

# THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

## Revelation 1-3

### Author and Canonicity of Revelation

Evidence of the acceptance of the Book of Revelation in the Western church is displayed quite early.

- In Rome in A.D. 150, Justin Martyr names the book and its author, the apostle John (*Dialogue with Trypho* 81).
- In A.D. 170, the Muratorian Canon says that the Apocalypse of John was universally recognized in Rome (Swete, 1908:cx).
- A.D. 180, Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.1; 4.20.11; 5.35.2) accepted Revelation as Scripture
- A.D. 210, Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 3.14.3) accepted Revelation as Scripture
- c. A.D. 210, Hippolytus (*de Ant.* 36) accepted Revelation as Scripture
- c. A.D. 200, Clement of Alexandria (*Who Is the Rich Man Who Shall Be Saved?* 42; *Miscellanies* 6.106-7) accepted Revelation as Scripture
- A.D. 229, Origen (*Commentary on John* 5.3) accepted Revelation as Scripture.
- A.D. 394, Jerome: “The Apocalypse of John has as many secrets as words. I am saying less than the book deserves. It is beyond all praise; for multiple meanings lie hidden in each single word” (*Letter* 53.9; translated in Caird, 1966:2).

In the fourth century, Eusebius stated that some accepted Revelation as canonical, but that he and others refer to it as a questioned book (*Eccl. Hist.* 4.26). His attitude may have been influenced by the use of the book by millenarians, who believed in a literal reign of Christ on the earth. Eusebius opposed the millenarians.

Thus, it is evident that Revelation was accepted early in the West.

**To the church in the East, Revelation was not well known for four centuries, but it was not without defenders, even in the East.**

- It was not included in the Fifth Century Peshitta Version of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>
- Third Council of Carthage (397 AD) listed it as canonical.  
”Of the New Testament: four books of the Gospels, one book of the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul, one epistle of the same [writer] to the Hebrews, two Epistles of the Apostle Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude, one book of the Apocalypse of John.”<sup>2</sup>
- Athanasius of Alexandria (298-373 AD), in his 367 Easter Letter included Revelation in his list of books of the New Testament canon.  
“Continuing, I must without hesitation mention the scriptures of the New Testament; they are the following: the four Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, after them the Acts of the Apostles and the seven so-called catholic epistles of the apostles -- namely, one of James, two of Peter, then three of John and after these one of Jude. In addition there are fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul written in the following order: the first to the Romans, then two to the Corinthians and then after these the one to the Galatians, following it the one to the Ephesians, thereafter the one

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<sup>1</sup> The Peshitta is a collection of Aramaic manuscripts of the Bible. Aramaic was the most common “shared language” among people of the Near East and Middle East for many centuries. This includes the years immediately before and after the earthly ministry of Jesus. For this reason, the Peshitta was an important early translation of the Bible, widely distributed and widely used. The earliest available manuscripts date to the AD 400s.

<sup>2</sup> *Enchiridium Biblicum* 8-10

to the Philippians and the one to the Colossians and two to the Thessalonians and the epistle to the Hebrews and then immediately two to Timothy , one to Titus and lastly the one to Philemon. Yet further the Revelation of John.

These are the springs of salvation, in order that he who is thirsty may fully refresh himself with the words contained in them. In them alone is the doctrine of piety proclaimed. Let no one add anything to them or take anything away from them...<sup>3</sup>

### UNDERSTANDING THE APOCALYPSE

Throughout history, there have been four different schools of thought on how to understand the Book of Revelation:

- **The Preterist view** states that the events recorded in the Revelation were fulfilled, for the most part, in 70 AD, with the fall of Jerusalem and the desecration of the Jewish temple. The Babylon of Revelation is Rome (14:8; 16:19;17:5;18:2;18:10;18:21) during the reign of Vespasian. The antichrist is the Roman emperor<sup>4</sup>
- **The Historical view** states that Revelation is a symbolic presentation of church history, from the First Century AD through the end of the age. The letters to the seven churches, in chapters two and three, are letters to those First/Second Century churches. Chapter four begins the history of the Church that follows the First Century.<sup>5</sup> The final chapters describe the ultimate victory of Christ and the beginning of life in New Jerusalem.
- **The Futurist View** states that the seven letters to the seven churches represent the seven periods of church history, which is followed by the rapture of the church, seven years of tribulation, and a millennial rule of Christ on the earth. This view was first popularized by J. Nelson Darby (1800 AD-1882 AD), who left the Plymouth Brethren to become one of the founders of the Exclusive Brethren, in which Darby's views were advanced. He influenced Cyrus I. Scofield who produced the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which presented Darby's Futurist View. Scofield's Bible caused the Futurist View to gain prominence in the United States. Scofield influenced C. Perry Chafer who founded Dallas Theological Seminary, which, to this present day, teaches the Futurist View of the end times.<sup>6 7</sup>
- **The Idealist View** uses the allegorical method to interpret the Book of Revelation. This view was first introduced by Origen (285 AD-254 AD) and gained prominence through Augustine (354 AD – 420 AD). According to this view, the events of Revelation are not tied to any historical events. The imagery of the book symbolically presents the struggle between God and Satan throughout the ages. In this struggle, the saints are symbolically

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ntcanon.org/Athanasius.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive treatment of this view and a strong defense of the Preterist view, see <https://preteristadvocate.com>

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough presentation of this view, see B. W. Johnson, *Vision of the Ages* (St. Louis, Christian Publishing Co.) 1881

<sup>6</sup> For collections of Darby on this subject, see, <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/john-nelson-darby-jnd/collected-writings-of-j-n-darby-prophetic-1/lub13-15227>

<sup>7</sup> Louis T. Talbot, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1937, is an excellent example of this understanding of the Apocalypse.

described as being persecuted and martyred but one day, they will receive vindication. In the end, God is victorious.<sup>8</sup>

In our present study, we will not be involved in seeking to determine the correct view on the Book of Revelation. We do, however, accept the position that the letters to the seven churches were addressed to the churches named in the letters – churches that existed in the time that John was exiled on the Island of Patmos.

