and behold I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and Hades."* Jesus is saying, I am the beginning of history, I am the end of history, I am the meaning of history, and I am in control of history. I have power over life and death. Again, Jesus' appearance and words are intended to reassure a Church that's under severe persecution. The hearts of First Century Christians, including John's, must have been greatly encouraged, even as Christians today are encouraged by these glorious Words.

As we move to chapters two and three, our focus shifts from Jesus, the Glorified One, to Jesus the Over-comer who is encouraging His Church to persevere and overcome with Him. Chapters two and three present us with seven letters, written by Jesus to seven Churches, and these are very interesting letters because first of all, they are letters to seven real churches located in the area we know today as Turkey. But these Churches were selected for a reason, folks. And that's because they are representative of all Churches existing at that time and today. Let's take a look at the types of Churches that are represented in these seven letters.

The very first Church addressed is the Church at Ephesus, which was a legalistic Church. It was a Church that dotted the i's, crossed the t's, but it had lost its first love. In verse eight, we are introduced to the Church at Smyrna, which was representative of persecuted Churches. In verse twelve we have the Church at Pergamum, which is a liberal Church. It's the Church that doesn't care about doctrine, it's the opposite of Ephesus, it embraces everyone. Then, in verse eighteen we have the Church at Thyatira, which is the pagan Church, the Church that is full of cultic practices. Chapter three begins with the Church of Sardis which is representative of dead Churches. It has a reputation for being alive, but in reality it is dead. The next Church mentioned is the Church of Philadelphia. It's the Church that we would all like to be a member of because it is the alive Church, for which Jesus has no criticism whatsoever. And then finally, in verse fourteen of chapter three we have the Church at Laodicea. In many respects it is the most pathetic of all the Churches because it's the worldly and apathetic Church, the Church that is neither hot nor cold because it could just simply care less.

Now, as I said, these seven Churches are representative of every kind of Church that exists today. You will find your Church in one of these seven or a combination of them. I think they are also representative of seven different types of Christians, so I ask you, are you a legalistic Christian? A persecuted Christian? Liberal? Worldly? Are you dead? Are you alive? Are you apathetic?

I believe these seven Churches are also representative of seven periods of Church history. All seven types of Churches have always existed, all of them exist today, but one type has dominated each period of Church history.

The Church at Ephesus is representative of the apostolic period from 30 AD to 95 AD, when the Church was concerned about organization and doctrine to the point that it became legalistic.

The Church at Smyrna represents the persecuted Church, or the martyred Church that existed from 95 AD to 312 AD. It's the Church that existed at the time that the book of Revelation was written.

Then we have the liberal Church of Pergamum representing the apostate Church that existed from 312 to 590. This period developed after the Emperor Constantine was converted and the Church and the state were welded together. As is always the case in such unions, the state began to corrupt the Church.

The Church at Thyatira represents the dark pagan period from 590 to 1517 when the Papacy developed and the Church became full of Babylonian occult practices.

When we come to the reformation, in 1517, we think of it as a time of life, but it was only partially so. The reformation produced the protestant state Churches of Europe, Churches that had a reputation for being alive, but were really dead because of their union with the state. So, the Church of Sardis, the dead Church, with a reputation for being alive, represents the post reformation period from 1517 to about 1750.

The opposite of Sardis is the Church at Philadelphia, the alive Church. It represents the period of Church history from about 1750 when the Church began to send missionaries out all over the world, until about 1925, when the German school of higher criticism invaded seminaries worldwide and destroyed many people's faith in the word of God.

The Church of today is represented by the Church of Laodicea. A Church that says to the world, I am rich and have become wealthy and need nothing whatsoever. But Jesus says to that Church, you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. It is a worldly, apathetic, apostate Church that will not even let Jesus in the front door.

You know, the best summary of these letters that I have ever encountered is the one penned by John Stott in his book, *Basic Christianity*. He sees the message of Jesus as three fold in nature. To a sinful Church, Jesus is saying "I know your sin, repent." To a doubtful Church, Jesus is saying "I know of your doubt, believe." And to a fearful Church, He is saying "I know of your fear, endure." Repent, believe, endure. That's a very relevant message for the Church today.

One final thing about these letters. Please note that each of these seven letters end with promises to over-comers. I would exhort you to go through and make a list of them and study them very carefully. You'll find a total of 13 promises.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to our study of the seven letters to the seven Churches of Revelation. I am delighted to have in the studio with me two of my colleagues who are experts on Bible prophecy. One is Don McGee, the founder and director of Crown and Sickie Ministries, located in Amite, Louisiana, that's right outside of Baton Rouge. The other is my former associate and evangelist, Dennis Pollock, who now is serving in his own ministry called Spirit of Grace, located in McKinney, Texas, a suburb of Dallas. Well fellows, I want to thank you right up front for taking the time out from your busy schedules to come here and be with me today. And I want to warn you right up front, I'm gonna give both of you all the tough questions that we have on this program, okay?

