

Christ in Prophecy

Revelation 11: “The 7 Churches: Philadelphia & Laodicea”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: In 95 AD, Jesus returned to this earth and dictated seven letters to seven churches located in modern day Turkey. The last two of those letters are studies in contrast. One was written to a Spirit-filled church that was on fire for the Lord. The other was addressed to a church that was wallowing in apathy. To see how these letters apply to us today, stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our blessed hope! I'm Dave Reagan, Founder and Director of Lamb and Lion ministries and I want to welcome you to our program Christ in Prophecy. Once again, this week for the fifth time I believe it is, fellows, I've got two of my colleagues here in the studio with me and I have really appreciated the time that they have given to this. One is Dennis Pollock, who is the Founder and Director of Spirit of Grace Ministries in McKinney, Texas, that's a suburb of Dallas, and the other is my good friend from Amite, Louisiana, Ragin' Cajun, Don McGee, Founder and Director of Crown and Sickle Ministries. Fellows, I really have appreciated your participation in these five programs.

Don McGee: It's really been good.

Dennis Pollock: Thank you for inviting us.

Dr. Reagan: Okay. Well, this is our fifth program, in a series on the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation. These are letters that Jesus dictated through the apostle

John when Jesus returned to this earth 65 years after His death, burial, and resurrection. In our first program, we presented an overview of all seven letters, focusing on thirteen promises the letters contain for those who are classified as overcomers. And we saw that an overcomer is defined as a person who has placed His faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. In our second program, we took a look at the Isle of Patmos, where the letters were written, and we discussed the first letter, the one to the church in Ephesus, a church that had become legalistic in nature. The third week we discussed the letters written to the churches at Smyrna and Pergamum. Smyrna was a church suffering from intense persecution, the church at Pergamum was a liberal church that had embraced various forms of heresy. Last week we took a look at two more of the letters of Jesus, the ones addressed to the churches at Thyatira and Sardis. The church at Thyatira was a pagan church full of all kinds of cultic practices. The church in Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but in reality it was dead. This week, we're going to consider the last two of the seven letters, the ones written to the church in Philadelphia and the church in Laodicea. But before we take a look at these churches, let's pause for a word about a Revelation study resource.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: The remains of the ancient city of Philadelphia are located on a high plateau, one hundred miles due east of Smyrna. Several trade routes merged at this location, and Rome's imperial postal route also went through it, earning it the name of the Gateway to the East. Needless to say, it became an important and wealthy trade center. It was also a center for the production of wine. The God of the town was Dionysius, the God of wine. To this day, the major source of employment is the growing of grapes and the production of wine. Almost no ruins of the ancient city still exist, what can be seen are three pillars of a Byzantine church called the church of St. John the Theologian. Today, the ruins are overshadowed by a Muslim mosque. The ruins are located right in the center of the modern day city of Alasehir, which has a population of 70,000. The city is literally full of Muslim mosques. While visiting the city, we walked through a colorful market area that was full of goods of all type, and the people we encountered were exceptionally friendly toward us. Dennis, how about reading for us the first four verses of that letter, okay?

Dennis Pollock: Seven through ten or seven through nine? Through ten?

Dr. Reagan: You just read brother.

Dennis Pollock: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, these things says He who is Holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens. I know your works, see I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it. If you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie, indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet and to know that I have loved you.”

Dr. Reagan: Okay, hold it right there for a moment. Now, what does Jesus mean in the salutation, the very opening verse there in verse seven, what in the world does he mean there when He refers to himself as the one who has the key of David?

Don McGee: The Key of David is directly associated with the throne of David, and the lineage of David, the dynasty of David. God said that David would always have a descendent to sit upon the throne, and we know that the ultimate descendent is Jesus Christ and that He will possess the throne of His son David.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, do you have anything to add to that?

Dennis Pollock: Well, this is another example of a time where this revelation is pulling from Old Testament theology.

Dr. Reagan: Boy it really is.

Dennis Pollock: Because in Isaiah 22 there was a fellow that was in charge of the house of David, of the Judean palace apparently, I guess he would have been a chief of staff type of guy. And Isaiah says that God is telling him I'm gonna get rid of you, I'm gonna replace you with another guy, Shebna was the first man, apparently he was wicked. God says I'm gonna replace you with a man named Eliakim, and he says I'm

gonna lay on his shoulder the key of David. And he'll open and no one will shut and so these are the exact same words Jesus is using declaring that he is the ultimate possessor of the key of David.