**Chapter One is a preface to the letters to the seven churches. Therefore, we will spend time examining Chapter One before proceeding to the study of the seven letters.**

### THE INTRODUCTION: 1:1-3

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His slaves, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His slave John,<sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.<sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

The Greek term rendered as, *revelation*, is ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*). The book often is referred to as the *apocalypse*, rather than, the *revelation*. The Greek term ἀποκάλυψις refers to, *uncovering, disclosing, revealing*.<sup>9</sup>

Apocalypses usually were written at a time of crisis and danger. One of their purposes was to strengthen the believers at a time of pending persecution and to encourage them to stand firm.

Immediately, in the first verse we are confronted with a translation issue that often is displayed in English versions of the New Testament.

- *God gave Him to show to His slaves.* The term rendered as *slaves*, is δούλοις (*doulois*), which is the dative plural of δοῦλος (*doulos*).
- *communicated it by His angel to His slave John.* The term rendered as *slave*, is δούλω (*doulōh*), which is the dative singular of δοῦλος (*doulos*)

δοῦλος is the Greek term referring to slaves. Most English versions avoid literally rendering the term because of an aversion to what the term implies.

- KJV, ESV, RSV, & NIV *servant of Jesus Christ*
- NKJV, NAS, & NAU *bondservant of Jesus Christ*

The NET & NLT render the term literally, *slave*.

The term, δοῦλος, simply means, *slave*. The Greek term for *servant* is διάκονος (*diakonos*).

The NAS is the version that we are quoting in our study, but we have taken the liberty of rendering the term literally in the citation which we began this section – i.e. *slave*.

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<sup>8</sup> William Milligan presents this view in *The Book of Revelation* (London, Hodder and Stoughton) 1889

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, *Analytical Concordance of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House) 1991

The sequence of the communication catches our attention:

- God the Father,
- gave to Jesus, the Son, this revelation,
- which an angel was to impart to Jesus' slave, John.
- John was to pass on the message to Jesus' slaves, i.e., the members of the Church.

John declared that he had been faithful in communicating everything that was shown to him. This is followed by the pronouncement of a blessing on all who hear and heed the truths that John will impart in this apocalypse.

The statement, *blessed is he who reads and those who hear*, is more literally translated, *blessed is he who is reading*<sup>10</sup> and *those who are hearing*,<sup>11</sup> Therefore, John intended for the document to be read aloud by a reader in the assembly of each of the seven churches to which the document is addressed.

John's statement, *for the time is near*, clearly indicates that John believed that his whole prophetic/apocalyptic vision would be fulfilled in the near future. It is important to keep in mind what Jesus said about the end times,

- *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Matthew 24:36)*
- *"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25:13)*

#### **THE CHURCHES TO WHICH THE APOCALYPSE IS ADDRESSED 1:4a**

*John to the seven churches that are in Asia:*

John refers to the Roman province of Asia, rather than the region to which that name is given today. The Churches are named in verse 11.

#### **JOHN'S OPENING GREETING TO THE CHURCHES 1:4b-8**

*Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*

*To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,<sup>6</sup> and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

<sup>7</sup> *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen.*

<sup>8</sup> *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

Notice three-fold source of the grace and peace that John declares is extended to his readers:

- The Father, who was, and is and is to come
- The Seven Spirits who are before the throne
- Jesus Christ

<sup>10</sup> (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων - *ho anaginohskoh* – present, active, masculine, nominative, singular, participle of the verb, ἀναγινώσκω *to read*)

<sup>11</sup> οἱ ἀκούοντες *oi akountes* – present, active, masculine nominative plural of the verb, ἀκούω *to hear*)

**The question naturally arises, to whom or what does the expression, *the seven Spirits who are before His throne*, refer?** The same terminology occurs three other times in this document:<sup>12</sup>

- Revelation 3:1 *"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*
- Revelation 4:5 *And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;*
- Revelation 5:6 *And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.*

There is no denying that the answer to this question requires interpretation.

Several arguments have been presented, stating that the terminology refers to the Holy Spirit.

Many exegetes consider this terminology to refer to seven-fold description the Holy Spirit, in Isaiah 11:1-3, which prophesied the descending of the Holy Spirit on Jesus when he was immersed in the Jordan River to begin His earthly ministry (Luke 3:22).

*Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of Yahweh will rest on Him, (1) The spirit of wisdom, (2) and understanding, (3) The spirit of counsel, (4) and strength, (5) The spirit of knowledge, (6) and the fear of the LORD (7) And He will delight in the fear of the LORD*

Consistent with this view is that presented by Archbishop Trench, the "Holy Spirit is regarded here not so much in personal unity as in his manifold energies; just as light, being one, yet in the prism separate itself into seven colors."<sup>13</sup>

Another argument that contends for this identification is based on the fact that the terminology is here presented in a Trinitarian sense, therefore it must refer to the Holy Spirit.

