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“Faithful, encouraging, convicting, needed. Sanchez’s *Seven Dangers* is all this and more. He demonstrates how Jesus’ words to these seven ancient churches are as relevant to our churches and our hearts as ever.”

JONATHAN LEEMAN,
Editorial Director, 9Marks

“I’ve heard (and preached) many sermons on Revelation’s “seven churches” but this book brought them alive to me in a new way with a rare combination of precise biblical exposition and precise practical application. It reminded me again of the abiding relevance and cultural timelessness of the Scriptures. May God use this book to awaken us to the fearful dangers inside as well as outside the church, but also point us to the Lord of the church as our only and all-sufficient hope for the future.”

DAVID MURRAY,
Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; and author of
Jesus on Every Page, Reset and *Exploring the Bible*

“Combining careful exposition and practical application out of an experienced pastor’s heart, this challenging book brings the text alive with penetrating parallels to our contemporary context. Unsettling and liberating in equal measure, its message deserves to be read and pondered by every church leader and member. Above all, its central focus is consistently on the gospel and on the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the head of his church, who is the only answer to our current predicaments. I warmly commend it.”

DAVID JACKMAN,
Former President of The Proclamation Trust

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“Every church in every age needs to hear the voice of Jesus speaking to it. In these seven letters in Revelation there is encouragement, challenge, rebuke, and exhortation—all from the lips of Jesus himself. Juan has done a great job of making the voice of our ascended Savior and Master clear, vibrant, and relevant for the age in which we live. May God give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church!”

ADRIAN REYNOLDS

Training Director, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches

“Juan Sanchez makes wonderfully clear the call of Christ to the churches in Revelation, and he helps open our ears to hear that call in the church today. This book doesn’t minimize Scripture’s life-and-death warnings, and it keeps before us the amazing promises of Christ’s presence and power. All this comes in the voice of a wise, experienced, Scripture-saturated pastor/preacher. I read his words with great thanksgiving for the gift of this strengthening exhortation to the church.”

KATHLEEN NIELSON

**Senior advisor and editor for The Gospel Coalition;
and author of *Women and God***

“A convicting, challenging, and comforting exposition of Christ’s message to the seven churches in Revelation. Juan Sanchez combines careful exegesis with incisive pastoral application. The message given to the seven churches needs to be heard afresh today, and Sanchez’s book reminds us why these words are so needed in our cultural moment.”

THOMAS R. SCHREINER

**James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**

“In *Seven Dangers Facing Your Church*, Juan Sanchez is not afraid to confront us with uncomfortable truths from the lips of Jesus about what it means to be church. His commitment to understanding what Jesus was saying to the first readers, combined with stunning insights into how we do exactly the same, make this a challenging read. Juan then goes further—with the experience of a pastor and a heart to win people, not arguments—he takes us to the cross, he calls us to repent, he shows us how to change. Simple but profound, this book provides a great spiritual health check of the life of our church.”

LINDA ALLCOCK
London Women's Convention

“In this book, Juan Sanchez opens the arsenal of the Spirit and uses the sword of the word of God to address the perennial concerns of the church. *Seven Dangers* is soul-searching and splicing and strengthening—I recommend reading it with a pen in your hand and some friends by your side.”

GLORIA FURMAN
Author of *Missional Motherhood* and *Alive in Him*

“This is a timely book. Dr. Sanchez looks at Jesus' assessment of the seven churches in the book of Revelation with biblical understanding and insightful applications. He searches the Scriptures and brings them to us in a clear and an engaging way from beginning to end. If you want to understand the condition of those churches to which these letters were addressed, and the dangers every church has faced in the last two thousand years, this book is for you.”

MIGUEL NÚÑEZ
Senior Pastor, International Baptist Church, Santo Domingo



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“The threats faced by the seven churches in Revelation aren’t very different from what our churches face today; the church has always existed in dangerous times. Jesus’ words to those churches are as timely today as they were two thousand years ago, and Juan Sanchez helps unpack the various dangers our congregations face today. This is a great resource and I cannot recommend it enough!”

