

Emmanuel Baptist Church
Life-group Studies
September-November 2026

“Among the Lampstands”



A 9-week teaching series looking at the message to the seven churches in Revelation

Introduction

John was on the island of Patmos, a Greek island off the coast of Turkey. Roman authorities, acting under the emperor Domitian's anti-Christian policies, exiled him for preaching God's word and bearing witness to Jesus.

However, God sovereignly employed that exile as the setting for the book of Revelation, thus turning imperial punishment into God's prophetic purpose.

We can see other Old Testament examples of this where exile became the crucible of Revelation; Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 41), Moses in Midian (Exodus 3), and Daniel in Babylon (Daniel 7).

John stands in this lineage where persecution became his platform.

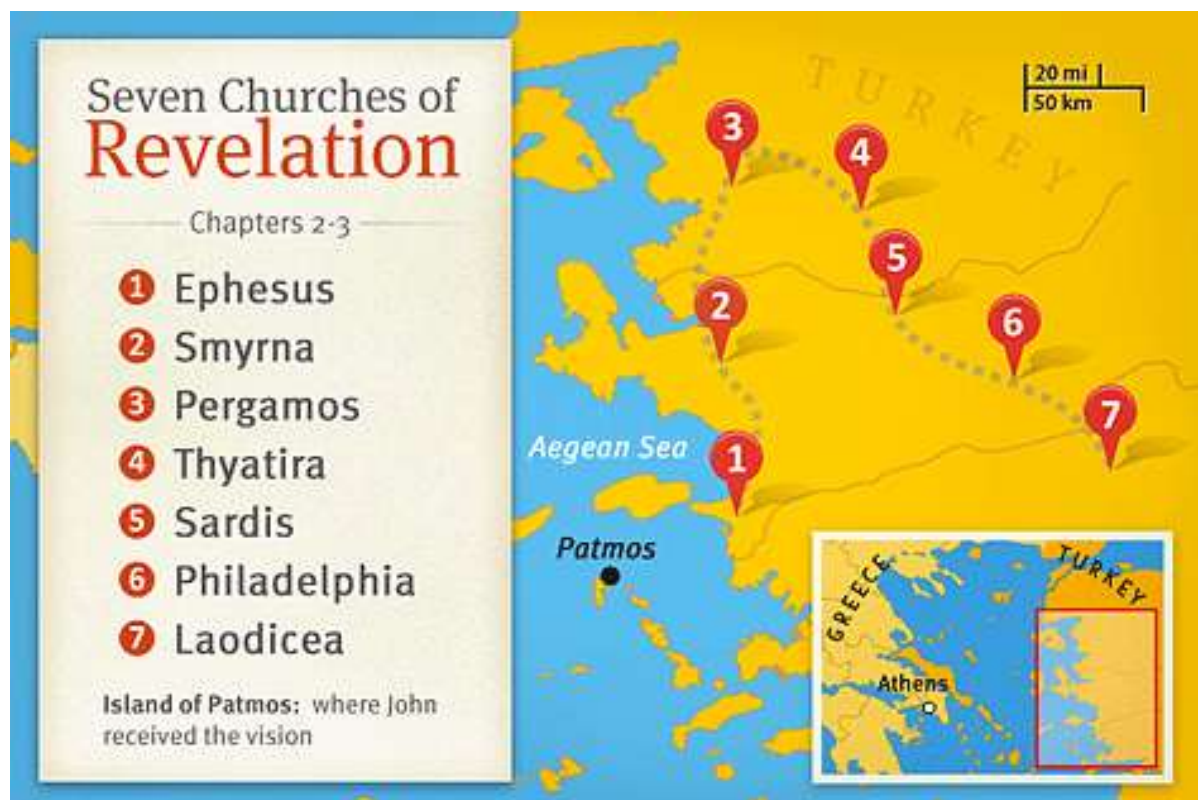
Our first study needs to understand the glorious context in chapter 1. Indeed, this chapter is the foundation for understanding all of the book of Revelation. It shows us that the emphasis must be on the divine, complete, and eternal authority of the risen Christ whatever may take place before he comes again in glory and majesty; the bringing and establishing a new heaven and a new earth. Before we launch into each letter it is necessary to understand how the letters came to be written and how to interpret them. Firstly, they were given by the risen Christ to very real churches. Please note, too, that they have come from Patmos, an island, to Ephesus, a mainland seaport, the order of them is as a mail delivery. Hence, from Ephesus the route is northwards, then inland and southeasterly in order. Consequently, we could return to Ephesus making almost a circle of 160km.

