

Checkin' Out My Walk
Lesson #2 - Have I Left My First Love?
Church Of Ephesus > Revelation 2:1-7

It has been 63 years since Pentecost and 35 years since Paul's departure.

Rev. 1:9-11 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. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "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." (See Chart A - Page 9)

Rev. 1:12-16 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. ¹⁴ His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword,

Rev. 1:20 The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

Jesus, with eyes of flames like fire and feet like bronze that glow in a furnace, is the risen, glorified, exalted Son of God. He is the Priest-King who has the authority to judge all men, beginning with His own people.

The letters to the churches of Revelation can be viewed three different ways.

Practically - These are real letters to real churches living in a real world.

Prophetically - These letters picture the church during different eras of history.

Personally - There is a word for the individuals in our church today.

Each one of the seven letters presents the following five points,

- I. Title of Jesus, according to the spiritual state of the church
- II. Praise, Commendation
- III. Condemnation, Concern
- IV. Exhortation, counsels to restore the situation
- V. Promise, encouragement to persevere

The City of Ephesus The traveler from Rome landing at Ephesus would proceed up a magnificent avenue 35' wide and lined with columns which led from the harbor to the center of the city. It boasted a major stadium, marketplace, and a theater which was built on the west slope of Mt. Pion overlooking the harbor, and seated about 25,000 people.

Ephesus was a prominent religious center: Temples were built to Claudius, Hadrian, and Severus. The major religious attraction was the Temple of Artemis (Diana in Latin), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. About four times the size of the Parthenon, it was adorned by the work of many great artists. Pliny the elder gives the dimensions of the temple as 425' long, 220' wide, and 60' high. He notes the 127 pillars were of Parian marble, with 36 of them overlaid with gold and jewels.

Note: Ephesus was a sophisticated, commercial city with running water, an underground sewage system, a large public library with an extensive collection of writings, and a number of affluent homes of up to 9-10,000 square feet with multiple levels, central heating systems, sophisticated art, and rich furnishings. Imagine wide, paved streets with beautiful, sophisticated buildings, shrines, columns and arches, hundreds of businesses, and many travelers on the major trade route, of which Ephesus was a key port city with a busy harbor. Imagine all this, and you are imagining the real Ephesus in the time of Christ and Paul.

People of Ephesus were not all willing to receive the message of the Gospel.

Paul at Ephesus - Acts 19:1-10 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples² he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."³ And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."⁴ Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."⁵ When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.⁷ Now the men were about twelve in all.⁸ And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.⁹ But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.¹⁰ And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Miracles Glorify Christ - Acts 19:11-20 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul,¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches."¹⁴ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"¹⁶ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.¹⁷ This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in

Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

¹⁸ And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. ¹⁹ Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

²⁰ So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

Results: Many were saved and the gospel was heard throughout Asia. The Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles and early believers to boldly proclaim the Gospel of Christ and to undergo persecution resulting from refusal to shrink back from the truth of the Gospel.

The Riot at Ephesus - Acts 19:23-34 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. ²⁴ For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. ²⁶ Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that *they are not gods which are made with hands.* ²⁷ So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

Note: Because of the size and dedication of the Ephesian church it became a threat to the idol-making industry in Ephesus. Led by Demetrius, a silversmith, his trade guild violently opposed Paul and the Ephesian church. An angry mob formed and two of Paul's companions were seized.

²⁸ Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ So the whole city was filled with confusion, (population of about 250,000) and rushed into the theater(seats 25,000) with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. ³⁰ And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. ³¹ Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. ³² Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ³³ And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. ³⁴ But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Consider: This was a major uprising - nearly a full-scale riot - against Christ and the Gospel. Someone finally calmed the mob down by warning them they were in danger of punishment by the Roman authorities for public disturbance. Paul's friends would not allow him into the theater for fear he would be killed. This was certainly no minor event.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians in 62 AD:

Paul underlines the consecration, the faithfulness and the perseverance of this church.

Eph. 1:1, 15-16 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

¹⁵Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

The first love which characterized the Ephesians was the zeal and ardor with which they embraced their salvation as they realized they loved Christ because He first loved them. (1 John 4:19) His love for them had made them "alive together with Christ." So overwhelmed were they by the joy that came from understanding their former state—dead in trespasses and sins—and their new life in Christ, they exhibited the fruit of that joy (Ephesians 2:1-5) which was exhibited in the passion of gratitude to the Savior which spilled over onto one another and out to those in the culture they inhabited, corrupt as it was.

Later, Paul passed by Ephesus because he was eager to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost and was determined not to be delayed by a stop in Asia. He did, however, call for the Ephesian elders to meet with him at Miletus. Paul told them of the prophecies concerning the danger of his returning to Jerusalem. His final words concerned the kind of ministry he had demonstrated before them as an example for them to follow. Paul reminded them of the importance of persevering in what they had learned, and the necessity of exhorting the congregation to do likewise.

