

Comparison Chart of the 7 Churches + Map

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION



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THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION








The book of Revelation contains seven letters from Jesus to churches in seven important cities in the Roman province of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). In these letters, after a brief but significant description of himself, Jesus addresses the spiritual condition of each church: as appropriate, he praises, challenges, and symbolically makes a promise to each.

For us, the praises, challenges, and promises are best understood when some background information about each city is taken into account.

Finally, each letter ends with the similar refrain “to the one who is victorious” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), which points to the main function of the entire book of Revelation: to give assurance and comfort to suffering and persecuted believers. The book assures Christians of the ultimate victory of God and God’s people over the powers of evil and death (John 16:33).

CITIES OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES



CHURCH	STRENGTH	FAULT	PROMISE: SYMBOL OF ETERNAL LIFE
Ephesus	Hard work / Patient endurance / Rejection of evil / Perseverance	Is losing its identity: Forsaking its first love places the church at Ephesus in danger, because love and faith are the wellspring of the believer's deeds.	The church at Ephesus will eat from the tree of life, the tree from the Garden of Eden, in paradise. 
Smyrna	Endurance through suffering and poverty, yet they are rich	None: The church at Smyrna has been faithful in the face of persecution and even martyrdom, but it should not become complacent.	The church at Smyrna will receive the victorious crown of life and not be hurt by the second death. 
Pergamum	Loyalty to Christ / Refusal to deny Christ	Compromise: The church at Pergamum has tolerated the teachings of people who want to practice idolatry while remaining in the church.	The church at Pergamum will receive manna (the life-giving bread of heaven) and a white stone (exoneration from guilt). 
Thyatira	Deeds, love, faith, service / Patient endurance / Constant improvement	Toleration of pagan practices: The church at Thyatira has justified teachings that have led to idolatry.	The church at Thyatira will receive authority over the nations and will receive the morning star, thus taking part in the new heavens and the new earth. 
Sardis	Faithfulness, but only of a few	Is dead: Engaging in idolatry has made the church at Sardis' garments dirty and caused the church to be spiritually dead.	The church at Sardis will walk with Jesus, and their names will remain in the book of life. 
Philadelphia	Faithful to the word / True to Jesus' name	None: Despite its relative weakness, the church at Philadelphia is strong because it remains faithful to God.	The church at Philadelphia will become a pillar in God's temple, forever in his presence, and will have God's name written on them, showing ownership. 
Laodicea	None	Has lost its identity: Its self-sufficiency and search for wealth has made it lose its love, faithfulness, and direct relationship with Jesus, which are central in the identity of a Christian church.	The church at Laodicea will sit next to Jesus on his throne. 

EPHESUS

ARTEMIS

BACKGROUND

- An influential commercial and cultural center built in the tenth century BC. The city was the main worship center of the goddess Artemis. Much of the city life and its prestige revolved around the temple and its activities, carried out by thousands of priests and a well-organized temple bureaucracy.
- Social, cultural, and legal pressures were probably exerted for all citizens, including Christians, to conform to pagan worship.

Artemis, known in Rome as Diana, was an ancient goddess of hunting and fertility. The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

PRAISE

The church in Ephesus is praised for hard work and perseverance, for not tolerating wicked people, for testing the claims of leaders (possibly the Nicolaitans mentioned in Rev. 2:6) and rejecting them when proven false, and for perseverance despite having to endure hardships. The statements build on each other: working hard and persevering translates into not tolerating wicked people and continuing to believe even though some leaders have tried to negatively influence them. Jesus noted their carefulness and praised it.

CHALLENGE: LOST FIRST LOVE

“You have forsaken the love you had at first” (Rev. 2:4). “First love” probably refers to one of the following:

- The burning love for Jesus that believers experience when they first believe, experience forgiveness, the promise of a new life, and the desire to put God first in their priorities.
- The love that believers have for one another.
- The love that must always be the moving force for believers.
- The love of witnessing about Jesus to nonbelievers. (Some scholars suggest that because of their focus on rejecting the teachings of false teachers, the Ephesians had given up on testifying about the love of God and salvation through Jesus Christ.)

NICOLAITANS

As a group, they compromised their Christian identity by incorporating pagan practices in their lives. Possibly, they corrupted the teachings of Nicolas from Antioch, one of the church’s first deacons (Acts 6:1–5).

Regardless of the correct reference, the solution Jesus identifies is clear: “Repent and do the things you did at first” (Rev. 2:5). Love is not an option. It is an integral part of what it means to be part of the body of Christ.

How can you restore your love for Jesus and others?