It is also important to note that these churches were not the only ones in this area, Indeed, Colossae was nearby, and Paul wrote a letter to them. While there are specific details about each one that Christ both commends and rebukes the letters were to be read by all the churches. It seems clear that these are examples of what

can take place in all churches and EBC in the 21st century needs to take them on board and act on them.

Christ, through John, sends them to 7 small congregations strung along one road in the Roman province of Asia, which is the western edge of modern Turkey. One of those churches was exhausted. One was terrified. One was poor and didn't know how rich it was. One was rich and didn't know how poor it was. All 7 were ordinary.

This matters far more than most readers notice. Revelation isn't a locked box waiting for someone clever to find the key. It's a letter that was posted, carried and read aloud to real people who were frightened, tempted and tired. The visions aren't there to satisfy our curiosity about the future. They're there to keep ordinary believers standing.



I have put a chart in this introduction that will need to be referred to as you move through each church to show how the natural aspects of the church figure in the spiritual judgements.

The Same 7 Steps, Every Time

Read the 7 letters one after another and you'll start to feel a rhythm. That's because John is following a template. Each letter has the same parts, in the same order.

THE 7 PARTS OF EACH LETTER	WHAT IT DOES
1. The command to write	"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write" (Revelation 2:1). The letter is dictated by Christ, not composed by John.
2. Christ introduces himself	Always beginning "The words of Him who...", and always borrowing an image from the vision of Christ in Revelation 1:12–20.
3. "I know"	Christ names what the church has done well. He sees the hidden faithfulness that nobody else noticed.
4. "But I have this against you"	The charge. Christ names the specific sin or failure, not a vague mood.
5. A call to repent or endure	Never a general appeal. A clear, concrete instruction for that church.
6. A call to hear	"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
7. A promise to the conqueror	A reward for "the one who conquers". Every single one of these promises is paid out later in the book, in Revelation 20–22.

Once we see the pattern, the interesting thing is where it breaks. The gaps are deliberate, and they're fraught with meaning.

WHERE THE PATTERN BREAKS—AND WHAT THAT TELLS US

Smyrna and Philadelphia receive no rebuke. These were the two weakest, poorest and most harassed congregations among the 7. Christ has nothing to hold against them. Weakness isn't the same thing as failure.

Laodicea receives no commendation at all. It was the wealthiest church on the route. It's the only one about which Christ has nothing good to say.

Sardis receives almost none. Only "a few names" there had kept their clothes clean (Revelation 3:4). A remnant, not a congregation.

The pattern is a warning to comfortable churches. Outward success and spiritual health are running in opposite directions across these 7 letters. That's not an accident; it's the point.

There's a further detail worth pausing over. 6 of the 7 letters contain a command to repent. Repentance here isn't a one-off decision made years ago and filed away. It's the normal, ongoing posture of a healthy church.

Why Jesus Introduces Himself Differently Each Time

In Revelation 1, John sees the risen Christ standing among 7 golden lampstands. The description is piled high with images: hair white as wool, eyes like flames, feet like glowing bronze, a sharp 2-edged sword coming out of His mouth, 7 stars in His right hand.

Then, in each of the 7 letters, Christ picks out 1 or 2 of those images and applies them to that particular church. He doesn't repeat Himself. Or pick at random.

CHURCH	HOW CHRIST DESCRIBES HIMSELF	WHY THAT IMAGE, FOR THAT CITY
Ephesus	Holds the 7 stars, walks among the lampstands (2:1)	A church losing its first love needs to know that Christ is still walking in the room.
Smyrna	The first and the last, who died and came to life (2:8)	Smyrna had been destroyed and rebuilt centuries earlier. A city that came back from death hears from the Lord who did the same.
Pergamum	Has the sharp 2-edged sword (2:12)	The Roman governor at Pergamum held the “right of the sword” — legal power to execute. Christ quietly announces whose sword actually matters.
Thyatira	Eyes like a flame of fire, feet like burnished bronze (2:18)	Thyatira was a metalworking town. The image is drawn straight from the trade its people knew.
Sardis	Has the 7 spirits of God and the 7 stars (3:1)	A dead church cannot revive itself. Life comes from the Spirit whom Christ holds.
Philadelphia	The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David (3:7)	A small church shut out of the synagogue hears from the one who alone decides which doors open.
Laodicea	The Amen, the faithful and true witness (3:14)	A church that thought its own assessment of itself was reliable meets the only witness who is never wrong.

