

End-Time Prophecy Bible Study Closing Challenge – 1 of 2

I. Closing Challenge

A. Introduction

1. Title: Revelation, “apokalupsis”, transliterated, Apocalypse, means an uncovering or unveiling.
2. Author: John, the apostle, is widely accepted as the author, despite stylistic differences between this book and the Gospel of John, and his three earlier epistles. Later identified as being on the island of Patmos as a prisoner because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. This banishment occurred during the reign of Emperor Domitian, A.D.81-96.
3. Date: Most likely A.D 95 or 96 according to early church fathers. After Emperor Domitian died in A.D. 96, Emperor Nerva, A.D. 96-98, released John from Patmos.

B. Rough Outline of Revelation

Rev 1:19

19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. NASU

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| 1. | The things you have seen, ... | Revelation Chapter 1 |
| 2. | The things which are, ... | Revelation Chapters 2 & 3 |
| 3. | The things which will take place after these things. ... | Revelation Chapters 4 thru 22 |

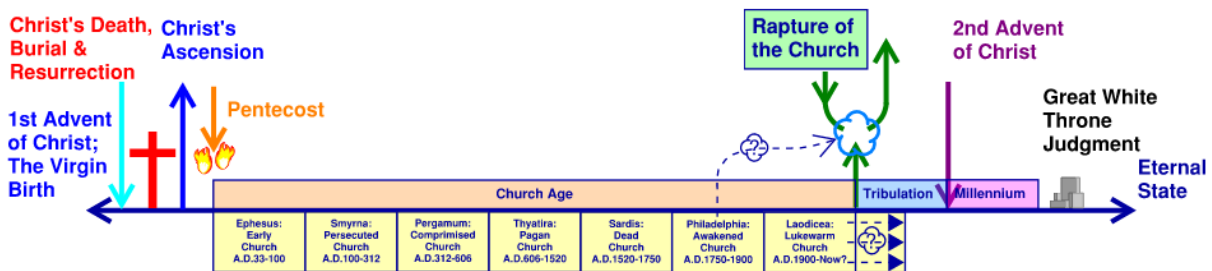
C. Church history in prophecy.

1. Church: From two words; one meaning "out of" and another meaning "a calling"; Therefore, literally, "called-out group or assembly." Crucial to interpretation of the rapture is the interpretation of the "Church." If the church is defined as all of the saved throughout history of man, then it may be that the Church will enter into and/or go through the Tribulation. However, if the Church is defined as a separate body which began at Pentecost, distinguished from OT saints, Tribulation saints, and Millennial saints, the Rapture most likely will occur before the Tribulation.
2. Body of Christ: It is that spiritual organism of which Christ is the Head, and is composed of all regenerated people from Pentecost to the rapture. Christ was the Founder in the sense that He was its Teacher, Builder, and the Sender of the Spirit, who actually formed the Body of Christ. Pentecost was the beginning, since the Body of Christ is formed by the baptizing work of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) and this was first performed on Pentecost (Ac 1:5; 11:15).
3. If the Church is found in the pages of biblical prophecy related to this present age, up to the literal return of Jesus Christ, it may only be found with respect to the Rapture and perhaps in the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2 & 3). There is no mention of the church, starting from Revelation chapter 4, until chapter 19.

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D. The Letters to the Seven Churches.

1. The seven churches described in these chapters are seven literal churches at the time that John wrote Revelation (See the map of The Seven Churches of Revelation Chapter 2 & 3 on the following page). Why were these seven churches selected? Why preserve these seven messages? With the exception of the church at Ephesus, these were not any more influential or important than any other church of the first century. However, most would agree that the trials and temptations, and the failures and successes of these seven churches are indicative of any church, then and now, and throughout the history of the church.
2. Additionally, some have observed a general correlation with the history of the church and the order of the messages contained in the seven letters. (Reference the Church Age of Revelation Chapter 2 and 3 graph below).