SMYRNA

BACKGROUND

- An ancient and wealthy port. It was one of the most important Roman cities of the area; a place where emperor worship was central to the life and prestige of the city, although the temple to Athena was also a source of city pride and a significant contributor to the city's economy.
- Had a large population of Jewish people, many of whom cooperated with the city leaders persecuting Christians, revealing by their actions that they opposed God (“a synagogue of Satan,” Rev. 2:9).

FIRST CITY OF ASIA

Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum were the three main cities in the Roman province of Asia. Each one competed with the others to be considered the most important. At different times, both Ephesus and Pergamum served as the capital of the province.

PRAISE

The Lord praises the church in Smyrna for the richness of their perseverance, faithfulness, and loyalty despite their suffering.

“I know your afflictions” is God’s reassurance that Jesus knows the afflictions of his people, he cares deeply about them, and he is there with the sufferers.

“Yet you are rich” might refer to the following:

- The richness that will come when Jesus returns in glory.
- One of the beatitudes: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:10–12).



CHALLENGE: NONE

“Do not be afraid. . . . Be faithful (Rev. 2:10). Smyrna had remained faithful, even in the face of persecution and affliction, and Jesus tells them to persevere because the future holds more suffering. In fact, it is possible that they will have to surrender their lives for the sake of Jesus’ name. As tremendous a challenge as this is, however, Jesus is not asking them to do anything he himself was not willing to do.

How can we stand firm even when we experience social pressure to do something that betrays our faith and love for Christ?

PERGAMUM

BACKGROUND

- An important center of learning, especially of medicine; site of the Sanctuary of Asclepius, the god of healing.
- Contained the second largest library in the ancient world, smaller only than the library of Alexandria in Egypt.
- An administrative center for the province; also famous for its emperor worship and its great altar to Zeus.

PRAISE

Although it struggles in a difficult and demanding society and culture, the church in Pergamum is praised because it retains its loyalty to Christ. In fact, as the death of Antipas suggests, they are willing to die for their faith (Rev. 2:13).

CHALLENGE: COMPROMISE

“Repent therefore!” (Rev. 2:16). Despite their faithfulness, some church members have allowed immoral and wrong teachings to take root in the church. Both Nicolaitans and the followers of Balaam have led some in the church astray, and several now take part in both Christian and pagan practices. The false teachings and practices must be wiped out because evil is insidious and corrosive. However, darkness and lies have no power over light and truth. Lack of repentance will cause judgment: “I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the



PARCHMENT

The word *parchment* is derived from the name *Pergamum*. Although not invented in Pergamum, parchment refers to an animal skin that has been prepared in such a way that it can be written on. It became a common medium for all sorts of documents, including letters and books. Although generally not used today, parchment is still the only material used to make a Jewish Torah scroll.

BALAAM

In the Old Testament, Balaam was a pagan prophet that Balak, the Moabite king, hired to curse Israel. But God had Balaam speak only what God put in his mouth (Num. 22:35), and Balaam ended up only blessing Israel. Unfortunately, Balaam eventually led Israel to idolatry, and around the time that the New Testament was written, Balaam was considered by the Jews a prime example of a person whose teachings should not be followed (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11).

“I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16).

How can we stand firm for what we believe while at the same time remain loving and caring toward others?

THYATIRA

TRADE GUILDS

BACKGROUND

- A commercial center, located between Pergamum and Sardis, on an important Roman road.
- Served as a crucial military post for whoever controlled the area.
- Well known for its many trade guilds: craftsmen of wool and linen; makers of leather, bronze, and outer garments; dyers, potters, and bakers; and dealers in slaves.

Trade guilds were associations of artisans who practiced the same craft or sold the same goods. The trade guilds of Thyatira were tightly connected to the pagan religion of the area, so they likely opposed Christianity. Thyatira was the home of Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth and an early Christian believer (Acts 16:14, 40).

PRAISE

The church is noted for its deeds, love, faith, and service and for persevering and constantly improving (Rev. 2:19). The Lord of the universe is aware of what his people are doing and he cares about their actions. Love and faith are the wellspring of the believer's deeds. In other words, our actions, our works, our deeds must be motivated by love and faith.

Serving the weak and needy as well as witnessing about the goodness and love of God were characteristic of the church in Thyatira.

CHALLENGE: TOLERATING PAGANISM

"I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (Rev. 2:23). Church members who "tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet"—in other words, those who allow pagan practices in the church—will be made to "suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways" (Rev. 2:20, 22). Church members who have remained faithful to Jesus and his teachings will not have "any other burden" imposed on them, "except to hold on to what you have until I come" (Rev. 2:24–25).

