

The Seven Churches

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, let's look at the seven churches.! The churches in order are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

And I hope you can spot on the map that is the order that if you were a messenger traveling around, that's actually what you would do. Can you see it?

Does it? Yes. The names of the churches are in yellow. So Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

Not quite a perfect circle, but that's the order that they're written in and that's the order that you would travel to them in. It's worth noting that it is a letter.

It's not seven letters to seven churches. It is one letter that is circulated. So I presume from that that it's saying that even though there are specific things addressed to Ephesus, it is worth the people in Smyrna hearing them because there's some relevance to them.

[1 : 45] And likewise, the people in Pergamum also get to hear the things written to the church in Thyatira. So although they're different churches, there's something relevant.

And I would draw from that that for us, we would do well to, you know, before we say, well, we're not like that, it's nothing to do with us to say, well, actually, let's not pass it by so quickly.

It's meant to be overheard by all the churches who hear the whole thing. So I thought this is a bit analytical.

We could look together, first of all, the general pattern of these, because as you've spotted, there's a general pattern, isn't there? And the pattern is, it begins by saying, these are the words of, and then something, and then I know something.

And in some cases, but not all, there's an objection, a but, and on the other hand, I hold this against you. So there is a call to repentance.

[3 : 07] There is a call to hear. He who has an ear, or perhaps he who has ears, depending on your translation, the number of ears depends on the number of your translation, on your translation.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. And then there's a promise, which takes the form, to him who overcomes, I will give something.

Okay, you agree with that's the general pattern. So this is sort of by way of a Bible study. Let's, let's do it together. Would you like to have a look? And I've got some tick boxes there along the top to put a tick if it says these are the words of, for ESP, T, SPL.

Those are the seven churches. Now, what do you think? Is that the same for all of them, or are there some exceptions? These are the words of, is that the same in each case?

What do we think? Same? Okay. Okay. The thing that follows these are the words of, is different in each case, but the fact that it says these are the words of, is a fixed part of the pattern.

[4 : 34] So we'll come back and look at the different descriptions, but we would agree that these are the words of, is there in every case. And let's look at the, hear, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Is that the same in every case, or are there, or is there an exception? What do we think?

Same in each case? Okay, that's what I thought. So I put a tick in each of those. Right. Now then, let's go a little bit further.

Let's look at the I knows. So I know something. Let's think, first of all, I know something positive about you.

Does it say in each case, I know something positive about you? Does it say in each case, I know something? And does it in each case, I know something positive?

[5 : 53] Just have a look. What do you think? It's a bit more difficult, that question. Okay, yep.

For example. So let's itemise it. So the Smyrna is the one where it says, I know the slander.

It also says, I know your afflictions of poverty. Which is the one I know where you live? Pergamum. Okay. So that's a sort of sympathetic knowledge rather than a...

It's knowledge of a situation rather than a knowledge of their response to it. Yeah? So those are slightly different. What happens? Does it?

So verse... So 219 for Thyatira, I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance.

[6:58] In Sardis, it's got the negative deeds first, hasn't it? I know your deeds, your whole reputation is in your life that you are in. Yeah. Yeah, that's a...

There's nothing... Is there anything positive there in Sardis? You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.

Yes, that's the on-the-other-hand bit, isn't it? It's on the other hand you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. So that's a bit different. And I'm not quite sure whether I reflected that on what I filled in.

Philadelphia, does it say I know things positively? Yeah.

I know your deeds. And Laodicea, does it say... Does it say anything positive? I know. It does say I know your deeds.

[7:58] Is he saying it positively though? Is it saying they're good? No. No, they make me sick, as Ray says, yes.

So there is an I knowing, but it isn't the same all the way through. And if I'd be more clever, I would find a way to tabulate this that would just help me.

The first one was positive. The second one was I know your situation. The third one was I know your situation. The fourth one was positive.

The Sardis was negative. Philadelphia is positive. And Laodicea is just negative.

