**The Vision of the Cosmic Jesus (1:9-20)**

John draws on three separate texts to describe the person he’s seeing.

1. one like a son of man
2. Daniel 7:9-10
3. Daniel 10:4-6

**Some more important notes about this cosmic Jesus:**

7 Churches

Jesus is walking among the lampstands

Jesus holds the seven stars in his Right Hand

**7 Letters to 7 Churches**

The questions we’ll use to interpret these letters follow the structure of the letters themselves.

1. What is the description of Jesus?
2. What is the church doing well?
3. What is the problem?
4. What is the warning?
5. What is the promise? (all have parallels in the vision of the new heaven (19-22))
6. Summarize: What’s really going on here?

**Ephesus (2:1-7)**

1. *What is the background of the city?* Ephesus was a costal port city that was vital to the economic livelihood of the Asian province. As such, it had developed an extremely metropolitan culture. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a Temple to Artemis, was housed in Ephesus, having been built around an ancient tree shrine to Artemis, the goddess of wisdom. Ephesus held athletic events in its stadium and had a thriving trade industry.
2. *What is the description of Jesus?* “Him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands”
3. *What is the church doing well?*
4. *What is the problem?*
5. *What is the warning?*
6. *What is the promise?*
7. *What is really going on here?*

**Smyrna (2:8-11)**

1. *What is the background of the city?* Smyrna was another port city that at one time had been “demoted” to village status. It was rebuilt by Alexander the Great so that it stretched from the harbor all the way up the side of a mountain. This “rebirth” of the city was a point of pride for its citizens, who were quite wealthy due to the city’s trade industry. Smyrna was known for its fierce loyalty to its allies. It was the first city in this region to build a temple to Roma, and a crown appeared on many of the city’s coins.
2. *What is the description of Jesus?* “The first and the last, who was dead and came to life”
3. *What is the church doing well?*
4. *What is the problem?*
5. *What is the warning?*
6. *What is the promise?*
7. *What is really going on here?*

**Pergamum(2:12-17)**

1. *What is the background of the city?* Pergamum was built around a citadel hill, and at the very top of the hill (some 1,000 feet above the plains) was a Temple to Zeus. The city was a noted center for the Imperial Cult, with two more major temples – one to Asclepius and one to Augustus – located in the city, as well as a Roman proconsul (regional governor). Apparently, one believer in the city, Antipas, had been killed for his faith, though this does not seem to be an immediate concern for the other believers (mob violence?).
2. *What is the description of Jesus?* “Him who has the two-edged sword.” Note that, according to the vision in chapter 1, the sword comes from Jesus’ mouth. This image represents Jesus’ own teachings, which have the power to cut away all falsehood (cf. Hebrews 4:12, which speaks to Jesus’ ability to judge and discern humanity’s true intentions through the power of his (s)word.
3. *What is the church doing well?*
4. *What is the problem?*
5. *What is the warning?*
6. *What is the promise?*
7. *What is really going on here?*

**Thyatira (2:18-29)**

1. *What is the background of the city?* Thyatira was a city known for its merchant class. One of Paul’s converts, Lydia, traded in cloth and lived in Thyatira (Acts 16:14-15). As a merchant city, it was home to many guilds, whose participants regularly met in pagan temples as a part of their business transactions. It was the least consequential city of the 7 mentioned in Revelation.
2. *What is the description of Jesus?* “Eyes are like flames of fire and feet are like burnished bronze”; eyes/heart refer to knowing/judging, while the feet symbolize action. Later, Jesus tells them that (v.23) he “searches minds and hearts” and who will “give to each of you as your works deserve”. Also behind this picture of Jesus is a reference to the angelic figure (Gabriel?) in Daniel 10, who comes not only to assure Daniel of the future, but also to tell him that Gabriel himself is waging war against the Empires who oppose God’s people.
3. *What is the church doing well?*
4. *What is the problem?*
5. *What is the warning?*
6. *What is the promise?*
7. *What is really going on here?*

**Sardis (3:1-6)**

1. *What is the background of the city?* Despite the fact that Sardis is situated on a hill, making it very easy to defend, the city had fallen twice to surprise attacks that succeeded because the city guards weren’t paying attention (5th and 3rd centuries BCE). In 17 CE, a fierce earthquake devastated the city, and it was rebuilt with help from Rome. As a result, the citizens became very pro-Roman and built several Roman temples within the city, either to Roman gods or to the Imperial cult.
2. *What is the description of Jesus?* “Him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars” Jesus is the only source of the Holy Spirit (7 spirits) and only he has control over the fate of the churches (7 stars).
3. *What is the church doing well?*
4. *What is the problem?*
5. *What is the warning?*
6. *What is the promise?*
7. *What is really going on here?*

**Philadelphia (3:7-13)**

1. *What is the background of the city?* Philadelphia was destroyed by the same earthquake that hit Sardis (17 CE), and rebuilt by Rome. The citizens renamed it “Neocaesarea” in appreciation, and then later renamed it “Philadelphia Flavia” in order to show their support for the Emperor Vespasian (Flavian was his family name).
2. *What is the description of Jesus?* “The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens”. This is a paraphrase of Isaiah 22:22, and it represents the authority over the house of David (i.e., the Messianic kingdom). Thus, Jesus alone controls who gets into his kingdom and who doesn’t.
3. *What is the church doing well?*
4. *What is the problem?*
5. *What is the warning?*
6. *What is the promise?*
7. *What is really going on here?*

**Laodicea (3:14-22)**

1. *What is the background of the city?* Laodicea was built for military reasons rather than for practical ones. As such, it had no natural water supply, but was situated halfway between the hot springs at Hieropolis and the cold springs at Colossae. Aqueducts transported the water to the city, but by the time the water arrived, it would be a lukewarm, fertile breeding ground for disease-causing bacteria.

Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 CE, but the city was so rich and proud that it refused Rome’s offer of assistance to rebuild. As a fiercely proud city, Laodicea was also famous for an eye salve thought to cure blindness and a fine, dark wool used to produce high-quality textiles.

1. *What is the description of Jesus?* “The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation” Jesus is the truth and the only source of anything that is real and lasting.
2. *What is the church doing well?*
3. *What is the problem?*
4. *What is the warning?*
5. *What is the promise?*
6. *What is really going on here?*

**Application**

\*\***Ephesus**: Where is the balance between loving and being righteous? Which is more important? Where has the American Church failed one direction or the other?

\*\* **Smyrna and Philadelphia**: Why does God choose to spare some from suffering and not others? What does this say about God’s character? How much could American believers suffer for standing up for what is right?

\*\* **Pergamum**: In what ways today could American believers compromise Jesus’ name in order to fit in with our culture?

\*\* **Sardis**: Do we cater to the wealthy in our churches? (do we compromise the gospel to make rich persons feel comfortable?) What is the relationship between actions and motivations? Are good intentions enough?

\*\* **Thyatira**: What believers have a good reputation with non-believers in America? Is that a sign that they are too “Americanized”?

\*\* **Laodicea**: What does being “spiritually self-sufficient” look like? Much like the city of Laodicea, America prizes individualism and self-sufficiency. How does that aspect of our culture interact with and impact our faith in light of the letter to the Laodiceans?