JEZEBEL

Jezebel is the name of the wife of King Ahab, king of Israel, in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16:31). She led her husband and Israel to worship the pagan gods of her native land. As used in chapter 2 of Revelation, the name probably refers to an actual person who received the name as an epithet, because of the heretical ideas the individual taught and were accepted by the church.

Notice that despite their idolatry Jesus promises a good future if they repent.

Why is it so hard to forgive ourselves and keep going when we have done wrong?

SARDIS

BACKGROUND

- Built high above a plain, making it militarily important, and located on an important highway, making it, at least for a time, a center of commerce; served as the capital of the powerful and wealthy Lydian empire (modern Turkey).
- Center for the manufacture of carpets and woolen goods; also known as the source for nearly pure gold and silver coins and the start of modern currency.
- Site of a large synagogue, and a bathhouse-gymnasium complex that covered over five acres.



PRAISE

It is good that some of the Sardis believers have remained true to the faith; and because they are free of guilt, they will be clothed in white and walk with Jesus and their names will never be erased from the Book of Life (Rev. 3:4–5). But it is bad that in general the Sardis church is stagnant, apparently going through the motions and participating in practices that no longer hold their interest and for which they show little if any enthusiasm. Some believers have actually “soiled their clothes” (Rev. 3:4), a possible reference to the sin of idolatry.

CHALLENGE: THE CHURCH IS DEAD

The church in Sardis is dead! The diagnosis is a critique on their idolatry, since they might have practiced the cult of Cybele, a cult of the dead and death.

This message does not make clear reference to persecution. However, those who are “dressed in white and walk with Jesus and are worthy” probably refer to those who suffered for the sake of Jesus (see Rev. 7:9–17). The challenge to the church in Sardis is to wake up from its spiritual stupor and recall what they had heard and learned.

The message encourages the church in Sardis to remember what they believed and loved, what they practiced and shared with others. God’s people are instructed to remember and act upon that memory and to hold it fast. They must repent of their errant ways.

Today the church also must stand guard of things that, although good, can distract us from God and become idols: money, properties, prestige, education. *How can you put Jesus first in all things in your life?*

PHILADELPHIA

BACKGROUND

- A successful commercial center, mainly because of its being situated at the entrance of a particularly fertile valley; also known for its many temples and religious festivals.
- Prone to earthquakes, because it is located close to an active volcanic region; in AD 17, completely destroyed by a devastating earthquake but eventually rebuilt.
- Founded only about 200 years before Christ and named by King Eumenes II for his brother.



PRAISE

Although very little is known about the church in Philadelphia, it is clear from the letter that in spite of apparently not having a loud voice in the community, it remains faithful and true to Christ. God commends them for having obeyed his “command to endure patiently” (Rev. 3:10). Like all the churches at the time, the church at Philadelphia also experienced persecution.

CHALLENGE: NONE

“I will . . . keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world” (Rev. 3:10). The church in Philadelphia is in very good shape spiritually. Because of their patient endurance and faithfulness, the Lord will spare them from either suffering or being tested by what will come to the world. He encourages them to “hold on to” the strength they have, so they will win the “crown” of eternal life (Rev. 3:11).

Becoming a pillar, a symbol of permanence and stability, is a particular encouragement for believers in Philadelphia because they suffered earthquakes.

God commends endurance, which shows trust in him. *What are you facing now that requires from you patience and endurance?*

CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

Attalus, brother of King Eumenes II, was an accomplished military commander. Because of his loyalty to his brother, he earned the nickname Philadelphus, which means the person who loves his brother. Eumenes even designated that upon his death, Attalus was to be his successor.

LAODICEA

BACKGROUND

- Strategic city located at the crossroads of two crucial trading routes; in Roman times, a prosperous commercial center especially known for its banking, its textile industry (especially its production of black wool), and its school of ophthalmology (noted for an eye salve it developed).
- Financially strong, even able to rebuild without imperial aid when destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60.
- Lacked an adequate water supply, so had an aqueduct built to bring in water.



PRAISE

This is the only church that does not receive a positive message.

CHALLENGE: LOSING IDENTITY IN CHRIST

“I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16). In previous messages Jesus’ presence brings comfort. Here, however, it is bad news, because the church is “lukewarm,” much like the city’s water. The church has little, if anything, to offer for spiritual encouragement, refreshment, or growth because it has lost its focus on Jesus.

The city was located close to a volcanic region. Hierapolis in the north and Colossae in the east had hot and cold waters, respectively. Hierapolis had hot water from its many hot springs, which were considered medicinal. Colossae had cool, refreshing waters that made the entire valley fertile. Their waters were part of their identity as cities. Laodicea, on the contrary, was neither hot nor cold. The accusation seems to say that the church in Laodicea, like the city’s waters, lacked an identity. Its zeal and love for God had become lukewarm. It had lost its Christian identity!

