

Assembly of Eloah

This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent -- Jesus Christ. Jn. 17:3

Lessons of the Seven Churches

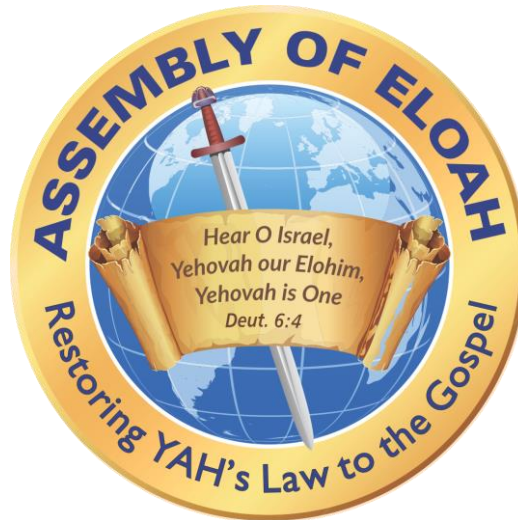
He Who Has an Ear to Hear Let Him Hear

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Edition 1



The letters to the seven churches contain lessons critical for Christians today. As Christians, we have a responsibility to avoid the pitfalls that befell these churches. In so doing, we will reap great reward.



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In Revelation, chapters 1-3, we find the letters written to the seven churches. In actuality, the letters are written to the angels of the churches. So, much like the nations, churches have angels over them with the responsibility to guide and direct them. As we will see, most of these angels have failed to keep the churches in line.

There is much debate about these seven churches. Are they physical churches or are they symbolic of church eras? It is not critical to our salvation, as Christians, to know the answer to that question. It is critical, however, for us to learn from the letters written to these churches. We need to be aware of what is taught in these letters so we can avoid both the pitfalls these churches fell victim to and the consequences for failing to heed the warnings contained therein.

Let's begin our study in Revelation chapter one.

Rev. 1:9-20 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation, kingdom, and perseverance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of God's word and the testimony about Jesus.¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet¹¹ saying, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."¹² I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. When I turned I saw seven gold lampstands,¹³ and among the lampstands was One like the Son of Man, dressed in a long robe, and with a gold sash wrapped around His chest.¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool--white as snow, His

eyes like a fiery flame,¹⁵ His feet like fine bronze fired in a furnace, and His voice like the sound of cascading waters.¹⁶ In His right hand He had seven stars; from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was shining like the sun at midday.¹⁷ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me, and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last,¹⁸ and the Living One. I was dead, but look--I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades."¹⁹ Therefore write what you have seen, what is, and what will take place after this.²⁰ The secret of the seven stars you saw in My right hand, and of the seven gold lampstands, is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Jesus Christ dictated these letters to John and he wrote them down. The first letter is to the church at Ephesus.

Rev. 2:1-7 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands says:² I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars.³ You also possess endurance and have tolerated many things because of My name, and have not grown weary.⁴ But I have this against you: you have abandoned the love you had at first.⁵ Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.⁶ Yet you do have this: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.⁷ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Christ walks among the churches. This is important to note because we need to be cognizant of that fact. When we are assembling for worship services, conducting church business or fellowshiping with the brethren, we need to be mindful of the fact that Christ is walking among us. He walks beside us as we walk in faith and obedience.

The church at Ephesus has many great attributes and Christ praises them in that regard. He says, "I know your works". Christ knows what we do; we can't hide anything. Our lives are open books to Christ and our Father. The church at Ephesus is praised for their labor, their endurance and their intolerance for evil. They challenged the doctrine of those who claimed to be apostles and weeded the false apostles out. They must have possessed characteristics similar to the Bereans. They themselves were tested and had to endure many things, yet they persevered. This is certainly admirable. In today's modern society, endurance is seldom found. This church also hated the practices of the Nicolaitans. While this study doesn't delve into the subject of the Nicolaitans, it is important and will be dealt with in a later study. It's difficult to avoid the practices of the Nicolaitans, if you don't know what they are.

The church at Ephesus also had some problems. They had lost their first love. Jude admonishes us not to make the same mistake.

Jude 1:3 Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write and exhort you to contend for the faith

that was delivered to the saints once for all.

While the church at Ephesus was diligent in identifying false Apostles, they still strayed from the faith once delivered. Their works diminished and their adherence to the laws of God weakened. This is a warning to Christians living in the last days and we had better heed the warning.

The next letter is written to the church at Smyrna.

