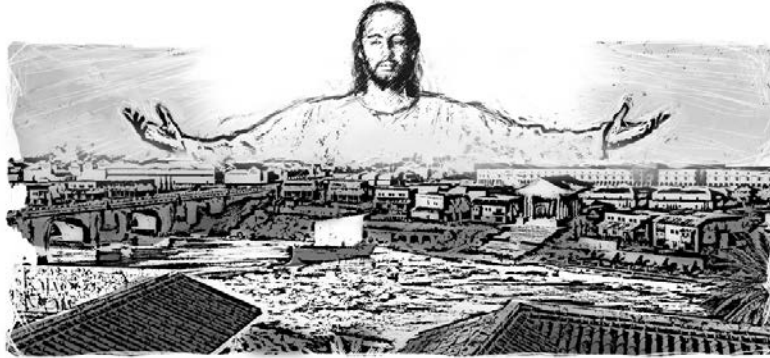


Jesus' Messages to the Seven Churches



SABBATH—JANUARY 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Revelation 2:8–3:17; Matthew 24:14–44; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8; Hosea 12:8.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Here is what I will do for anyone who has victory over sin. I will give that person the right [something a person has the legal power to do or get] to sit with me on my throne. In the same way, I had victory. Then I sat down with my Father on his throne’ ” (Revelation 3:21, NlrV).



The seven messages to the churches show us how Jesus met the needs of each church in the past. So, we can trust that Jesus will continue to meet our needs as a church today too.

ON PATMOS ISLAND, Jesus told John to write a letter to His people in seven churches in Asia. In the beginning, John gave the letter only to those seven churches. But John also wrote it for all Christians everywhere, now or in the past.

We see that each message has the same six parts. (1) first, Jesus says the name of each church. (2) Second, each message starts with the same words: “ ‘Here are the words of Jesus’ ” (Revelation 2:1, NlrV). Jesus also includes some word pictures that help us see that He gives each church everything it needs. (3) Next, Jesus tells each church what it is doing right or wrong. (4) Then, Jesus tells each church what to do to fix its problems. (5) Jesus tells the churches to obey the Holy Spirit. (6) Jesus makes promises to His people who win the war against sin.

Last week, we looked at Jesus' message to the church in Ephesus. This week we will look at His messages to the other six churches. We will see that Jesus met the needs of each church in the past. So, we can trust that Jesus will continue to meet our needs as a church today too.

JESUS' MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES IN SMYRNA AND PERGAMUM (Revelation 2:8–11)

Smyrna is a beautiful, rich city in John's day. But the leaders of Smyrna make a law that forces everyone to worship the High King of Rome as a god. The people who refuse to obey this law can lose their legal power. This legal power allows them to do special things as citizens. The people who refuse to worship the High King of Rome also risk being attacked and even killed.

In Revelation 2:8–11, Jesus shows Himself to the church in Smyrna. How does Jesus' picture of Himself help us know what happened to the church? What warning does Jesus give Smyrna about the trouble coming in the future?

Jesus' message to the church in Smyrna also is for the whole Christian church during the 200 years after John's death. The Kingdom of Rome was very mean to Christians. Rome attacked them for their faith. The "ten days" that Jesus talks about in Revelation 2:10 are a word picture. In special messages about time in the Bible, a day often is a symbol for a year. So, the "ten days" show us the ten years that Rome attacked Christians, from A.D. 303 until A.D. 313. In A.D. 313, Constantine the Great gave Christians religious freedom.

Read Revelation 2:12–15. How does Jesus show Himself in these verses to the church in Pergamum? What does Jesus say is wrong with the church?

False gods and their temples surround the Christians everywhere in Pergamum. Most Christians stay loyal to God. But one group starts to say that the church should mix Bible truth with the worship of false gods. They believe that if the church allows some changes, then Rome's attacks against the church will stop. This group is named the Nicolaitans [nē-ko-lā-ē'-təns].

The message to the church in Pergamum is a word picture. It shows us the things that happened in the Christian church from A.D. 313–538. At that time, Christians won the freedom to worship God. Many believers during this time stayed loyal to the Good News about Jesus. But other believers turned away from the truth. Then the church's faith and its love for the truth grew weak.



The "ten days" that Jesus talks about in Revelation 2:10 are a word picture. They show us the ten years that Rome attacked Christians, from A.D. 303 until A.D. 313.



The Nicolaitans said that believers should mix Bible truth with the worship of false gods.

JESUS' MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA (Revelation 2:18–29)

Thyatira was not a very important city in the Roman Kingdom. The city was not famous for its way of life, art, food, or dancing the same as other Roman cities. But Thyatira was famous for one thing: it was a big place for business. In Thyatira, if you wanted to own a business or have a job, you needed to join a special business club. These clubs were named guilds. People needed to do special things to join a guild. They went to their guild's special parties. Guild members also worshiped false gods. Some of the things that guild members did in the temples of these gods were very wrong and evil. What happened to people who did not do what their guild told them to do? They were kicked out of the guilds. Then they were not allowed to buy or sell things.