MATT CARTER

Pastor of Preaching and Vision, The Austin Stone Community Church

“Writing for both church leaders and members, Juan Sanchez provides a tonic for the soul. *Seven Dangers* is easy to read yet hard hitting, gracious but incisive. Through careful yet simple attention to the text, he prises open contemporary challenges and encouragements that remind us of Jesus’ concern for his church—and the real dangers of forgetting or ignoring this.”

CARL CHAMBERS

Park Hill Evangelical Church, Brighton; and Chair of Cuba para Cristo

“Juan Sanchez does 21st-century congregations a great service in giving us these expositions of the early chapters of Revelation. As he so ably shows, the letter of Jesus to the seven churches in Asia Minor is also a letter to the churches of the 21st century, with huge relevance to us in our different contexts and situations. We need these messages, as have Christians of every generation.”

ANDY LINES

Mission Director, Crosslinks

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**JUAN
SANCHEZ
SEVEN**

**DANGERS
FACING YOUR
CHURCH**

To
First Baptist Church, Avon Park, Florida
Sunridge Baptist Church, Avon Park, Florida
Orange Heights Baptist Church, Hawthorne, Florida
First Baptist Church, Baldwin, Florida
First Baptist Church, Eastman, Georgia
Ryker's Ridge Baptist Church, Madison, Indiana
(Churches that cared for me and my family)

And to
High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas
(The church family I have the privilege to pastor)

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⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of a man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. "

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Revelation 1 v 9-19

INTRODUCTION

There's never been a more dangerous time for the church. It's swimming against the moral tide of culture, and is, frankly, struggling to keep its head above water.

From the outside, it faces growing oppression from tyrannical rulers and the reality of increasing persecution at the hands of an anti-Christian majority. From within, some church leaders are leading Christians astray with new and seemingly more attractive interpretations of Scripture. And those who are trying to stay faithful are left scratching their heads in bewilderment, at a loss over how to respond. The situation looks incredibly bleak.

But here's the thing: the church I've described in the paragraphs above is not, as you might have assumed, the church in the West today. It's a church in an entirely different time and place—Asia Minor in the 1st century—and the original recipients of the book of Revelation.

And this was a church in danger. They faced the pressures of living in a culture of rampant immorality and idolatry (referred to in Revelation as “the great prostitute”), the tyranny of an oppressive Roman regime (“the beast”), and discrimination from both the pagan Roman religious leaders and the Jewish synagogues (“the false prophet”), as well as the population at large (“those who dwell on the earth”).

But behind the scenes, all these pressures were merely tools used by Satan (“the great dragon”) in his attempt to destroy the church (“the bride of the Lamb”).

Another church, two thousand years ago and several thousand miles away, and yet something in their experience rings true with our own today. And it’s no surprise, because your church faces the same dangers at the hands of the same enemy, employing the same methods, using the same tools. Except that nowadays, that looks a little different. It looks like Christians being mocked on talk shows or sneered at on social media. It looks like Christians cowed into silence in their workplace because they fear losing their job. It looks like church leadership teams falling out over theological differences. It looks like denominations embracing a new definition of marriage. It looks like churches closing down and being snapped up by developers to be converted into something more “relevant.” It looks like congregations losing heart because attendance is dwindling and the soul of their nation just seems so irreversibly lost.

There’s no denying it. There’s no point burying your head in the sand. Every church is in danger—and that includes yours. In fact, there are only really two kinds of churches: those who are soberly aware of the risks and are prepared to face them, and those who are carrying on completely unaware.

The devil is prowling on both. The question is: what are you going to do about it?

Dear Church, Love from Jesus

The good news is that Jesus *has done* something about the dangers facing your church—he wrote us a letter.

