



YES, NO AND MAYBE

1. If I could, I'd like to time-travel back to the 7 Churches of Revelation at the time that John wrote about them.

2. The 7 Churches of Revelation represent different time periods of church history.

3. Churches that stress "love" instead of "truth" are most likely going to become more and more worldly.

4. There are some churches in places where God does not require the members to grow into full maturity.

5. God has a secret that will only be known to Him and me.

➤ READ Revelation 2

« What do you think the 7 churches of Revelation are all about?

DIG DEEPER

THE FIRST 4 OF THE 7 CHURCHES

» **Chapter 2, Vss. 1-7: The Message to the Church in Ephesus** - Ephesus was an outstanding religious center, the chief cult being that of Artemis (cf. Acts 19:24ff.). The city had the prized status of *neōkoros* (lit. 'temple-sweeper!') in connection with the great temple which was one of the seven wonders of the world. But religion and magic were hopelessly intermingled, and magical arts were popular (cf. Acts 19:19). 'Ephesian letters' were charms widely supposed to cure sickness and to bring luck.

- **From** - The one who holds [*literally: firm grip*] the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands.

- **Compliment** - Hard workers (*kopos* means labor to the point of weariness), patient endurance, examine claims, and don't tolerate false teachers, patiently suffered without quitting. You hate the evil deeds of the **Nicolaitans**, just as Jesus does.

- **Complaint** - You don't love Jesus or each other as you did at first! You have forsaken your first love [Forsaken (*aphēkes*) is a strong term; they had completely abandoned their first fine flush of enthusiastic love. They had yielded to the temptation, ever present to Christians, to put all their emphasis on sound teaching. In the process they lost love, without which all else is nothing.]

- **Advice** - Turn back to Jesus and do the works you did at first.

- **Discipline** - If you don't repent, Jesus will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. [Without love it ceases to be a church. Its lampstand is removed. If you do not repent shows that the judgment is not irrevocable.]

- **Reward** - Jesus will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

« What does it say about God that his first and greatest concern is whether his churches are loving or not?

» Chapter 2, Vss. 8-11: The Message to the Church in Smyrna -

- **From** - The one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive.

- **Compliment** - Despite suffering and poverty, you are rich! [Many think that the Smyrneans' poverty was in part due to pillage of their goods by the Jews. Christianity was not legally permitted, which made it easy for Jews or pagans to take action against believers.]

- **Complaint** - NONE.

- **Advice** - Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. You will suffer for ten days. [Ten days (the time of Daniel's testing, Dan. 1:12-15) may well point to the completion of their suffering: 'It is only for a limited time that you will have to endure, even though endurance will be tested to the limit' (Niles). It certainly points to something more than three and a half days, which is John's usual expression for a trial of limited duration. Yet even ten has its limit.]

- **Discipline** - NONE.

- **Reward** - Jesus will give you the crown of life. You will not be harmed by the second death. [Crown (*stephanos*)



THE BIBLE LAB

DIG DEEPER...CONTINUED

means a wreath or chaplet, and is to be distinguished from the royal crown (diadēma). The stephanos was the trophy awarded to the victor at the games, and the same word was used of the festive garland worn at banquets by all the guests. Here it is plainly the victory wreath, which would be specially appropriate in Smyrna, a city famous for its Games. The believer who remains faithful even when it means death will receive the trophy of victory. His crown is life.

« Why does God not protect his church from suffering? Is his victory trophy worth the pain?

» **Chapter 2, Vss. 12-17: The Message to the Church in Pergamum** - Apart from its administrative importance, it was significant for its great library, said to have contained more than 200,000 parchment scrolls. Indeed, our word 'parchment' is derived from this name 'Pergamum'. It was an important religious center. People came from all over the world to be healed by the god Asklepios.

- **From** - The one with the sharp two-edged sword.

- **Compliment** - You live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. [The symbol of Asklepios was the serpent (12:9; 20:2). There was a great throne altar to Zeus cut on the Acropolis rock, symbol of rampant paganism and the new Caesar-worship with the recent martyrdom of Antipas made Pergamum indeed a very throne of Satan.] You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you. [Nothing more is known of Antipas (though legend has it that he was roasted in a brazen bull).]

- **Complaint** - You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam. In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching.

- **Advice** - Repent of your sin.

- **Discipline** - Jesus will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of his mouth.

- **Reward** - Jesus will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And he will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it. [With us a name is no more than a distinguishing mark, a label. But in antiquity the name was widely held to sum up what the man stood for. It represented his character. It stood for the whole man. The white stone: (ψηφον λευκην [psēphon leukēn]). This old word for pebble (from ψαω [psaō], to rub) was used in courts of justice, black pebbles for condemning, white pebbles for acquitting. The only other use of the word in the N. T. is in Acts 26:10, where Paul speaks of "depositing his pebble" (κατηνεγκα ψηφον [katēnegka psēphon]) or casting his vote. The white stone with one's name on it was used to admit one to entertainments and also as an amulet or charm.

« What does it say about God that He personally has given us a secret name with deep meaning?

» **Chapter 2, Vss. 18-29: The Message to the Church in Thyatira** -

- **From** - The Son of God, whose eyes are like flames of fire, whose feet are like polished bronze [This is the one letter to use the title the Son of God, indeed the one place where it occurs in Revelation. The description emphasizes the majesty of his Person.]

- **Compliment** - I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things.

- **Complaint** - You are permitting that woman—that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet—to lead my servants astray. She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols. [One suggestion is the oracle Sambethe, a female fortune-teller located at Thyatira.]

- **Advice** - Repent and turn away from her evil deeds. I will ask nothing more of you except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come. [The powerful trade guilds in this city would have made it very difficult for any Christian to earn a living without belonging to a guild. But membership involved attendance at guild banquets, and this in turn meant eating meat which had first been sacrificed to an idol.

- **Discipline** - I will throw her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer greatly unless they repent. [The bed (*klinē*) may be a 'sickbed' (rsv) or one of suffering (niv). The punishment fits the crime—she who profaned the bed of love is pinned to the bed of sickness.]

- **Reward** - I will give to each of you whatever you deserve. I will give you authority over all the nations. They will have the same authority I received from my Father, and I will also give them the morning star! [Christ is himself referred to as 'the bright Morning Star' (22:16) it is likely that it is the presence of the Lord that is meant.]

« What does it say about God that the only thing he requires in some situations is that His people just hold on, without any further growth?

MY PRAYER...

1. What message does God have for me in my church today?
2. Which one of these four churches matches my current spiritual situation?
3. What new aspect of God's character does He want me to know?



THE BIBLE LAB