What the Cities Themselves Tell Us

CITY	WHAT WAS TRUE OF THE PLACE	WHAT IT EXPLAINS
Ephesus	A wealthy port whose harbour was silting up. The city was later abandoned entirely and is ruins today.	“I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (2:5).
Smyrna	Public buildings ringed the summit of Mount Pagos; visitors described the city as wearing a crown. An early centre of emperor worship.	“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (2:10).
Pergamum	The provincial capital. Home to a vast altar of Zeus, the serpent-emblem healing cult of Asclepius, and the first provincial temple to a Roman emperor.	“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is” (2:13).
Thyatira	A town run by trade guilds. Membership was needed to work, and guild dinners involved idol worship and sexual immorality.	The pressure behind the woman called “Jezebel” (2:20) was economic before it was theological.

CITY	WHAT WAS TRUE OF THE PLACE	WHAT IT EXPLAINS
Sardis	Built on a cliff thought impossible to capture. It fell twice to small raiding parties who climbed up at night while the sentries slept. Famous for its woollen cloth.	“If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief” (3:3); the promise of white garments (3:4–5).
Philadelphia	On a fault line. Flattened by the earthquake of AD 17. Many residents lived outside the walls for years, afraid of aftershocks. The city was twice renamed in honour of emperors.	“I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it... and my own new name” (3:12).
Laodicea	A banking centre so rich it refused imperial disaster aid and rebuilt itself. Known for glossy black wool and for an eye ointment produced in the region.	“I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing... you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (3:17).

Study 1. Jesus stands among the Lampstands

Icebreaker

Have you ever had, or known someone, who received a vision? Can you share it?

Reading Revelation 1

Comment

Before looking at the message to the seven churches it is important to see that the whole of Revelation is unfolding for us the 'wonder of Christ' and His victory, as seen in the past, present, and the future. the Greek word for Revelation is *apokalupsis* where we get our word 'apocalypse'

The difficulty for us is knowing what aspects of Revelation apply to those three times. By that I mean, "What *has* taken place, what *is* taking place now, and what *is yet to come* before Christ returns and afterwards.

Chapter 1 is set out in 3 parts.

- a) the prologue (vs 1-3) which states what is taking place and the blessings for those who read it and believe it as the Word of God.
- b) The words the angel is speaking to John about Christ. (vs 4-8)
- c) The vision John sees of the risen Christ and some explanation. (vs 9-20)

As you read the chapter bear in mind that while the letter addresses real churches that existed, with real issues, the reference to seven stars and seven lampstands is a number of completeness. This vision with its encouragements and challenges is written for the whole global church in every generation. Therefore, "What is the risen Christ saying to EBC?"

Please be encouraged that Jesus walks among the lampstands (His church). He is with us, encouraging us to shine His light in the darkness.

Questions for discussion

1. Given the situation John found himself why was this revelation so important, both to him and the church?
2. Who are the seven spirits before his throne? See v2
3. In verse 7 reference is made to an OT prophecy. See Daniel 7:13 and Zech. 12:10. What does this mean?
4. What does “I am the Alpha and Omega” refer to? See v8
5. Can you recall a time when seeing a vision or hearing about Jesus caused you to respond like John? See vs17, Isaiah 6:1-7
6. If the 7 lampstands are the church or churches what are the stars?

Takeaway

Reflect on John’s vision of the risen Christ. How does this cause you to feel and respond?

Study 2. Ephesus

Icebreaker

Can you think of something you enjoyed doing but for some reason you gave it up?

Reading Revelation 2:1-7

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

Ephesus was a thriving seaport, the gateway to Asia, and the Apostle Paul stayed longer there than anywhere else. Timothy joined him and became the pastor, and it seems later the Apostle John lived there and looked after Jesus’ mother.

Jesus commends their hard work and toil, but it seems it was now being done more from duty rather than love of Jesus.

Questions for discussion

1. What is significant about the location of Ephesus?
2. What does the risen Christ commend the church for? Matt 7:15
3. What is His challenge to them and what might it lead to if they didn't change?
4. What can cause us to lose our first love? See Hebrews 2:1
5. What is your understanding of *repentance* both in terms of coming to faith, and living it out each day? See 1 John 1:9
6. What can we do to get back our first love? Ephesians 5:18

Takeaway

What would it mean for you to renew your first love for Jesus?