Dennis Pollock: Thank you. Why does that not surprise me?

Dr. Reagan: [laughs] Okay. Well, we're not gonna have time to talk about all 13 of the promises that are given in these letters to the seven Churches of Revelation, but I do want to try to cover as many as possible. And I thought we might just get into this by giving you a chance to tell me which one of these thirteen is your favorite and whoever goes first, you better jump in fast because the other one will probably take your favorite.

Dennis Pollock: Go ahead, Don, I'll be the gentleman here.

Don McGee: Each one of them has a real distinct appeal to me. A couple of them that come to mind as I read this is we'll be allowed to eat of the Tree of Life. I like to eat. [Dave laughs] And I believe with this we're going to be able to consume all of this Tree of Life, the fruit of the Tree of Life we want. It's not gonna have any cholesterol.

Dr. Reagan: And it's gonna have a different fruit every month.

Don McGee: That's right, and it's gonna be healthy for you. I look forward to that. Also the idea of never being separated from God again, that has to do with chapter 2, verse 11, where we will not be hurt by the second death. We'll talk perhaps later about the first death, just to be able to be with God for all eternity. And then the authority over the nations...

Dr. Reagan: Now, look, you can't go down and...

Don McGee: I just...

Dr. Reagan: We wanted your favorite, Don, if you select every one on the list, we won't have anything left!

Don McGee: I have three favorites. [Dave laughs] Well, the other one is the authority over the nations. I really look forward to participating in righteous rule over the nations.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, now, Dennis, what is your favorite, and by the time you get through, there probably won't be anything left for me to choose.

Dennis Pollock: Well, I picked twelve of the thirteen. [Dave laughs] No, no, I was a good boy. Actually, I just chose one, and it's actually the very last one, it's from the 21st verse in chapter three. Jesus says, "He whoever overcomes I'll grant to sit with me on my throne, as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." And it speaks to me of two things. One, it speaks of intimacy. I mean, you can't get much closer to someone than sitting right next to them. And, I don't know how big the throne of Jesus is but I think I'll be right up alongside of Him. And then the idea of course is the idea of co-reigning with Christ, which the Bible makes clear is what we will do throughout eternity. And as I was meditating on that I thought about when I was like fourteen years old, I wanted to drive so desperately, and I finally convinced my dad to let me steer. Now, he wouldn't let me actually drive, he would still be in the driver's seat, but he'd let me kind of steer. And then every once in awhile, if I'd mess up too badly, he'd put his hand on the wheel and he'd fix it for me, and it kind of reminded me of what we'll be doing with Jesus. We'll be co-driving with Him the universe, reigning with Him, and that's an awesome thing.

Dr. Reagan: Well, I tell you, that's one of my favorites too. And let me just ask you this question. What do you say to the vast majority of Christendom who says we're already doing that, that we're reigning with Jesus right now, sitting on his throne with Him?

Dennis Pollock: Well, if we're reigning with Christ, the world is not doing very well as a result of it.

Don McGee: We're not doing a very good job.

Dennis Pollock: We're not doing a good job and no, I mean, that's one of those things that if you look and you think about it very long, you say "no, it just can't be."

Dr. Reagan: And furthermore, the Bible says Jesus is going to reign on the throne of David, and where is the throne of David? Is it in heaven? It's always been in one place.

Don McGee: In Jerusalem.

Dr. Reagan: In Jerusalem, absolutely. Okay, well neither one of you touched on the one that I was going to mention.

Dennis Pollock: Alright, go for it brother.

Dr. Reagan: Again, all of them are my favorite, I love them all. But there's a sentimental favorite, and I don't know why. It's just that, the first time I ever read it, it just touched my heart, and that is in chapter two, verse 17, where it says that those who are over-comers are going to be given a white stone and a new name will be written on that stone which nobody knows but he who receives it. And I just, I don't know why, that just touched my heart, a white stone. Back in that day and time, when you were tried by a jury and it was time for the jury to make their verdict, you'd walk over, put your hand out and they'd put in your hand either a white stone or a black stone. Black if you were guilty and white if you were innocent. And the Lord's gonna put in my hand a white stone that's gonna say "David, you're innocent." And hey, I know I'm not innocent, but I'm innocent by the blood of Jesus Christ, because I stand in His righteousness and not my own. And God's gonna forgive me and forget all those sins that I've committed and I will stand righteous before Him. That touches my heart. And, on that stone is going to be a new name. You know, God loves to change names. All through the Bible He changes, He changed Abraham's name, He changed Sarah's name, He changed Paul's name, He changed Peter's name. He loves to change names at new points in our spiritual development. Well, boy this is going to be a new point.