Acts 20:28-32 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified

Did they follow Paul's valuable advice?

This 1st letter describes the 1st stage of the Christian Church: the Apostolic Church, renowned for the purity of its doctrine. This period begins in A.D. 31 (the year of Jesus' ascension), and ends in A.D. 100 (the year of the death of John, the last apostle).

The Apostolic Church had experienced a lightning growth.

At the end of the first century, there were about 6 million Christians in the known world.

Rev. 2:1-7 Ephesus > Desired One - The Loveless Church - Apostolic Church in church history

I. Notice Christ's title: Christ is present and in control.

Rev. 2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

This church had enjoyed some stellar leadership > Paul, Timothy and John.

You worship the Lord God; not the leader.

Col. 1:21-23 *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

II. Commendation of the Church of Ephesus.

Note: 7 Commendations: Rev. 2:2-3, 6 *I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;*

[Inserted Note: They have followed Paul's advice, and have "tried them which say they are apostles, and are not".]

³ *and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.*

⁶ *But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

1. Serving > Very BUSY doing the works of the Lord > Much activity
2. Sacrificing > Labor = Toil to the point of exhaustion
3. Steadfast > Patient = Endurance under trial > kept going when the going was tough
4. Separated Themselves From >

a. False Doctrine: Weeded out heresy; Gate-keepers of Truth

Paul had warned> False teachers will arise from the outside as well as within.

John had instructed them to "try the spirits." (I John 4:1-6)

II Cor. 11:1-4, 12-15> Satan has false ministers. Be alert to detect them> Reject them

b. False Deeds:

Nicolaitans = To Conquer the People; Possibly refers to a sect who initiated "clergy" and "laity" and "lorded themselves over the church and people.

A false division that is taught NOWHERE in the New Testament.

I Pet. 2:9 & Rev. 1:6 God's children are "kings and priests" and have equal access to the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:30 *Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*

1. The Nicolaitans were teaching that the body was independent of the soul. This way, according to them, it was possible to commit sin in one's body without causing harm to one's soul. This doctrine can still be found today in some Christian churches.
2. The leadership in the church (Nicolaitans) were elevating themselves above everyone else. Like all deceivers which come from the body of Christ, claimed "not that they were destroying Christianity, but they were presenting an improved and modernized version of it.

5. Suffering > Patiently bore burdens; toiled without fainting > ALL for His name's sake

Christ's Concern: The diagnosis of Jesus is very clear as He examines the Heart.

Rev. 2:4 *Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

This busy, separated, suffering people suffered from heart trouble.

1. They abandoned or LEFT their first love.

The word first indicates that the love which has been left is a love which existed previously.

2. They displayed "works, labor and patience." > NOT motivated by love for Christ.

Note: I Thess. 1:3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ

Truth: What we do for the Lord is important, but WHY we do it is vital.

Consider: It is possible to serve, sacrifice and suffer for His names' sake and not TRULY love Jesus Christ.

Truth: Church of Ephesus >so BUSY (Being Under Satan's Yoke) maintaining their separation they neglected adoration. Consequently, they lost their warmth and zeal for Christ. Thus, they began to "go through the motions" of good works. What was once a love relationship cooled into mere religion. Their passion for Him became little more than cold orthodoxy. Labor is NO substitute for love; purity is NO substitute for passion. Need both>please Him

God's Case Against Israel:

Jer. 2:2, 5 *Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD:*

"I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal,

When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown. Thus says the LORD:

"What injustice have your fathers found in Me, That they have gone far from Me, Have followed idols, And have become idolaters?"

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he referenced love 20 times.

He emphasized the believers' "exalted position in Jesus Christ...in heavenly places."

The church of Ephesus was not EXPERIENCING its heavenly position in Christ.

Note: The very last verse of the Paul's epistle to the people of Ephesus >

Eph. 6:24 *Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*

Importance of loving the Lord «with an undying love».

Often, as time goes by, we lose the love we had for Jesus in the first days of our conversion.

Matt. 24:12 *And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*

The experience of the local church of Ephesus was the same as that of the Apostolic Church. During the second half of the first century, as the apostles were dying one by one, the Christians progressively lost the vision transmitted at the Day of the Pentecost. Slowly, they let the evangelical fervor of the early days cool down, that same fervor which had formerly brought about the conversion of thousands of souls day after day. Internal betrayal and spiritual battles had eroded much of their enthusiasm.

Christ's Exhortation

Rev. 2:5 Remember (literally > *Keep On Remembering*) therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

Ponder: They were doing MANY good things, but they were DISTRACTED from doing their first works...their first love, and, unless they return to that first love, their church itself would become extinct...no more...of no use to Him any longer.