I'll show you what I thought in a moment. What about the on the other hand? Is that the same in each case? Does he give something positive and then say, on the other hand, something negative in each case?

[9:00] Is that the same in each case? So it certainly does that in the first one. In Ephesus, I know your hard work.

On the other hand, you've forsaken your first love. Philadelphia, he doesn't or does?

He doesn't. Philadelphia, he doesn't. That's the sixth one. He doesn't. What about the second one? Yeah, there is a yet, but it isn't a negative yet, is it?

It's not saying on the positive, but also on the other hand, on the negative. He doesn't have a negative comment for Smyrna.

Is that right? And so for number one, there's a, on the other hand, negative.

[10:08] Not for number two. For number three, there's an on the other hand which is negative in terms of Balaam. Number four, there's on the other hand in terms of Jezebel.

Number five, yeah, I'm getting lost now. One, two, three, four, five, five, five, five.

Yes, it's on the other hand positive, isn't it, rather than on the other hand negative. At Philadelphia, I think Ben had already said there isn't an on the other hand negative, because it's a positive.

And Laodicea is completely negative. Let's look at the next part of the pattern, to repent.

Are they all told to repent? Repent. First one is told to repent.

[11:14] Ephesus is told to repent. Yeah, just to be faithful. It's Smyrna.

They're not told to repent. They're told to be faithful to the point of death, or presumably to keep being faithful. Keep on keeping on. Yeah, Sardis is repent.

Pergamum is repent. Pergamum is repent. Thyatira, where they have the woman Jezebel. I think there's two repents there, isn't there?

Verse 21, I've given her time to repent. I'll cast her onto a bed of suffering unless they repent of their ways. There's at least two repents there.

Sardis. Did we say repent for Sardis? I think we did that, didn't we? I'm looking for which verse that was.

[12:22] Yeah, it's verse 3. Obey and repent. It actually says wake up, wake up, repent.

Philadelphia. Repent?

No. Laodicea, repent. Yeah. So I made a little table of it, which is something like that.

So always these are the words of I know. The last one is completely negative, the Laodicea. The yet and on the other hand is yes, no, yes, yes, yes, no.

And the last one is all to do with negative stuff. Likewise, the repentance forms a little pattern actually.

So repent, nothing, repent. Twice repent, repent, nothing, repent. So it's those last but one and first but one.

[13:36] Number two and number six tend to be the exceptions. And they're all told to hear. And there is a promise to them all, slightly different promise.

Just trying to try and get it into my head so that when I can try and get a grasp of it when I'm speaking about it. But that seems to be the way it is.

Let's look at the things that he knows. For Ephesus, he knows their hard work.

But on the other hand, they've lost their first love. For Smyrna, he knows their afflictions and their poverty.

But there isn't a negative to that. I just know and keep on keeping on. For Pergamum, I know where you live.

[14:51] Where Satan has his throne. And I think I remember when I was researching it before, it said that in Pergamum there was a particular temple. Maybe a temple to the emperor.

I forget exactly. Maybe that's what's being referred to. You're at the center of the diocese of emperor worship. Satan has his throne there.

And that's what an antipass, my faithful witness, was put to death in your city where Satan lives.

And then the negative is this to do with Balaam. I'd like to have a look at that. Verses 14 and 15.

You've heard about Balaam.

Balaam was a prophet in the Old Testament who was hired to curse the people of God. And he claimed to be a man of great spiritual discernment.

[15:59] But the irony of it was that he had a donkey who knew more about the purposes of God than he did. And the donkey could tell him what was going on more than he did. It was quite funny.

And he was also involved in tempting the Israelites to sin.

By eating food, it says here, sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. So he says, you've got a Balaam thing going on in your church.

Which is a pretty striking thing to say. And I wonder what was going on. So maybe there was somebody saying, idolatry is okay.

You don't have to be too serious as a Christian. I mean, we meet together as Christians on a Sunday. But on a Saturday evening, you know, there's no problem in going to the emperor's temple worship.

