

HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR

Revelation 2-3

I. BIBLICAL TEXT

Rev 2:7—*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

A. REPEATED TO EACH OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

- Ephesus—**2:7**
- Smyrna—**2:11**
- Pergamum—**2:17**
- Thyatira—**3:29**
- Sardis—**3:6**
- Philadelphia—**3:13**
- Laodicea—**3:22**

B. LOCATION IN PASSAGE

1. First three churches—*before* promises to “He who overcomes”
 - o Exhortation—charging them listen to what has been said—to help them overcome
2. Last four churches—*after* promises to “He who overcomes”—at very end of letter
 - o Reinforces everything said in whole letter
 - o Exhortation—encouraging them with the promises at the end
3. Location at end of letter—probably suggests three things
 - a. Listen!—pay attention to everything I have said!
 - b. Exhortation
 - Charging them to overcome
 - Encouraging them with promises

II. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

A. OLD TESTAMENT

1. DEUTERONOMY

- a. Israel was renewing its covenant with God before entering Canaan
- b. God was about to open Israel’s eyes to the significance of all He had done so far
- c. Moses exhorted Israel to understand this covenant—take it seriously—and be loyal to God

Dt 29—*And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. . . . The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

2. ISAIAH—AFTER HIS VISION IN THE TEMPLE

Is 6:8-10—*Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!” He said, “Go, and tell the people; ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.’ Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.”*

- a. Quoted by Jesus—while telling Parable of the Sower—**Mk 4**
- b. Quoted by Paul—describing those who would not listen to him in Rome—**Acts 28**
- c. Meaning—strong dose of irony—expresses divine despair at the human condition
 - Go ahead and tell them—but I know they will not listen to you!
 - I might as well harden their hearts—they have proven they will not listen
 - The last thing you should expect—is for them to listen—turn—and repent

3. JEREMIAH—PRONOUNCING JUDGMENT UPON JUDAH

Jer 5:20-22—*Declare this in the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah, saying, “Now hear is, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see; who have ears but do not hear. Do you not fear Me?” declares the Lord. “Do you not tremble in My presence?”*

4. EZEKIEL

- a. Explains his call/commission by the Lord

Ez 3:27—*But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, Thus says the Lord God, He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.*

- b. As he prepares for Exile

Ez 12:1-2—*Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house.*

5. SUMMARY

- a. Pronouncements of judgment—describing rebellious, hard-hearted state of the people
- b. Not—that God does not *want* them to hear and repent
- c. But they are so rebellious—so hard-hearted—He knows they *will not listen*
- d. Fulfills judgment pronounced by the Psalmist
 - Those who make and worship idols—will become like their idols!
 - They *cannot* listen—any more than their idols can hear!

Ps 115: 5, 6, 8—*They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but they cannot hear . . . Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.*

B. NEW TESTAMENT

1. USED IN TWO CONTEXTS

- a. By Paul—descriptive usage—Paul explained the state of non-believers
 - 1. **Romans 11**—the unbelieving state of Jews in his day
 - 2. **Acts 28**—the unbelieving state of those who rejected his message in Rome
- b. **Primary** usage By Jesus—prophetic exhortation
 - 1. All usages in NT that directly addressed people—were by Jesus
 - 2. He spoke with prophetic, divine authority—urging them to *listen*
 - 3. Reaches beyond OT despair—extends *hope* to those who will listen

2. JESUS' USAGE

- a. After speaking parables—exhorting disciples to *apply* themselves
 - 1. Parable of the Sower—**Mk 4, Mt 13, Lk 18**
Mk 4:9, 12-13—*He who has ears to hear, let him hear. . . . To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.*
 - 2. Parable of the Tares
Mt 13:43—*He who has ears, let him hear.*
 - 3. Significance for Revelation
Mk 4:33-34—*With many similar parable Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything without using a parable. But when He was alone with His own disciples, he explained everything.*
 - a. Jesus used parables—so only those who believed would understand
 - b. He explained them—to those who were willing to follow Him and seek explanations
 - c. Revelation
 - 1. Was written with apocalyptic language—hidden meaning intended to reveal
 - 2. Only those who listened carefully—seeking the truth—would understand
- b. When explaining hard truths

- **Mk 7**—what comes *out* of people is what makes them unclean—not what goes in!
 - **Lk 14**—count the high cost of discipleship!—and be salty salt!
- c. Rebuking followers for being obtuse—dull
- **Mk 8**—for not understanding the significance of the leaven of Pharisees and Herod
 - **Mt 13**—for not recognizing John as Elijah—and rejecting both John and Jesus
- d. Affirming disciples—as they began to understand about the Kingdom of God
- Matthew’s account of the Parable of the Sower
 - After Jesus explained why unbelievers did not understand the parable
 - How they are blessed—privileged—for Jesus to reveal these things to them
- Mt 13:16-17**—*But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