Preoccupied with acquiring wealth and prestige, the church shows no dependence on God. True riches come only from God, who can clothe them in white and soothe and open their eyes so that they see what is truly important (Rev. 3:18).

“Be earnest and repent” (Rev. 3:19). God’s call is to return to faithfulness and perseverance. The church must recognize that it is spiritually bankrupt and has pushed Jesus out of the door! Jesus is there, however, knocking on the door, making his presence available to the church. *What helps you keep your focus on Christ during the good and the bad times in your life?*

JESUS' PRESENCE IN EACH CHURCH

CHURCH	STRENGTH
<p>Ephesus</p> <p><i>“These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands”</i> (Rev. 2:1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The seven lampstands stand for the Church in general, and Jesus walking in their midst points to his constant presence with his people. • As the lamps symbolized the presence of God in the tabernacle (Ex. 25; see also Zech. 4:2–10), they also symbolize the presence of Jesus among his people. • The stars could be either heavenly beings or human beings. • This description shows that Jesus has authority over the Church on earth and in heaven. The final victory of the Church depends on the faithfulness of the Lamb and the faithful response of his people, especially in times of persecution and suffering.
<p>Smyrna</p> <p><i>“These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again”</i> (Rev. 2:8).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The First and the Last” occurs three times in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 22:13), and it is connected to the self-description of God in Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12. In Isaiah, the description is used to express that God is the only true God. • This description highlights Christ’s divinity and emphasizes that Jesus is the source and the end of all things, he is sovereign over the entire creation, and he is eternal. • Because of Smyrna’s political competition with Ephesus and Pergamum to be the first city of Asia Minor, this description may also be an affirmation that the believers’ identity in Smyrna is firmly rooted in a far more stable and legitimate first: Jesus.
<p>Pergamum</p> <p><i>“These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword”</i> (Rev. 2:12).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a military image, this description is further clarified in verse 16: “the sword of my mouth” and is related also to a prophecy about the Servant in Isaiah, “He made my mouth like a sharpened sword” (Isa. 49:2); both suggest divine judgment. • Rulings for the entire Roman province of Asia originated in Pergamum, but this image of Jesus shows that he is the true ruler and judge of the Church and all of humanity.
<p>Thyatira</p> <p><i>“These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze”</i> (Rev. 2:18).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Son of God” serves several important functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ A jab at the reference of the god Apollo and the divine emperors as “sons of god [Zeus].” ~ A reference to the prophet Daniel, who wrote of the “Son of man” and the “Son of God” (Dan. 10:6, 16). ~ A reference to Psalm 2:1–3, which describes the nations gathering against the Messiah, the Son of God. • This description of Jesus’ eyes and feet reflects his keen insight and the fact that he is dressed as is appropriate for a priest—in this case our high priest.



CHURCH	STRENGTH
<p>Sardis</p> <p><i>“These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars”</i> (Rev. 3:1).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This description refers back to Revelation 1:4, where the seven spirits refer to being empowered by the Holy Spirit. The number seven here does not refer to completeness but to ultimate divine authority. Isaiah 11:2 lists the sevenfold mention of the Spirit. • The stars refer to the seven messengers who are sent to the churches carrying the full authority of God to carry out their tasks. • Jesus, then as now, comes to the church with the fullness of God’s authority.
<p>Philadelphia</p> <p><i>“These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David”</i> (Rev. 3:7).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Holy” refers to God or to something of God. This description affirms that, unlike the Roman emperors who are false gods, Jesus is the only one worthy of worship and the only one worthy to judge the whole world. • “True” could also mean “faithful,” which is the name of the rider on the white horse (Rev. 19:11). Jesus, who expects faithfulness from the seven churches, is the steadfast one who never changes. • “The key of David” is an allusion to Isaiah 22:22. Jesus is from the line of David, and just as Jesus holds “the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18), he also holds the answer for eternal life. Jesus has authority over all creation.
<p>Laodicea</p> <p><i>“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation”</i> (Rev. 3:14).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This description might refer to Isaiah 65:16, where God’s name is mentioned as being used with blessings and oaths “Amen” probably means “faithfulness or trustworthiness.” The blessings upon the earth and the swearing of an oath have validity only because they are made effective by God’s trustworthiness. • The expression “the faithful and true witness” is similar to the “holy and true” used for Philadelphia. Jesus Christ is “the faithful witness” (Rev. 1:5), because he never changes: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

Jesus said to his disciples, “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Our lives, individual and in our churches, must reflect our connection to the risen Christ. His example of love, service, humility, sacrifice, and obedience must shape our lives. What do you need to reevaluate in your life in light of Jesus’ example?