Jezebel is a word picture that Jesus uses to give us an example of people who are not loyal to God.

Read Revelation 2:18–29. In these verses, how does Jesus show Himself to the church in Thyatira? Why does Jesus praise the church? What problem does the church have?

The danger to the church in Thyatira was the same as the danger to the church in Pergamum. Both churches were in danger of giving up important Bible truths because they wanted to fit in better with the people around them. In the message to the church in Thyatira, Jesus talks about “Jezebel.” She was an evil queen, married to King Ahab. Queen Jezebel led God’s people to sin deeply against God and turn away from Him (1 Kings 16:31–33). Jezebel is a word picture that Jesus uses to give us an example of people who are not loyal to God. Who helped Jezebel do her work? Anyone who accepted Jezebel’s teaching and showed other people how to live and act the same as she did.

The church in Thyatira is a word picture for the Christian church during the Middle Ages (A.D. 538–1565). The biggest danger to the church at this time did not come from outside the church but from inside it. During this time, human ideas became more important than Bible truth. The church also taught sinners that good behavior, and not Jesus, saves them. Anyone who disagreed with the church’s new rules was attacked and even put to death. For many hundreds of years during this time, the Good News about Jesus was hidden from human hearts and minds because of these false teachings.

JESUS' MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS (Revelation 3:1–6)

The city of Sardis had a wonderful history. But by the time Rome ruled the earth, Sardis already lost its fame. Sardis continued to enjoy wealth, but all its fame was old and in the past. The city was built on top of a high hill. It was not easy to walk up this hill. So, Sardis was hard to attack. The citizens of Sardis felt very safe in their city. They did not carefully guard their walls at all.

Read Revelation 3:1–6, along with Matthew 24:42–44, and 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8. What three things in Revelation 3:1–6 does Jesus tell Christians in Sardis to do to heal their spiritual sickness? Jesus warns His people in Sardis to watch out for danger. He tells them to “ ‘Wake up!’ ” (Revelation 3:2, NIV). How does His warning show His people they are in danger? Sardis’s history and the careless way that its people watched the city’s walls are a word picture. How do these two things teach us what is wrong with the spiritual lives of God’s people in Sardis?

Jesus knows that a few members in the church in Sardis are loyal in their faith to God. But the other members in the church are not loyal. On the outside the people seem alive, but on the inside their spirits are dead. Jesus does not tell us what sin the church is guilty of doing. But the church is very lazy. The members are not spiritual at all.

Jesus’ message to Sardis is a word picture for the spiritual health of God’s people from about A.D. 1565 to A.D. 1740. Sardis shows us what happened in the Protestant churches after the Reformation. The Reformation was the time in the 1500s when the church in Europe woke up to Bible truth and started to make big changes. Those changes led to the start of the Protestant churches. But then the churches stopped growing in spiritual power. They stopped believing that Jesus saves us with His loving-favor. They replaced Bible truth with human thinking. The churches seemed to be alive on the outside. But inside, they were dead.

Jesus’ message to Sardis also is for all Christians everywhere. There are Christians who like to talk about how wonderful their connection with Jesus was in the past. But they do not have any news to share about their experience with Jesus now. Why? Because their religion does not start in the heart. They do not believe in the Good News.



The church in Sardis seemed to be alive on the outside. But inside it was dead.

JESUS' MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA (Revelation 3:7–9)

Jesus gave the 6th message to the church in the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” The city stood next to a trade road. Jesus named this city an “open door” because it led people to flat land that was very good for growing crops. In Bible times, sick people went to Philadelphia to heal.

Read Revelation 3:7–9. How does Jesus show Himself in these verses to the church in Philadelphia? How does this picture help us understand the troubles that this church suffered? What do Jesus' words, “ ‘I know that you don't [do not] have much strength [power]’ ” (Revelation 3:8, NIV) show us about what is happening in the church?



The open door and the shut door show us that, in 1844, Jesus changes the work He does for us in heaven's sanctuary.

Jesus' message to Philadelphia also shows us what happened in the Protestant churches during the First and Second Awakenings, from about A.D. 1740–1844. During this time, Protestant churches in Great Britain and America woke up to Bible truth. At this time, God's people learned it was very important to obey God's law and to live holy lives. The “ ‘open door’ ” in Revelation 3:8 is a word picture. It explains how to enter heaven's sanctuary. Heaven's sanctuary is the place where Jesus works to save His people from sin. We know that the “ ‘open door’ ” is a word picture for heaven's sanctuary because John also talks about God's temple in Revelation 3:12 and in Revelation 4:1, 2). God shut one door in heaven's sanctuary. But He opened another door. These doors show us that, in 1844, Jesus changes the work He does for us in heaven.

