

Christ in Prophecy

Revelation 10: “The 7 Churches: Thyatira & Sardis”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: Jesus returned to this earth in 95 AD when He appeared to the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. He dictated letters to seven churches that were located in modern day Turkey. Two of those letters were addressed to a pagan church and a dead church. To see how those 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 welcome to our program, Christ in Prophecy! I am delighted to have with me once again this week two colleagues who are experts, experts. One of them got after me last week because I didn't say he was an expert, so he's an ex...

Dennis Pollock: I was just teasing Dave, you've got to keep that in mind!

Dr. Reagan: These guys are experts, experts in Bible prophecy and they're going to help me interpret and apply the seven church letters of Revelation. They are Dennis Pollock of Spirit of Grace ministries in McKinney, Texas, and Don McGee of Crown and Sickle Ministries in Amite, Louisiana. Thanks for joining me fellows once again, I'm glad to have you, and I guess I'm glad to have you Dennis, okay. Now this is our fourth program in a series on the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation. Now, these are letters that Jesus dictated to the apostle John, when He 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 13 promises the letters contain for those who are classified as overcomers. And we saw that an overcome 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. Last 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. This week, we're going to take 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 cultic practices. The church in Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but in reality it was dead. But before we take a look at these churches, let's pause for a word about some Revelation study resources.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to our study of the letters to the seven churches of Revelation. We are ready to consider the church at Thyatira. The town of Thyatira is located about 40 miles northeast of Smyrna. There are few remains of the ancient city left today. What is left is located in the center of a modern town called Akhisar, which has a population of 60,000. Thyatira is the only one of the seven cities of Revelation that was located on a flat land with no natural defenses. Thus, it was often invaded and destroyed. In comparison to the other large and sophisticated cities we have considered, you know, places like Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum, Thyatira was a small and rather obscure working man's village. Most of its inhabitants were tradesmen, and the city was full of trade gills or labor unions as we would call them today. The strongest were the coppersmiths and the dyers of cloth. To this day, the area is still a center of skill labor, one of the biggest industries being rug making. Thyatira was noted for its unique purple dyes, in fact, the Apostle Paul's first European convert whom he met at Philippi, was a lady from Thyatira named Lydia. She is listed in the word as a seller of purple fabrics. Christians living in Thyatira were forced to join the trade gills in order to work, and this caused serious problems for the church. That's because each gill had its own God and the gills held weekly banquets where members were expected to offer sacrifices to the idols and participate in sexual revelry. Unlike the other cities we've considered, Thyatira was not an important center for any temples to particular Gods. In fact, Thyatira was the most insignificant of all seven cities in every regard, and yet, it received the

longest letter from Jesus, due to the gravity of the situation that existed in the church. Dennis, let's read about it.

Dennis Pollock: Okay, starting in verse 18 of chapter two of Revelation, we read these words, "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, these things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass. I know your works, Love, service, faith, and your patience. And as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you because you allowed that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sick bed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine who have not known the depths of Satan as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have 'til I come."

Dr. Reagan: Hold on right there, let's just stop, we'll come back to the rest of that letter in just a moment. I am intrigued by verse 20 there fellows, I'd like to start with that. It talks about the Lord being very angry that they are tolerating a woman named Jezebel. You know, who is this Jezebel, do you think this was her actual name, maybe a symbolic name, but, what's the problem here?

Don McGee: It could have been her actual name, or He could be referring to her Old Testament spiritual precedent who was a woman named Jezebel. Jezebel is as most probably remember was an idolater, and not only was she an idolater but she was just an evil, wicked woman with blood on her hands. She had absolutely no respect whatsoever for the sanctity of life.

Dennis Pollock: I tend to think probably it wasn't her name, it would be for like one of us today naming our sons Adolf. It just doesn't happen, because he's got such a notorious reputation of Hitler. And Jezebel was known far and wide not only among the Jews but even outside Judaism, of being an extremely evil woman. So chances are...

Dr. Reagan: We even use that term today in that way, you know, “she’s a Jezebel” or something like that.

Dennis Pollock: So chances are it was a woman and he calls her Jezebel to describe her character, who is encouraging and actually teaching it, apparently it’s part of a doctrine that sexual immorality is okay and participating in these events where they would eat food sacrificed to idols, and involve themselves with sexual immorality was okay.

