

Christ in Prophecy

Revelation 8: “The 7 Churches: Patmos & Ephesus”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: 65 years after his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus returned to this earth to the Isle of Patmos where He dictated seven remarkable letters to seven churches located in modern day Turkey. Are these letters relevant to you and me today? And if so, how? Stay tuned as we take a look at the letters.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Well 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. And I am delighted to have with me once again this week two colleagues who are experts in Bible prophecy and who are going to help me to interpret and apply the seven church letters of Revelation. They are Dennis Pollock, my former associate here at Lamb and Lion, he is now the founder and director of Spirit of Grace Ministries in McKinney, Texas. And the other one is my dear friend Don McGee who I refer to as the Ragin' Cajun. He is from Amite, Louisiana and is founder and director of Crown and Sickle Ministries. Thanks for joining me fellows!

Don McGee: Good to be here.

Dr. Reagan: I appreciate you taking the time out to do so. Now, before we consider the first of the seven letters, the one to the church at Ephesus, let's take a look at the place where the letters were written, namely the Isle of Patmos. Dennis, how about reading Revelation 1:9-13 for us.

Dennis Pollock: Alright, starting in verse 9, we read, “I John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the Island that is called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the spirit on the Lord’s Day and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. What you see write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me and having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands, one like the son of Man clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.”

Dr. Reagan: Thank you very much Dennis, I think you’re reading out of the New King James there, right?

Dennis Pollock: I am.

Dr. Reagan: Okay. Now, according to this passage folks, the apostle John was a prisoner of the Roman government on the Isle of Patmos when he wrote the book of Revelation. The Isle of Patmos is a barren rock about 35 miles off the western coast of Turkey. In John’s time, it was a Roman penal colony. Today it is a beautiful and enchanting place with three villages containing a total population of about 3,000 people, mainly Greeks. All the houses and buildings on the Isle are painted bright white except a gray stone fortress-like structure on the island’s highest hill. It is the Greek orthodox monastery of St. John the Divine, which was built in 1088 AD. John was exiled to this Island in 95 AD, when he was about 90 years old. At that time he was the bishop of the church at Ephesus. Now, according to tradition, John remained on the Isle for about 18 months. After his release, he returned to Ephesus, where, according to tradition, he died in 104 AD at the age of 99. This building, called the Monastery of the Apocalypse, is built over the site of a cave where John supposedly wrote the book of Revelation. Tradition holds that John’s most faithful disciple, a man by the name of Prochoros was sent to the Isle by the church in Ephesus to encourage John. He became John’s scribe and was the one who actually wrote down John’s visions. A couple of years ago, I was blessed with the opportunity to visit the Isle of Patmos. I did not have a professional video crew with me, but my Media Director Don Gordoni who was traveling with me, did have a video

camera and he recorded me sharing some thoughts that had occurred to me en route to the island.

I am standing on the island of Patmos, and this is a barren volcanic rock out in the Aegean Sea. It belongs to the nation of Greece and is about 37 miles off the coast of Turkey. Right behind me you see a monastery that was built in about 1088 and that monastery is located directly above a very good sized cave here on the Island of Patmos. That cave was the traditional site where John wrote the book of Revelation. Today this Island has about 3,000 people on it, most of them in the port city below us, and they mainly live off tourism. When we were coming out here on a boat from Turkey, the cruise was above three and a half hours and during that time I had a lot of time to think about the apostle John and what he did on this island. And the thing that kept coming back to me over and over was I just kept wondering what did John think as he was on that boat coming out here. And it suddenly occurred to me that even John the Baptist doubted when he was arrested and was facing death, and he sent messengers to say, "Are you really who you said you were?" And I got to thinking, John was no saint in the sense that he walked on water or had no temptations in the flesh, he was a human being like you and me. And I could not help but believe that as he was on that voyage which took more than three and a half hours, probably took a whole day to get over here, that there must have been many things going through his mind. He must have been thinking, "Lord, I'm 95 years old. Lord, I'm head of the church in Ephesus. Lord, the church is under terrible persecution from Domitian, the church needs me. I'm the only apostle left alive. Why are you allowing the Roman authorities to take me to this barren island, away from everybody, in the middle of nowhere, why Lord? What good can possibly come out of this?" I can't help but wonder if maybe that's what he was thinking. And then he arrived here and stayed about 18 months and sometime during that time, the Lord Jesus Christ in His glorified body appeared to him and John fell on the ground as though dead and John was so frightened that the Lord said to him some of the most comforting words in all the Bible, "Fear not John, behold. I am the first and the last, I'm the Alpha and the Omega, I was dead and now I'm alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades." What Jesus was saying was I am the beginning of the history, I am the end of history, I am the middle of history, I am the meaning of history, and I have overcome death and because of that I have the keys, I have the authority, over death and Hades. Over both the body and the soul and one day those who put their faith

