

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today we will introduce Revelation chapters 2 to 3.

REVELATION CHAPTER 2 AND 3 teaches that **Christ is present and acts among all the Christian churches in the world.**

Revelation chapter 2-3 is divided into seven letters written to seven historical churches.

They were probably founded by Paul during his 3rd missionary journey when he stayed in Ephesus. In Acts 19:10 we read, "All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord". Nevertheless, the letters are intended for all churches in the world from the first to the second coming of Christ.

Revelation 2:1-7. The 1st letter to the church at Ephesus.

One. Ephesus was a wealthy, prosperous, magnificent harbour city, which accommodated the largest ships. It was a city connected with many roads to all the major cities of Asia Minor, and therefore the commercial centre of Asia Minor. It was famous for its temple of the idol Diana. This temple harboured many criminals and furnished employment for many silversmiths, who made miniature shrines of Diana.

The church at Ephesus was founded by Paul in A.D. 52. Paul stayed 3 years in Ephesus from A.D. 55-57. After Paul's death, John lived and worked in Ephesus from about A.D. 66 onwards. Revelation was revealed to John on Patmos about A.D. 81-98. The church at Ephesus was therefore about 40 years old when Jesus Christ dictated this letter. The next generation of Christians were not as enthusiastic and zealous for Christ as the first generation of converts.

Two. Christ introduces himself as the one who holds the church leaders in his hand and who is present and active among all the churches on earth.

Three. Christ commends the church for its intolerance against false apostles, for its hatred of the practices of the Nicolaitans and for its hard work.

Four. But Christ rebukes the church for having forsaken its first love. In spite of their many Christian activities, they were not as devoted to Jesus Christ as before!

Five. Christ commands the church to reflect on their fall backwards, to convert, that is, to change their mind and behaviour, and to again do what they used to do when they were completely devoted to Christ!

Christ warns them, if they do not convert, he would remove the church from their city!

Six. Christ exhorts all churches to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Seven. Christ promises Christians that overcome "the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God". He promises them the inheritance of eternal life first in heaven and later on the new earth. What does it mean to overcome or to conquer? The people that overcome or conquer are all born-again Christians who by faith in the accomplished salvation work of Christ (1 Jn 5:4) fight against sin, the sinful world and the devil, and who persevere in their love for Christ unto the very end.

Revelation 2:8-11. The 2nd letter to the church at Smyrna.

One. Smyrna was always a loyal ally of Rome and therefore this city practised the worship of the Roman emperor. Many Jews immigrated into Smyrna to do business and they were rich. In this city, it was especially the Jews who betrayed the Christians to the Roman persecutors. Although these Jews regarded themselves as "the synagogue of God", God regarded them in reality as "the synagogue of Satan", because they were the instruments used by Satan to persecute the Christian church.

Two. Christ introduces himself as "the First and the Last", that is, as the One who is one with God the Father, the Almighty (cf. 1:4,8,17). And he says that he "died and came to life again". Thus, Jesus Christ introduces himself as the One who is 100% God (Jn 10:30) and 100% man (Jn 14:28).

Three. Christ commends the church for remaining faithful to him during their suffering due to persecution and extreme poverty. Becoming a Christian was from an earthly point of view a real sacrifice, because Christians often lost their jobs and were poor and hungry. Nevertheless, in God's eyes they were spiritually rich (2 Cor 6:10). They were persecuted by the non-Christians and suffered imprisonment and often death by means of wild beasts that tore them up or by means of the stake at which they were burned. In 155 A.D. Polycarp, the leader of this church, was burned alive at the stake.

Four. Christ has no rebuke for this church.

Five. Christ commands the church not to begin to pity themselves, because he knows everything that is happening to them. He exhorts them not to fear their enemies, because their suffering will only last for "ten days", a symbol for a *definite, but brief period of time*. He exhorts them to be faithful even if it costs them their life.

Six. Christ exhorts all churches to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Seven. Christ promises Christians that overcome "the crown of life", that is, not a royal crown, but "the wreath of victory consisting of life". They will possess and experience everlasting life in the new heaven and new earth. And they

will not be hurt by “the second death”, that is, that they will never be cast, body and soul, into hell at the second coming of Christ.

Revelation 2:12-17. The 3rd letter to the church at Pergamum.

One. Pergamum was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Jesus called the city “where Satan has his throne”, because it was the centre of emperor-worship. There were temples dedicated to the worship of Caesar and all people were required to burn incense to the images of Caesar and declare that “Caesar is Lord”. Besides the Roman emperor-worship, there were many other heathen shrines, especially dedicated to the many gods of the trade-guilds. The cities of Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira also had a cult called the Nicolaitans, who enticed the Christians to make compromises with the sinful world, to participate in idolatrous banquets and to commit sexual immorality. Their teaching was similar to the teaching of the false prophet Balaam in Numbers 25:1-2 and 31:16.

Two. Christ introduces himself as having “the sharp, double-edged sword”. This is a symbol of *his words of judgement with which he makes war especially against the false teachers and cults* like Nicolaitans.