Most of us don't usually think of the book of Revelation as a letter, but that's what it is. It has a typical opening greeting and concluding blessing, and was written to and meant to circulate among seven churches in Asia Minor—what is now most of modern-day Turkey. Jesus wrote it in order to “show to his servants the things that must soon take place” (1 v 1). He intended to equip them to conquer these satanic threats to their faithful witness to Christ and his gospel. To deliver this message, Jesus chose the apostle John, their “brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (v 9). But this letter is unusual in that it is written in the genre of apocalyptic literature, which reveals both present and future events of judgment and salvation in vivid and memorable visions, dreams, images, and symbols.

John opens his message with a crystal clear promise: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (1 v 3). In other words, John fulfills the office of a prophet, and all who read, hear, and obey the words of this prophecy will be blessed; they will not be overcome by the dangers facing them. They will conquer; they will receive what God has promised; they will be blessed. And this promise is for you, too, and for your church.

So what exactly is it that we so badly need to hear? What is it that the church needs when it's distraught, weakened, threatened, and caused to wonder if God is in control? We need a vision. When there are many who are against us, we need a vision of the One who is *for us*: Jesus Christ. He's the One "who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (v 5-6). But he's not hanging on the cross anymore. In Revelation 1 v 12-20, John describes meeting Jesus face to face as he is now: risen, ascended, exalted, glorified. And there are three details which are particularly encouraging.

Jesus Is with Us

First, we see that Jesus is with us. As the apostle John is praying one Sunday, he hears a voice and turns around to see "seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man" (v 12-13). A few verses later, Jesus explains that "the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (v 20). Revelation is written to seven specific churches in Asia Minor in the first century, but there were more than seven churches in that region at the time (see 1 Peter 1 v 1). The number seven, being a number of fullness, indicates that Revelation is written to all churches, including yours. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2 v 7).

As a lampstand, each church is to hold up the light of the world: to be a faithful witness to Jesus and his gospel in a dark world. But notice the encouragement. Jesus, the Son of Man, is in the midst of his churches: ALL of them—the good ones and the bad ones (and we'll discover that there are plenty of the latter). In the face of danger, there is no greater promise that we or the first-century church could hear than this: that Jesus is present with us.

But Jesus is not just with us; he is with us to rule over us, protect us, and care for us and our messengers. “In his right hand” this shining figure holds “seven stars” (1 v 16). Jesus explains that the “seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” (v 20). Each church appears to have its own angel, who receives the message for each of the churches. What’s important to note is that Jesus holds the “stars” in his right hand: the hand of power and authority, protection, and care. Jesus is sovereign over these messengers and, by extension, he rules over each of the angels’ churches, caring for them and protecting them as a shepherd cares for and protects his sheep.

The dangers we face may feel overwhelming, but we will overcome them by looking to the all-glorious, risen Christ. He is with us; he cares for us; he protects us; he provides for us; he holds us in his right hand, from which nothing or no one can snatch us away.

Jesus Represents Us

Second, Jesus is our priest. John describes the figure in the midst of the lampstands as “one like a son of man” (1 v 13). This is the title Jesus often used of himself in the Gospels. It comes from Daniel 7 v 13-14, where Daniel witnessed “one like a son of man” receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days. But the son of man is also dressed like a priest: he’s wearing “a long robe” and “a golden sash around his chest” (Revelation 1 v 13), just as Israel’s priests did in Exodus 28 v 4, 31.

Jesus is the One who finally and faithfully fulfills mankind’s destiny to represent God to creation as a royal priest. This was the job given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: a job that they failed at miserably. But here we see Jesus doing it perfectly. As a priest, Jesus represents God before the

world; he gives us a glimpse of what God is like. He reveals God's glory: "his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace" (Revelation 1 v 15), and "his face was like the sun shining in full strength" (v 16). He's the royal Son, who rules with divine wisdom, just like his Father: "The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow" (v 14; Daniel 7 v 9). And because he is the royal Son, Jesus has received all authority to judge. Nothing gets past his gaze, for his "eyes were like a flame of fire" (Revelation 1 v 14). And he will judge swiftly, thoroughly, and fairly, for he will judge by the word of God: "from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword" (v 16; 19 v 11-16).