Dennis Pollock: Well, you know, I'm glad of that because the truth is I've never liked my name anyway. [Laughter] I've always wondered "Mom, why didn't you name me Rocky or somebody a little more masculine... Dennis." But anyway....

Dr. Reagan: Well, I have a suspicion, now this is just a suspicion, that the new name we're gonna get in eternity is going to be related to our spiritual walk in this life. And I would imagine some might get the name of Perseverance, or Faith, or Hope, or Charity. Wouldn't it be awful to look at it and say well, your name for eternity is gonna be Wishy-Washy. I hope that's not the situation with me. But I'm looking forward to that.

Okay, those are our favorites, now let's look at some of these other promises that are made here. You know there's a total of thirteen of them. And one of them says we will not be hurt by the second death. Now what in the world is that? I find that non-Christians have great difficulty with that idea, when you start talking about "I'm not subject to the second death. What about the first death, what are you talking about?"

Dennis Pollock: Yeah. Well, Jesus made it real plain when He describes it. I think it's in Revelation 20, where He talks about the wicked will be cast into the Lake of Fire, and then the words are added, which is the second death. So the second death is that consuming Lake of Fire that the wicked will go into.

Don McGee: It's not just a Lake of Fire, that's very real and it's going to be very painful, but the second death has to do with the idea of separation. If you're separated from someone, that adds to the torment. A person can be in pain, a person can be in suffering, but as long as they are in close proximity to someone that they love, there is always comfort and a sense of a close association. When a person is separated from God for all eternity that's the premiere thing about death.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah.

Dr. Reagan: I had a fellow say to me one time, he said, "Have you ever thought about if you're born again, you die only once. But if you're not born again, you die twice." And the world doesn't understand that.

Don McGee: Yeah. There's something that needs to be said I believe about the first death, and it's from Ephesians 2:1 where it says, "*that we were dead in our trespasses and sins.*" That's the first death. We are separated from God by our sin. But it doesn't mean that our sin is going to keep us separated from Him for all eternity. As Christians we have that restored fellowship. But if a person is not a Christian, not only are they dead in their trespasses and sins, separated from God in this life right now. But, for all eternity, they will be separated from Him.

Dennis Pollock: You know, the Bible says "*Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.*" And basically, the sinner spends his life praying to God to leave him alone. He avoids church, he avoids solid preaching, he doesn't like strong Christians to talk about God. Basically, their whole life is a prayer saying "Oh God would you just please leave me alone." And God, who answers prayers, says, "Fine, I'll do it for eternity."

Dr. Reagan: Wow. Well, let's take a look at one of the most enigmatic of all these promises.

Dennis Pollock: You better tell us what enigmatic means. [laughter]

Dr. Reagan: Because some of these problems are not very clear, there's one that's kind of like a Chinese puzzle, and that is in chapter 2:17, the verse I just read from. And it says there that the over-comer will be given some of the hidden manna. What in the world is that talking about?

Don McGee: Well, the word "manna," you remember from the Old Testament, means "What is it?" And I think that we are in the presence of the Lord, the things that we are going to be given will be an understanding of what it is. I think that we're going to know some things that we are totally incapable of knowing now. And I think that's going to be a sort of feeding for the soul. There will be a spiritual feeding for the soul there, because our knowledge will increase. The things about God that we do not and can not understand now will be revealed to us at that time.

Dr. Reagan: You know, I think that eternity is going to be a constant process of learning. We'll be learning more and more about God throughout all eternity. And I think that since God is infinite, no matter how much we learn, there will just be that much more to learn. Same with the Word, I think we can study His Word for all eternity. And wouldn't it be

great to sit down with the apostle John for example, he said, "Well, let's go through the gospel of John." And he'd just show you so many things that you never even thought of before. It'd just be exciting.

Dennis Pollock: You know you pick up on a good point. A lot of people assume that the minute you die and go to heaven, you know everything about everything. And you know we will never be God. We're not God now - we won't turn into God when we go to heaven. We won't know everything then, and you're right, we will be learning continually, and the neat thing of it is, we'll enjoy it. Some people don't like it.

Dr. Reagan: Yes, I think we're gonna be growing eternally.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah.

Dr. Reagan: Growing eternally. Well, here's another one that's almost equally enigmatic. And that is chapter 2:28. Says, "*To the overcomer, I'm going to give him the morning star.*" What in the world is the morning star?

Dennis Pollock: Well, Jesus actually tells us He is the Morning Star, it's actually in the same book, where He says I am the bright and the morning star, and so.

Dr. Reagan: In chapter 22:16 I believe it is.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, the very last chapter of Revelation.

Dr. Reagan: He says, "*I Jesus have sent my angel to testify to these things for the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.*"

Dennis Pollock: And it's kind of neat because often times He talks about doing something for us, or giving something to us, and then we find that what He does for us, or what He gives to us is Himself. Like, He talks about leading the believers to living fountains of waters, well He is the living fountain of waters. And then He talks about giving us the morning star, well He is the Morning Star. So, He's not only the door and the giver, He's the gift and what we receive. I mean, He is all in all.