Three. Christ commends the church for not renouncing the Christian faith and even for its suffering.

Four. But Christ rebukes the church for tolerating certain members who hold to the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

Five. Christ commands these members to repent and to convert their lives.

Christ warns that those who persist in their worldly practices will definitely get doomed by his word.

Six. Christ exhorts all churches to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Seven. Christ promises Christians who overcome the temptation to make compromises with the false religions that they will receive of “the hidden manna”, which is a symbol of *the fullness of Christ and his grace* (Jn 6:35; 1:16). They will receive “a white stone with a new name on it, known only to him who receives it.” The best interpretation is that Christians receive “*the name of Christ*” (14:1) in opposition to unbelievers who receive “the mark of the beast” (13:16). That new name is a symbol of *their new and perfect relationship to Christ*.

Revelation 2:18-29. The 4th letter to the church at Thyatira.

One. Thyatira was a centre of communication, with many people passing through, and it thus became a trading centre. There were many trade-guilds, like wool-workers, linen-workers, garments industries, leather-workers, potters, etc. These trade-guilds functioned like trade-unions and were associated with the worship of tutelary-deities. Each trade had its own guardian god. If a person wished to get ahead in the world, he had to belong to a guild and this meant that he had to worship its guardian god. He was expected to attend the guild-festivals and to eat the food as a gift from this guardian god. After the meal he was expected to participate in the gross immoral fun. Whoever refused to participate became the object of ridicule and persecution. And if he quit the trade-union, he lost his job and his status in society. But if a Christian remained in the guild, he denied the Lord. In Thyatira there were false teachers and the cult of the Nicolaitans. One of their prophetesses was called Jezebel. Her name is a synonym for seduction to idolatry and immorality (1 Ki 16:31-33). She apparently taught a way how Christians could escape the above mentioned persecution. She exhorted Christians to “learn Satan’s so-called deep secrets” (2:24). She argued that in order to conquer Satan, Christians must get involved in Satan’s cult. She taught that a person would never be able to conquer sin unless he first became thoroughly acquainted with sin by experience! Therefore, she urged Christians to attend the trade-guild festivals and to commit sexual immorality in order to be able to remain a Christian and even become a better Christian.

Two. Christ introduces himself as the Son of God whose eyes see everything people do and whose feet are ready to destroy the wicked people.

Three. Christ commends the church for their love, faith and perseverance and for serving more than they did before.

Four. But Christ rebukes the church for tolerating this prophetess Jezebel and her followers, the Nicolaitans. The church should have disciplined the people who made a compromise with the sinful world and should have put them out of the church. Christ has already given her enough time to repent. His penetrating eyes have seen her real motive, namely, that she is unwilling to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ.

Christ warns that he knows the inmost motives of people and that he will repay the wicked people according to their deeds.

Five. Christ commands the faithful Christians to hold on to what they have. Overcomers or conquerors are Christians who do the will of Jesus Christ to the end.

Six. Christ promises Christians who overcome “authority over the nations”. Through their prayers and preaching, they share in Christ’s rule over this present world! They will also share in the final judgement. Christ will give them “the morning star”. Just as Christ is the True Morning Star (22:16) who rules the universe of light (Jn 8:12), so Christians will rule with Christ and share in his royal splendour.

Seven. Christ exhorts all churches to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Revelation 3:1-6. The 5th letter to the church at Sardis.

One. Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. It was an impregnable city, built upon a nearly inaccessible hill. The people were proud, arrogant, over-confident and sure. Yet it was twice captured and once suffered an earthquake and it gradually declined.

Two. Christ introduces himself as “holding the seven spirits of God and the seven stars”. Christ is 100% God because he possesses the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Christ is also able to revive dead churches through the manifold work of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of genuine church-leaders. But then such churches must convert and turn to him.

Three. Christ rebukes the church of Sardis as having “the reputation that she lives, but in reality she is dead”. The church possessed the Christian forms, ceremonies, religious customs, traditions and services. But the real essence of being a church, such as real faith, hope, love, sincerity and power, was lacking. Christ does not look at the outward forms and activities of a church, but at genuine rebirth and lasting fruit in the Christians. Christ inspected the church and found them incomplete!

Four. Christ commands the church to wake up from their self-satisfaction and boasting. They must strengthen the little that remains, but stand under threat of dying. They should firmly establish the church again, f.e. by disciplining the members.

Christ warns them that if they do not wake up, then he will come suddenly and unexpectedly like a thief at night to punish them. Christ is not speaking about his second coming, but about his imminent coming to and acting within the church.

Five. But Christ commends the few individual members of the church who have not soiled their lives with unholy living.

Six. Christ promises Christians who overcome that they will “be dressed in white”, a symbol of living their lives in 100% assurance of their forgiveness and justification in Christ. The statement in the negative, “I will never blot out his name from the book of life” is a very positive statement that his name would never be blotted out of the book of life (Jn 10:28)! And when Christians die, they will never be forgotten, because Christ himself will acknowledge them before God the Father as belonging to him.