What hint do Revelation 3:10–13 give us that time is short and that Jesus' Second Coming is near? What does it mean that God will write His name on His people (read 2 Timothy 2:19)? In Bible times, a person's name showed us what was in someone's heart. What does Exodus 34:6 tell us about the people who have God's name written on them?

God's name is a word picture for His love and His law. God's promise to write His name on His people shows us that everyone on earth will see God's people obey His law and show His love.

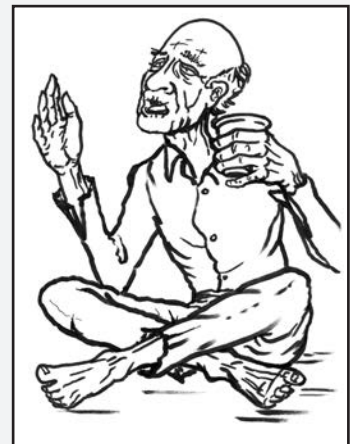
CHRISTIANS IN THE CHURCH IN THE CITY OF LAODICEA (Revelation 3:14–17)

Jesus' last message was to the church in Laodicea. Laodicea was a rich city. It was located on the main business road in the Roman Kingdom. Laodicea was famous for its wool, its banks, and a medical school that made a special lotion to heal the eyes. The city's banks were full of gold. The riches of the city "puffed up" the heads and hearts of the citizens with pride. Around the year A.D. 60, an earthquake destroyed the city. The Roman Kingdom wanted to help the people of Laodicea build their city again. But the Laodicean people said no to Rome's help because they felt they had everything they needed right there in Laodicea to do the job on their own. One thing Laodicea did not have was water. So, water had to be brought to the city in underground pipes. These pipes carried the water from hot springs in Hierapolis. Because Hierapolis was very far away, the water temperature changed from hot to warm when it arrived in Laodicea. In fact, it was not hot or cold. Another word for water that is not hot and not cold is lukewarm water.

Read Revelation 3:14–17 and Hosea 12:8. In Revelation 3, what does Jesus tell us about Laodicea's problems? How do the things you learned about Laodicea help you understand why Jesus tells His church in Laodicea to do some special things to fix its problems? How did the proud spirit of the city also fill the Laodicean Christians?

The Christians in Laodicea were the same as the water that reached their city: they were not cold or hot. They were only "lukewarm." They bragged about their riches and how they did not need anything. But Jesus showed them that they were poor, naked, and blind to their spiritual needs.

The church in Laodicea in John's day is a word picture. It clearly shows us the spiritual health of the Christian church at the end of this earth's history. In Revelation 16:15, Jesus warns His people living in the last days to get dressed so that no one will see that they are naked. He wants His people to put on the "clothes" He offers to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:17, 18. But God's church in the end times feels no need for Jesus. Jesus warns His end-time church what will happen if they choose to stay naked: they will not be saved when He comes back.



The Laodicean Christians were poor, naked, and blind to their spiritual needs.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Revelation [to remove the cover from something so that it can be seen],” page 578–592, in *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*.

Jesus’ seven messages to the churches in Asia show how the spiritual power of the churches grows weaker. The church in Ephesus continued to be loyal to Bible truth. But the church did not love the truth the same way it did before when it first fell in love with Jesus. Most of the church members in Smyrna and Philadelphia stayed loyal to God. The churches in Pergamum and Thyatira were divided between their loyalty to Jesus and wanting to be accepted by the people on this earth. They accepted more and more wrong teachings until they fully turned away from Bible truth. The church in Sardis was in deep need for help. Most of its members did not live in agreement with the Good News. But there was a small group in the church in Sardis that stayed loyal to God. The church in Philadelphia shows us the time when God’s people were loyal to Him and obeyed His law, but they were few in number. The spiritual health of the church in Laodicea was so bad that Jesus did not have anything good to say about that church at all.



Jesus gives Laodicea only one promise. But it is the biggest promise of all: to sit with Jesus on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

At the end of His message to each church, Jesus makes promises to the people in those churches who follow His advice. Now let us look at something wonderful about the promises that Jesus makes to the churches. Do you see that the weaker that each church becomes, the more help Jesus offers it and the more promises He makes to it? Just look at the church in Ephesus. Jesus gives that church only one promise. But as the spiritual life of each church after Ephesus gets worse, Jesus gives each church more promises than He gave to the church before it. The last church to get a promise is Laodicea. Laodicea is weaker than any church before it. To our surprise, Laodicea gets only one promise. But it is the biggest promise of all: to sit with Jesus on His throne (Revelation 3:21)!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① When the churches in Revelation grow weaker, Jesus gives them more promises to help them. What does that show us about how God’s loving-favor works?
- ② Jesus’ warning to the church in Laodicea is for Christians living in the end times. What does Jesus’ warning mean to us as Seventh-day Adventists? What must we do to change our lives?