[17:06] That's okay, you can do that. And some of that temple worship was pretty X-rated. And I wonder whether that's what he's referring to here.

Food, sacrifice to idols and committing sexual immorality. Whether it's literally that. Or whether he's saying that to get involved with idols is a sort of unfaithfulness to our exclusive marriage-like commitment to the Lord.

I don't know. Has anybody got any views on that? Anybody got any wisdom on that? And the two do seem to be linked, don't they? And it would also be interesting if anybody in any book at all knew anything about the Nicolaitans.

Nicolaitans. As far as I have read, nobody really knows very much about them. The word Nico is the word to overcome.

So, when it says to him who overcomes, it's using this word Nico. So, maybe these were the overcomers. The Nicolaitans. Maybe they were claiming we're the overcomers.

[18:23] But they weren't overcoming. They were teaching the wrong thing, weren't they?

Likewise, you have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

So, that was Pergamum. And Thyatira. The things that he knows are their work.

I know your deeds, your love, your faith, your service and perseverance. And that you are now doing more than you did at first. Which is a great commendation. But he says, on the other hand, I have this against you.

So, this is another Old Testament person. This isn't Balaam, but Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess. And she seems to be saying much the same thing, except in a female way that Balaam was saying in a male way.

By her teaching, she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I've given her time to repent. And it's pretty serious stuff.

[19 : 25] I will strike her children dead if they don't repent. And then about Sardis. What does the Lord know?

He says, I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Which is an awful thing to say, isn't it? You know, such and such a church.

One of the biggest churches in their denomination. Famous church in the area. Huge children's work, whatever it might be. Wonderful band to play the music.

You have a reputation of being alive, but actually you're dead. Awful thing. And a call to repent to the church.

And Philadelphia, the things that he knows. I know your deeds. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and not denied my name.

[20 : 26] I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who claim to be Jews, though they are not, but are liars, will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come across upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I think that's probably the only promise that is a short-term promise.

The other promises are very, very long-term. But I will keep you from the period of temptation, trial that's going to come across the whole world.

And Laodicea, well, it doesn't say anything positive. It just says, I know that you make me sick.

You're not hot, you're not cold, you think you're rich, you're not, you're actually needy.

So those are the things that Jesus knows. Let's sing something and then come back to look again.

So let's sing 834.

[21 : 29] Let's go a little bit further. And look at the promises. The promises are... I think they're peculiar.

If you were to go home and write down what you felt was really important to you that the Lord had promised you, I don't know, what would you say?

I've been promised the forgiveness of my sins? Promised eternal life. Promised eternal life? Yes, he'd never leave us nor forsake us.

But you probably wouldn't write down that he will give me a white stone with a new name written on it. But that's what these promises are.

So I think it is another way of saying we need to take the whole thing together. I mean, what I haven't done is put together all of the descriptions of Jesus at the beginning of the sentence, at the beginning of each section.

[22 : 44] But if you put them together, you get something like the picture that you had in chapter 1 of the Jesus who walks among the seven golden lampstands, the one who's the first and the last.

He has a sharp double-edged sword in his mouth. His eyes are like blazing fire. He holds the seven spirits and the seven stars. He has the key of David.

He is the faithful witness and the ruler of God's creation. So I think it's meant to sort of be all put together, perhaps in layers like that.

But let's look just for a few minutes at the promises, and then we'll try and draw a bit of a conclusion. I think the promises are... Well, they take a bit of thinking about, don't they?

Let's look through them. So the promise given to the church in Ephesus, to him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

[23 : 53] Any thoughts of what that refers to? Or any references that echo in your mind from that? Eternal life, yep, thank you.

Back in the garden. Yes, it's back in the garden where God meant us to be, because that was where it all went wrong in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were kicked out, so they either couldn't eat from the tree of life, or they couldn't continue to eat from the tree of life, depending on which view you take.

So that's a Garden of Eden promise. I wouldn't have thought of that, but that's what's put down here. The one to Smyrna, verse 11.