Some argue that seven is the number of perfection and therefore it refers to the perfect Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

One challenge to the arguments that the expression refers to the Holy Spirit is the fact that the term in the text is plural, *spirits who are before His throne*, not the singular, *spirit who is before His throne*.

Because any solution to this problem requires a questionable arbitrary decision, I (JWG) cannot, in good conscience, declare with any certainty the identity of the seven spirits mentioned in the Revelation.

**Not only has He released us from our sins by His blood, but. *He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.***

<sup>12</sup> Three times in the Gospels, seven Satanic spirits are described: Matthew 12:45; Luke 8:2; 11:26.

<sup>13</sup> Archbishop Trench, *Letters to the Seven Churches* page 9 as quoted in G. F. Glasson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary, The Revelation of John* (London, Cambridge University Press) 1965 page 17-18

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-spirits-in-revelation/>

NOTE: The KJV and NKJV state in verse 6, *He has made us kings*. The Greek term is βασιλεία (*basileia*).<sup>15</sup> Although in some unusual contexts, the term might be construed to mean, *to make someone king*, the term is more properly rendered, *kingdom*. There is another Greek term that is understood as *to make someone king*. That term is βασιλεύς (*basileus*).

John is stating the same truth that is declared in I Peter 2:9, *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession*.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we can be born from above. Note: John 3:3 & 7, which most versions render as, *born again*, literally states, *born from above* (γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν *gennaythay anothen*). Through the atoning work of Christ, a new kingdom was born, and those who have experienced the spiritual new birth are the new race that inhabits that kingdom.

Those born into this kingdom are priests to Jesus' God and Father. In that priestly role, members of this kingdom preach the Gospel and by immersing converts, perform a priestly role. Another priestly duty of the redeemed is the wonderful privilege and weighty responsibility of interceding for the world and all of its inhabitants.

John's recitation of the blessings given to believers by Jesus Christ, brings forth praise and thanksgiving for what Christ has done for us: *to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen*.

Verse 7 presents one of the main themes of the Apocalypse – the return of Christ and events associated with it. *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen*.

This is a good example of the use of the Old Testament in New Testament quotes. The first part of this verse harks back to Daniel 7:13 and the latter part to Zechariah 12:10

*"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming ... (Daniel 7:13a)*

*"And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born. (Zechariah 12:10)*

**These verses bring to mind the statement of Jesus, concerning his coming and the end of the age as recorded by both Matthew and Luke:**

*"For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,<sup>39</sup> and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.<sup>40</sup> "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left.<sup>41</sup> "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.<sup>42</sup> "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:38-42)*

*"I tell you, on that night there will be two men in one bed; one will be taken, and the other will be left.<sup>35</sup> "There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken, and the other will be left.<sup>36</sup> "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left." (Luke 17:34-36)*

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<sup>15</sup> Liddel-Scott, *Greek Lexicon, abridged* (London, Oxford University Press) revised 1940, entry 8046

Because the earth is a globe, and there are different time zones on different portions of the globe, when Jesus comes, it will be

- Nighttime for some – they will be in bed
- Early morning for some – women will be grinding the meal for the day ahead
- Daytime for some – men will be working in the field.

How those on different sides of the globe will see the coming Christ, is something that defies explanation. We will have to wait for the event to see how this is made possible.

**Verse 8 – *I am the Alpha and the Omega***, refers to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is an idiom meaning, *the first, the last, and all inclusive*. This is reminiscent of Isaiah 44:6,

*"Thus says Yahweh, the King of Israel And his Redeemer, the Yahweh of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.*

### **JOHN'S LOCATION AND CIRCUMSTANCE AT THE TIME OF HIS WRITING THE APOCALYPSE 1:9**

***I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.***

The island of Patmos is about 7 ½ miles long and 6 miles wide. The island is volcanic, and it was devoid of trees at the time of John's exile (later generations, because of the island's significance to Christianity, planted many palm trees on the island).

During the reign of Domitian, it was the custom to send better-class criminals to various islands for punishment. Those who refused to worship the emperor as a god, were among those so banished. There is a tradition that prisoners sent to this small island had to work in quarries, although there is no solid evidence that this was so. A cave on the island is claimed to be the site in which John received the Apocalypse. That cave has been the site of spiritual pilgrimages for several centuries.

John, having been banished to this island because of his boldness in adhering to his faith in Jesus Christ, could write that he was, *fellow partaker in the tribulation.... because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

### **JOHN'S VISION OF THE GLORIFIED CHRIST 1:10-20**

<sup>10</sup> ***I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,*** <sup>11</sup> ***saying, "Write in a book what you see, 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."***

<sup>12</sup> ***And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;*** <sup>13</sup> ***and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.*** <sup>14</sup> ***And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire;*** <sup>15</sup> ***and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.***

<sup>16</sup> ***And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.***

<sup>17</sup> *And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,"<sup>18</sup> and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.*

<sup>19</sup> *"Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.*

<sup>20</sup> *"As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.* This is the only time in the New Testament where the term, *Lord's Day*, is used. Later, Christians used this term for Sunday, the day on which the early church met each week. That being true, we assume that John is stating that the day in which he received these visions was on Sunday.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, the Greek term for *Lord's* in the expression, *Lord's Day*, is κυρικῆ (kurikay).<sup>17</sup> From this Greek term, the Norse, and subsequently the Scots and northern English, called God's assembly, the *Kirk*. Finns call the assembly *Kirkko*. The term evolved into the English term, *Church*.

#### THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF THE APOCALYPSE<sup>18</sup>



<sup>16</sup> Paul used the term, *Lord's Supper* in I Corinthians 11:20. Then, in 16:2 he implies that the church met weekly, on the first day of the week.

<sup>17</sup> Dative singular of κυρικός (kurikos), meaning, *belonging to the Lord*.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.returnofelias.org/post/revelation-the-seven-churches>



There were other churches in the province of Asia. The seven churches addressed in the letter were important posts on the Roman postal circuit that followed the well-established Roman road.<sup>19</sup>

The pattern of seven occurred in the seven spirits and the seven churches, and now, seven golden lampstands and seven stars.

The expression, *son of man*, indicates that the individual whom John saw had the appearance of a human, with all of the added accoutrements described. The description of the *son of man* in Daniel 7:13, includes the same accoutrements as described in this scene.

*"I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow, And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. (Daniel 7:9)*

Feet like burnished brass is reminiscent of Daniel 10:6

*His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. (Daniel 10:6)*

*His voice was like the sound of many waters* mirrors what Ezekiel described as the sound of the voice of God when His Glory appeared before the Israelites.

*and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. (Ezekiel 43:2)*

*Out of His mouth came a two-edged sword,* is reflects Hebrews 4:12 and Isaiah 49:2

*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

*And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me, And He has also made Me a select arrow; He has hidden Me in His quiver. (Isaiah 49:2)*

Thus, many dramatic and striking Old Testament descriptions of Yahweh are displayed in John's vision of Jesus. Even so, John was not referring to the Old Testament episodes, he was reporting what he, personally, saw.

When he saw the glorified Jesus, in overwhelming awe, John fell at Jesus' feet as a dead man. This is the John, who had leaned upon the breast of Jesus Christ at the last supper (John 13:25; 21:20).

Again, we note the similarity between John's reaction and the reaction of others who had a visual encounter with God.

*.....Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking. (Ezekiel 1:28)*

*Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5)*

The glorified Jesus declared, *I have the keys of death and of Hades.*

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<sup>19</sup> William Ramsey, Chapter 15, <https://ccel.org/ccel/ramsay/letters/letters.xvii.html>

In Greek mythology, *Hades*<sup>20</sup> originally was the name of the god of the underworld. In time, the term came to be applied to his abode. Greeks had various traditions and mythological stories about this realm. Even though the Greeks mythological accounts did vary in many ways, all of them did present realm in a similar manner. In all of them, Hades was the realm of the spirits of the dead. In one version, when the spirit was separated from the body, the spirit was taken to the shore of the river Styx. The boatman, Charon, was waiting to transport the spirit to the isle of Hades. He had to be paid a fee – an *obol*, a Greek coin. When a body received a proper burial, an *obol* was placed on the eyelid or under the tongue, as payment to Charon. Those who did not receive a proper burial were destined to wander the earth as ghosts.

Hades came to be the New Testament term used for the destiny of the spirit, at the time, of death, where spirits wait for the end of the age.

Unfortunately, the KJV did not make distinction between *hades* and *Gehenna*. *Gehenna* is the name of the place of the eternally damned. In English *Gehenna* is rendered as hell. Hades is mentioned ten times in the New Testament: Matt. 11:23; Matt. 16:18; Lk. 10:15; Lk. 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18; Rev. 6:8; Rev. 20:13, 14.

There are two portions of *hades*. Those who die in Christ will be in the company of Christ.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, *But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;* (Philippians 1:23)

To the thief on the cross, was dying with Jesus on Calvary, Jesus gave a similar promise, *And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"<sup>43</sup> And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:42-43)

Those who die outside of Christ, are in another portion of Hades. The portion where the damned are awaiting judgement is called Tartarus (prison) in II Peter 2:4: *For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into Tartarus and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;* (literal translation)

In the account of the rich man and Lazarus, although the story does take some liberties in the parable, the rich man, in *hades*, was in torment,

*"And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom.* (Luke 16:23)

Christ stated that He had the keys of death and Hades. He is the one who will lead the spirits out of Hades, to appear before the judgment seat, where those who are his will be judged to determine their reward. Those who are not in Christ will be judged on the record of their deeds and the lake of fire (*Gehenna*) awaits those whose names are not in the **Lamb's book of Life**.

Here are verses that mention the book of life:

- (Philippians 4:3) *Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*
- (Revelation 3:5) *'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.*

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<sup>20</sup> Greek – ᾠδης (*hahdays*)

- (Revelation 13:8) *And all who dwell on the earth will worship him (the beast – verse 4ff), everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.*  
(Revelation 17:8) *"The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.*
- (Revelation 20:12) *And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.*
- (Revelation 20:15) *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*
- (Revelation 21:27) *and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*
- (Revelation 22:19) *and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

A challenging question is presented in the statement, ***the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.***

As was true of the seven spirits, we have to ask. "who are the angels of the seven churches?" Interestingly, some commentaries don't even address the question.

The English term, *angel*, is an Anglicization of the Greek term, ἄγγελος (*angellos*). The term simply means, *messenger*.

**Scripture is filled with examples of this term's being used of heavenly spirit beings whom God sent or commissioned in some way to be His agent to various individuals.**

For example, Hebrews 1:13-14 describes angels as God's ministers whom He has sent to minister to those who will inherit salvation.

