

# God's People in Cities



Collegiate Quarterly

## Teacher's Guide

### Surveying the Source

Dan. 2:27; Matt. 13:55; Rev. 2:1; 3:19, 22

### Plotting the Course

#### The students will:

- ▶ Understand the book of Revelation as a message to God's people collectively.
- ▶ Become familiar with the historical context of Revelation and its place within the canon of Scripture.

- ▶ Be able to apply the principles of the book to their own lives as followers of Christ.

### Preparing to Lead

The book of Revelation is sometimes known as the Apocalypse of John. The word apocalypse in popular parlance has come to mean a series of dire events leading to the end of something, usually the world. The expression “zombie apocalypse” in connection with the inexplicable (to this writer) popularity of fiction involving zombies references the end of

human civilization through the assault of zombies. However, the word in Greek, *apokálypsis* means an uncovering. So, in fact, the apocalypse would be a revelation of things that were previously unknown. What is the last book of the New Testament attempting to make known to us as a church and as individual Christians? Let's find out!

### Materials

Reproducible Activity, Bibles

### Getting Started

**A.** Start by sharing prayer requests and pray together.

*Ask:* “How do you deal with criticism or correction? Does it offend you? Do you feel guilty or ashamed? Does it matter who is delivering it? Are you more willing to take it from someone you like and trust? Can you be objective when the criticism seems to be spot on, and determine what changes you need to make?”

**B.** Start by sharing prayer requests and pray together.

*Say:* “Revelation 3:22 calls on those who ‘have an ear’ to ‘hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ In a literal sense, most of us have ears, in the sense that we can be communicated with; we can hear or read something and absorb the message. But something more is being asked for here. What is it, and do we have it? If not, how do we get it?”

## Delving Into the Word

**A.** The messages to the seven churches take up the entirety of Revelation 2 and 3. Each message begins with Jesus uniquely identifying Himself to the church being addressed. These ways of identifying Himself are not random or incidental, but apply to the situation in which the church finds itself, and its major weaknesses and/or strengths in its collective walk with God. For example, to the church of Ephesus He presents Himself as walking among lampstands—sources of light. This emphasizes the Ephesians’ efforts to discover what the truth is, and to subject it to scrutiny, or examine it in the light of God’s Word. Discuss the ways in which the nature of each of the churches corresponds to the way in which Christ introduces Himself in His message to it. Note your findings in the Reproducible Activity.

**B.** This option also uses the Reproducible Activity but examines a different aspect of the texts concerning the seven churches. The churches are not only symbolic representations of different ages and spiritual states, they were real places inhabited by real people at a specific time.

Read chapters two and three of Revelation. *Ask:* “What is He calling each of the churches to do in order to perfect or complete its life in Christ? What specific form might such efforts take in the life of an individual or a body of believers in this (or any) time?”

Using the Reproducible Activity, have class members write their findings down next to the relevant church listed.

## Discussing the Ideas

1. Why is even constructive criticism, such as that delivered to the churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3, hard for us to take? What can make it easier for us to accept and take it to heart?
2. What does Christ’s portrayal of Himself in Rev. 2:1 tell us about the nature of His continuing ministry?
3. What does it suggest to you that the situations of these churches millennia ago

are still relevant to Christians today?

4. Which of the churches do you think most represents your spiritual state? Which do you most identify with?

5. What is the overall picture of Christ and His gospel that you take away from Revelation 2–3?

6. How can we draw encouragement from circumstances that may appear to be discouraging?

## Closing the Activity

In her cycle of plays based upon the life of Christ, *The Man Born to Be King*, British author Dorothy Sayers chose to use modern idioms and language rather than the language of the King James Version. One critic objected in particular to King Herod’s telling his advisors to “keep your mouth shut!” on the grounds that “such coarse expressions were jarring on the lips of anyone so closely connected to our Lord.”

We can laugh at this, but we still have a tendency to assume that people in biblical times or the early church were better than us, somehow closer to God than we are today. But a look at the seven churches of Revelation reveals that humanity has always faced the same struggles with the world and with its own nature. Let us ask God to reveal to us the things we need to change, and to ask for His help in addressing these issues.

**Alan Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland, USA**

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## The Seven Churches of Asia

| Church       | Greeting | Characteristics |
|--------------|----------|-----------------|
| Ephesus      |          |                 |
| Smyrna       |          |                 |
| Pergamum     |          |                 |
| Thyatira     |          |                 |
| Sardis       |          |                 |
| Philadelphia |          |                 |
| Laodicea     |          |                 |

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