Seven. Christ exhorts all churches to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Revelation 3:7-13. The 6th letter to the church at Philadelphia.

One. Philadelphia was situated in a valley on an important road. It was founded to spread the Greek language and manners in Lydia and in Phrygia.

Two. Christ introduces himself as “holy and true”. He exposes the claims of unbelieving Jews that they are God’s people as false pretensions and displeasing to him. Only Christ holds the key of David, that is, the highest power and authority in the kingdom of God. According to Revelation 5:5, only Jesus Christ has the power and authority “to open the scroll and its seven seals”, that is, only he reveals and realises the eternal plan of God on earth: he reveals the glory of God to all creation, he rules the history of every nation in this world, he brings people to eternal life and he guides the kingdom of God to its final completion in a new heaven and a new earth. Only Jesus Christ sovereignly opens and closes doors, that is, he opens wonderful opportunities to preach the gospel and he opens hearts to receive the grace of God! He promises that he will even cause many of the Jewish accusers and scoffers to be converted and to acknowledge God’s plan and salvation work with the whole world.

Three. Christ has no rebuke for this church

Four. Christ commends the church for “keeping his word of patient endurance” (3:10,8). These Christians were constantly and patiently waiting for Christ’s promise to return at his second coming in spite of being despised and oppressed (cf. Heb 11:32-40).

Five. Christ commands the church “to hold on to what they have”. Christians have a personal responsibility to persevere in their obedience to Christ. Only through God’s protection and their own exertion will they be able to gain “the wreath of victory”. Christ promises that he will keep Christians “out of” (not “away from”) the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole inhabited world before the second coming. *He does not say that the Christians will not go through the great tribulation, but rather that he will protect them in and throughout the great tribulation!* While tribulation, persecution and suffering is from Satan’s point of view “a temptation” to deny Jesus Christ, from God’s point of view it is “a trial or test” to bring to light what really is in the hearts of people and to purify Christians from all impurities.

Christ warns the church that he is coming soon. Besides his final second coming, Christ comes at any time through his Spirit, his Word and his acts to an individual in the church. And Christ comes finally to each believer the moment he dies! No matter how old a person becomes, life is always too short and death is always too sudden!

Six. Christ promises Christians who overcome that he will make them “a pillar in God’s temple”, that is, they will forever dwell in the presence of the living God and behold his beauty (Ps 27:4). The name that God gives to them is *the assurance that they belong to God*, to the New Jerusalem, which is a symbol of *the Church Triumphant*, and to Christ. They will forever share in all the blessings and privileges of all three.

Seven. Christ exhorts all churches to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Revelation 3:14-22. The 7th letter to the church at Laodicea.

One. Laodicea was situated near hot springs, from which lukewarm water poured. There was a famous medical school that produced salve for weak eyes. The citizens wore clothes made of the soft wool of black sheep. And the city was especially famous for its wealth. It was situated at the cross-roads of three highways, became a great commercial centre and was the home of bankers, finance and millionaires. The citizens took pride in their riches and adopted a defiant and

conceited attitude. Even the Christians boasted in their spiritual riches, thought very highly of themselves, were not bothered by a consciousness of sin and were always ready to make compromises.

Two. Christ introduces himself as the “Amen, the faithful and true witness”. He is trustworthy, faithful and true. His eyes see everything that is going on in the hearts of people and his lips declare the exact truth that he sees.

Three. Christ has no commendation for this church!

Four. Christ rebukes the church as “lukewarm”, as *half-hearted and compromising, as indifferent and listless*. He condemns their independence and self-sufficiency. He is thoroughly disgusted with them!

Christ warns them that he is about to reject them! He has not done it yet, but he is on the point of executing his threat!

Five. Christ commands the church to become serious and repent. He gives them the best possible counsel and that is to come to him for real and complete salvation. Salvation is like “gold”: it makes the Christian rich. Salvation is like “white clothes”: it covers the nakedness of his guilt and makes the Christian righteous. Salvation is like “eye-salve”: it takes away spiritual blindness. Salvation must “be bought”: that is, the Christian must obtain rightful possession of it; he cannot gain salvation in his own way or by his own effort. He can only gain salvation in Christ’s way and that is by receiving Christ through faith into his heart and life! In the matter of salvation, Christ has taken the initiative: he is actually “leaning against the door or pressing against it” so that it may be opened. And he is “knocking again and again” on the door of the church and the door of the hearts of people and calling them to repent and believe. *When the heart has been opened by Christ’s leaning against the door, knocking on the door and calling from outside the door, the individual becomes active, opens the door and receives Christ.* This sovereign work of Christ is called “regeneration” and the responsibility of the individual is called “conversion”.

Six. Christ promises Christians who overcome that they will be able to fellowship with Christ forever and that they will reign with Christ.

Seven. Christ exhorts all churches to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Read Revelation 4-7. Tomorrow we will introduce Revelation 4-7.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.