*But to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies A footstool for Thy feet" ?<sup>14</sup> Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:13-14)*

An angel brought the message to Zachariah that his wife would give birth to John the Baptist, and later announced to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus. (Luke 1:11-19, 27-35)

**Scripture mentions guardian angels:**

- Michael, who is described in Scripture as an archangel (Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7) is portrayed as the guardian angel over Israel:  
*"However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince. (Daniel 10:21)*  
*"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. (Daniel 12:1)*

- Jesus stated that children have a guardian angel:  
*"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)*

Because of this term's being used to refer to spiritual messengers, through whom God communicates and relates to humans, we must ask, are the seven angels spirit beings who are guardian/messengers related to specific churches in Asia?

**The term also is used for human messengers, both in Greek literature,<sup>21</sup> and in Scripture.**

**Scriptural examples of its use in reference to human messengers:**

- *Then Jacob sent messengers (ἄγγελος) before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. ....And the messengers (ἄγγελος) returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." (Genesis 32:3,6 Septuagint)*
- It is used of the disciples of Jesus whom He sent ahead to prepare the way for him when He passed through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem. *and He sent messengers (ἄγγελος) on ahead of Him. And they went, and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make arrangements for Him. (Luke 9:52)*
- It is used of John's disciples who approached Jesus, in behalf of John, to ask Jesus if He were the messiah. *And when the messengers (ἄγγελος) of John had left, He began to speak to the multitudes about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? (Luke 7:24)*
- It is used of John the Baptist, the prophesied prophet who would go before Jesus to prepare the way before him *"This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger (ἄγγελος) before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27)*

So, the question remains, are the messengers heavenly beings who in some way are related to these seven churches, or are human messengers the recipients of the letters, which they, in turn, will communicate to the church?

Some argue that the term refers to the pastors of these churches, but at this stage of Church development, no church was led by a pastor. Churches were led by a council of elders. The concept of a church's being led by a pastor is a modern concept.

Justin Martyr described a Sunday morning service in which a reader read from the Scriptures.

*"On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then when the reader has ceased, the person presiding verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."<sup>22</sup>*

So, are the messengers those who are the readers in each of the Sunday services?

Of the many explanations offered concerning the identity of the messengers, this is the one that makes the most sense to me (JWG). However, as was true of the seven spirits, I cannot in good conscience declare without question the identity of the seven messengers. Our

<sup>21</sup> Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, the University of Chicago Press) Second Edition 1958, page 7

<sup>22</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*

inability to identify the seven messengers does not impact the messages sent to each of the seven churches, the understanding of which is the goal of our study. The important thing is that Jesus gave to his slave, John, messages for his other slaves, and that is the message of the seven letters to the seven churches.

From this point on, in our study, we will not render the term by its Anglicization, *angels*, but will render the term by its literal translation, *messengers*.

That the seven golden lampstands are the churches is very appropriate. Our Lord, speaking to His disciples, stated, *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* (Matthew 5:14)

However, He also stated, *I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.* (John 8:12)

Then, He later stated, *"We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* (John 9:4-5)

Therefore, as long as Christ was in the world, physically, He was the light of the world. After His ascension, He shone/shines His light through individual Christians, but especially through the local churches. Every local church has the important responsibility of making certain that it is under the lordship of Christ and being a light in its local community.

The fact that the night comes to all of us at death, is one understanding of the statement, *night is coming, when no man can work*. Other eschatological understandings have been put forth as the understanding of *night*. The important point of the statement is that every follower of Jesus should be diligent in doing the works of God – shining the light of Christ – as long as that Christian is alive and able to do the works assigned to him by Christ. This is especially pertinent for those churches in countries where Christians are free to display their faith, realizing that the time could come when persecution could limit that freedom as is true in much of the world – and the agenda of some secularists in America.

As we proceed to study the seven letters, in each instance, we first will spend time getting acquainted with the city in which each church existed. By so doing, hopefully, we can get a feel for what each church faced and the relevance of the topics addressed in each letter.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