III. EXPOSITION

Rev 2:7—*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

A. ESSENTIAL POINTS

1. REVELATION USED APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE
 - o Like Jesus’ Kingdom parables—the meaning was not obvious to everyone
 - o Intended for believers—and genuine seekers—true followers of the Kingdom
 - o It was impossible for non-believers—skeptics—to understand the truth behind them
2. ‘LISTEN’ CAREFULLY—WITH A GENUINE DESIRE TO KNOW THE TRUTH
 - o Then you will truly understand—what others cannot know
3. CHRIST’S WORDS—*ARE* THE WORDS OF THE SPIRIT
4. CHRIST DWELLS AMONG THE CHURCHES—AND KNOWS THEM
 - o He knows them intimately—the reality—and not just the appearance
 - o He speaks to them accordingly—with knowledge—that calls them to accountability
5. THIS ‘HEARING’—IS A KEY TO OVERCOMING—AND BLESSING
 - o Those who ‘hear’ the truth—will obey it
 - o Those who obey it—will overcome
 - o Those who overcome—will be blessed

B. LISTENING—NOT JUST HEARING

1. THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEARING AND LISTENING

- a. Hearing—is mere auditory exposure to sound
 - Sound can “go in one ear and out the other”
- b. Listening—is attaching meaning/significance to that sound
 - When one intentionally focuses on sound to understand its meaning
- c. Two examples—hearing but not understanding

1. Jesus in the presence of the ‘Greeks’

Jn 12:27-33—“*Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.*” Then a voice came out of heaven: “*I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*” So the crowds of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, “*An angel has spoken to Him.*” Jesus answered and said, “*This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*”

2. Saul’s conversion—two accounts *seem* to contradict each other

- a. **Acts 9:8**—says witnesses heard the Lord’s voice but saw no one
- b. **Acts 22:9**—says witnesses saw the light but did not ‘hear’ the Lord’s voice
- c. Solution
 - 1. **Acts 9**—says they *heard*—**ακουω**—*without* understanding [genitive]
 - 2. **Acts 22**—says they *did not hear*—**ακουω**—*with* understanding [accusative]
- d. The point → they heard something—but they did not understand it

2. TO ‘LISTEN’—MEANS TO ‘HAVE AN EAR’

- a. Why say, “He who has ears”—?
 - o This is not about the physical ability to hear
 - o Some people are deaf—and *cannot* hear
 - o But this passage does not say—“He who *can* hear”
 - o Almost *everyone* has ears!!!
 - o So—it *seems* like a useless rhetorical device

b. The answer—what it means to ‘have an ear’

- 1. Greek word ‘ear’—**ουσ**—has two meanings
 - a. Literal → physical hearing organ
 - b. Metaphorical → mental faculty—to understand—to know

2. Parallels

- Having an ‘ear’ for music—or for a language
- Having an ‘eye’ for art—or for beauty
- Having a ‘taste’ for the finer things of life
- Having a ‘mind’ for business

3. Meaning

- a. Having a **capacity** to understand—having a ‘mind’ to know
 - Having the right **tool(s)**—to interpret sounds
- b. Being **ready** to use that tool—to convert hearing to a message of understanding
- c. Being **open** to ‘listening’ to that message
- d. Staying **focused**—not distracted by other sounds (and messages)

C. WHAT DISTRACTED THE CHURCHES FROM LISTENING TO GOD

1. EPHESUS—DISTRACTED BY DEFENDING PURITY OF ORTHODOX TEACHING
 - o Lost their passion for sharing the Gospel
2. PERGAMUM—DISTRACTED BY FALSE TEACHING AND IMMORALITY
 - o Motivated by their desire to prosper financially—keep their businesses
3. THYATIRA—DISTRACTED BY SIMILAR PROBLEMS AS PERGAMUM
 - o Also—possibly distracted by desire for ‘deeper’ life—mysterious teachings
4. SARDIS—DISTRACTED BY THEIR REPUTATION
 - o Focused on themselves—and living up to their past fame
 - o Forgot to hold on to what really mattered—the truth that really made a difference
5. LAODICEA—DISTRACTED BY LAZINESS AND WEALTH
 - o Lack of resolve—content to settle for mediocrity

D. IMPLIED MESSAGE

1. ‘HEARERS WITH AN EAR’—LISTEN WITH A VIEW TOWARD ACTION
 - o The message goes from the ear—to the mind—to the heart
 - o They have a heart to obey the message
 - o They ‘lend’ their ears—with a purpose to obey
2. THEY GO BEYOND HEARING—**WILLING TO DO** WHAT THE MESSAGE SAYS
 - o **Jas 1:22**—Be doers—not just hearers of the word.
 - o **Rom 2:13**—Not hearers of the Law—but doers of it—who are right before God

E. THE PROMISED BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENT LISTENING

1. EPHESUS—ETERNAL LIFE
 - o The right to eat of the Tree of Life in Paradise
2. SMYRNA—FREEDOM FROM GUILT/DREAD
 - o Will not be hurt by the second death
3. PERGAMUM—PROVISION AND IDENTITY
 - o Hidden manna—divine sustenance
 - o White stone—approval—without guilt
 - o New Name—identity with the Lord
4. THYATIRA—PARTICIPATION IN HIS MESSIANIC RULE
 - o Authority—with Christ—over the nations
 - o Linked to serving Christ
 - o Morning star—being in His glorious presence
5. SARDIS—RIGHTEOUSNESS—ASSURANCE—AFFIRMATION
 - o Dressed in white—righteousness
 - o Never blotted out of the Book of Life—assurance
 - o Acknowledged before the Father—affirmation
6. PHILADELPHIA—KINGDOM IDENTITY
 - o Being a pillar in the Temple
 - o Names written on us—God's name—name of the City of God—New glorious name
7. LAODICEA—KINGDOM AUTHORITY
 - o Right to sit with Christ on His throne