PERSECUTION AND TRIUMPH

Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also”

(John 15:20). What a puzzling thing to say to his confused and grieving

disciples. However, Jesus’ point was that God was not abandoning the disciples in their coming sufferings. He promised to be with them, to send the Comforter, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit:

“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away” (John 16:1).

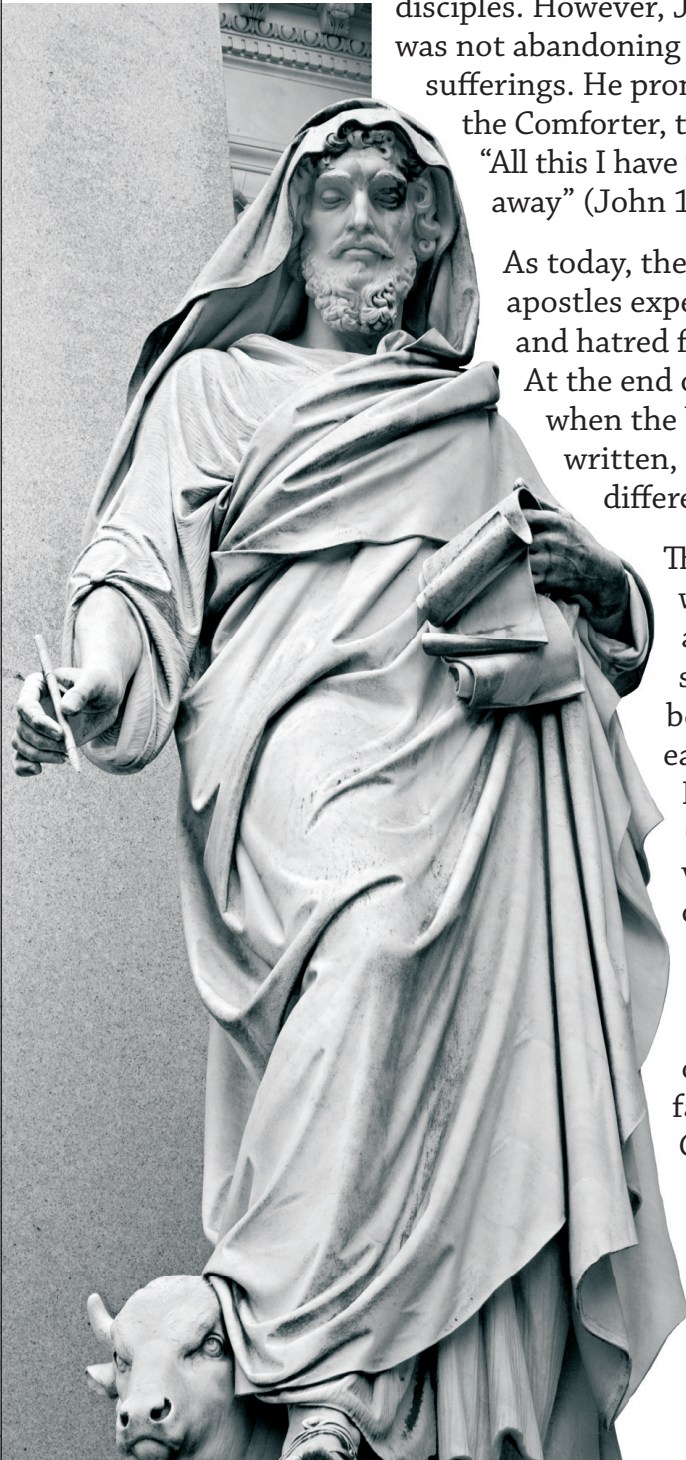
As today, the church in the times of the apostles experienced suffering, persecution, and hatred from some people around them.

At the end of the first century, at the time when the book of Revelation was likely written, Christians were experiencing different kinds of persecution.

The book of Revelation as a whole was written to give assurance and comfort to suffering and persecuted believers. This theme is crucial in each of the letters to the church.

However, each letter assures Christians of the ultimate victory of God and God’s people over the powers of evil and death. Jesus’ victory over the powers of evil and death is the first decisive step. Christians can claim this victory by being faithful in their devotion to Christ and faithful witnesses of the good news in the world.

How does Jesus’ victory bring comfort to suffering Christians today?