in me will have the resurrection of their body and their soul put back together with their body and will receive a glorified body to live with me forever and ever. How that must have encouraged John. How that encourages me. How it should encourage you. And how it should encourage Christians I'm sure, for other 2,000 years as they've read it. Once again, God proved that He is the God of the impossible. That He can take the worst situation and bring something glorious out of it.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to our discussion of the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation. With me are my colleagues Dennis Pollock and Don McGee. Fellows, before we take a look at this particular Scripture that Dennis read a few moments ago, let me just take a moment to tell you a funny story about the Isle of Patmos. It has to do with this beautiful rock right here, one of the most beautiful rocks I've ever run across and it's an interesting story. Back in the late '70s, I was teaching a course on the book of Revelation, it was kind of a home Bible study and one of the members was a medical doctor. And he came one night in the middle of the course and he said, "Oh I am so excited, my wife and I are going on a Mediterranean cruise, we're leaving next week and I just found out that one of the stops is gonna be the Isle of Patmos!" He said, "I'm gonna get to see where this book came from." Well, I told him, I said, "Would you please get me a souvenir." So he came back and when he came back he presented me with this rock, and I tell you, that's been a precious possession of mine ever since then, I said, "Well, tell me about the rock." He said, "Well, Dave it's the funniest thing," he said, "We got off the cruise ship and," he said, "the only thing to see on the island is this monastery, and we start walking up to the monastery and we go by these people who have all these card tables and they're selling everything you can imagine and this one lady had a table with a table cloth and on it was all this cheap stuff, jewelry made out of shells and stuff like that, but on each corner she had a big rock to hold the table cloth down. And I saw this rock and I thought it was so pretty and I said to her, 'How much for the rock?' And she looked at me like I was nuts, and she pointed to her stuff, her knickknacks, I said, 'no, the rock, how much is the rock?' she said, 'A dollar.'" So he bought the rock and went up to the monastery. When he came back she

had removed all her knickknacks and the table was covered with rocks. She thought if these crazy Americans want rocks, I'll sell 'em rocks.

Dennis Pollock: There's a good entrepreneur for you.

Dr. Reagan: That was a good entrepreneur. Well, let's go ahead now and take a look at the verses Dennis read at the beginning of the program. Revelation 1:9-11 and I want to single out verse 9. It says, "I John your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the Isle called Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Now this is an important verse for many reasons but one certainly, it has to do with the dating of the book. There is a lot of debate about the dating of this book. Why is this verse crucial in determining the dating of the book?

Don McGee: This is one of the clearest indications of the late dating for the book because persecution extended from simply being in Rome under Nero until this time where it was empire wide under Domitian.

Dr. Reagan: That's correct Domitian was the one who launched the empire wide persecution. So we know that this was in the hinterlands and this had to be under Domitian. Now we know that there are other reasons that we know it was under Domitian, but this is certainly one of the most important internal evidences that it was during that time. And that's so important because there are people today called Preterists folks, who argue that the book of Revelation was written before 70 AD and that everything in it has to do with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and it's all be fulfilled. But this is strong evidence it was written after 70 AD and it is yet to be fulfilled. Okay, let's continue in verse 10. John says he was in the spirit on the Lord's Day, what does it mean in the spirit? Does it mean he was slain in the spirit on the floor, or what does it mean? Dennis?

Dennis Pollock: Well, I believe he was in the realm of the Holy Spirit, it's interesting that that term is used several times in the book of Revelation.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah, well, Paul says he was taken up to Heaven in the Spirit, whether in the body or not he didn't know.

Dennis Pollock: And then John later on talks about being carried away in the Spirit and he sees the city of new Jerusalem, another time he's carried away and he sees the destruction of Babylon. So, clearly the idea of being in the Spirit is a significant concept, and I believe it meant he was in a realm where the Holy Spirit could reveal things to him that you just normally don't see, you don't get. In other words, this was not a futurist who's just writing some nice thoughts about what he thinks may happen. This was a man who was inspired by the spirit of God and shown what will occur before Christ comes back.

Dr. Reagan: Under a heavy anointing of the Holy Spirit. Now, Don, what about that statement that it was the Lord's Day. Does this mean this was a Sunday morning?

Don McGee: No, I don't think it does at all. Actually, this word could be translated imperial, which means it's not a Sunday, as a day in the week. But Dave actually, what I think it has reference to is an epic, or an era of time. It goes beyond just a 24-hour period on Sunday. This is a time when God is going to be dealing with things on this Earth. And John was translated into that and he was viewing it.