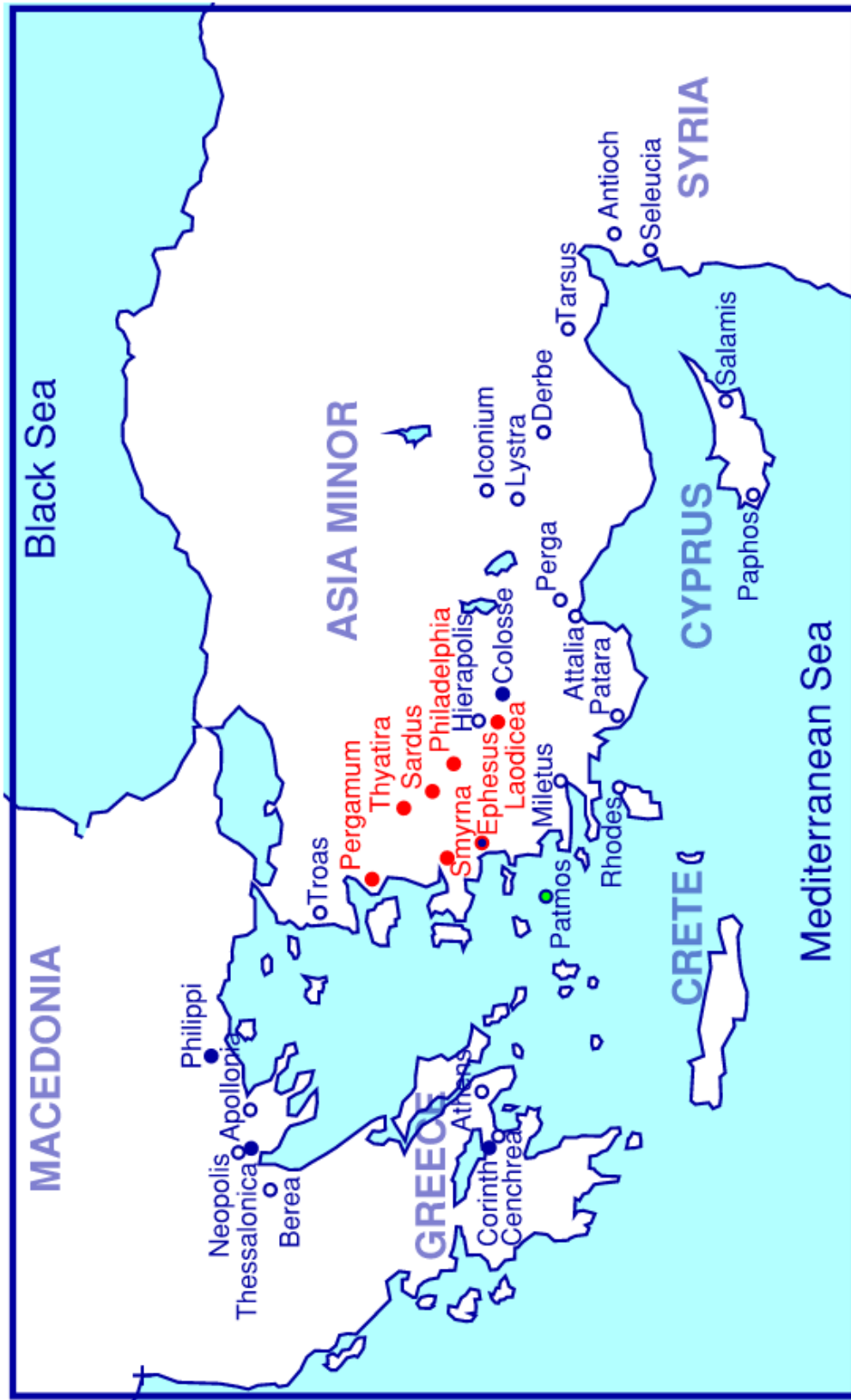
THE CHURCH AGE OF REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 & 3

Although there may be some truth to the seven churches representing seven eras, there are several interpretational challenges to this view. The focus should be on what message God is giving us through the seven churches, realizing they are the last personal messages of Jesus recorded in the New Testament.

3. Format of the letters is as follows:
 - a) Destination - City and historical background or significance.
 - b) Description of Christ - Designed to meet a specific need or meaning.
 - c) Commendation - Except for Laodicea.
 - d) Rebuke - Except for Smyrna and Philadelphia.
 - e) Exhortation - Counsel for wise course of action.
 - f) Promise - Blessings to those who hear and heed the message.
4. Common words and or phrases:
 - a) Seven: Occurs more frequently than any other number in the Bible and is used multiple times in the book of Revelation. Biblically, it is associated with completion, fulfillment, and perfection.
 - b) Angel: A messenger; especially and "angel"; by implication, a pastor.
 - c) He who overcomes: Overcome, "nikao", means to conquer, overcome, prevail, get the victory. Recall 1 John 5:5:

1 John 5:5

5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? NASU



THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 & 3

- City / Town of One of the Seven Churches (Excluding Ephesus)
- City of Ephesus
- City / Town of One of Paul's Epistles
- Nearby City / Town Included in Scripture
- Island of Patmos

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5. The Seven Letters: Background information regarding the cultural influence of each city in which these churches were founded, along with the proposed placement within the prophetic timeline of the Church Age that each church may represent.