He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. Any comments on that? Anybody know what it means?

It does. Yeah. It says, this is the second death. It does. Yes, it does. It may also be related to the tree of life, because God said, the day you eat of the tree of life, you will surely die.

[25 : 06] There may be a connection. The definite one is the second death is something that he talks about in the book of Revelation, but he only talks about it later on.

So it's sort of an invitation to read on in the book, because you only understand that when you've read it through once and come back again. So the first death is physical death, and the second death is the eternal death of judgment.

That's the way that one's going to work. And he's saying, you won't be hurt by the day of judgment. You will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Would you say that was a short-term promise or a long-term promise? Yeah, long-term. To the church at Pergamum, verse 17.

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

[26 : 08] I think Aaron did some research on this. What did you come up with on that? Yes. Do you want to have the microphone? That would probably help.

I'm going to pass that back to him. Well, back in ancient times, the white pebble, and I believe the black pebble, were significant in courts of judgment.

And the white pebble would be given to those who were found to be not guilty.

And the black pebble would be given to those who were condemned. I think there's a strong connection there. Certainly fits, doesn't it?

So Jesus is saying, I'm going to give you the white pebble. And this says, you're not guilty, not condemned. Yeah? Yes. Yeah. Is there a connection with Zechariah 3 verse 9 as well?

[27 : 24] The same I've seen in front of Joshua, where it says lies on that stone. It might be. Is it a white stone? Is it a white stone? No. It's a stone.

Something's going to be personal about it. The hidden manna, so it's a sort of secret thing, isn't it? And a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

That's very personal, isn't it? It is for you. Not just for everybody the same. It is particularly for you. Yeah. Something that you can feed on that isn't public.

In that sense, it is especially for you. And an identity, a preciousness, which is particularly for you. Yeah. Thank you.

To me, it sort of resonates with the priest with the names of the tribes going into the holy place. You know, it's a person to you.

[28 : 26] Yes, the priest had a thing on his front with 12 semi-precious stones, and they had the names of the tribes engraved, didn't they, personally as such.

Do you think there's any link to Jesus at the well and to pay the woman and the disciples who says, I'm not hungry, I have food to eat that you know not of.

He does say, to finish the work that my father has given me to do, I think is what he says. But yeah, it's certainly a hidden source of food, isn't it?

Yes, thank you. Yeah. Quite often, in the day-to-day life, it's, because this probably can be short-term as well, because I find it fascinating to think of the, as the world chases off things of this life, to think that there's something longer term and more sustainable and something that I'm investing in, which the world isn't investing in.

And that's a secret sustenance that people wouldn't understand if you try to fix. Yeah, I appreciate that.

[30 : 06] That's helpful. Thank you very much, Ross. Yeah, that's very helpful. Thank you. Let's look at the, yeah, yes. Yes. Give you the crown of life.

Yes, there is a promise there. Yeah. Yeah. That's right.

I died and came to life again. Yeah, that's true. Thank you. Yeah. Yeah, thank you. Let's go to Thyatira.

to him who overcomes and does my will to the end. I realized when I wrote the bit on the screen, I'd missed a bit out.

Who does my will to the end. I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He will dash them to pieces like pottery. Just as I have received authority from my father, I will also give him the morning star.

[31 : 17] So the, I'm going to carry on. The quote there, he will rule them with an iron scepter and dash them to pieces like pottery.

Anybody know where that comes from? It is Psalm 2. Yes, it's Psalm 2. And who, in Psalm 2, who is it, who does it attach itself to?

Who is the he? The son. Yes, the son, the king. But it's very interesting, this. I mean, it all goes ways that I wouldn't have thought, I wouldn't have written it like this.

So, the believer gets the privileged status that actually belongs to the king. I will give to him who overcomes, I will give authority over the nations.

He will rule them with an iron scepter. He will dash them to pieces like pottery. So what's said of the king, is applied to the believer. You will have that authority, which is remarkable.