Dr. Reagan: And you know, the point you made is a wonderful one that I want to remind our viewers of, and that is that, you made it in an earlier program, that there is no way to understand the book of Revelation unless you know the Old Testament. The book of Revelation folks has more quotations from the Old Testament in it than any other New Testament book. Over 350 quotations and not a single one is identified. There's never a point where it says, "As Jeremiah said," or "Isaiah said." It just quotes it and you've got to know the Old Testament to understand the book of Revelation.

Dennis Pollock: I have to say, when I first started with Lamb and Lion I was in the habit of writing and not giving references. And one of the things Dave did as my editor, he would constantly get after me to quote the reference. I find I have a very good precedent for not always giving the reference.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah, in fact, the writer of Hebrews always says, it says somewhere, and then he quotes, you know, time after time.

Don McGee: Yeah, but Jesus is the author of each one of these books so He does not need to reference Himself.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, okay, guys, alright. Now, in verse 9, Jesus brings up an issue that we mentioned previously, it was in the letter to the church at Smyrna. He condemns the congregation of Satan. What is He talking about there, the congregation of Satan? Any comments about that, look at there in verse nine.

Dennis Pollock: Again, it appears to be a case of Jews that were hostile toward Christianity. Now, keep in mind much of the church were Jewish too, so this was not, Jews that were persecuting Gentiles. But they were unbelieving Jews persecuting believing Jews, and He calls them the synagogue of Satan.

Don McGee: It's just not the Jews though, this was a consortium of Jews, blasphemous Jews, and also pagan Gentiles. The Gentiles were in on the persecution just like the blasphemous Jews were.

Dr. Reagan: Now in verse 10 we come to what is probably the most controversial verse in this letter, and one of the most controversial verses in all these letters, let's read it. "Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth." Now, many argue that this verse applies only to the church at Philadelphia. Others argue that it's talking about the Great Tribulation, the Tribulation that's gonna come upon the whole world. And that is even is an inference that the church would be taken out in the Rapture before that Tribulation begins. What is your feeling about that?

Don McGee: Context.

Dr. Reagan: Context, context, context.

Don McGee: Context requires that the application be to the entire world. Look what He says, "It's coming upon the whole world." So if the judgment is coming upon the whole world, those who escape, has to have a whole world context also. And I believe this refers not just to Philadelphia but to the entire Church, that we'll escape the Tribulation.

Dr. Reagan: And this is the church, it's talking about this church would do that, these are the people who are faithful to the Lord, these are the people there is no condemnation whatsoever in this letter, these are people. In fact, they are commended so highly that He says, I'm gonna give you an open door. It's like, I'm gonna give you an opportunity to share the Gospel with many other people because you're sharing the pure Gospel. What about it Dennis? Do you have any observations about that verse, verse 10?

Dennis Pollock: Well, you know, that verse has always stood out to me Dave, even when I was a young believer and knew nothing about any kind of Bible prophecy or the Lord's Return or anything. It just stood out as having to do with the idea of the Last

Days, the Tribulation, and the Rapture, so to me it's an amazing verse, Jesus talking about the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole earth, as Don said, not just Israel, not just the middle east, but the whole earth, and they would be kept from it. So to me it's a tremendous promise of God's grace and desire to keep us and take us out before.

Dr. Reagan: Amen, and it reminds me of that passage over I believe it's first Thessalonians 1 verse 10 that says that we are to wait for Jesus who is coming to deliver us from the wrath that is to come. Wow. I'm ready to be delivered from the wrath that is to come because I know that great wrath is coming. Okay, this is one of two letters of these seven that contains no condemnation whatsoever, no criticism. The other one is the one that was addressed to the church at Smyrna that was suffering great persecution. Now the letter ends with some great promises. Read those for us Don.

Don McGee: 3:12, "He who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will not go out from it anymore. And I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God and my new name. And he who has an ear to hear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches."

Dr. Reagan: Okay. Now, any comments about those particular promises? We discussed the thirteen promises to some degree in the very first program in this series, but let's just go back for a moment. Here is a promise number one, we're gonna be a pillar in the temple of God, and number two, that we will have written upon us the name of God, the name of God's new city Jerusalem, and Jesus' new name. That's interesting, Jesus is going to have a new name.

Don McGee: And we're gonna have new names.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah, yeah.

Don McGee: The aspect there in my thoughts is that everything having to do with our earthly lives, is gone, even the earthly life of Jesus. And as He gets the new name for all eternity, so too will we have it. I kind of like that idea because when you say a person's

name, you associate it with all kinds of things, his history, his shortcomings, or whatever it might have been. I don't want any association with that.