As the wicked seem to continually prosper and have their way in the world and with the church, we can entrust ourselves to the just Judge. While the nations may rage against God's King, they won't be able to stand against his rule. But we don't need to fear Jesus' coming judgment, because we have entrusted ourselves to God's faithful Priest—one who not only represents God to us, but represents us before God. He himself became the once-for-all sacrifice for repentant sinners: he "freed us from our sins by his blood" (1 v 5). All who trust in Christ will not experience God's judgment, because Jesus has already received God's wrath in our place.

Jesus Speaks to Us

Finally, Jesus speaks God's words. Just as Israel heard the thunderous voice of God on Mount Sinai as "a very loud trumpet blast" (Exodus 19 v 16, 19), so too John hears Jesus speak in "a loud voice like a trumpet" (Revelation 1 v 10). Like Israel, John was overwhelmed when he heard Jesus' voice, for "his voice was like the roar of many waters" (v 15).

Jesus' voice is God's voice; Jesus' word is God's word. All who hear and read and keep his word will be blessed (v 3). This, surely, is a message worth listening to. In fact, the only appropriate response to this vision is to fall down before Jesus in fear and awe as John did (v 17). This Jesus is worthy of all our worship. We must bow down before him, and not before immoral culture, nor tyrannical governments, nor anti-Christian religions. The very dangers our church faces will either tempt us to deny Christ or move us to worship Christ.

And we worship him joyfully, not fearfully: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not.'" What glorious words! Jesus is the all-glorious, risen King, but we, the church, are not to be afraid of him because Jesus is also our Savior, who "died, and ... [is] alive forevermore" (v 18).

Where We're Heading

Following this stunning vision, in Revelation 2 and 3 Jesus goes on to expose seven dangers facing the churches in Asia Minor. Each message follows a similar pattern. First, he restates aspects of this vision that are relevant to each church as it faces its particular danger. Then, Jesus assesses each church, providing either commendation for what they're doing well or rebuke for where they're going wrong, or both. With the assessment, there is usually a call for repentance. But key to all the messages are the promises to overcomers which appear at the end of each message: promises that will be described in greater detail in Revelation 19 to 22.

Because Revelation is a circular letter, each church is to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Thus, the seven dangers are representative of dangers all churches have faced

for the last 2000 years. So, over the next seven chapters, we'll unpack each message in turn. We'll look carefully at the text, and sketch in some helpful historical details. Then we'll explore what these same dangers look like in the life of your church today and, crucially, what to do to avoid them. Responsibility for guarding the church doesn't only lie with pastors and elders, but with every member too—so for that reason, this book is written for *everyone* who cares about their church.

A word of warning: this book will make uncomfortable reading in places. In fact, if it doesn't, it might be because you're not searching your heart hard enough. Most of us are good at seeing the dangers we're least at risk of and how they apply to others. Most of us are better at pointing the finger at our neighbor than we are at ourselves. So approach this book prayerfully, humbly, and thoughtfully—and keep your own church (as opposed to anybody else's) at the forefront of your mind.

And remember that Jesus does not merely expose these seven dangers and exhort us to overcome them in our own strength. Jesus calls us to live by faith in him and not by the sight of our circumstances. Revelation invites us to view this world, our church, and our lives from the perspective of God's throne room. Regardless of how bad things appear in this world, our sovereign God is on his throne (Revelation 4). And regardless of how out of control things appear in our lives, Jesus has received all authority in heaven and on earth and is carrying out God's eternal plan (Revelation 5). Jesus will vindicate his bride (Revelation 19); he will crush every enemy under his feet (Revelation 20); and he will lead us to our eternal inheritance (Revelation 21 – 22).

SEVEN DANGERS FACING YOUR CHURCH

Forewarned by and forearmed with this prophecy, we can endure patiently in this world by faith in Christ. Be under no illusions: your church is in danger. But be in no doubt: you can overcome.