

Jesus and the Seven Churches

September 20, 2026

Main Passage: Revelation 2–3

Theological Theme

Jesus's letters to the seven churches of ancient Asia offered commendation and criticism we can learn from today.

Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever written a letter (or other type of message) that prompted some sort of action? What did you write and what happened?
- ❓ Why can this type of communication be effective?

1. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum (Revelation 2:1-17)

These are the words of Jesus to His churches. In them, He both commended and corrected, giving feedback for these individual congregations that benefitted not only those particular bodies, but the church as a whole. Now, even thousands of years after these original letters were written, the issues they address are still relevant.

- ❓ What did Jesus commend the church in Ephesus for? What correction did He give?
- ❓ What was the church in Smyrna doing well? What were they to correct?
- ❓ What did Jesus commend Pergamum for? What notes of correction did He give?

2. Thyatira and Sardis (Revelation 2:18–Revelation 3:6)

Thyatira sat on the Lycus River, about thirty miles southeast of Pergamum. Its trade guilds were devoted to patron (little g) gods and goddesses, and a huge pressure existed there for Christians to participate in a culturally acceptable lifestyle of idolatry. Thyatira, whose letter is featured in the middle of this set of letters, was the smallest city written to, but received the longest letter.

Sardis was one of the oldest cities in Asia Minor. The people there were obsessed with death and immortality, and worshiped Artemis.

- ❓ What did Jesus commend Thyatira for? What notes for correction did He give?
- ❓ What was Sardis doing well? What were they to correct?
- ❓ How might we be threatened to go the same way as the people of Sardis? How might we guard against this?

3. Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 3:7-22)

Philadelphia was about forty miles southeast of Sardis. After a devastating earthquake in AD 17, the people carefully planned for the future (and any earthquakes it held). Evidently, they also faced Jewish opposition similar to the church in Smyrna.¹³

Laodicea was an ancient trade center famous for its textiles. Idol worship, Zeus especially, flourished in Laodicea. They also had a water problem. They didn't have direct access to the cold water available in the mountains, or the nearby hot springs. They had to bring in their water, and when it arrived, it was lukewarm. Like their water, the faith of the Laodiceans was lukewarm.

- ❓ What does Jesus commend the church in Philadelphia for? What correction did He give?
- ❓ What was Laodicea doing well? What should they correct?
- ❓ Which of these churches stands out to you most? What are you encouraged or challenged by in their situation?

Conclusion

- ❓ In what ways does the modern church still display some aspects of faith Jesus commended in these letters?
- ❓ How do we see these types of challenges still present in the church today?
- ❓ How is God calling you to respond today based on these letters to His churches? If Jesus were to write you a letter, what might it say?