Rev. 2:8-11 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: "The First and the Last, the One who was dead and came to life, says: ⁹ I know your tribulation and 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 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The victor will never be harmed by the second death.

Smyrna receives only praise from Christ. They aren't condemned for any backsliding, idolatry or any other form of wickedness. They are stated to be poverty stricken yet rich. The city of Smyrna was a merchant city and had great riches. However, it was also a place of much idol worship containing many temples to pagan gods and also to the emperor Tiberius. There was a temple dedicated to the poet Homer as well.

The Christian church in Smyrna suffered much persecution from the "Jews". These are those that say they are Jews but are not. This subject merits a study in its own right but suffice it to say there is much more than meets the eye in that statement. Polycarp was the first bishop of the church in Smyrna and is said to have been martyred in the stadium there.

Christ also sends them comfort. He tells them not to be afraid of what is coming upon them. They are promised a crown of life, if they endure. This is not just a message to them but to us as well. We aren't to be afraid of what anyone can do to us. We have been given a spirit of boldness not a spirit of fear. We must hold fast to the faith once delivered, even unto death. It is only with this type of faith that we will receive our crown.

A deeper study into the ten day period needs to be done so we might gain a better understanding of the timeframe of this passage.

The next letter is written to the angel of the church in Pergamum.

Rev. 2:12-17 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The One who has the sharp, two-edged sword says: ¹³ I know where you live--where Satan's throne is! And you are holding on to My name and did not deny your faith in Me, even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the sons of Israel: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵

In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Therefore repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷"Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.

The church at Pergamum is praised for the fact that they hold fast to the Name of Christ in spite of the fact that they live in a major seat of paganism and false worship.

Pergamum is called the place where Satan lives. In Robertson's Word Pictures in his comment on Revelation 2:12 we read:

In Pergamum (en Pergamw). In a north-easterly direction from Smyrna in the Caicus Valley, some fifty-five miles away, in Mysia, on a lofty hill, a great political and religious centre. Ramsay (*Op. cit.*, p. 281) calls it "the royal city, the city of authority." Eumenes II (B.C. 197-159) extended it and embellished it with many great buildings, including a library with 200,000 volumes, second only to Alexandria. The Kingdom of Pergamum became a Roman province B.C. 130. Pliny termed it the most illustrious city of Asia. Parchment (xarta Pergamena) derived its name from Pergamum. It was a rival of Ephesus in the temples to Zeus, Athena, Dionysos, in the great grove Nicephorium (the glory of the city). Next to this was the grove and temple of Asklepios, the god of healing, called the god of Pergamum, with a university for medical study. Pergamum was the first city in Asia (A.D. 29) with a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavius Caesar). Hence in the Apocalypse Pergamum is a very centre of emperor-worship "where Satan dwells"

(Rev. 2:13). Here also the Nicolaitans flourished (Rev. 2:15) as in Ephesus (Rev. 2:6) and in Thyatira (Rev. 2:20 f.). Like Ephesus this city is called temple-sweeper (newkorov) for the gods.

They do not deny the faith even in the face of death as in the case of Antipas. Christ does however have some issues with this church. The fact is they allow some who hold to the practices of the Nicolaitans to remain in their midst. We are admonished by Paul in I Corinthians 5 not to allow sin to remain within the body.

1Cor. 5:1-13 It is widely reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even condoned among the Gentiles--a man is living with his father's wife. ² And you are inflated with pride, instead of filled with grief so that he who has committed this act might be removed from among you. ³ For though absent in body but present in spirit, I have already decided about him who has done this thing as though I were present. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, along with my spirit and with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast permeates the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, since you are unleavened. For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old yeast, or with the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰ by no means referring to this world's immoral people, or to the greedy and swindlers, or to idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. ¹¹ But now

I am writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a reviler, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. ¹² For what is it to me to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³ But God judges outsiders. **Put away the evil person from among yourselves.**

With the warning also came a promise. If they repent, they will receive a white stone with a new name written thereon that only the recipient knows. They will also receive some of the hidden manna which we know is the bread of life.

The next letter is to the church at Thyatira.