- a) Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7):
 - (1) Background:
 - (a) Large city colonized by the Greeks around 1,000 B.C. with population up to about 300,000 people that was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, surpassed in size and importance only by Rome
 - (b) Amphitheater built by the Romans that could seat somewhere between 25,000 to 50,000 people was a major landmark (Acts 19:24-29)
 - (c) Large commercial center, often called "The Market of Asia" with an excellent harbor
 - (d) Banking center with a vault in Temple of Diana (Artemus per Greeks), patron of prostitutes, fertility and sexuality rites, silver images of Diana a major part of economy
 - (e) Occult worship was prevalent
 - (f) Church was well taught since Paul, Apollos, Timothy, John were pastors
 - (g) Epistle of Ephesians written by Paul around A.D. 60-61
 - (h) A.D. 262 the Goths destroyed the entire city and never regained prominence. Later attacked by the Arabs, Turks, and finally the Mongols in A.D. 1403. The city remains in ruins to this day.
 - (2) Content:
 - (a) Destination: angel of the church in Ephesus
 - (b) Description of Christ: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands
 - (c) Commendation: I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary ... that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate
 - (d) Rebuke: you have left your first love
 - (e) Exhortation: remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent
 - (f) Promise: To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God

Even though this church was strong in many areas, they were given a strong rebuke. Years earlier, Paul commended them for their love for the saints (Eph 1:15). Most of the believers at the time of writing would have been 2nd generation believers. They had maintained purity of doctrine and morality along with high level of service. They apparently lost their deep devotion to Christ. Perhaps, doing the right things for all the wrong reasons, allowing legalism to take root. No clear understanding of who the Nicolaitans were, but their doctrine and practice were false.

- (3) Placement: A.D. 33-100; Apostolic church, with correct doctrine, zealous labor, waywardness in heart attitudes leading to open door for legalism

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- b) Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11):
- (1) Background:
 - (a) Located 40 miles north of Ephesus
 - (b) Safest seaport, main trade route from Rome to India and Persia
 - (c) Personally planned by Alexander the Great
 - (d) Called the "Ornament of Asia"
 - (e) Many Jews, but overwhelmingly pagan
 - (f) At one end of "Street of Gold", Temple of Zeus, "the sky and thunder god", at the other end, Temple of Cybele, "the goddess of fertility and protectress in time of war"
 - (g) Center of emperor worship in Roman Empire with Temple to Tiberius Caesar
 - (h) Christians in Smyrna were continually persecuted from the time of writing this letter until about A.D. 312; including Polycarp who was burned to death in A.D. 155. Destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 178, but was quickly rebuilt. Survived numerous attacks by the Turks and remains to this day; the modern city of Izmir, Turkey, with a population of about 500,000 people.
 - (2) Content:
 - (a) Destination: angel of the church in Smyrna
 - (b) Description of Christ: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life
 - (c) Commendation: I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan
 - (d) Rebuke: None
 - (e) Exhortation: Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life
 - (f) Promise: He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death

Interestingly, the name Smyrna, means the same as myrrh, spice used as an anointing oil in the tabernacle and for embalming dead bodies for burial. These believers suffered at the hands of pagan gentiles, hostile Jews, ultimately by Satan himself. The reference to imprisonment, testing, tribulation, for ten days, may refer to literal days, or maybe symbolic for the entire persecution of the church or ten periods of time, under rule of ten cruel Emperors. In that day, imprisonment was not a sentence, but waiting for a trial and then either fined, banished, or executed.

- (3) Placement: A.D. 100-312; persecuted church, victims of "ten-percenters", people who reported Christians to Romans for ten percent of "heretics" property. Period of persecution under ten noteworthy Caesars; Nero (A.D. 64-68), Domitian (A.D. 90-95), Trajan (A.D. 104-117), Aurelius (A.D.161-180), Severus (A.D. 200-211), Maximus (A.D. 235-237), Decius (A.D. 250-253), Valerian (A.D. 257-260), Aurelian (A.D. 270-275), and Diocletian (A.D. 303-312)

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c) Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17):

(1) Background:

- (a) Political power, pagan worship, and academic sophistication at its university
- (b) The capital city of Asia Minor was filled with palaces, temples, statues, and idols, including a temple to Octavius Caesar
- (c) All pagan rites of antiquity were practiced
- (d) A university library with over 200,000 books (2nd only to Alexandria's)
- (e) Greek philosophy pervaded the city
- (f) The city became influential center for the state religion of Christianity under Constantine. Attacked by the Arabs in A.D. 716-717, losing its political power, eventually falling into ruin as it is today.

(2) Content:

- (a) Destination: angel of the church in Pergamum
- (b) Description of Christ: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword
- (c) Commendation: I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells
- (d) Rebuke: because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality ... So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans
- (e) Exhortation: Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth
- (f) Promise: To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it

Here we see the instruction given to this church in this wealthy, wicked city, said to be where Satan has his throne. Nothing is known about the martyr Antipas listed in the text. This church fell into the trap of following the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Recall Balaam influenced Israel to sin through idol worship and intermarriage with pagan cultures. This church was guilty of adopting the worldly morality and false doctrine of their day.

(3) Placement: A.D. 312-606; Church merged with State; Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of Roman Empire, massive persecution ceased, apparent blessing became curse; church compromised position to gain favor and power; church hierarchy developed with Bishop of Rome claiming prominence because of proximity to ruler of the empire; declared apostolic authority by succession...alleging office in Rome linked directly to Peter; misinterpreting Peter as foundation of church; committed spiritual adultery in alliance with Rome.