Dr. Reagan: That's right. Well, what about chapter 3:12? Another one that's a little bit difficult to understand. In chapter 3:12 it says, "*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God and he will not go out from it anymore.*" What does it mean to be a pillar in the temple of God?

Don McGee: We talk about people being pillars of the community.

Dr. Reagan: There you go.

Don McGee: You know, we use that quite often in regular speech. It simply means that you have a place of prominence and responsibility and authority within a community. And there's a time coming when Christians are going to share in that authority that God is going to give them, through Jesus, His son. We are like Him in that we're going to be co-heirs with Him.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah.

Don McGee: And that means that what He has, we have. Now only will we have Him as the manna, as the bright and morning star in us, but we'll share in that responsibility and authority that He will give us.

Dr. Reagan: You know, the Bible actually refers to certain people as pillars of the Church. The stalwarts, the strong ones, and that sort of thing. And when I read this about making a pillar in the temple of my God, I think of something that you often mention. I think of a person that, once we are in that glorified body, that we'll be a strong person in the Spirit who simply is no longer going to sin. We'll have a whole new nature. We won't have that old sin nature anymore. And boy will we ever be a pillar in the temple of God. You talk about that a lot, about that new nature.

Don McGee: Yeah, I look forward to it personally, as I'm sure all Christians do.

Dr. Reagan: Oh, I really am, I'm looking forward to it because I'm tired of the struggle that goes on inside of me.

Don McGee: It's the ball and chain of this life.

Dr. Reagan: Oh yeah, I mean every time I gotta make a decision, the Holy Spirit's pulling me in one direction, and Satan's pulling me in another. And I got this conflict going on inside. It gets easier I think as I grow older in the Lord Jesus Christ, to make those decisions. But the struggle is always there. Do you have anything to say about that, becoming a pillar?

Dennis Pollock: Well, you know, as I was doing a little study on this, first of all, this was written to the Church in Philadelphia, and apparently there were a lot of earthquakes in that region.

Dr. Reagan: It's true.

Dennis Pollock: And the pillars of course were extremely important in that they were the foundation. They were holding up the building and in times of earthquakes, you wanted strong pillars, so that's one thought. Another thing is, these are not just pillars they are pillars with names on them.

Dr. Reagan: That's right.

Dennis Pollock: He says, I'll make them a pillar and I'll write my name, the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, on them. And, true enough, back in the days that this was written, they would inscribe names on pillars to devote them to various people. So we will be pillars in Heaven and we will have the name of the Father, and the Son, and the name of New Jerusalem on us as belonging to them.

Don McGee: Solomon had names on the pillars of his temples, what is it, Jachin and Boaz?

Dr. Reagan: Yes. I like that idea of those names being on. You know, when something belongs to you, you often will write your name on it. Your kid's going to school, you write their name on their possessions because you know somebody may have sticky fingers.

Dennis Pollock: And you use permanent marker.

Dr. Reagan: This is a symbol that boy we belong, we belong to God. We belong to Jerusalem. We belong to these.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, and not just for now, but a zillion years from now, we'll still belong to God. You know, there's no changing. There'll be no falling away.

Dr. Reagan: And then it says we're going to be given authority over the nations, chapter 2:26. Authority over the nations. Now, you mentioned that in particular, that you're looking forward to that.

Don McGee: Every morning when I read the paper, or watch the news I become so frustrated by what I see in the rebellious hearts of humanity, and that doesn't exclude me. But it does say that this world is in rebellion against God. And because of a former profession that I was in, I have an inclination toward wanting justice and peace and that kind of thing. This will be a time when we will participate with God, in insuring that the rebellion will be quelled.

Dr. Reagan: Yep. Now these thirteen glorious promises are made, every one of them, to overcomers. Dennis, what in the world is an overcomer?

Dennis Pollock: Well, the Bible actually tells us in First John, the fifth chapter. It says, "*Who is he who overcomes but he who believes that Jesus is the son of God. This is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.*" So it is our faith in Christ, receiving the new birth, and then continuing to trust in Him that makes us an overcomer. And in the idea of being an overcomer, there is an inference, and that is, there is something to be overcome. There is resistance in this world. And it's through faith in Christ that we overcome that resistance.

Dr. Reagan: So, my friends, if any of you viewers right now have never received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I urge you to do that because then you will be an overcomer and you will be an heir of all thirteen of these promises.

Well, I see that our time has expired for this week so we must bring this discussion to a close. Next week the Lord willing, we'll start by considering each of the letters in detail, and once again, I will have with me both Don and Dennis. Until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries staying "Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near."

End of Program