Dr. Reagan: And Jesus who had the name Yeshua, which means God's salvation, is going to have a new name because His role is going to be changed. He's not coming back as God's Savior, He's coming back as God's King of Kings and Lord and Lords. And it's interesting to me that I've got a little note here in my Bible in Jeremiah 23:6 there is a reference to this that says the new name of the Messiah at that time will be Yahweh Tsidkenu, which in Hebrew means, "the Lord is our righteousness." He's coming to bring peace, righteousness, and justice to this world and boy do we need righteousness in this sin sick world.

Don McGee: That's right.

Dr. Reagan: What a glorious day that's gonna be. You have any observations about these Dennis? These wonderful promises made here?

Dennis Pollock: Well, of course, to me the thing that is so exciting is they speak of intimacy and the fact that we belong to God and God belongs to us. There's a song we used to sing in church, "I am my beloveds and he is mine." Coming from Song of Solomon, and we are here declared those belonging to God, those belonging to Christ, His name is on us, God's name is on us. We will have an intimate relationship with Him forever and ever. And you know, one of the things that people once in awhile ask is, well okay, you get to Heaven, you know, you're in, but maybe a million years down the road, you're gonna mess up and then you'll just get knocked out of it. But no, we are His forever. His name is in us and on us and we don't have to worry, it's a lock in from here on in.

Dr. Reagan: And what you said there reminded me of Revelation 22 where it says that in the eternal state, that God the father and God the Son will live with us, we will be with them and it says, "We will see the face of God."

Don McGee: I can't even picture that.

Dr. Reagan: Isn't that something? What that means to me is we are going to have intimacy with our creator.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: We come next to the church at Laodicea. The church Jesus condemns for being lukewarm. Laodicea is located on a mesa about 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was the wealthiest of all the seven cities. It was known for its banks, its manufacture of rare black wool, and its medical school that produced a very effective eye salve. The city was the center of the imperial cult, as well as for the worship of Asclepius, the God of healing, and Zeus, the chief God of all Greek Gods. The city also had a fairly large Jewish population. Like Philadelphia, Laodicea was situated on some major trade routes between Rome and the Orient, and it thus served as a commercial center. Previously, there had been almost nothing to see at this site, but it is currently being excavated, and the ancient city is gradually being resurrected from the dust. Here is what its impressive main boulevard looked like. And here you can see the faint outline of the theatre carved into the side of a hill, it is currently being restored to its former glory. The city has always had a problem with its water supply, a city close by called Hierapolis was famous for its hot mineral springs. An aqueduct was built to bring the water to Laodicea, but by the time the water reached the city it was neither hot nor cold, rather it was lukewarm and filled with impure minerals, it tasted awful. Jesus addressed His most biting and sarcastic letter to the church located in Laodicea. Don, why don't you read the first four verses of that particular letter, beginning in Revelation 3:14.

Don McGee: "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, the Amen, the faithful and true witness the beginning of the creation of God says this, 'I know your needs that you are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot, so because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'll spit you out of my mouth, because you say I am rich and you become wealthy and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you were wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.'"

Dr. Reagan: Wow.

Don McGee: Quite an indictment.

Dr. Reagan: That is sarcasm, that is biting, that must have made a lot of people squirm. What do you guys make of this?

Don McGee: Laodicea forgot just how far and how low God had to reach down to get them. That's it. They just didn't realize how low they really were.

Dennis Pollock: You know it speaks to me of being the reverse of the church in Smyrna. Jesus said about Smyrna, He says, "I know you're poor, but the truth is, you're rich." And here He says, "You say you're rich, but the truth is, you're poor."

Dr. Reagan: Hey, that is good, that is good. That'll preach brother.

Dennis Pollock: Well, gimme a chance to...

Dr. Reagan: Wow that is a great observation, yeah.

Dennis Pollock: But you know they did a study of American students, because Americans are always trying to build their kids up in self esteem, okay. So they test American students and they found they had the highest self esteem among any of the modern countries. But, you know, they thought they were really great students, but when they test them in comparison to various other countries, in specific subjects, they did lower than anybody. So they thought they were above everybody, but in truth they were below almost everybody.

Dr. Reagan: So they were sort of ignorant, but they felt good about themselves.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, and that's what you have here. These people think, hey we're doing good we've got a nice sanctuary and our pastor is so fine and eloquent and articulate and man, we are so blessed, and Jesus says, you've got nothing, you've got nothing.

Dr. Reagan: Nothing. Look at verse 18. This is, now, I'm gonna go back to one of my favorite words, I word you all give me some trouble about, and that's that word enigmatic. That was one of Winston Churchill's favorite words you know, he said that Russia was enigmatic. Well, this verse is sometimes considered to be a very enigmatic verse, so let's take a look at it, verse 18. "I advise you to buy from me Gold refined by fire that you may become rich and white garments that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see." Now, he's saying, I want you to buy gold refined from fire, buy some white garments, and buy some eye salve and you're gonna be okay. Does this imply that we can purchase salvation?