[32 : 25] And the bit that I didn't put in is, I will give him the morning star. I don't know where to begin by understanding that.

The morning star is Venus, we now know. And it's the star, because it's a planet, it's brighter, and sometimes it rises in the morning before the sun actually comes up.

And the promise is, I will give you the morning star. Sounds great. I'm not quite sure what it means, but I think I'm well up for that. What I don't get as well is, when we get to the end, and there's no more trouble and sorrow and pain, why do we need to be able to smash the nation into the night's set?

Because it's done and busted and never really sitting on the bowels and our hearts? Well, I don't know. I think maybe what we'll be doing is sitting on thrones administering astronomical systems, maybe.

I don't know. Maybe we will. But there's something there about authority that is part of the world to come. You know, if you've been faithful in small things, you'll be given bigger things to do.

[33 : 46] Rule over ten cities, doesn't it, say in one place? It's heady stuff, isn't it? And you don't want to get carried away by it. But there is something there about having authority to do things that now would make you gasp.

Wouldn't want to do that. Don't want to be chair of governors, let alone ruling nations. There will be new creations, and they'll look at us and they'll be like, oh, there's the elders of the old world, and they manage persevere through to the end.

And we're hearing these new world-known things. Those guys have to put up with all that trouble, and we'll listen to them, because of course, and I'm not going to look back. Yeah. I think we're allowed to think that.

Yes. I don't think one would dogmatize and say that's exactly what's going to happen, but I think we're allowed to think that. Didn't Steve have a story from C.S. Lewis about a woman entering into heaven?

Is it from C.S. Lewis? Do you want the microphone? Yeah. Here we go. Microphone. Yeah. It's coming.

[34 : 58] It's coming. It's from the great divorce. It's not a woman entering into heaven. It's when, you know, it's about a bus trip to heaven, the great divorce. And he sees this beautiful woman with sort of everybody rejoicing around her, and he says, is that the virgin?

And the guide says, the angel says, no, that's just, I can't remember the name, but so-and-so from Hampstead Heath or something like that. You know, it's somebody who is, you know, you wouldn't have noticed her in her life on earth, but it's beautiful in heaven.

Yeah. Beautiful, glorious, noble, almost legendary. Yes. Good thing, isn't it? You have to change your email address from Ross the Red to Ross the Legend. I'll get there first.

Yeah, well, that's the thing. Yeah, you've got to get there first. Definitely got to get there first. Yes. 1 Corinthians 6.2 says, do you not know that saints will judge the world? Yes.

Which is, it is heady, isn't it? Because you think, whoa, I'm going to judge the world, I'll start now. But it's not quite like that, is it? But there's something remarkable going to come.

[36 : 11] Let's go to Sardis. He who overcomes will be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my father and his angels.

So that's another name thing. It's quite a bit about names there. I will not blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my father and his angels.

I wouldn't have put as a promise they will be dressed in white. purity. I think. Yeah, purity. It does go on to say they'll be clothed in white linen, which is the righteousness of the saints.

But I wouldn't have thought of doing that. Obviously, I would be wrong. But there we are. I will never blot out his name from the book of life. So that book comes in later as well.

It's another one of these things you've got to read through to the end before you understand the beginning. I would take that to be a reference to the perseverance of the saints.

[37 : 17] If your name's down in the book, it will never be taken away. That name will not be blotted out. And acknowledging his name before my father would be, I think, something like if you were to go to a presentation function at the Dome for the notable people in Brighton and Hove.

And Bill Randall or some high important person like Caroline Lucas or Jason Kit Kat picked you out and said, Maureen, come up here.

Folks, I want you to meet Maureen. She's my mate. And Jesus is saying, what I'll do if you're a believer, I will acknowledge your name before my father in heaven.

I will say to my father, this person here, they're my mate. I know them. I died for them. They've served me. It's an amazing thought, isn't it?

I will, Jesus, rather than saying, actually, go away, I'm a bit busy. Sorry. Love you greatly, but I'm a bit busy at the moment. That's what people would say, isn't it?