Dr. Reagan: She’s encouraging them to do the very same thing that was happening you remember when last week when we talked about the church in Pergamum and He said you have the teaching of Balaam within your congregation, and what was the teaching of Balaam? He was teaching them to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality, same sort of thing.

Dennis Pollock: It’s amazing Dave, because this is such a basic thing, this is not some sin that is so obscure and so little referred to in the Scripture that you know, well maybe they just didn’t know. I mean, it is one of the central tenants of Christianity that you live a sexually pure life, and yet this was a major issue in several of these churches.

Dr. Reagan: And He says in verse 21, I’ve given you time to repent and she just will not repent of this immorality and then boy, verse 22 and 23, He cuts loose.

Dennis Pollock: He really does.

Dr. Reagan: This is not the namby-pamby Jesus that most people think of, the one who’s willing to wink and overlook things and whatever. He says, you’re either gonna deal with this or I’m gonna throw the whole congregation into a bed of sickness and I will kill you with pestilence, you better get your act together.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah.

Dr. Reagan: Woo!

Dennis Pollock: He's very serious about this.

Don McGee: I wonder what he's gonna do with the American entertainment industry, in light of these things.

Dr. Reagan: Well, you better believe it, I mean, we're dealing with a God here who there is an end to His patience. Thank God He is very patient, but there comes a time when there is an end of His patience. You've got a whole sermon on that don't you? How the wrath of God builds up to a certain point and then brother he cuts loose.

Dennis Pollock: And what we're seeing here is flagrant sin. I mean, to me, I liken this whole issue to basketball. Now, you may say, what does this have to do with basketball? You know, you play basketball, you're gonna foul guys, just by the nature of the game, okay, and you live life, you're gonna mess up from time to time just by the nature of our own humanity in our flesh, okay, we're all gonna make mistakes. But in basketball there's such a thing as a flagrant foul, that's when the guy's about to go up for a lay up and you deliberately just smash him, knock him down to the ground, you know, knock out a few of his teeth. And the ref doesn't just give the guy a free throw, he throws you out of the game. It's a flagrant foul.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah.

Dennis Pollock: And here, we're not just talking about someone who maybe loses their patience over a situation, they are flagrantly, blatantly, defying the express commands of God, and Jesus is hot about this.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah, just thumbing their nose at God.

Dennis Pollock: Exactly.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah. Okay, let's continuing reading with the letter, verse 26.

Dennis Pollock: Okay. Jesus says he who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations. He shall rule them with a rod of iron. They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels, as I also have received from my father. And I will give him the morning star, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, now here are some very interesting promises that are made to overcomers. In our first program in this series we took a look at all 13 of the promises made in these seven letters and we briefly mentioned these, but let's just look at them again for a moment. The first of the promises is He's going to give to an overcomer authority over the nations, that he will rule them with a rod of iron as the vessel of potter are broken to pieces. Now folks, fellows, the majority view in Christendom today, both Catholic and Protestant, is to spiritualize this and say that we are living in that period right now, that we currently are reigning with Jesus Christ over the nations of the world. Now what is your response to that?

Don McGee: No, I can't find my throne.

Dennis Pollock: Did you look in your closet?

Don McGee: I have a real problem. I have my own place and ten acres over there in rural Tangipahoa parish, east of Amite, and I have problems ruling over that, much less over the nations. You know, when you're raising kids you understand your kids don't listen to you, and no one in the nations listens to me, so I think that those who look at this have gone beyond just spiritualizing, I think it's a total rejection of the obvious.

Dr. Reagan: Well, it certainly is and it goes back to the point that I've often made and that is that when you start spiritualizing scripture, you become God because then you can make it mean whatever you want it to mean. And if it doesn't fit your theology, you just say "well that doesn't mean what it means, it's gotta mean something else." And you start making up explanations of what it really does mean. But this says, point blank, "A day is coming when we are going to reign with Him over the nations." And you notice in verse 27 it says, "He will rule them with a rod of iron," that's an Old Testament concept right out of Psalm 2.

Don McGee: This doesn't make good preaching for most preachers today though Dave. This is not the Jesus that they portray for people.

Dr. Reagan: Well, He's certainly not ruling over the nations with a rod of iron right now. He's just not doing it. Now what about this one in verse 28? "I will give to the overcomer the morning star." What is your interpretation of that particular statement?