Truth: I must regain this first love, before He entrusts His purpose to someone else.

Edmund Burke: "Very seldom does a man take one giant step from a life of virtue & goodness into a life of sin & corruption. Usually, he begins his journey into evil by taking little steps into the shaded areas; areas tinted & colored just a bit, almost unnoticed by those around him. Until one day, hardly aware that he has made the journey, he finds himself firmly entangled in a life of sin & corruption."

We see this same kind of journey pictured repeatedly in Scripture.

1. In Judges we read of Samson whose life from birth to manhood was dedicated to God. Gradually, Samson started flirting with evil, which little by little, invaded his life.

Judges 16:20 reveals a startling verse:

The Lord had departed from Samson, and he didn't realize it.

Samson, once a great man of God, became so deeply enmeshed in sin God left him.

Insensitive to the presence of God, Samson didn't even realize it.

2. Saul, initially, was a man God loved, & he loved God. Gradually, he turned his back on God. The storm clouds began to gather. Ultimately, the Spirit of God left him. Scripture tells us Saul ended up slinking off to the witch of Endor, seeking help from the powers of evil because those were the forces that were now controlling his life.

Ponder: It isn't the giant step from virtue into sin that we need to fear.

It's the little steps that ultimately lead us away from God.

Consider: It must have happened that way in the church in Ephesus.

Remember when Jesus examined this church, He listed 7 positive things.

I know your deeds, hard work & your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, & have found them false. You have persevered & have endured hardships for My name, & have not grown weary.

He continues His examination: "Yet I hold this against you: You have LEFT your first love."

Did they just decide one day not to love God anymore? It was a gradual thing. For a while their love for God was so great & so infectious people were drawn into their fellowship. They were known far & wide for their steadfast faithfulness, even in the face of persecution.

Consider: "This I have against you. You have forsaken your first love."

Question: "What is first love?"

Devotion to Christ that often characterizes a new believer > fervent, personal, uninhibited

"First love" in God's eyes: The LOVE >

1. First brought you to God
2. Love you experienced when you saw the cross as it really was.
3. It was when you realized the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for your sin.
4. You were overwhelmed with His amazing love.
5. You believed and trusted in Him, became a child of God, and experienced His forgiveness.

First love:

1. First love looks at rivers of grief & worry that arise in life & says, God will carry me through.
2. First love looks at stumbling blocks & sees them as stepping stones > These will prove the power of God.
3. First love cries out, "Just give us a mountain to climb. Give us a river to swim. Give us something to prove the greatness of God's love & how powerful He really is."

Question: How Do You Leave Something As Wonderful As First Love?

Sometimes it just disappears, vanishes, goes away.

Matt. 24:12 Jesus is talking about the end of time >

"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold."

Sin works, not by taking giant steps from virtue to sin, just little steps. As sin increases in your life, the once wonderful, warm, unselfish, vibrant love in your life begins to grow cold like an ember that is all alone, no longer a part of the fire. Soon it will die.

Question: How Do You Restore Your First Love?

Rev. 2:5 Jesus gives us a simple and direct prescription. Jesus says,

1. "Remember the height from which you have fallen!"

Keep on remembering what you have lost. Cultivate a desire to regain the fellowship. God desires my devotion rather than doctrine.

2. "Repent and do the things you did at first."

Repent = Change your mind - Confess your sin

When John the Baptist began to preach, the first word out of his mouth was "repent."

When Jesus sent the 70 out 2 by 2, the first word out of their mouths was to be "repent." Every time the prophets stood before the rebellious nation of Israel, they spoke with the authority of God & they commanded the people to repent. True repentance goes far beyond sorrow. It is a genuine change of heart and mind which results in a change in lifestyle and behavior.

When you repent:

1. Look at your sin! See how ugly and horrible it is. Pray: Let me see my sin as You see it.
2. Don't deny it. Don't blame it on someone or something else. Face the reality of it.
3. Come with no pretense before God: "God, I can't carry it. I need your power to overcome _____ in my life. Help me to forsake it.
4. Repeat the First Works > Restore the original fellowship that was broken by MY sin and MY neglect. Restore prayer, Bible reading/study, meditate on and memorize the Word, obedient service and worship.

Consider: Today the city of Ephesus is a heap of stones and ruin. If I, like the church at Ephesus, lose my love and devotion for Christ, I will lose my light, no matter how doctrinally sound I may be.

Ghost towns capture the imagination. As you walk the streets you can almost hear the echoes of the past, but the buildings stand empty as mute reminders of life that is gone. With every passing season more buildings collapse, more weeds grow up, more animals take over the ruins where a thriving town once stood. A ghost town is nature's testimony that once something has been emptied, destruction & death follow, unless the void is filled.