Study 3. Smyrna

Icebreaker

Can you recall a difficult time in your life, but you felt God helped you either directly or through others?

Reading Revelation 2:8-11

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

Clearly, Smyrna was fearful because of the persecution they faced but Jesus wanted to reassure them of his Lordship and though they seemed poor they were rich in him.

Questions for discussion

1. Why was this church being persecuted? See Acts 13:50
2. How is the church being persecuted in this country? See Matt 5:10
3. Are we in danger not speaking out for what we believe to be truth?
4. How does Satan seek to defeat us? See Eph. 6:11

5. What can we do to gain more victories from having Christ's riches?
6. What does Christ promise for his faithful people?

Takeaway

Do we see success in a comfortable life or a faithful life?

Study 4. Pergamum

Icebreaker

Think about where you have lived in your life and whether it has been in a city or a rural place or both and what was the difference for you?

Reading Revelation 2:12-17

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

Clearly, Pergamum was a more provincial town and significant both politically and spiritually. Against a backdrop of emperor worship and paganism the church remained faithful. Two areas are mentioned where some seem to hold unhelpful views. These relate to the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. In short it is the teaching that as Christians it is ok to embrace the world's values. Yet we know that we are called to be Holy which is different. Not to run away but stay where we are to be salt and light. In the world but not of it. Indeed, a relevant challenge for the church today, especially in the West.

Questions for discussion

1. Why is this letter introduced as from the one who hold the two-edged sword? See Heb. 4:12
2. Why is the throne of Satan mentioned here?
3. Why is the reference to Balaam and the Nicolaitans significant to us today?
4. How do you understand repentance?

5. What is the promise of hidden manna? See Exodus 16:4, John 6:48-51
6. What could reference to a white stone and a new name mean? See Matt. 5:12

Takeaway

Jesus is with us wherever we are and expects us to stand firm and bear witness to him through words and lifestyle.

Study 5. Thyatira

Icebreaker

Reading Revelation 2:18-29

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

Thyatira is the least known of all the seven churches and was not a centre of emperor worship or paganism like we saw at our previous church. It was a commercial centre largely due to its location for travelling between places. Consequently, it had many trade guilds and business associations. You may recall that when Paul visited Philippi, he encountered a Christian woman running a home group named Lydia, a purple cloth seller from Thyatira. (See Acts 16:14)

However, trade guilds had religious ceremonies causing Christians to compromise their faith and engage in activities where an excess of drinking led to inappropriate behaviour. To be a successful businessperson, meant joining trade guilds. Little is known of the mention of Jezebel but thinking about her Old Testament namesake she was clearly manipulative for her own ends while conveying a prophetic word. The problem was therefore in the church and not external persecution.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is significant about the picture of Jesus in the opening verse?

2. What are the two things about the church that Christ commends and why are they so important?
3. Motive for why we do things is important. How should we help people to do things from the right motives?
4. In what ways does the problem here relate to the church and Freemasonry?
5. How can the love of money become the fruit of all evil? See 1 Tim. 6:10
6. To those who overcome they will be given the 'morning star.' What does that mean? See Daniel 12:3

Takeaway

While we are called to be loving and gracious toward people should we accept unholy living in the church?

Study 6. Sardis

Icebreaker

Have you ever bought something on the basis of its publicity or packaging only to be disappointed when you started using it?

Reading Revelation 3:1-6

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

Seven hundred years before this letter was written Sardis was one of the greatest cities in the world. It was two cities one high on a plateau the other deep in the valley which had a river running where gold came from. Croesus lived there and we have probably heard the phrase, 'As rich as Croesus.' Sadly, he embarked on a war with King Cyrus of Persia having been told if he crossed the river he would destroy an empire. He took it to mean Persia, but it was his own great Sardinian Empire.

At the time of this letter Sardis was still well off and under the Romans became a thriving wool dying centre. Sadly, the church

was full of activity but not life through the Christian Gospel. Clearly, reference is being made here to the church appearing to be full of life but spiritually dead. I'm reminded of St Paul writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:5 when he speaks about a 'form of godliness but denying its power.'