Don McGee: Go ahead Dennis.

Dennis Pollock: Well, I was just going to say, of course, the morning star in those days and today, generally, was considered Venus, which is not a star at all. But it was the harbinger of the morning, it was the light that showed the day is coming, and Jesus is using that concept. And then later on He calls Himself the Morning Star.

Dr. Reagan: Yes. So, He is saying that he is the very beginning of all the good things in God that we're going to have. He's the beginning of it all. And when we come to Christ, the morning star has risen in our hearts, as Peter described. And so, it's exciting stuff.

Dr. Reagan: And there's gonna be a day when we'll be with him eye to eye.

Dennis Pollock: Amen.

Dr. Reagan: Amen. Now, everyone of these letters, I haven't mentioned this so far, every one of them begins with Jesus giving a description of Himself. All these descriptions are taken from chapter one. And in this particular one, He begins by saying that the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze. What's the symbolism of the eyes like fire and the feet like burnished bronze?

Don McGee: There is an unlimited aspect to his omniscience. He's omniscient. He knows, he sees, there is no aspect of life in any corner of any place that the Lord is not aware of. And, not just being aware that it's going on, but being able to look beyond the obvious and see motives.

Dennis Pollock: There's a term you sometimes hear referring to someone, they say, "I felt like he could see right through me." Well, if that ever applied to anyone it certainly applies to the Lord Jesus, He really can see right through us. To me, both of these are symbols of Judgment. The first time Jesus came, He had eyes filled with tears, He wept over the city of Jerusalem, He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. But He's coming back with eyes like a flame of fire, to look into people's hearts to see if they love Him or they do not love Him. And feet like burnished bronze, everything that is made of bronze in the Old Testament had to do with judgment. He is coming in judgment. The first time He came at the Savior, He's returning as King in judgment.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: We come next to the church at Sardis, the church that had a reputation for being alive, but was in reality dead. You know fellows, that reminds me of a story that I want to share with you, it's a story about a good friend of mine named Alex Camacho. You know Alex. Alex is a Hispanic preacher, Don, here in the Dallas area and he was born and raised in Mexico, and I remember one time, he was invited to speak at a community service and I went to hear his sermon and I nearly fell out of the chair when I heard him give this illustration. His whole sermon was about dead churches. And he said, "You know, dead churches remind me of something when I was a kid in Mexico," he said, "the only time we ever got any meat when we went to see Grandma on Sunday. And she'd go out in the backyard and she'd grab a chicken and she would just snap her wrist and wring that chicken's neck, I'm sure you've seen that done, my Grandma used to do that. And that chicken run around all over the backyard and all the other chickens would just stand there and watch it." He said, "That's what dead churches are like. They've got all kinds of activities going, they've got classes in yoga, and they've got classes in transcendental meditation, and classes on American history. Anything that has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, you know. There's just a buzz of activity, and he said, "They're just dead as that chicken running around." He said, "That was the liveliest chicken in the yard, and it was the deadest one." Now, I tell ya, that is an illustration. That's the kind of illustration you like isn't it?

Dennis Pollock: That's right.

Dr. Reagan: Well, let me share with you a little background here about this particular church. Unlike Thyatira, Sardis is a very interesting place to visit because it contains some spectacular archeological ruins. There is a huge temple dedicated to Artemis, or Diana, that dates from the Fourth Century B.C. It is over 150 feet wide, and longer than a football field. Incredibly, the city also contained the largest synagogue that has yet been discovered anywhere in the world, dating from ancient times, including synagogues in Israel. The synagogue is 400 feet long and 60 feet wide. These impressive buildings attest to the size and the prosperity of the city. The population of the First Century is estimated to have been in excess of 100,000. The city's wealth was based on textile manufacturing and jewelry making. The city contained a huge gymnasium, consisting of a large courtyard for athletic games and an extensive complex of baths. Next to the temple are the remains of an ancient church that dates back to about the Fourth Century and its location adjacent to the temple indicate that its members had gotten involved in idolatry. Our Lord's letter to the First Century church must have been a shocking one to its members, for they had a good reputation that masked an ugly reality. Don, read the letter for us.

Don McGee: "Unto the angel of the church in Sardis write, he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says this: I know your deeds that you have a name that you are alive, but you're dead. Wake up and strengthen the things that remain which were about to die, because I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of my God. Remember therefore what you have received and heard and keep it and repent. If therefore you will not wakeup, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments and they will walk with me in white for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments and I will not erase his name from the Book of Life, and I will confess His name before my Father and before His angels. He who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches."