FOUR VIEWS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

VIEWS	VIEW OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION	VIEW ABOUT THE SEVEN CHURCHES
Historicist	It is prophecy about church history from the time of John to the end of the world.	The prophecy begins with the seven actual churches in John's day and proceeds through history from there.
Preterist	It is prophecy that was fulfilled primarily in the first century AD.	The prophecy begins with the seven actual churches of Asia Minor. It then focuses on the land of Israel before AD 70.
Futurist	Revelation is prophecy primarily about the future end of the world.	The prophecy begins with the seven churches, which were actual churches in John's day and may also symbolize the types of churches present in the last days.
Idealist	It is a non-historical and non-prophetic drama about spiritual realities.	The book begins with the seven churches, which symbolize tendencies in the church that can occur in every age.



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© 2015 Bristol Works, Inc.
Rose Publishing, Inc.
4733 Torrance Blvd., #259
Torrance, CA 90503 U.S.A.
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Author: Benjamin Galan, MTS, ThM, Professor of Old Testament Hebrew and Literature.

RELIGION/Biblical Studies/New Testament

ISBN-13: 978-162862-255-3



Stock #4068X The Seven Churches of Revelation pamphlet
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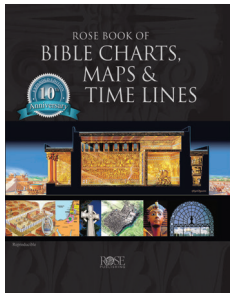
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Title: **Seven Churches of Revelation Pamphlet** Product Code: 4068X ISBN-13: **9781628622553**

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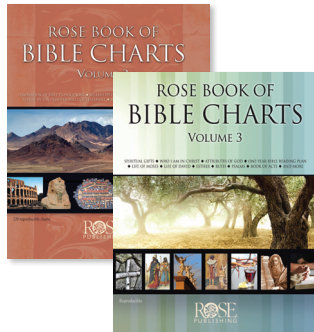
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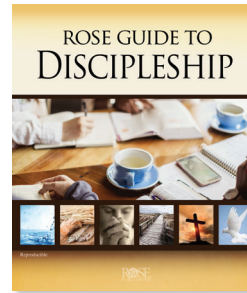
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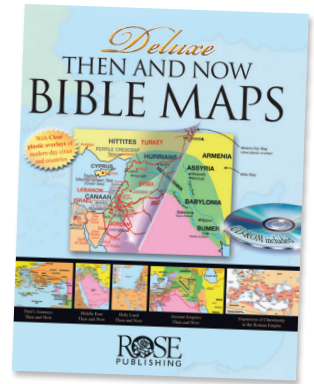
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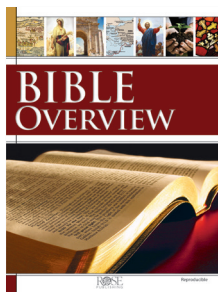
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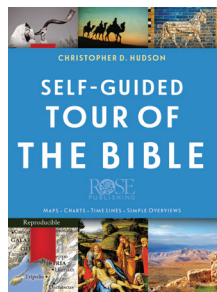
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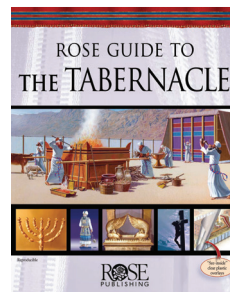
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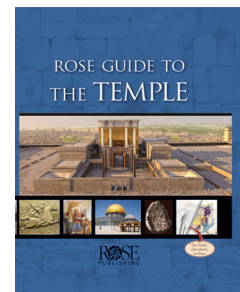
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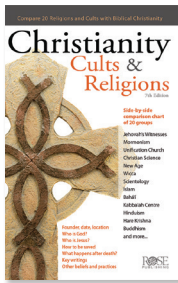
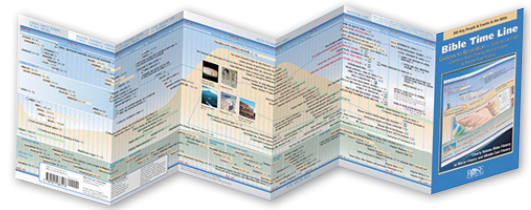
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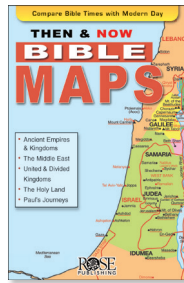
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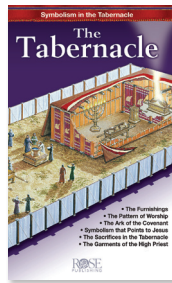
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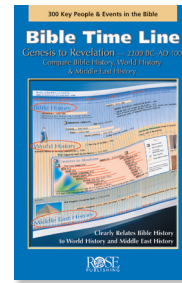
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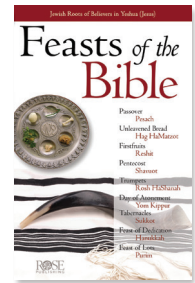
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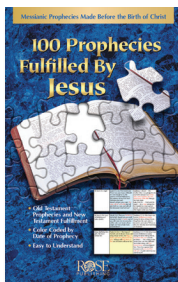
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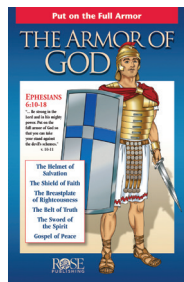
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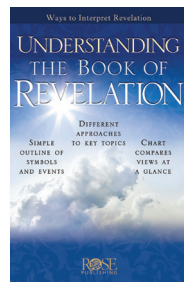
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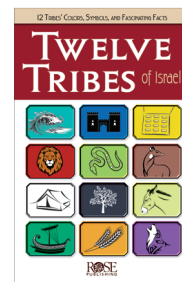
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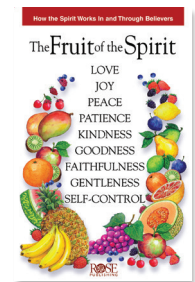
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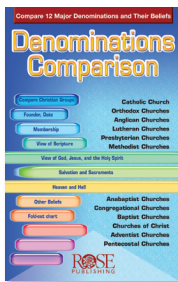
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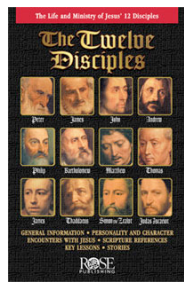
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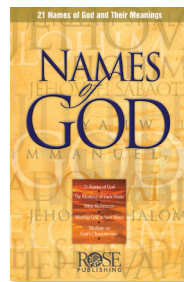
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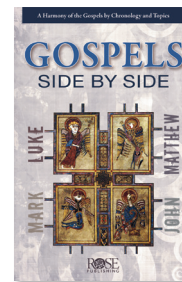
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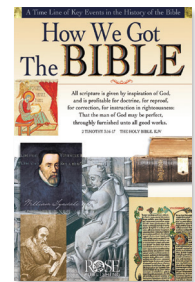
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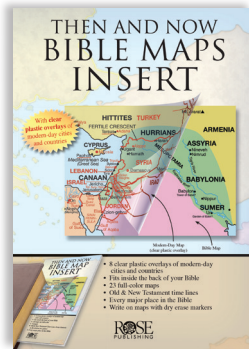
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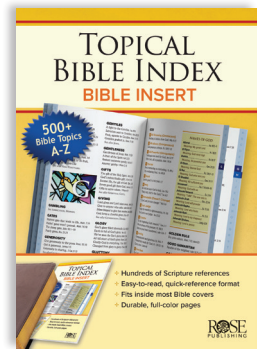
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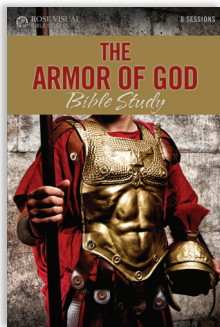