In the parable of the empty house, Jesus tells us it is not enough for a man to be freed from the power of Satan. His life must be filled with the Spirit of God or Satan will get hold of him again. Like the ghost town, if a person is not filled with a life in Christ, he will be filled with something else, & the end result is death & decay.

Jesus said, "I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

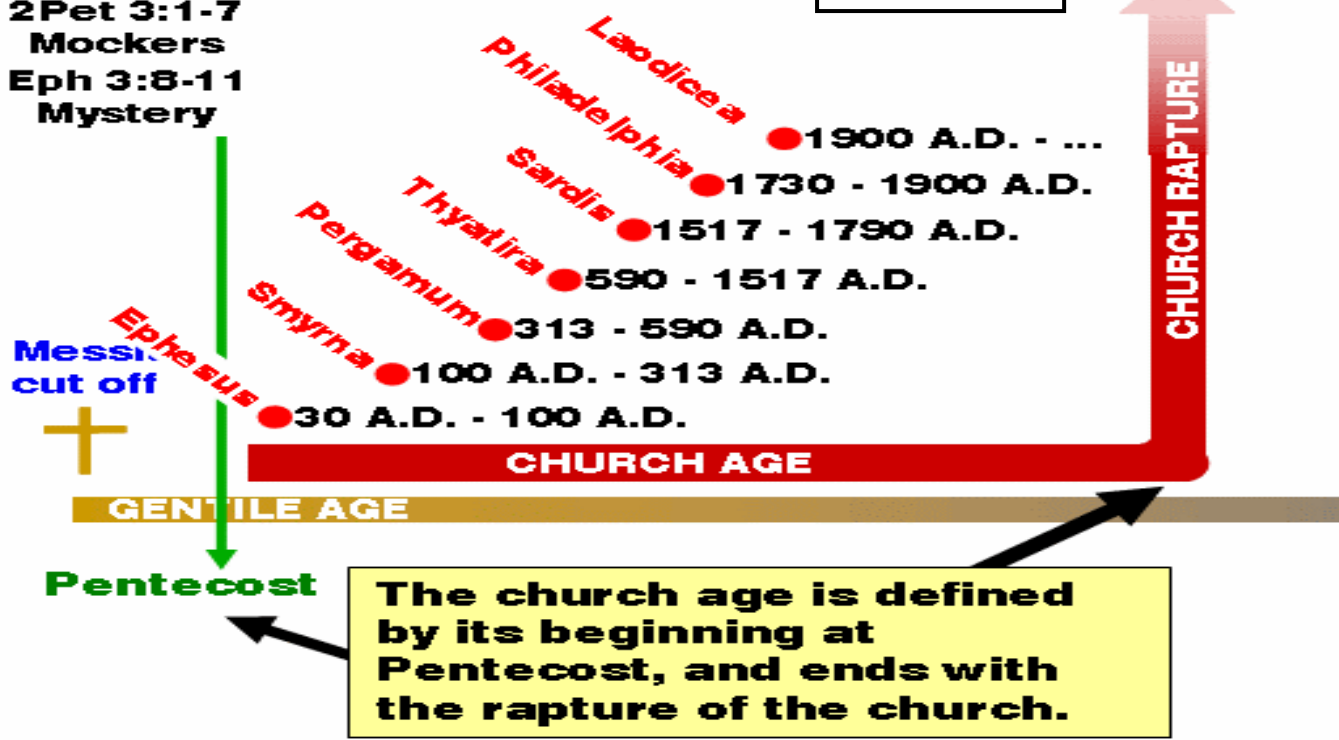
Like the Ephesian church, I can easily fall prey to a cold, mechanical observance of religion. Like the Ephesians, many tend to focus solely on doctrinal purity and hard work, to the exclusion of true love for Christ. As this letter shows, no amount of zeal for the truth or moral rectitude can replace a heart full of love for Jesus.

What is my state? Is my experience daily becoming richer, fresher, and more quickening? Am I daily walking more and more surely in newness of life? Abiding in Him?

Rev. 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches.

Titus 2:13
Glorious
appearing
2Pet 3:1-7
Mockers
Eph 3:8-11
Mystery

Chart A



The seven churches symbolize the seven stages of Church history:

| Church | Meaning of its name | Symbolized period | Dates | |
|--------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Ephesus | Desirable | Apostolic Church | 33 - 100 |
| 2 | Smyrna | Fragrant when crushed | Persecuted Church | 100 - 313 |
| 3 | Pergamos | Raised up city | Compromising Church | 313 - 538 |
| 4 | Thyatira | Savor of labor | Corrupt Church | 538 - 1517 |
| 5 | Sardis | That which remains | Reformation Church | 1517 - 1755 |
| 6 | Philadelphia | Brotherly love | Awakening Church | 1755 - 1844 |
| 7 | Laodicea | Judging the people | Today's Church | 1844 - End |