Dr. Reagan: Okay, thank you Don, I appreciate that. Now let's just look at this letter for a moment. Fellows, what do you see as the message of this letter for the church today, the church of the 21st century, does it have any message or is this just passé?

Don McGee: A very, very strong message regarding watching and strengthening and remembering where they were and to repent. That's a pretty good message I think.

Dr. Reagan: Well, that is, that would preach wouldn't it?

Don McGee: I think it would!

Dr. Reagan: How about you Dennis? Well, He's talking to a church that feels like they're doing pretty good, looks like they're doing pretty good. But in truth they are dead and He's saying you need to remember where you started, remember what you've heard you need to get back to the basics. Kind of reminds of an old Andre Crouch song, now, young people wouldn't have a clue who Andre is probably because he was popular about 30 years ago, but it was called, "Take Me Back to the Place Where I Once Believed."

Dr. Reagan: Oh yes, Oh yes.

Dennis Pollock: And that's what Jesus is saying, you need to get back. Now, that's not a message you want to say to a Christian that's doing well, because you don't wanna go back you want to go forward. But to these people, they were so far gone they needed to get back to where they once were.

Dr. Reagan: Now fellows, you've been to a lot of churches, both of you are representatives of nondenominational ministries, just as Lamb and Lion is nondenominational, I've been to every kind of church you can possibly imagine and I've been to some you couldn't even imagine. I've been to Charismatic, Pentecostal, Non-Pentecostal, I've been to Orthodox, I've been to all kinds. And you know, I've been to so many churches that now when I walk into a church I can almost sense spiritually whether it is in tune with the Lord or not. You just sense it, in my spirit. What is the key to a live church? It obviously is not just a lot of activities. I mean, you could have basketball games going every minute, and softball games, and courses in Yoga and all that sort of thing. What is the difference between a live church and a dead church?

Don McGee: Dave, I think praise and worship has a lot to do with it, and that's one of the things we look at when we walk into a church. But we have to understand that praise and worship often times appeals to the flesh, and just because someone has a very exciting kind of praise and worship program, doesn't mean that the important thing is still the important thing which is a connection with the head.

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Don McGee: Regarding the chicken, when I was in service we were being taught some survival training by some Green Beret soldiers and the men on my team were all city boys and we had to capture, kill, and cook a chicken.

Dennis Pollock: At least they let you cook it.

Don McGee: Yeah, what we had to do was find, you had to do all this yourself, so we found a gallon can and we boiled a chicken is what we did. But these young men didn't know how we were going to do this, because they had never seen it. I said, "I'll tell you what guys, I'll capture and kill if you'll cook." It's a big white rock chicken and about three turns of the neck and I'd popped his head off, as your friend said, he was active but he was dead, because he was no longer connected to the head. So we can have a lot of activity and really not be connected with the Lord.

Dr. Reagan: Dennis?

Dennis Pollock: There is a term that people use of certain individuals, who have outstanding personalities, and they generally make a gathering a success because they are just such neat people, they call them the life of the party.

Dr. Reagan: There you go, there you go.

Dennis Pollock: There are people like that. Well, there is a person who is the life of the party for the church. When He's present, when He's working, when He's active, it's gonna be good. And when He's not, it's gonna be lousy no matter what you have, and the Holy Spirit is the life of the party.

Dr. Reagan: There you go.

Dennis Pollock: And we need to find out what pleases Him and what grieves Him. He's pleased, for example, when Christ is honored and lifted up because He came to glorify Jesus. He's not pleased, He's grieved when pastors give little sermonettes on topics that have nothing to do with the word.

Dr. Reagan: Kind of warmed-over homilies from the readers digest, inspirational...

Don McGee: Offline off the internet.

Dennis Pollock: He's pleased when Christians walk in unity. He's not pleased, He's grieved when they're constantly criticizing each other. So, as we, He's pleased for example with prayer, He's not pleased when Christians are prayerless. So as we learn to please the Holy Spirit, to honor Christ, and allow Christ to fill us with the Holy Spirit, we will have life. And the praise and worship in one church may be way off the top with people jumping around and shouting and others it may be more subdued. But if the Holy Spirit is present, there is life there, and if he's not, it doesn't matter what else is going on.