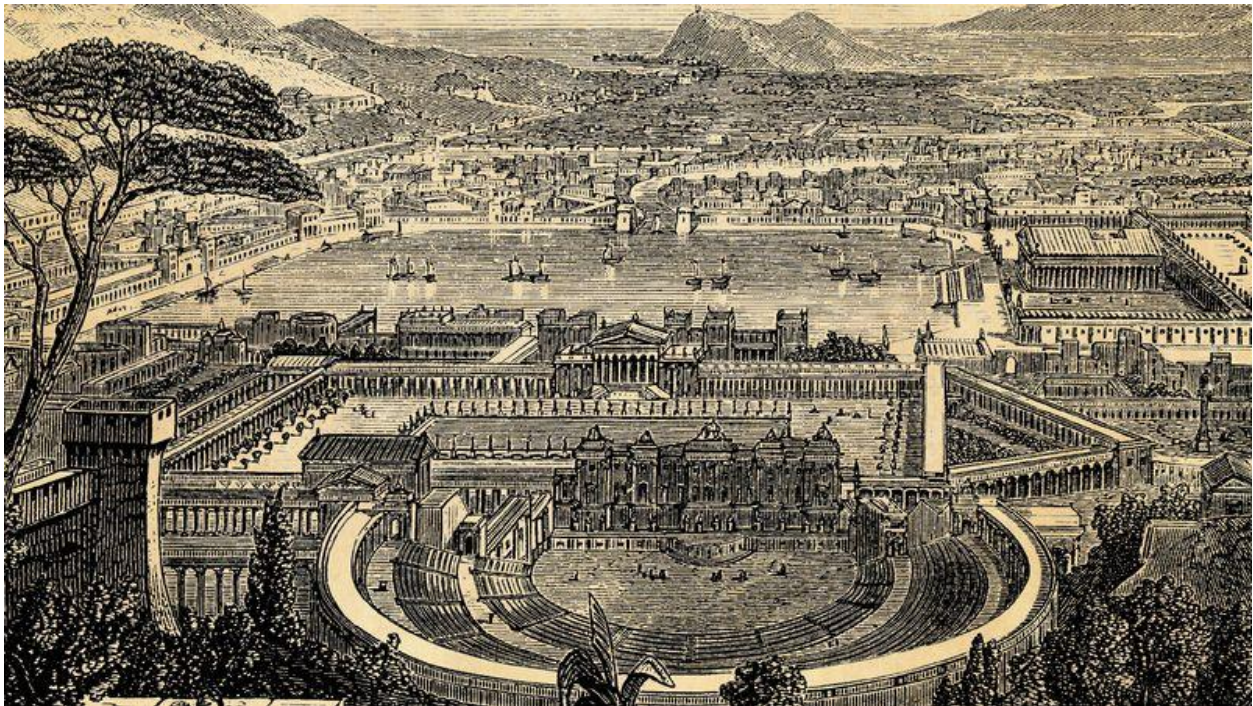
### EPHESUS

Ephesus was located near modern-day Selçuk, Turkey. Under Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD), Ephesus became the leading city of the Roman province of Asia.

The triumphal arch (built 3 BC) and the aqueduct, (built 4–14 AD) initiated a long series of public buildings, ornamental and useful, that made Ephesus the most-impressive Greek city in the early Christian era.

#### An archeologist's drawing of First Century Athens.<sup>23</sup>

The amphitheatre in which protest against the teachings of Paul took place (Acts 19) is in the foreground. The Temple of Artemis is in the middle right of the drawing.



One of the most important elements of the city was its role as the center of the worship of Artemis (Romans worshipped the same goddess, but called the goddess, *Diana*<sup>24</sup>). The temple of Artemis was serviced by silversmiths who produced and sold silver shrines of Artemis. It was these silversmiths, led by the silversmith Demetrius, that stirred up the riot described in Acts 19.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ephesus>

<sup>24</sup> The KJV and NKJV took the liberty of rendering Artemis (Ἄρτεμις) as, *Diana*, the Roman name for the Goddess.



### Artemis

In ancient Greek religion and mythology, Artemis was the goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, wild animals, nature, vegetation, childbirth, care of children, and chastity. In later times, she was identified with Selene, the personification of the Moon. She was often said to roam the forests and mountains, attended by her entourage of nymphs.

In Greek tradition, Artemis was the daughter of Zeus, as the result of an extramarital affair that Zeus had with Leto. Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo. Because the twins were the products of an extramarital liaison, Zeus' wife, Hera, forbade her husband's paramour, Leto, from giving birth anywhere on land. Only the island of Delos gave refuge to Leto, allowing her to give birth to her children.

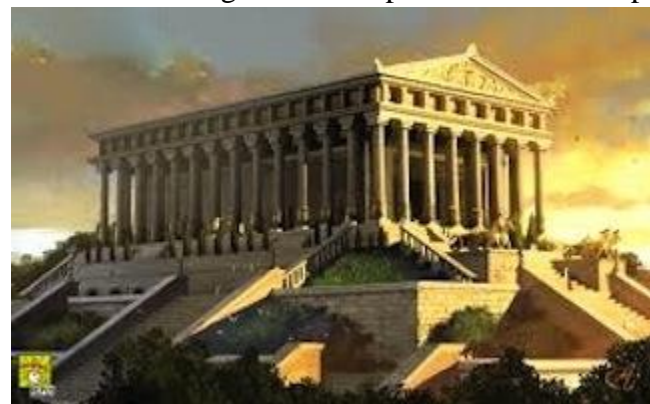
Usually, Artemis is described as the twin to be born first, who then proceeded to assist her mother, Leto, in the birth of the second child, Apollo. Artemis was a kourotrophic (child-nurturing) deity, i.e. the patron and protector of young children, especially young girls. Artemis was worshipped as one of the primary goddesses of childbirth and midwifery along with Eileithyia and Zeus' wife, Hera.

Artemis was also a patroness of healing and disease, particularly among women and children. Greeks believed that she sent both good health and illness upon women and children.

Artemis was one of the three major virgin goddesses alongside Athena and Hestia. Artemis preferred to remain an unmarried maiden and was one of the three Greek goddesses over whom Aphrodite (the goddess of lust and romance) had no power.

The Greek poet Antipater of Sidon who compiled the list of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World in c. 140 AD, described the Temple of Artemis/Diana in Ephesus in his *Greek Anthology* 9.58: "I have seen **the wall of lofty Babylon** which is a road for chariots, and the **statue of Zeus** by the Alpheus and the **hanging gardens**, and the **colossus of Rhodes**, and the huge labour of **the high pyramids** and the **vast tomb of Mausolus**; but when I saw **the house of Artemis** that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, 'Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.'"

Artist's rendering of the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus<sup>25</sup>



As Christianity began to develop in Ephesus, various traditions and beliefs developed. Ephesus is the traditional site of John's final years. One local tradition was that Ephesus was the last home

<sup>25</sup> drivethruhistory.com

of the Virgin Mary. Tradition states that Mary lived near the city with the apostle John, to whom Jesus, while on the cross, had consigned the care of Mary (John 19:26-27).