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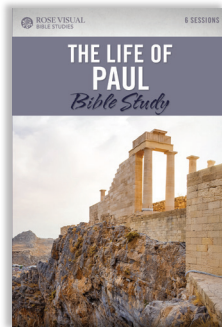
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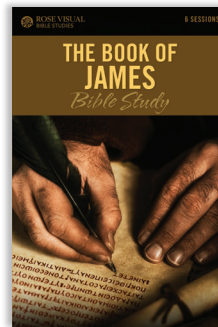
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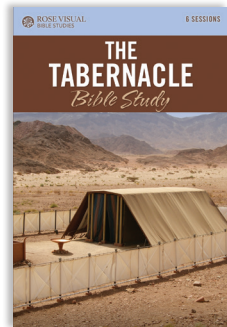
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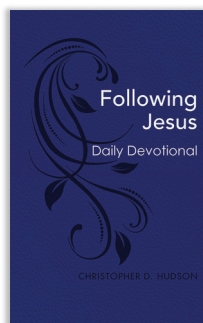
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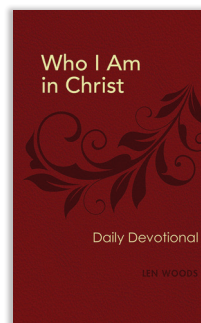
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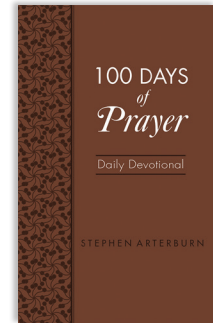
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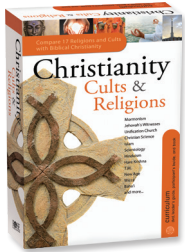
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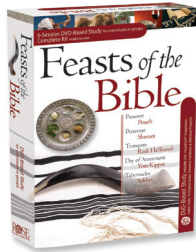
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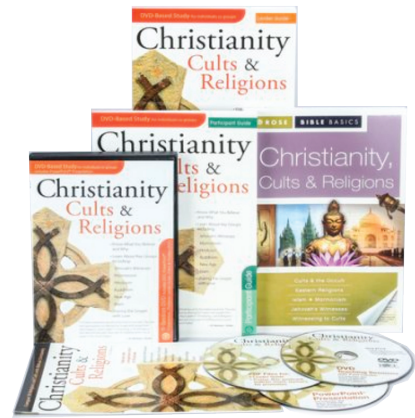
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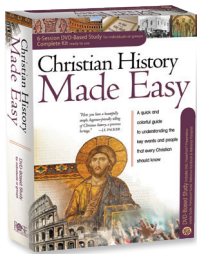