Questions for discussion

1. Discuss what is meant by Christ writing as the one holding the seven spirits and the seven stars.
2. What does the risen Christ challenge this church about?
3. How is it possible to appear full of life yet spiritually dead?
See 2 Tim. 3:5
4. It seems there was remnant in the church that were faithful.
How is that encouraging?
5. Why did the writer encourage watchfulness and how did it relate to Sardis's history? See Psalm 130:6, 1Cor. 16:13, 1Peter 5:8
6. What is the 3-fold promise to the faithful and what is its significance to Sardis. See Rev 3:5, Rev 7:9-17,

Takeaway

Let's remind ourselves of what Christ is looking for. Not successful in attracting people alone but faithful in presenting the Gospel.

Study 7. Philadelphia

Icebreaker

Are you known by your birth name or another. Share the circumstances.

Reading Revelation 3:7-13

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

Philadelphia, the youngest of these seven places, which in Greek is 'love of a brother' was so named because King Attalus of

Pergamum founded this place, and because he loved his brother Eumenes he named the city '*philadelphos*' which later became a community name Philadelphia.

It was a missionary centre for the Greek language and culture and stood at the crossroads of a number of empires. However, it was on a Faultline where earthquakes happened, and people became fearful of living in the city. They moved outside it. Yet the church there was faithful to the Gospel and are commended by Christ who promised them missionary success, namely the 'open door'.

Questions for discussion

1. What did Jesus mean about an 'open door' for this church?
See Colossians 4:3
2. It seems that some Jews were shunning the church. What did the risen Christ think of this?
3. While Israel is in the heart and purposes of God in what way is the church the new Israel and Jews need to receive Christ as Messiah.
4. What is the synagogue of Satan and what does the risen Christ promise?
5. It seems that Philadelphia went through a name change brought about by Roman emperors. Christ speaks of a new name. What can that mean for us both now and in the future?
6. The church in Philadelphia were fearful of earthquakes. How does what they were promised counter that? See Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 34:4

Takeaway

If Jesus is aware of our uncertainty or insecurity, what will we hold on to?

Study 8. Laodicea

Icebreaker

It seems both tea and coffee can be served hot or cold. Which do you prefer and how are you with lukewarm?

Reading Revelation 3:14-22

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

Laodicea was a banking centre and so very wealthy. It was also a renowned centre for the treatment of eyes. The danger for the church was that it adopted the society attitude that they were self-sufficient and didn't need help. Indeed, when an earthquake happened the residents of Laodicea took no financial help and rebuilt the city from their own means. The danger of a self-sufficient church is no dependence on Christ.

Sadly, this is the only church from the seven where there is no commendation from the Risen Christ. They are told they are lukewarm, neither hot or cold and makes Him sick. It seems that their water came from aqueducts 6 miles away but there were warm springs nearby too that, if drunk from, made people sick.

However, the encouragement is they are offered hope. They have the opportunity to invite Christ in to feed and fellowship with them and to make a difference. That's what we all need!

Questions for discussion

1. When Jesus calls himself the Amen what does He mean?
2. What was it that caused them to be lukewarm See John 15:5
3. What can cause us to become lukewarm

4. Jesus speaks those famous words which Holman Hunt depicted in his painting 'Light of the World' What does this mean and what do we do?
5. What is promised to the faithful?



Takeaway

I must seek to rely on Christ's resources to live my life for him.

Study 9 'He who has ears to hear..'

Icebreaker

Have you ever acted on something you misheard and what were the consequences?

Reading Matthew 16:13-20

Comment

Look at the charts in the introduction and note the details for this church. It will help in discussing the specific issues.

In this last study we will reflect on the messages to the churches and consider what Jesus would commend and what he would challenge about EBC.

In the previous study we saw how Laodicea's problem was self-sufficiency perhaps we could reflect further on that and ask the question, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from EBC how much of the church would continue unaffected?" In this way we ensure that we are living out the promise in our reading. See Matthew 16:18.

Questions for discussion

1. Which of the words to the churches do you most identify with both encouragement and challenge?
2. In our reading it is Peter who received encouragement from Jesus. What did Jesus mean when he said to Peter, "flesh and blood has not revealed that to you?"
3. What did he mean when he said, "You are rock, and on this rock, I will build my church?"
4. What does "the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" mean?
5. What are the "keys of the kingdom?" See Eph. 2:20
6. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of "binding and loosing?"

Takeaway

Lord, help me to recognise you are building your church and help me to contribute through more of your Holy Spirit working through me.