Rev. 2:18-29 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: "The Son of God, the One whose eyes are like a fiery flame, and whose feet are like fine bronze says: ¹⁹ I know your works--your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. Your last works are greater than the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you: you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and deceives My slaves to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Look! I will throw her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her practices. ²³ I will kill her children with the plague. Then all the churches will know that I am the One who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known the deep things of Satan--as they say--I do not put any other burden on you. ²⁵ But hold on to what you have until I come. ²⁶ The victor and the one who keeps My

works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations-- ²⁷ **and He will shepherd them with an iron scepter; He will shatter them like pottery**--just as I have received *this* from My Father. ²⁸ I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Christ praises the church at Thyatira for their love, faithfulness, service and endurance. It appears the church actually grew in understanding and dedication. However, they were tolerant of the woman Jezebel. The commentaries differ in opinion in regard to this woman. Some claim that it is a reference to the wife of the bishop of Thyatira whom he allowed to sway the church with her wickedness. Others claim that it is symbolic of the wife of Ahab, king of Israel.

While both opinions are possibilities, the latter seems more appropriate in this context. Here, again, we find reference to idolatrous behavior. This was a serious problem for the Christian churches in these cities so steeped in pagan worship. As they, we must be diligent in our effort to hold fast to the faith once delivered. We are told that those that commit such things will be destroyed. The wickedness is so great in this church that Christ tells those who remain faithful to just hold on to what they have. It appears that the spiritual growth of the church was stunted as a result of the wickedness within it.

The victors here are promised authority over the nations. As he received it from our Father, he will give to those who keep his works to the end. We must be

obedient to the laws and statutes of the One True God. Another promise is made. Christ promises to give those who are victorious the "morning star". Morning star is a rank amongst the angelic host. Christ is a morning star.

Rev. 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to attest these things to you for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star."

This passage could be a reference to the hidden manna given to the church at Thyatira. This manna is the bread of life. Christ gives life to the faithful who endure to the end. The more plausible meaning, given the context, is that of rank. Perhaps the victorious are given the rank of morning star. This seems to fit with verses 26 and 27 which speak of the authority given to those who overcome.

Both are great promises and one need not invalidate or nullify the other.

The next letter is to the church at Sardis.

Rev. 3:1-6 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: "The One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says: I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. ² Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before My God. ³ Remember therefore what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent. But if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you have no idea at what hour I will come against you. ⁴ But you have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes, and they will walk with Me in white, because they are worthy. ⁵In the same way, the victor will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his

name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and before His angels. ⁶ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Sardis church is said to have a reputation for being alive but it is dead. This church is spiritually dead. They are admonished to repent and save what remains of the true works, which is dying. This church has forgotten the faith once delivered.

If we aren't justified by works (Rom. 3:20), then why the reference to the works of the churches? We know that faith without works is dead (Jam 2:7). This church is not obedient to the laws and statutes of God. Not all of them are dead. There are some who have not defiled their garments. These are promised white clothes because they are worthy of the gift. They are promised never to be erased from the book of life. This is a wonderful promise made not only to the Sardis church but to all who overcome.

The next letter is to the church at Philadelphia.

Rev. 3:7-13 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "The Holy One, the True One, the One who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and closes and no one opens says: ⁸ I know your works. Because you have limited strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name, look, I have placed before you an open door that no one is able to close. ⁹ Take note! I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying--note this--I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will

know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come over the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown. ¹² The victor: I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God, and he will never go out again. I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God--the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God--and My new name. ¹³ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

This church is given great praise and promises. This church is not strong but they are obedient, faithful and they endure. They have been given an open door that no one can close. This door is an opportunity that is not presented to any of the other churches. Pray always that we are able to discern the will of God and understand.

This open door is the opportunity to preach the gospel. The Philadelphian church is given an opportunity to do the work of God as no other church has been given.

We need to be ever mindful of the great blessing given to this church. The gospel must be preached with zeal and diligence. We can't afford to be indolent in our approach to doing the work of God.

This church is promised that those who claim they are Jews and are not will bow at their feet. Those who persecute this church will be conquered by Christ. It remains to be seen who these are that

say they are Jews and are not. A future study will be done on this subject.

A promise is made by Christ to keep this church from the hour of tribulation. It appears this church will be kept safe as a result of its faith and obedience. This indeed is a wonderful promise. The entire world will endure tribulation for one hour.

Rev. 17:12-14 The 10 horns you saw are 10 kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. ¹³ These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ These will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings. Those with Him are called and elect and faithful."

The elect and faithful of this church are made pillars in the sanctuary of God.

The seventh letter is written to the church at Laodicea.

