

**Episode:** Revelation Series No. 02

**Narrator:** An Elder of Laodicea

**Primary Scriptures:** Revelation 2,3

**Story Summary:** Background of the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3

**Location:** Roman Empire, Island of Patmos

**Time:**

AD 30	Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48	Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50	Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 53	Start of Third Missionary Journey
AD 67/68	Paul probably killed in Rome
AD 85-95	John writes <i>Revelation</i>

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Revelation 2:2, 2:4, 2:10, 2:23; 3:3, 3:5, 3:11, 3:15-17, 3:19-20

John had possibly been living in Ephesus for many years prior to the writing of *Revelation*. If so, he would have been very familiar with the churches in Asia, including the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3.

Revelation 1:19-20 introduces Revelation 2 and 3, and these two verses are sourced from Revelation 1:12-16. All seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3 are addressed to the angel of that church, but it is not clear to modern readers what that means. It is possible that *angel* refers to the human leader of each church or to the envoys these churches had sent to John. It seems as if the letters are meant to be applied both by the angel and the church members.

The seven churches are located in a rough geometrical oval. The order of the church letters starts with Ephesus on the southwest side and progresses in a clockwise fashion to Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The church at Ephesus was the largest of these churches and, along with Laodicea, is the only church mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (although Lydia of Thyatira is mentioned). Due to its location, it seems like the church at Colossae should have been included in this list; we don't know why it was not.

The letters of Revelation 2 and 3 are from Jesus. The general pattern of the letters is: the address to the angel of the church, a characteristic of Jesus, an acknowledgement of the condition of the church, something good about the church, a warning to the church, and a promise of a reward for changed behavior.

Although the letters are addressed to seven specific churches, you can easily see that the problems addressed in them are experienced by modern churches, making Revelation 2 and 3 very valuable and relevant to modern Christians and churches. To many people, some of the most sobering verses in the Bible are found in passages such as Revelation 2:4-5, 2:14, 3:3 and 3:15-17. However, some of the most encouraging verses of the Bible are also found in these two chapters.

### Discussion Questions:

1. The section on the letters to the seven churches starts in Revelation 1:10. Who are the letters from? What do the seven stars and the seven lampstands signify? What or who are the angels of the seven churches?
  2. Where are the seven churches located?
  3. What is the typical structure of the letters?
  4. How many of the churches had letters to them written by Paul?
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1. The letters are from Jesus. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. It is not specified who the angels are, but they might be the head elder at the church. 2. At Ephesus and in cities to the east of Ephesus, all in the Roman Senatorial province of Asia. 3. An opening from Jesus, a description of the church, good things about the church, bad things about the church, and a warning and/or promised reward. 4. Ephesus had the letter in the New Testament known as *Ephesians*; Paul said he wrote a letter to Laodicea, but no copy of that letter exists.

### Application Questions:

1. Jesus told the Ephesians that they had forsaken their first love. Can you remember the first person (outside of your family) that you loved? Why did you love them? Do you still love them? How do you think the Ephesians forsook Jesus?
2. Jesus told the Christians at Smyrna they would be persecuted as a test. How would you react if you were persecuted for being a Christian? Are you training yourself to withstand persecution?
3. Jesus told the church at Thyatira they should not tolerate the immoral Jezebel who pretends to be a prophet but instead leads the people into sin. Are you willing to tolerate defiantly sinful people in your church? After reading this letter to Thyatira, do you think you should continue to do so?
4. Jesus warned the church at Laodicea for being lukewarm and for relying on their material wealth. Have you ever been lukewarm in your love for Jesus? According to this letter, how is material wealth deceptive? Do you let your material wealth deceive you?

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. Which of the evaluations of the seven churches hits closest to your own life? What is the penalty or reward for that church?
2. Following the style of the letters in Revelation 2 and 3, write a letter to yourself as if it were from Jesus.
3. Jesus warned the Laodiceans about feeling as if they need nothing. Do you ever dream of having great riches or piles of friends so you won't need anybody or anything? In spiritual terms, can you ever be self-sufficient?