

## Revelation: Lesson 3 Part 2.

In this particular lesson we finished Lesson three. We used the chiasmic structure to navigate to the overall meaning of Revelation 2-3 trying to see how the messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor are still very relevant today.

Chiasmus: A Chiasmus is a very Jewish style of writing. It's a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form. It would follow a pattern like A B C D C' B' A'. Generally speaking, the main idea of what the author is trying to get across can be found in the middle, in the example above that would be D. It would be outlined as so:

A  
    B  
        C  
            D  
            C'  
        B'  
A'

Revelation 2-3 form a chiasmic structure using the seven letters as follows:

A Ephesus  
    B Smyrna  
        C Pergamum  
        C Thyatira  
        C Sardis  
    B' Philadelphia  
A' Laodicea

Therefore, the messages of Ephesus and Laodicea mirror/relate to one another. Same with Smyrna and Philadelphia. And finally, the same is true with the three messages in the middle. (Some scholars do move Thyatira to a D position due to it's length, but I found that it's message is not all that different than the two surrounding letters.

So then, how do these all relate to one another?

Ephesus is a church that is strong in doctrinal purity because they have tested the spirits and fended off false teachers. However they have abandoned their first love which I interpret to mean their desire to share Jesus with others, i.e. Loving others. They have cut themselves out of the world and are inward focused to the point of being in danger of losing their lampstand. Laodicea, on the other hand, has done the opposite. They have embraced the culture so much that no only does Jesus not have anything good to say about them. They became so much like the world that they are indiscernible from it. The two messages, parallel one another as warnings of opposite ends of the spectrum. The message then would be to find the balance between "being in the world, but not of the world." Essentially, they have identity issues. They don't know who they are anymore and what they ought to be doing.

Smyrna and Philadelphia are both wonderful churches that Jesus has only good things to say. They are both enduring persecution and his message to both of them is to endure. Smyrna is told that they will endure 10 days of persecution which is Revelation code referencing Daniel 1. This is an apocalyptic way of saying that the church will endure persecution for a short period of time and will see the end. What is interesting is that today there is still a church of Smyrna. There are no archeological remains of a church in Smyrna, just a church. It is the church of Polycarp who was martyred there about 50 years or so after the events of Revelation take place. Polycarp was a disciple of John.

The focal point of the chiasmus are the three churches that are all facing some sort of internal issue like false teaching, heretics, and cultural oppression. They are all having to figure out this balance between church and surrounding culture or church and internal struggle for truth. Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia are the central three messages. The first two struggle with internal heresies. The latter struggles with cultural oppression from former Jewish brethren.

So to sum up, the four major struggles of the churches are, 1. Too inward focused, 2. Persecution, 3. Struggling with compromise, and 4. Too outward focused. So even in these four things you can see a movement of struggle. Too inward focused moving outward through the lens of persecution may bring about compromise. You abandon your resolve to share the love of Jesus and perhaps even your doctrine in the face of persecution and you will compromise your identity. The same is true when moving outward from the center of the chiasmus. If you are compromising on the truth and are faced again with persecution you may abandon all sense of the truth and end up like Laodicea, a church that has nothing good about it and is indistinguishable from the world. So as you can see, there is a movement, a journey, or even a story being told in this Chiastic structure of seven letters. But at the very center lies a message of hope. In 2:19, to the church in Thyatira he says this, "Your last works are great the first." In this central letter, Jesus praises them on their progress of returning to their proper role in the world. They are doing greater deeds now than they used to. I want my church and my life to grow in greatness or maturity for God's sake the longer I tarry in this life.

These letters are not just to each specific church. At the end of each letter, Jesus/John ends the message with, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches." So this tells us that the messages to these seven churches transcends their specific experiences and are a warning and sign for all churches everywhere and in every time.

In revelation 2-3, Jesus through John has given us a second introduction to this book of Revelation. The first was an introduction into who Jesus truly is, he is God unlike you've seen him before. The second was an introduction into what our identity needs to be in light of who Jesus is. We are to be a light in the world spreading the good news of Jesus and his Lordship. We are to be the kingdom of believers who does the will of their king, Jesus. Next, we are going to see the third introduction to the book of Revelation, how to worship as a church this Jesus and God we are learning more about and the strength that gives us to endure anything that may come our way.