The church at Ephesus was established by Paul (Acts 18:18-21; 19:1ff) By the time that John wrote the seven letters to the seven churches, in spite of initial opposition, Christianity had become well established in Ephesus.

## THE LETTER

### Revelation 2:1-7

#### Commendation for adhering to the truth and rejecting false apostles - verses 1-2

***"To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: <sup>2</sup> 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;***

Christ's intimate knowledge of the churches is described as, *the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands* (the lampstands earlier identified as churches 1:20). The description resembles that of a gardener walking through his/her garden.

The fact that He holds the seven stars – messengers – in His right hand indicates His care and oversight of those who are to bear the message to each church.

The commendation, *you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false*, is a commendation that every church should seek to merit. False apostles are people who masquerade as Christian leaders, get other people to follow them, and then lead them astray.

In II Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul addressed the problem of false apostles invading the Corinthian church. He described the false apostles as *those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about* (verse 12). Paul exhorted the church to recognize the error that had crept into their midst. He contrasted his selfless service with that of the *super-apostles* (verse 5) who were seducing the church with their smooth speech and apparent wisdom. These impostors were pretending to be true servants of Christ, but they did not know the Lord. They were deceivers, preying on gullible Christians in Corinth to profit themselves and boost their ego. Paul chided the church that they *even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face* (verse 20). He even compared these impostors to Satan himself, who also *masquerades as an angel of light* (verse 14).

Paul had warned the Ephesian elders about false apostles, when he summoned them to meet him at Miletus. He told them, *I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them* (Acts 20:29). As seen in the opening paragraph of the letter before us, they heeded his words and put to the test those who claimed to be apostles.

False teachers and false apostles have been plentiful throughout the history of the church. They still infiltrate unsuspecting churches and have even led whole denominations into heresy and apostasy (see 1 Timothy 4:1–4). Scripture gives us clear warning, to which the contemporary church must give heed. I John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”



The following is a greatly edited and expanded discussion presented by [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org)<sup>26</sup> of some of the ways that false apostles can be identified:

1. False apostles often deny important truths about the identity and deity of Jesus Christ. In New Testament times, Gnosticism was rampant. In his first Letter John (1 John 4:3–4) John warned his readers against Gnostic teaching; the test, he says, is Christological: *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.*

There are many ways a spirit may deny that Jesus is the Christ. From demonic cults to denominations that have veered away from the gospel, evil spirits are always behind the slander of Jesus. Any teacher who attempts to take away from or add to Jesus' finished work on the cross for our salvation is a false prophet (John 19:30; Acts 4:12).

As was true in that era, false apostles abound today.

One influential movement that is impacting the evangelical churches today is that put forth by Bill Johnson and The Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry. Johnson argues that Jesus had no power in Himself, it was all the Holy Spirit and that every Christian can have the same spirit and do everything that Jesus did. In his book, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, Johnson wrote,

“JESUS COULD NOT HEAL THE SICK.<sup>27</sup> Neither could He deliver the tormented from demons or raise the dead. To believe otherwise is to ignore what He said about Himself, and more importantly, to miss the purpose of His self-imposed restriction to live as a man. Jesus Christ said of Himself, ‘The Son can do nothing’ (John 5:19).’ ...He had no supernatural capabilities, whatever.”<sup>28</sup>

Johnson ignores the rest of Jesus' statement, as well as the context in which the statement was made. Here is the entire passage.

*For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.*

*Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them,*

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.*

*For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel.*

*For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*

*For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (John 5:18-23)*

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/false-apostles.html>

<sup>27</sup> Caps are Johnson's

<sup>28</sup> Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, expanded edition (Shippensburg, PA, Destiny Image Publishers Inc.) 2013 Page 29

Jesus clearly said that when He saw what the Father was doing in a given situation, then He, Jesus, did it. Jesus does not indicate that He did not have the power to do it. He did what He knew was the will of the Father.

Verse 21 states specifically that *"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."*

This is but one of the many doctrines being put forth by false apostles today. It is important for the elders of each local church to heed Paul's exhortation given to the Ephesian elders when he called them to meet with him at Miletus.

2. False apostles often are motivated by their greed, lust, or power. II Timothy 3:1–8 describes such teachers,

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.*

*They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.*

3. False apostles distort or deny the Bible as God's infallible, inspired Word (II Timothy 3:16). In Galatians 1:8–9 Paul counters legalism with these strong words: *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

The inspired writings of the apostles are the Word of God, and no one has a right to change their message.

I know of an instance in which a very influential leader in the Charismatic Movement in Tulsa gave a prophecy that contradicted Scripture. When a member of the church staff confronted him, he said, "My prophecies are equal to Scripture." That staff member immediately resigned his position in the church.

4. False apostles usually refuse to make themselves subject to spiritual authorities, but consider themselves the final authority (Hebrews 13:7; 2 Corinthians 10:12). They will often adopt lofty-sounding titles for themselves, such as "Bishop," "Apostle," "Reverend," or "Father." This does *not* mean that every person carrying such a title is a false prophet, but rather, evil impostors often love lofty titles and will self-title to gain a hearing.

I know of one instance in which a new church was formed on a college campus in Indiana. The church sought to learn what the apostolic church was like and be a true, New Testament Church. At one point, one of the leaders of the group encountered a man who said, "You cannot be a New Testament Church unless you are under the authority of an apostle – and, by the way, I am one." He sought to become some sort of a controlling authority over the new church.

