

Jesus made three statements to all of the seven churches...

1 JESUS said: "I KNOW..."

To five of the churches Jesus Christ said, "I know your deeds." Revelation 2:2,19; 3:1,8,15. To the church at Smyrna the Lord Jesus said, "I know your afflictions and poverty." Revelation 2:9. To the church at Pergamum He said, "I know where you live." Revelation 2:13.

Jesus Christ knows all about His people. He introduced Himself to each church in such a way as to reveal that He could meet the needs of His people:

TO THE CHURCH AT:

JESUS CHRIST IS:

Ephesus

the One walking among the lampstands.

Smyrna

the One who died yet lives again.

Pergamum

the One with the sharp, double-edged sword.

Thyatira

the One who is the Son of God.

Sardis

the One who holds the sevenfold Spirit and seven stars in His hand.

Philadelphia

the One who is holy and true who holds the key of David.

Laodicea

the One who is the faithful witness.

2 JESUS said: "HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES."

Each message was a personal letter sent to a specific congregation. Local problems and experiences were addressed. The words of encouragement and counsel were relevant to the believers living at the end of the first century. They were urged to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22.)

There is also a message for all Christian churches and believers in all times in these letters. The seven churches were models of the whole Christian church of the first century as well as the church of all ages. The letters address all spiritual conditions from great commitment to sad rebellion and apostasy. At least one of these messages will speak to each of us in an extremely direct way. All are urged to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Some have looked back over history and noted that the experiences and characteristics of the seven churches found some parallel in consecutive periods of church history. Christians in all ages are urged to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches:"

Ephesus: The high regard that the church at Ephesus had for truth was characteristic of the *CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES*. However, by the end of the first century attacks were being levelled at the pure teachings of the church and its evangelistic zeal was diminishing.

centuries the church experienced severe hardship. Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian the church suffered an intense ten-year period of persecution from A.D. 303-313. The church refused to worship the emperor. Smyrna represents the *PERSECUTED CHURCH*.

Smyrna: During the second and third

Pergamum: Satan was unsuccessful in

his attempts to destroy the church by persecution. However, the church was internally corrupted by popularity and worldly alliances. Biblical truths were compromised and pagan beliefs and practices entered the church. It became the new state religion of the failing Roman Empire. Thus Satan drew many into the apostasy warned of by Paul in Acts 20:25-31 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4. The church of the fourth and fifth centuries, like the church at Pergamum, was the *CHURCH OF COMPROMISE*.

Thyatira: Thyatira's open disobedience of God's commandments, reminiscent of the Jezebel-led rebellion of Old Testament times, parallels the *CORRUPT CHURCH OF THE DARK AGES*. During those thousand years the light of truth was almost extinguished.

Sardis: Jesus Christ's message to Sardis was, "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete." Revelation 3:2. Many have seen the church at Sardis as characterising the *REFORMATION CHURCH* of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The Reformation was a "protest" against unbiblical traditions and practices that were encouraged by the church

leaders of the time. However, the return to the Word of God in those centuries was not complete.

Philadelphia: The Philadelphian church's concern for and obedience to God's Word reflects the spiritual awakening of the latter part of the eighteenth and early half of the nineteenth centuries. Close study of the Bible brought about great revivals. Bible societies were established. An interest in foreign missions was born. Powerful preachers of the Bible and the gospel, such as the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield, swept away the formalism and world-centredness of many Christians. Many Bible teachings were rediscovered including the promises of the return of Jesus Christ. It was the *CHURCH OF THE BIBLE AND ADVENT REVIVAL*.

Laodicea: Laodicea represents the *CHURCH OF TODAY*. This church is described as being self-satisfied and materialistic. Such a description certainly fits much of the modern Christendom. The book of Revelation portrays the final revival of the church from its lukewarmness and trials ultimately climaxing with the return of Jesus Christ.■

3 **JESUS said: "TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES..."**

Jesus Christ promises blessings to those who overcome. Revelation 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21. Through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are to follow the Word of God and overcome Satan's schemes. To overcome means to follow the counsel of the letters which is the written Word of God. The counsel of the letters was not only for the seven specific churches, but for all believers in all ages. We are to be overcomers. The promises made to overcomers in these seven messages relate to the trials and pressures that the believers in each of the churches were facing. These promises are still true today!■