[38 : 39] He'd say, I will acknowledge you. I will sort of say, yeah. She's one of mine. He's one of mine.

Yeah. Yeah. And also in Hebrews, where the point is that we might be ashamed to acknowledge him, but he is not ashamed to acknowledge us, which is fairly mind-blowing, isn't it?

Let's move on to the promise for the church in Philadelphia. I wouldn't have put it this way. He who overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

I've never, I would never, I think, probably in a million years have thought that's what I would, that's the promise that I would like to be. I'd like to be an architectural feature. But that's what it says.

I'll make a pillar in the temple of God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God, and I will write on him my new name.

[39 : 51] There's a lot about names there. Living stones. Living stones, yes. Yeah, I wasn't thinking of pillars being made out of stone, but I suppose they would have been, wouldn't they?

Yes. Living stones to be part of the temple. It's also permanent, isn't it? Being built in, it's never again will they leave it.

Yeah. So not just a tourist on a day trip, but a part of the whole structure. Yeah. So is it a short-term promise or a long-term promise?

Long-term, yeah. Last one, over the page. Before you go, do we know anything about Jesus' new name?

That's my wife. You're wearing the other way. No, a lot of this I'm totally mystified by, to be honest.

Yeah. The only thing is, in that Zechariah passage, it doesn't actually tell you what the inscription is on the stone.

[40 : 54] Yes. But then we haven't even known what the inscription was, because the inscription is holy to the Lord. Yeah. It's not a name, so maybe it is the name of the child. Yeah.

It's more meaning than we don't see now. A name is a meaning. Yes, a new name. My new name. I probably ought to check in Greek that that's actually quite what it says.

My new name. So Jesus has a new name, does he? I don't know, I'm mystified. I've no idea, to be honest, but that's what it's there.

No help at all on that, Ross. End of chapter 3. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my father on his throne.

It's similar to the Psalm 2 thing, isn't it? That the authority that belongs to the king, because the lamb sits on the throne, is shared with and spills over to his people, which is pretty amazing.

[42 : 05] I'm going to draw to a conclusion. What conclusions? I think quite frightening that only two of the seven are without rebuke. Which would we be?

So it's tempting to say, well, I'm sure we would be part of the two out of seven. But I'm not sure that's the safest way to look at it, because they're there could be, you know, if everybody did that, then all the churches in Christendom are saying, well, we're part of the two out of seven.

God doesn't have a criticism of us. I think the safest response is to be constantly saying, I am trusting in the blood of Jesus Christ.

To be constantly turning to obedience. I think to be constantly repenting. Because although the two of them weren't told to repent, I think it's the safest option is to keep repenting.

And to be daily saying, how could I turn to you better? What can I be turning from? Where do I need to be turning? Certainly to keep fighting, because that goes all the way through.

[43 : 18] You keep on overcoming. And I think the safest way to keep our first love is rather than say, well, that doesn't apply to me, but just to keep on coming back to making Jesus number one in our lives.

That's what I think, anyway. I think that's the safe way to do it. The humble way to do it. And we know that Jesus is constantly great. So the great depictions of Jesus that are put into that cluster at the beginning of each address to each church.

Jesus is always those great things. And to bear in mind that the promises are constantly true, and they're nearly all future promises.

I think that's a worthwhile exercise to stretch us to say we need to be looking not just to the time when we get a new digital projector.

You know, that's a big thing we're looking forward to. But the big thing is that we're looking forward to when we see the Lord, when on the great day, when he gives out the crowns.

[44 : 48] So, the seven churches, that's the practical bit. That's where the rubber hits the road. And the rest of the book is the reason for doing and being what it says in these chapters.

In much of the New Testament, you get the theology first and then the application. Therefore, do this. In the book of Revelation, you get it the other way around. At the beginning, it says that you should be repenting, living such and such a way.

And then it goes on to explain why. Let's sing and then we'll close. Let's sing and then we'll close. Thank you.