Dr. Reagan: I think you're absolutely correct. In fact, Church historians have pointed out that the term the Lord's Day, as a term for Sunday did not really develop until about 300 AD, long after this period. I think he's talking here about the Day of the Lord, what the Old Testament prophets called the day of the Lord. It's like he's put into a time capsule and catapulted to the future to see what's going to happen. Do you feel comfortable with that Dennis?

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, I'm comfortable with it.

Dr. Reagan: Okay. In verses 12 and 13, John says he sees a Son of Man clothed in a robe with a golden sash standing among seven golden candlesticks. Now who in the world would this son of man be?

Dennis Pollock: Well Jesus referred to himself frequently in the Gospels as the Son of Man. Of course, a lot of times people think of that as a term of humility, He was saying I'm just a man like everybody else. Well, it does reflect His humanity, but actually it goes back to the book of Daniel where Daniel sees this amazing vision, perhaps the most amazing vision seen by an Old testament prophet, where he sees the Ancient of Days, God almighty, and he sees Jesus Christ, spoken of as the Son of Man, who comes before the Ancient of Days, and it says, "To Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples and nations and languages should serve Him forever and ever.

Dr. Reagan: And because of that great vision, that term Son of Man became a messianic title.

Dennis Pollock: Messianic title. So here, John is describing Messiah. And of course, the Jews would immediately know who that.

Dr. Reagan: What is the significance of the clothing that he's wearing?

Dennis Pollock: A lot of researchers believe this was high priestly clothing, the idea of wearing a long garment, the golden sash. Now He didn't have the full regalia, He didn't have the stones over the chest and so forth, but it looks like He was revealing Himself in His glorious fashion as our high priest, the one who goes before the father and declares that we are justified through his...

Dr. Reagan: Which it exactly what He is right now.

Dennis Pollock: Well absolutely.

Dr. Reagan: I mean, He came as our Savior, He is now our High Priest. And He's going to return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Dennis Pollock: And what's neat is, I mean, so much of this vision is so dazzling, I mean, and it was to John, I mean, he fell down like a dead man. But, the neat thing is, in the midst of all this glory and all this awesome majesty, there is the element of Him being our High Priest which is a good thing for us. It means He's a friend, He's not a foe.

Dr. Reagan: Don, what in the world are these candlesticks he's talking about here? He sees the Son of Man standing among candlesticks.

Don McGee: Candlesticks have to do with the seven churches and as purveyors of truth in this world, the Church is, then and should even be now, purveyors of light. We are the bearers of light, in a very dark and decrepit world.

Dr. Reagan: You know, people often say that Bible prophecy can't be understood because there's so much symbolism and there is a lot of symbolism, but normally, the Bible is its own best interpreter and tells us what the symbols mean. In fact, here, it tells us point blank because if you go down to verse 20 it says the seven lamp stands are the seven churches. You don't even have to guess about this or whatever. It just tells you what they are. It is Jesus standing among His churches. He is walking among them, He is encouraging them. That's what this letter is all about, is a letter of encouragement. Now, in verses 17 and 18, we have some of the most powerful words that Jesus ever spoke on this Earth. John just falls at His feet as if dead. He has never seen the Lord in His glorified state except on the Mount of Transfiguration. Now he sees it again and he falls on the floor as if dead and Jesus reaches out and puts His right hand upon him and says, "Do not be afraid, I'm the first and the last. I'm the living one. I was dead and behold I'm alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and Hades." What in the world does that mean?

Don McGee: I think of something Ken Humphrey said, our friend who has been on this program.

Dr. Reagan: From Northern Ireland.

Don McGee: Yes, very fine Christian man. Ken said something one time that I'll never forget in regard to this text. He says, "Jesus was saying to John in a matter of speaking, 'John, you were right in having stood up for me for all that I said I would be, I am.'"

Dr. Reagan: Woo! Boy that'll preach.

Don McGee: Yes it will.

Dr. Reagan: To me it seems that Jesus is saying, “Folks listen. I am the beginning of history, I am the end of history, I am the middle of history, I am the meaning of history. I’m what it’s all about!”

Don McGee: And once that’s believed in a person’s heart, what is there to fear?

Dr. Reagan: Yeah. And I have the keys. What does that? That’s authority, right?

Dennis Pollock: Well, it’s authority, and it’s authority over the issue of death and Hades. And you know, the greatest fear man has is the fear of death and the recognition that it’s all gonna come to and end. At least that’s the normal perception. And Jesus is saying, “Hey, I’ve been there. I’ve been through death. I am alive, I’ll live forever and I’ve got the keys and if you’ll trust in me, you will as well.”