Don McGee: Doesn't mean that we purchase salvation, it just means that what we have He is the source of it. Not in and of ourselves. Laodicea felt that they had everything that they needed, not just materialistically, but spiritually also, they didn't need what the Lord had. And the Lord says you're interested in Gold and salve and that kind of thing, it has to come from me. Call it what you want to call it, it's got to come from me.

Dr. Reagan: Okay.

Dennis Pollock: In Isaiah, I think its 55, God says to Israel, everyone that's thirsty, let him come to the waters, and you who have no money, come by and eat. Well, it's kind of a strange thing saying you don't have any money, come and buy something from me. But obviously it's not money that's the currency that at issue here. And you know every country has its own currency. I remember one time, Dave, me, and you and several others were in I think it was Poland, and Bob Wallace was at a McDonalds, one of Lamb and Lion's board members, and they said, well this is will be something like 12,000 zlotys, I think that's what it was, and Bob's going, wow! 12,000 zlotys. Well, turned out it was like \$3.25 or something, but that was currency of the country, so it was totally different from our currency. Well, in God's economy there is a currency, but it's not based on human money. It is a faith look at Christ, and through faith in Christ we can receive the blessings of Heaven.

Dr. Reagan: That's exactly right, and in fact, that reminds me of verse over in First Peter chapter one, in verse seven. The proof of your faith being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Wow. Well, when we come to verse 20, we come to one of the most famous pictures to be found of Jesus in all the Scriptures. Let's take a look at it. Go ahead Don, verse 20.

Don McGee: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock and if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and will dine with him and He with me. He who overcomes I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne as I also overcome and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Dr. Reagan: Okay now that is a picture of Jesus knocking at the door. We've all seen paintings of this, painting after painting. Knocking on the door and people have always presented this as Jesus knocking on someone's heart in order to get into their heart and become the King of their heart. But that's not the context here, that's okay, that's alright, but it's not the context. He's knocking on the door of one of his churches saying would you let me in.

Don McGee: Right, that's the whole point of the thing. William Holman Hunt painted that very famous picture. And the idea is not that He's searching for the pagan, He's searching for His own people, and also on the door in the painting there is no handle, it has to be opened from the inside. Laodicea parallels a lot of churches today, from the smallest to many of the mega churches. And there is a sign that could be put over those churches, small and large, that fits Laodicea, and that sign is the sign, Ichabod. The glory has departed.

Dr. Reagan: The glory has departed. I have been to churches that, so help me, I am not kidding, would not let Jesus in the front door. I'm not kidding, they would not do it because it would be a threat to everything they stand for. It's not something just in that day and time, it's something here today.

Don McGee: Definitely.

Dennis Pollock: Well, the thing that stands out to me is the graciousness of Jesus. I mean, it's like this door is keeping Him out because they refuse to open. The truth is He's the one who is holding that door together. I mean, its very molecules and atoms are being held together by the word of His power. But He being such a gentleman, He's not gonna come in until He is invited and they're not inviting Him.

Dr. Reagan: That's right. Okay fellows, let's finish our consideration of this letter by looking at verse 21, the promise, "He who overcomes I shall grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne as I also overcame and sat down with my father on his throne." What throne is Jesus on today?

Don McGee: Well, He's not on His throne He's at the right hand of the Father on His throne, the Father's throne. Jesus' throne always has been, is, and always will be, the throne of David, which is in Jerusalem.

Dr. Reagan: And that's a very important point.

Don McGee: A very important, very important.

Dr. Reagan: Because the majority of the Christian world today argues that Jesus is on the throne of David right now, reigning in fulfillment of all the promises of the millennium. And that there will never be any Jesus coming back to this earth and reigning from Mount Zion in Jerusalem. But He doesn't say He's on his throne now, He says He's on the Father's throne, sitting at His right hand. And one day He is gonna come and sit on His throne and let you and me and all the saints have our turn sitting next to him on his throne just as He's sitting next to His Father. Boy that's exciting.

Don McGee: Two distinct thrones here.

Dr. Reagan: Would you argue?

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, it sounds exciting to me.

Dr. Reagan: So you're saying amen hallelujah huh? Well, say it!

Dennis Pollock: Amen, Hallelujah!

Dr. Reagan: Okay, thank you.

