

## 7 Letters to the Churches (Revelation 2 & 3)

While these seven letters have local and personal applications, they also portray elements that can be found, to some degree, in all churches. They portray – in seven orthogonal dimensions – the spiritual conditions against which all churches can be profiled. They also remarkably profile all of church history in advance. (In any other order, they wouldn't.) Here's a summary of the prophetic aspects.

*The Apostolic Church.* The letter to Ephesus (Revelation 2:1 – 7) profiles the early apostolic church: diligent in maintaining sound doctrine but negligent on devotion; they had lost their “first love.” Even the name is significant: Ephesus meant “darling” or “desired one.” The relationship with the Bridegroom is, after all, a courtship.

*The Persecuted Church.* The letter to Smyrna (Revelation 2:8 – 11) is a call to perseverance through suffering, and thus speaks of death and martyrdom. The very name Smyrna means “myrrh,” an embalming ointment. This is one of only two churches that had nothing adverse mentioned about them.

*The Married Church.* Pergamos (“Twisted Marriage,” Revelation 2:12 – 17) is the church that married the world. What Satan couldn't accomplish by persecution, he achieved by joining the church to the ways of the world. State sponsorship replaced salvation; pagan rituals replaced relationship.

*The Medieval Church.* Thyatira in Revelation 2:18 – 29 (the longest letter of all seven) originally was named Semiramis, the queen consort of the first world dictator, Nimrod. Thyatira embraced pagan idolatry introduced through the devotion to the Queen of Heaven, and Mariolatry dominated the Dark Ages. The entire medieval period in the history of Europe is a saga of the quest for temporal power under the trappings of the Church.

*The Reformation and Its Sequels.* The letter to Sardis (Revelation 3:1 – 6) follows and profiles the Reformation and its sequels, making some doctrinal recovery but suffering ossification through denominationalism. Jesus declared, “that thou hast a name that thou livest but art dead,” that is, in name only, but lacking the Spirit. This is one of the two letters in which nothing positive is mentioned. The Reformation achieved an effective doctrinal recovery in the area of soteriology (the study of Salvation): re-establishing the authority of the Word of God and salvation by faith alone. Unfortunately, it didn't go far enough. Sardis, incidentally, was a city that was known for its repeated falling to its enemies due to its false confidence in its defences.

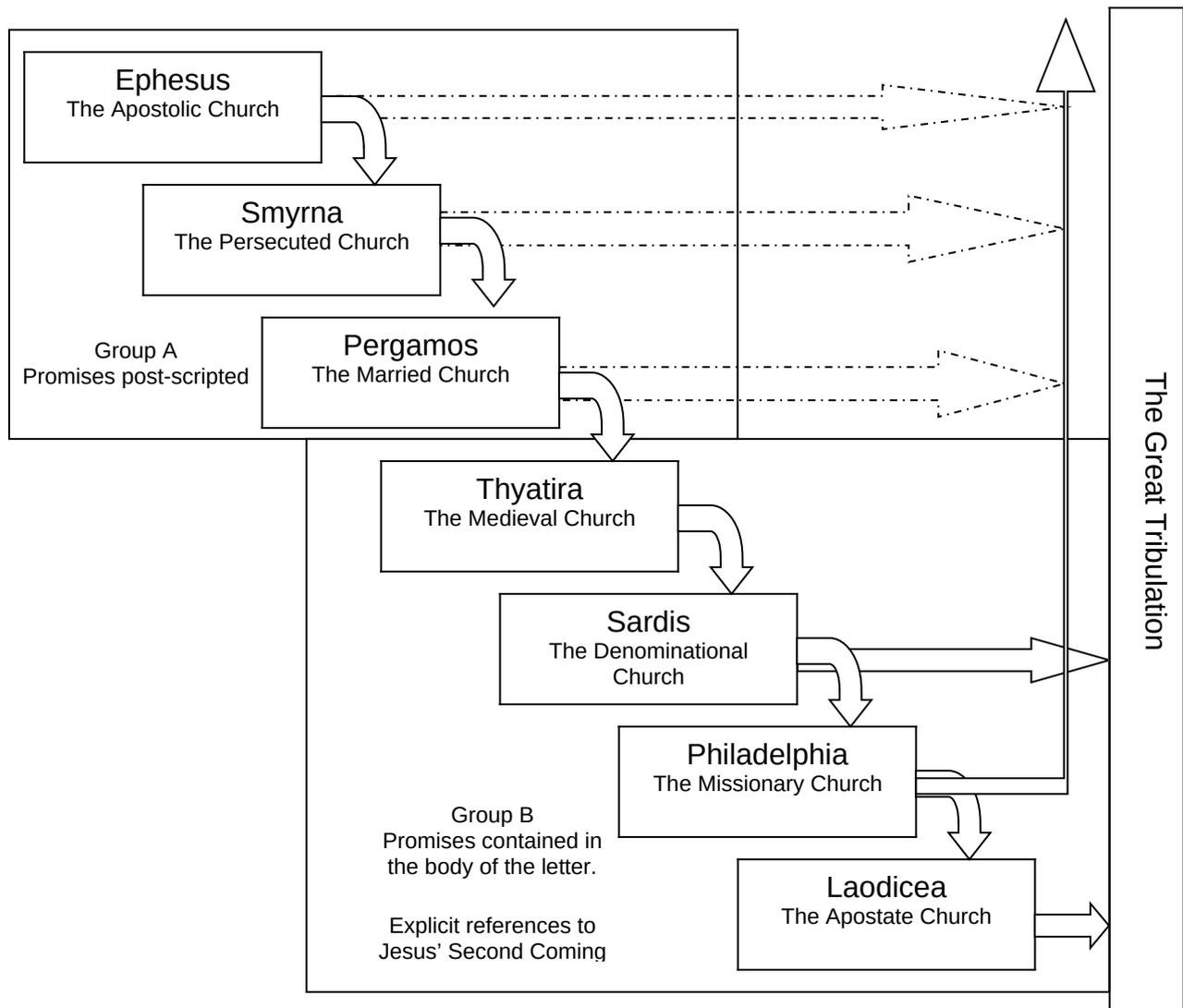
*The Missionary Church.* The letter to Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7 – 13) is the one that everyone attempts to identify with for two reasons: it is the other of the two that has nothing adverse mentioned; secondly, it appears to have an explicit promise of being taken in the *Harpazo* (the Rapture).

*The Apostate Church.* The letter to Laodicea (Revelation 3:14 – 22) is to the church whose people believed that they were “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” and yet knew not that they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” In this letter, Jesus is *outside*, knocking to have the door opened to Him. And His invitation is given to the *individual* within that church rather than to the corporate body (3:20). This very invitation is a widely used verse at evangelical meetings; however, its placement here serves as a scathing indictment of the Laodicean church that along with the church at Sardis had nothing positive to commend it.

While people may view this apparent history with differing views, most conservative scholars recognize Laodicea as representing the Apostate Church, and most would argue that we are already into this (apparently final) period.

From structural indications, the seven churches appear to be in two groups: the first three, and the last four. The last four are distinctive in that, among other things, they each contain an explicit allusion to the return of Christ. One way to view these is in the following sketch:

### Prophetic Profile



Material taken from a book titled:  
 "Prophecy 20/20 Profiling the Future through the lens of Scripture" by Chuck Missler.  
 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc. © 2006)pp 218 – 221.