Dr. Reagan: The book of Hebrews says, “Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death.” And boy does He ever. Only a Christian can look death in the eye and say, “Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?”

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: The first letter Jesus dictated was addressed to the church at Ephesus, John’s home church. At the time John wrote Revelation, Ephesus was considered to be the fourth most important city in the Roman Empire. It was a sea port city, and thus, a commercial center of great wealth. It also housed the temple of the goddess Artemis, or Diana. This temple is considered to have been one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Artemis was worshiped as the goddess of the wilderness and wild animals. And in many places, here in Ephesus for example, she was considered to be a goddess of fertility. Today, Ephesus is a great archeological site of absolutely unsurpassed magnitude. Its theatre which seated 25,000 people attests to a city with a population approaching 300,000. The apostle Paul visited the city for the first time in 53 AD during his second missionary journey. He was accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila whom he

left there after teaching for a short time in the Jewish Synagogue. Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and had a resident ministry there for three years. It was during this time that he wrote the book of First Corinthians. It was in Ephesus that a silversmith named Demetrius stirred up a riot against Paul for fear that his preaching would undermine the worship of Diana, and he was right about that. Paul was hauled into the theatre where he was almost killed before the riot was quelled. The apostle John came to the city around 80 AD, the tradition is that he brought with him, Mary, the mother of Jesus. And you know, this makes sense when you consider the fact that while Jesus was hanging on the cross, He entrusted the care of his mother into John's hands. Accordingly, there is a beautiful site in the mountains above Ephesus that supposedly marks the tomb of Mary. Let's take a look now at Jesus' letter to Ephesus. It begins with a word of commendation. Don, read verses 2 and 3 of chapter 2.

Don McGee: "I know your deeds and your toil and your perseverance and you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they're not. And you found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for my namesake and have not grown weary.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, any comments fellows about that?

Dennis Pollock: Well, it looks great. You know, it's good stuff and if the average Christian had that said to them, they should feel pretty good about it. Of course, we know he's gonna go on and have something critical to say, but still it's a good commendation.

Dr. Reagan: It is a good commendation. How about it Don?

Don McGee: There's something here that I think we need to draw some attention to. Two of the most important words that we find in the seven letters are found first of all, here. When Jesus says, "I know."

Dr. Reagan: I know.

Don McGee: And that applies to someone who may not be up to snuff, so to speak, in their spiritual life. But it also applies to those who are sacrificing, who are being persecuted for the Lord's sake. I know.

Dr. Reagan: He says that over and over, "I know your deeds." People often, Christians, are almost like deists. They think that God is impersonal, aloof, separated, not really interested in anything that is going on except the big guys like the President or the King or whatever. But He's interested in each one of us, He knows our deeds, He's interested in our works. We don't work to be saved, we work because we are saved.

Dennis Pollock: Should be a very sobering thought.

Dennis Pollock: Amen.

Dr. Reagan: One day we're gonna be rewarded on the basis of those works. It doesn't determine our eternal destiny but there's gonna be degrees of reward.

Dennis Pollock: That's right.

Dr. Reagan: Okay.

Dennis Pollock: It reflects the deity of Christ. If He were not God, there's no way He could know what's going on in every church and with every believer, but because He is God, He can intimately know every single thing that's going on.

Dr. Reagan: But in verse 4 He shifts gears. In verse 4 it comes, "But, but I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore, from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent." Now what is Jesus talking about in these verses here? He says you've left your first love.

Dennis Pollock: It really becomes amazing when you think of how highly He commends them on the one hand and then how strongly He rebukes them on the other hand, I mean, these guys have done pretty well, they have labored, they have, he says

you're not tired, you're still going at it, you're working for me, you have patience, you're checking out the people that are coming up with false teachings and you're recognizing they are not true apostles. But in spite of all the good stuff they're doing, you have no love for me, you have no passion. It's like they're living on momentum. They're living on doing the things they've always done. But somehow the love has died out and to Jesus that's really serious.

Don McGee: Jesus doesn't condemn their efforts, what he does is he condemns their changing of priority.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah. And it reminds me of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 where he talks about, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if I do not have love I become a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophesy, know all mysteries, all knowledge, have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, and it shows us that Christianity is not just a formula, it's not like saying, "Ok read 3 chapters in the Bible each day, pray 15 minutes each day, make sure that you talk to at least 4 people each week about Christ. You know, do these things and you'll be a nice good Do Bee."

Dr. Reagan: Good Do Bee. [Dave laughter]

Don McGee: That's a new one.