Dr. Reagan: Boy, you got it right, You know Don, there's probably nobody on planet Earth that loves to worship more than I do, and I mean, I love to get into it. But I have been at worship services that were basically a performance, that were entertainment, rather than being motivated by the Holy Spirit. And I've been at churches that had great worship but there just wasn't any teaching from the Word. You've got to find a church that yes, loves to worship the Lord, but you've got to find a church that believes this is the basis of everything, the Word of God. And the Word is taught, but most of all, you've got to be in a church where Jesus is lifted up as the only hope of the world, where the focus is on Jesus Christ and everything is spirit filled. And that's gonna be a live church, as opposed to a dead one. What about an individual Christian? What's the key to being a live Christian as apposed to a dead one?

Don McGee: Same thing, same thing, I believe. Spirit filled! What applies to the congregation applies to the person. The congregation is made of persons.

Dennis Pollock: You know Jesus gave two basic commands, one to the sinner, one to the Christian. To the sinner, He only has one thing to say, and that is come to me. Regardless of what's going on in your life, His one command to the sinner is come to me, repent, put your faith in me. To the Christian, He also has one basic command, and that is abide in me, once you get there, you stay there, you don't go anywhere. And to have life is to abide in Christ. He is the true vine, we are branches as we plug ourselves into him, through fellowship, through the Word, through a life of prayer, constantly focusing on Christ, loving Christ, allowing Him to direct our lives. Life will abound in us and through us.

Dr. Reagan: I think the fundamental key in all of this is being filled with the Holy Spirit, that everything is done under the Spirit's direction and guidance, leadership. You know, when I was growing up in the church, so often I saw elders and deacons selected on the basis of politics, on the basis of who was the wealthiest, who gave the most, who had the most influence in society, and they might not be filled with the Spirit at all, they might just be carnal Christians who go to church every Sunday but they're really not... And I noticed what a difference in acts chapter 6 it talks about that in the early church, they needed some fellows to wait on tables, now wait on tables? And what was the qualifications they'd look for? Select from among you brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom whom we may put in charge of this task. Even though who wait on tables they wanted them to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When churches start to make sure that all of their leaders including the pastor and the pulpit are filled with the Holy Spirit, the choir members are filled with the Holy Spirit, the worship leader is filled with the Holy Spirit, the Sunday school teachers are filled, we're gonna have churches alive.

Dennis Pollock: And one thing the Christians have to know about, they have to know who is the Holy Spirit and have to learn. There's churches where you could sit through twenty years worth of sermons and you would never hear one message or even hardly a reference to the Holy Spirit, so how are you going to be filled with the spirit if you don't even know who He is or what he does?

Dr. Reagan: That's right, and I would urge our viewers to make a study of the Holy Spirit and to make a study of how you can be a person who truly releases the power of the Holy Spirit in your life so that the Holy Spirit is on the throne of your life and not your own ego.

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: In the time we have remaining I want to share a few thoughts with you concerning Christian symbols that were used by the early Church. The most commonly known is the fish. It was drawn like this. The reason it became a Christian symbol is because the Greek word for fish was Icthus. Those letters were an acronym for Jesus Christ, God, Son, and Savior. The Greek letters were Iota, Chi, Theta, Upsilon, and Sigma. The Greek words they stood for were Iesous, Christos, Theou, Uiou, and Soter, meaning, Jesus Christ, God, Son, and Savior. Now, while I was touring the seven cities of Revelation, I discovered another Christian symbol carved in the streets and on the sides of buildings. It utilized the same word, Icthus, but the symbol was a wheel with spokes, that looked like this. Here is the Iota for Iesous, here is the Chi for Christos or Christ, here is the theta for theou, or God, here is the Upsilon for Uiou or Son, and here is the sigma for soter or Savior. Well, our time is up. One final observation, I hope the greatest symbol of Jesus in your life is not a code symbol, like the ones we have been discussing, or even a very obvious symbol like a cross around your neck. Rather I hope it is the quality of life you live for the Lord. Once again, I want to thank my guests for their help. The Lord willing, both of them will be back next week, and fellows you better be, because I need your help. At that time we will take a look at the letters to the churches in Philadelphia and Laodicea. Until then this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries saying "Look up, be watchful, for your redemption is drawing near."

End of Program