Rev. 3:14-22 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Originator of God's creation says: ¹⁵ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy, and need nothing,' and you don't know that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, and white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be committed

and repent. ²⁰ Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me. ²¹ The victor: I will give him the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I also won the victory and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

This entire church is vomited out of Christ's mouth. They are so complacent and ambivalent that they cannot be used by Christ. They have no zeal. They obviously don't realize their own state as they claim to be in need of nothing. They have "arrived" as it were. We can't allow ourselves to become self-reliant. We need Christ and we need God. God is our savior and Christ is our head and high priest. Of ourselves we can do nothing but in God all things are possible.

This church is called to repentance. Those that do are promised a seat on Christ's throne. The victorious will rule with Christ, as Christ rules with the Father.

All of the letters written to the churches speak of either repenting of or avoiding disobedience and idolatrous behavior. The works of the churches are known, just as our individual works are known. The book of Jude is a warning to true Christians and encapsulates many of the warnings contained in the seven letters.

Jude 1:1-25 Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James: To those who are the called, loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. ² May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. ³ Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about our common salvation, I found it

necessary to write and exhort you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. ⁴ For certain men, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into promiscuity and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. ⁵ Now I want to remind you, though you know all these things: the Lord, having first of all saved a people out of Egypt, later destroyed those who did not believe; ⁶ and He has kept, with eternal chains in darkness for the judgment of the great day, angels who did not keep their own position but deserted their proper dwelling. ⁷ In the same way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them committed sexual immorality and practiced perversions, just as they did, and serve as an example by undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. ⁸ Nevertheless, these dreamers likewise defile their flesh, despise authority, and blaspheme glorious beings. ⁹ Yet Michael the archangel, when he was disputing with the Devil in a debate about Moses' body, did not dare bring an abusive condemnation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ¹⁰ But these people blaspheme anything they don't understand, and what they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals--they destroy themselves with these things. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they have traveled in the way of Cain, have abandoned themselves to the error of Balaam for profit, and have perished in Korah's rebellion. ¹² These are the ones who are like dangerous reefs at your love feasts. They feast with you, nurturing only themselves without fear. They are waterless clouds carried along by winds; trees in late autumn--fruitless, twice dead, pulled out by the roots; ¹³ wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shameful deeds; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever! ¹⁴ And Enoch, in the seventh *generation* from Adam, prophesied about them: Look! The Lord comes with thousands of His holy ones ¹⁵

to execute judgment on all, and to convict them of all their ungodly deeds that they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things ungodly sinners have said against Him. ¹⁶ These people are discontented grumblers, walking according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage. ¹⁷ But you, dear friends, remember the words foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; ¹⁸ they told you, "In the end time there will be scoffers walking according to their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These people create divisions and are merely natural, not having the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, dear friends, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. ²² Have mercy on some who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching *them* from the fire; on others have mercy in fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. ²⁴ Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now, and forever. Amen.

Conclusion

Brethren, whether the churches are literal or symbolic, the lessons taught are important for us today. In these letters are many warnings and many promises. In summary the warnings are against the following:

- Abandoning the love we had at first. This is the faith once delivered.
- Allowing the teachings of Baalam and the Nicolaitans to enter into and gain a foothold in the church.

- Allowing the idolatry and sexual immorality of Jezebel into the church.
- Becoming spiritually dead.
- Lacking zeal for the laws, statutes and work of God.

All of these warnings reflect disobedience toward God and His ways and a lack of diligence in keeping the church pure. Let's be perseverant in our obedience and diligent in our effort to keep the church pure. We can't backslide and we can't become lackadaisical in our approach to living uprightly toward God and our worship of Him.

The promises to those who endure to the end are great. Whether the end is our physical death or the end of the age is of no consequence to our salvation. Our duty is to remain in the faith and endure to whichever end it is to which we come. The promises to the faithful elect are:

- The right to eat from the tree of life.
- Receipt of the crown of life.
- Victory over the second death.
- Receipt of some of the hidden manna (the bread of life).
- A new name which only the recipient knows.
- Authority over the nations.
- The morning star (whether as a rank or as the symbolic body of Christ or manna).
- White garments signifying purity and righteousness.
- Name never erased from the Book of Life but acknowledged before God and the Angels.
- Being made a pillar in the sanctuary of God.

- A seat on Christ's throne.

Brethren, the promises contained in these letters are indeed wonderful. Our minds can't really grasp the greatness of God and His promises to His people. Be ever watchful against the sin that lies in wait at the door. Don't allow Satan to gain a foothold in your life or in the church. Disobedience and faithlessness will be punished severely but obedience and diligent faith will be rewarded beyond our wildest dreams. He who has an ear to hear let him hear.