Dennis Pollock: My Romper Room education is coming out here.

Don McGee: I want to write that down.

Dennis Pollock: That was a term for all you people that are over 99 years old, there was a show called Romper Room and it talked about good Do Bees. Anyway, he's saying it's not just what you do, it is the heart from which you do it. And the truth is, if you've got the heart for God and for Christ, you will be out there doing the things you

need to do. But it is possible to be doing good things, and yet not have the heart, and that is a problem.

Dr. Reagan: Now, in verse 6 he shifts gears again. He says, “yet, this you do have,” now here comes another word of commendation, “you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.”

Don McGee: There’s a lot here that we don’t know, regarding the Nicolaitans.

Dr. Reagan: People have written books about them.

Don McGee: And lots of arguments actually. Though we don’t know a lot about them, we do know two things, we know that the Lord hated their deeds and so did this church and that is something that we can chalk up for the church here. Some speculate that these people were the first group of so called church leaders that formed an oligarchy kind of situation, a hierarchy, where they would actually lord it over the regular common people, and their authority was never to be questioned by the regular people.

Dr. Reagan: Well, that’s a good guess, I’ll tell you why, and that is that that’s what it literally means in the Greek “nica” that’s victory, and the “laitie” victory over the laity. So many have said, “Well, based on that, this is probably people who wanted to continue with the Old Testament priesthood concept and instead of having a priesthood of all believers, let’s have an official priesthood, an ecclesiastical organization. Could be.

Don McGee: We haven’t seen things change much in 2,000 years. There are those today who would subjugate and take away our freedom in Christ.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah. And that ecclesiastical concept continues. I never cease to be amazed at how many people will get involved in ministry and the first thing they want is they want a collar and they want a robe and they want something that makes them look you know, like they’re ecclesiastical.

Don McGee: But what I can’t understand is why people will subjugate themselves to that kind of thing, I just don’t understand it.

Dennis Pollock: One of the things that fascinates me about this is the fact that Jesus says, "I hate their deeds." You know, hate is a very strong word.

Dr. Reagan: Boy, you better believe it.

Dennis Pollock: One time we were driving up to visit relatives from Texas to Missouri and going through Oklahoma, which is a diagonal drive and it takes forever, it's like a 4 and a half drive, and my youngest son Jordan was probably just six or seven, and after we got up there, he just suddenly, in the middle of nowhere, just broke out into tears, and cried "I hate Oklahoma!"

Dr. Reagan: Sorry about that folks! I'm sorry, I apologize.

Dennis Pollock: But, you know, hate is a strong word. And, you know, we don't think of Jesus and hate in the same context. He loves.

Dr. Reagan: Hey, we have some trustees of this ministry from Oklahoma, you're getting me in big trouble brother!

Dennis Pollock: The point is, there are some things, there are some doctrines, there are some concepts that Jesus flat out hates. And it's a good thing when you hate what Jesus hates.

Dr. Reagan: And we need to remember that because we're in a time of tolerance where churches are increasingly moving to the point where they're saying doctrine is totally irrelevant, we just got to have feel-good, we just feel good about everything, you know, touchy-feely and that's it. Okay, verse 7. He makes a promise, a promise to overcomers. How about reading that for us Dennis?

Dennis Pollock: He says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches, to him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

Dr. Reagan: Okay, what is the meaning of that? Is that meaning basically, eternal life?

Dennis Pollock: Well, I believe it is. That was of course referring back to Genesis, and you know, just as an aside, Revelation is laced with references to the Old Testament. I mean, someone said...

Dr. Reagan: More than any other book in the New Testament.

Dennis Pollock: More than any other book. Probably 70% of the verses and the concepts has some Old Testament reference, either an idea or a partial quote of a verse or whatever and so this is going back to Genesis, going back to Eden, going back to the tree of life which of course gives eternal life. And Jesus is saying, believe on me, put your faith in me, be an over comer through faith in Christ, and you will live forever.

Dr. Reagan: You know I grew up in a church that did not understand Bible prophecy and one of the reasons was we never ever, ever studied the Old Testament. It was nailed across, it was passé, we focused on the New Testament. There is no way you can understand the book of Revelation, or the book of Hebrews, either one, without knowing the Old Testament, I mean it's just. For example, the theme of the entire book of Revelation is found in verse seven of chapter one, "He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see and even though who have pierced Him and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him even so amen, Jesus is coming back." That takes two Old Testament verses and puts them end to end and you'd never know it because it doesn't even tell you where they come from.

Closing

Dr. Reagan: Well, that's our time for this week folks. Next week, the lord willing, we will take a look at the letters to the churches at Smyrna and Pergamum. 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