



Revelation

Cracking the Code

or

Why you won't be left behind!

Week 2

Scene 1 – The Church in the World

(John's Opening Vision and the Letters to the Churches)

1



John's Introduction

- ❖ This is a revelation from Jesus Christ to John on the island of Patmos.
 - Jesus is referred to as the "firstborn of the dead." Why?
- ❖ Blessed are those who hear and keep what is written.
 - It can't all be a "secret" if we are obey it!
- ❖ "I am the Alpha and the Omega" – who is and who was and who is to come
- ❖ John is to write a book for seven churches
- ❖ John turns, and in the midst of seven lampstands, John sees "one like the Son of Man."
- ❖ John falls as if he was dead. What does Jesus do? He comforts him! Tells him to be unafraid. And then tells him what to write to the seven churches.

©2003 Scott L. Engle



The Vision of the Son of Man

- ❖ From the apocalyptic Daniel – chapter 7, esp. 7:13
- ❖ Jesus often refers to himself as the Son of Man.
 - He uses the images of Daniel 7:13 in his warnings about the coming judgment on the Temple in Mark 13 & Matt 24
 - In Jesus' day, Daniel's "Son of Man" was understood to be a messianic reference – the anointed king at the center of Israel's vindication against the pagan/Roman oppressors.
- ❖ Notice that the symbols are not obscure!
 - The sword in Jesus' mouth: directly from Hebrew 4:12, "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword"
 - The stars are the angels of the churches
 - The lampstands are the churches themselves
 - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples to shine their light for all the world to see, not hide it under a bushel basket.

©2003 Scott L. Engle



The Seven Churches

- ❖ These are all real churches in the same region of Asia Minor.
- ❖ Why seven?
 - Seven is the most important number in the Bible!
 - God created in seven days. Hence, seven was the number of completeness or totality.
 - In John's Gospel there are seven "signs" and seven "I am" statements. These are not literary accidents! In James, there are seven characteristics of wisdom – no accident!
 - Some sevens are not so obvious. In Revelation, there are seven beatitudes, as in 1:3.
- ❖ Seven churches because they represent all churches.
- ❖ The seven spirits of 1:4 represent the fullness of God's Spirit – not seven separate beings!
- ❖ Next week, we'll meet the seven-eyed, seven-horned Lamb of God! Why seven eyes and seven horns?

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Letter to the church at Ephesus

- ❖ You can visit Ephesus today!! The site has some of the best ancient ruins in the world. It was near the gigantic Temple of Artemis.
- ❖ In this letter, there is an emphasis on guarding against false teaching. The Christians in Ephesus had tested some apostles (meaning ones who are sent or messengers) and found them wanting. One group of false teachers is even named – the Nicolaitians.
- ❖ In the later NT writings, there is a lot of attention paid to false teaching.
 - Today – do we even have a sense anymore of false teaching?! How faithfully do we protect what we teach our children – and ourselves?
- ❖ But . . . The Ephesians seem to have forgotten about love. Perhaps, in their admirable defense of the faith, they forgot they are to do so with gentleness, humility, and love.

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Letter to the church at Smyrna

- ❖ Evidently, overt persecution is going on – persecution of this impoverished congregation of Christians who are “rich in faith.”
 - On the whole, Smyrna was not poor, but prosperous and elegant. It had beautiful gardens and public walks.
- ❖ There seems to have been a lot of fighting over “who are the real Jews.”
 - Struggles between Jewish-Christians and Jews who rejected the Christian claims are prominent in the NT. As are the struggles for harmony among Jewish-Christians and Gentile-Christians.
- ❖ Here, the Christians in Smyrna, knowing what lies ahead, are urged to stay faithful, for they will not be harmed by the second death (the last judgment).
 - This IS the theme of John’s Revelation.

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Letter to the church at Pergamum

- ❖ Pergamum was a cultural and administrative center of Asia Minor.
- ❖ We can't be sure exactly what is meant by "Satan's throne." Perhaps it is a reference to one of the pagan temples or law courts.
- ❖ As at Ephesus, the Christians are warned to avoid false teaching and repent of some of their practices.
- ❖ The "hidden manna" that the faithful receive is probably a reference to the great Messianic banquet.
 - Remember how many of Jesus' parables have to do with parties and banquets. The coming of God's kingdom was like a great feast to which all would be welcome, but not all would come.
- ❖ We aren't sure about the "white stone." But its whiteness probably ties it to Christ and his name. We do know that white stones were prized amulets.

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Letter to the church at Thyatira

- ❖ Again . . . with the food and fornication!
- ❖ Already, in these letters, how much do we see of all the temptations and false teachings to which we can be drawn!
 - "Jezebel" is teaching – and showing! – people how to incorporate pagan practices into their Christian worship and life. Those who commit "adultery" with Jezebel are those who follow her false teachings. See Hosea in the OT.
 - Beware of those who teach the deep things of God, or sarcastically, the "deep things of Satan"!
- ❖ What a commendation – "I know that your last works are greater than your first."
 - The gift of the "morning star" is the gift of a new day after the long night – the dawning of God's kingdom.

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Letter to the church at Sardis

- ❖ Had a reputation for wealth because of nearby gold mines.
- ❖ Jesus doesn't have much good to say to the Christians in Sardis!
 - Though they seem alive, they are dead. So . . . hear, obey, and repent. Notice how often we find repentance in these letters.
- ❖ It is as if they are sleeping soundly, but in their death. Jesus calls for them to wake up!
- ❖ These are COMPLACENT Christians.
 - Jesus wants more from them.
- ❖ But still, there are words of encouragement and reward for those who are faithful to God!

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Letter to the church at Philadelphia

- ❖ Though living in a rich agricultural area, the Christians in Philadelphia are poor – they are not the city's powerful.
- ❖ Yet, they are faithful. Jesus holds open for them a door that no one can shut. Those who persecute them will learn that Jesus has loved these Christians.
- ❖ They have patiently endured and Jesus urges them on. They should hold fast to what they have.
- ❖ Oh to be as the Philadelphians! They will be a pillar in God's temple and upon them, Jesus will write:
 - The name of God and the name of God's city, the new Jerusalem, and even Jesus' own new name (see Rev 19:12).

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Letter to the church at Laodicea

- ❖ Like Sardis, there seem to be no threats to the Christians at Laodicea. Yet, like the letter to Sardis, Jesus has little good to say to these Christians. They are LUKEWARM!
- ❖ They say, "I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing." But actually, they are wretched and to be pitied. They should seek the gold that is Jesus, rather than the gold they can put in the bank. They are blind, but the eye salve of Jesus will enable them to see their own "lukewarmness."
- ❖ Jesus corrects and disciplines those whom he loves. The Laodiceans should repent and listen for the knock at the door. It is Jesus. They need only open the door and invite him in. Then, he and the Laodiceans can truly share a meal – the bread of life.

©2003 Scott L. Engle



Looking Ahead – Scene 2, the Church Suffers

- ❖ John is beckoned to heaven, to the very throne room of God!
- ❖ There is a scroll, that cannot be opened . . . except by the Lamb who was slain, the one who is worthy!
 - When you read these visions, pay attention to the worship!
- ❖ Six seals and four horsemen – the Church suffers
- ❖ Can no one stand before God? Yes, by God's grace. We see the 144,000, the faithful, the great multitude, who will be protected from wrath.
 - The multitude, waving palm branches and rejoicing, praise God – "who will wipe every tear from their eyes." (see Jeremiah 31:16)
- ❖ The seventh seal is opened and there is silence.

©2003 Scott L. Engle