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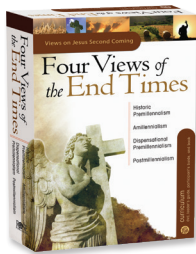


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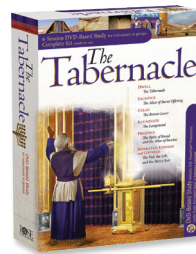
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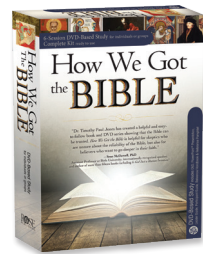
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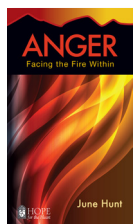
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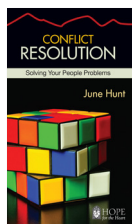


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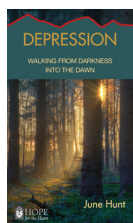
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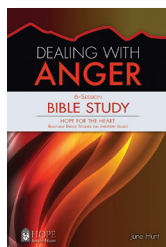


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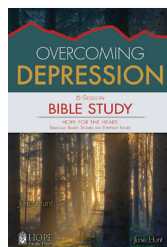
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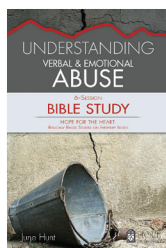
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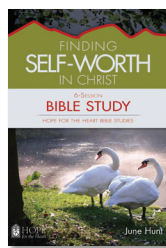
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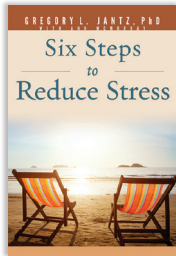
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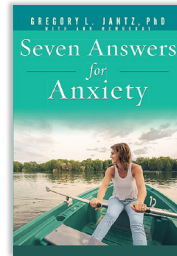
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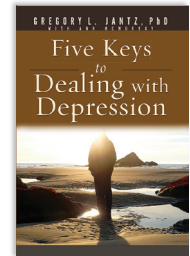
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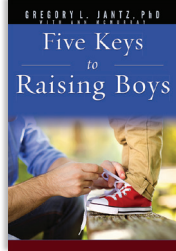
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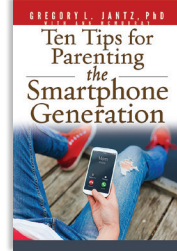
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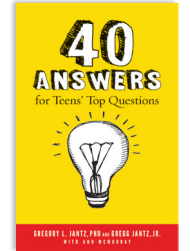
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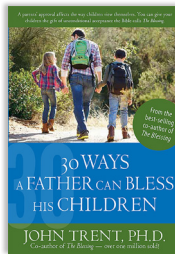
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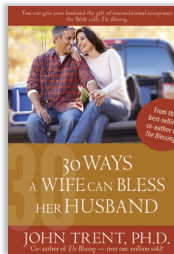
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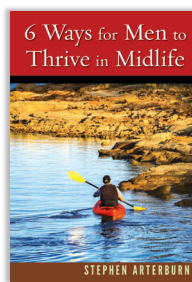
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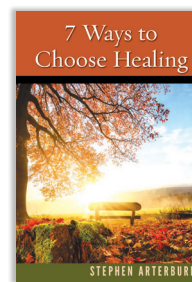
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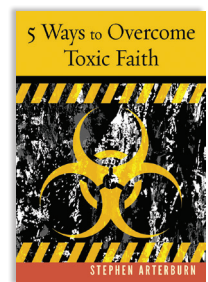
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