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: The stark reality is that none of the seven churches mentioned in these letters in Revelation continue to exist today. And in fact, this area of the world that became the first mission outpost of Christianity is now 98% Muslim. Jesus warned the churches repeatedly that if they did not remain faithful to Him, He would remove their lamp stand. It seems to me that this warning has remained valid throughout history since that time. For example, churches throughout England that thrive with revival and evidenced great spiritual power during the Nineteenth Century stand empty today, converted into museums or Muslim mosques. In fact, only 7% of the people in England today go to church. I personally remember visiting the church in Wales that was the home base of Evan Roberts who led a great national revival in 1904, it has been beautifully preserved but it is nothing more than just a museum. The membership of the church today is less than 20 persons. Fellows, what do we have to do to keep a church vibrant and to keep your own Christian life vibrant?

Dennis Pollock: Well, Dave, C.S. Lewis wrote, "God made us to run on the fuel of Himself."

Dr. Reagan: Wow, I like that.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, and for a church or for a Christian, our greatest need is God. And there is a way we can have God, and that is through Christ, through faith in Christ, through an abiding walk with Christ, and a spirit filled life. And that is always the foundational and the most important of all aspects of life in Christ, of a church that's filled with the life of Christ, it is knowing Him, walking with Him, experiencing Him. And then out of the outflow of that relationship, he calls you to do things. He says, I want you to do this, I want you to do that. Here's my call, here's my task for you. And he has tasks for

church and various ministries. And the ministry is very important and that's why Jesus keeps saying, "I know your works, I know your works." But it starts from a relationship with God and abiding in Christ and the Spirit filled life.

Dr. Reagan: Don?

Don McGee: I think it's absolutely impossible for a person, an individual, to be effective without daily prayer, daily Bible study, and fellowship with believers. Take anyone of those out and you're going to have an emaciated Christian.

Dr. Reagan: It's like the physical body. If you don't feed it daily, if you don't get rest, if you don't do certain things, you're gonna get sick.

Don McGee: And regarding churches. That's for the individual, but in regard to churches Dave, I think that many churches today are no longer keeping the main thing the main thing, and the main thing is evangelism. That's it.

Dennis Pollock: You know, one of the problems with the churches, in fact the great evangelist George Whitfield one time commented on that, is that fact that in too many cases, you have unconverted pastors that are behind the pulpit. They've never been born again themselves. Whitfield said, "How can dead men beget living children? It's impossible." In some cases we need the pastors to get converted and get filled with Christ and filled with the Spirit.

Dr. Reagan: You know, I've met several people in my life who come up to me and said, I was an elder, I was a deacon, I was an elder and I was Bible study teacher at my church for many years and didn't even know the Lord.

Dennis Pollock: That's sad.

Don McGee: Well, look what's coming out of some of our seminars. They question the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, what do you expect?

Dr. Reagan: They question everything.

Don McGee: Yeah.

Dr. Reagan: Because in the average seminary today, they're teaching that this book is man's search for God, not God's revelation to man.

Don McGee: Totally ludicrous.

Dennis Pollock: They've done studies and they've found that in most of what we would consider fairly liberal churches, it is the pastors that are far more liberal than their congregations. When they do the surveys, it's like 70% of the congregations believe the Bible to be inspired, believe Christ was born of a virgin. The pastors many of them don't.

Dr. Reagan: Oh boy do we know that in teaching Bible prophecy how many pastors have absolutely no interest in it whatsoever. And the average person in that pew is just jumping at the opportunity to hear something about the End Times and Bible prophecy.

Don McGee: The very first church I went to when Crown and Sickle Ministries was established is exactly what you described there. People were soaking it up like a sponge and he stood there in the back, looking at me like I was some kind of alien from outer space.

Dennis Pollock: And I need to add this, we're not anti-pastors, I mean, I've been a pastor, I love pastors and I do pastors conference, so we're not anti-pastors at all. But there are some that really are giving the church a bad name.

Dr. Reagan: Well, fellows our time is almost up and as we bring this series to a close, I want to end the way I began by presenting John Stott's great summary of the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation. "To a sinful church Jesus is saying I know your sin repent, to a doubtful church He is saying, I know your doubt believe, and to a fearful church, He is saying, I know your fear endure!" Repent, believe, and endure. That's a very relevant message for the church today. Once again, I want to thank my guests for their help, it is always a joy and a blessing to minister with you guys. Thank you so much for being a part of these five programs!

Dennis Pollock & Don McGee: Thank you.

Dr. Reagan: Okay. I want to encourage all of you to get better acquainted with these men's ministries. You can find Dennis' ministry Spirit of Grace on the internet at spiritofgrace.org. And you can find Don's ministry, Crown and Sickle, on the internet at crownandsickle.com. Thanks for being with us this week, I hope you'll be back with us again next week. And until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near!"

End of Program