False apostles can arise anywhere the Word of God does not reign supreme. From organized churches to home Bible studies, we must always be on guard against "new teachings" or "revelations" that are not subject to the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

### **Ephesus is commended for not giving in to the opposition – verse 3**

*and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.*

Given the outburst against the teaching of Paul, when the Ephesian church was in its embryonic state, we wonder what sort of opposition the church did face, in its early years. Obviously, it did not allow itself to be intimidated by hard times, whatever they may have been.

So, thus far we have seen the picture of a church that seems to be exactly what Christ would have desired a church to be. However.....

**Although staunchly orthodox, and faithful in the face of opposition, the church at Ephesus had been exclusively focused on doctrine, and failed to focus on a relationship with Christ – verses 4-5**

*<sup>4</sup> 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.*

The faithful orthodoxy of this church was insufficient without an emphasis on a relationship with Christ. Genuine Christianity is not just a religion of rules and doctrines. Christianity is a living relationship with Christ.

Jesus declared, *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides<sup>29</sup> in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.* (John 15:5-6)

Paul wrote to the Colossians concerning the source of the riches of glory, *to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* (Colossians 1:27)

Paul reminded the Corinthians of the intimate relationship that genuine Christians have with the Holy Spirit, *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?* (1 Corinthians 6:19)

As is true in all of the holy writings, the word describing the love that God has toward man and that man has toward God is ἀγάπη (*agapay*). In early studies we have pointed out that this term does not necessary imply affection or emotion. It is a volitional word, requiring an act. Friberg's lexicon describes this term,

“...especially as an attitude of appreciation resulting from a conscious evaluation and choice; used of divine and human *love, devotion.*”<sup>30</sup>

The difference between what they did at first and what they were doing when the letter was written was in the spirit in which they were done. Earlier, these things were done with a sense being motivated by and in union with Christ. When this letter was written, their deeds had become just practiced behavior and adherence to truth. They had become members of the club and were going through the ceremonies and displaying the behaviors that defined their membership.

<sup>29</sup> The Greek term rendered as *abides*, is, μένω (*menoh*), which literally is, *remain*

<sup>30</sup> Friberg, entry 120

It is possible to go through all of the motions of Christian behaviour, observing the weekly Lord's supper, etc. as just some sort of routine, without a sense of being in an abiding relationship with Christ.

It is important for each Christian, especially Church leaders, to spend time in prayer and personal devotional fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said concerning those who do not abide in Him - *he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned...*

The Lord declared the same truth to the Ephesian Church, *Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.*

### **The Glorified Lord returns to a commendation of the church – verse 6**

*'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

We now face another question – who were the Nicolaitans? The precise answer to this question is not easy to achieve. They are mentioned in many early writings of the Church, including, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Epiphanius and Theodoret. All of these state that the origin of the of this sect and its heresies was the Nicolas who was one of the seven deacons ordained by the Jerusalem Church (Acts 6:5).

According to this view, Nicolas, abandoned his beautiful wife and offered her to any who wanted to enjoy her. The sect became known for its fornication and debauchery, with partners being exchanged in turn.<sup>31</sup> Irenaeus wrote,

“The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, [when they are represented] as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.”<sup>32</sup>

Based upon the many references to the Nicolaitans, even though there is some variation in the descriptions of the sect, it is obvious that they had infected the early church and were a problem, for a number of years.

One other view holds that the name, *Nicolaitan*, refers to those who insisted on being overlords of the people. The word, νίκος (*nikos*) means, *victory*. The term λάος (*layos*) means *people*. According to this view, the name means *conquers of the lay people*. These were the early progenitors of the view that there are some who are clergy and some who are laity.

A modern example of this sort of controlling Nicolaitanism was the Shepherding Movement that had great influence in the Charismatic Movement of the 1970's and for the next two decades.

### **A closing exhortation and promised blessing – verse 7**

*<sup>7</sup> 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'*

The promise harks back to the closing episode in the Garden of Eden.

<sup>31</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, Book VIII, De ecclesia et secta (the church and sects).

<sup>32</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Book I. 26, paragraph 3

*So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)*

The closing portion of the Apocalypse describes the Tree of Life as an important element in the new heavens and the new earth.

- *And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, <sup>2</sup> in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)*
- *Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14)*
- *and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:19)*

The specific details of the role of this tree in the new heavens and new earth cannot be known until those who belong to Our Lord began their existence in that new dwelling place.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

### SMYRNA

Smyrna was thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. Present-day Izmir,<sup>33</sup> Turkey, was built over a portion of the ancient city of Smyrna.

An ancient Greek colony had existed near the site occupied by Smyrna. This colony was destroyed in the Seventh Century B.C. In the Fourth Century, B.C., Alexander the Great commissioned one of his generals, Lysimachus, to oversee the rebuilding of Smyrna. The Smyrna of the apostolic period was the city built by Lysimachus. This city was destroyed by an earthquake in 178 A.D. and rebuilt by the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius. A bust of Aurelius' wife, Faustina, is on one of the columns of the covered main walkway of the city.<sup>34</sup>

The population of the city in New Testament times was approximately 200,00 and it vied with Ephesus and Pergamum for the title, "First of Asia." Smyrna was at the head of a gulf that reached thirty miles inland (see map on page 8 of these notes). Because of its excellent port conditions, its ease of defense, and being the hub of significant roads leading to inland Asia, Smyrna rose to prominence as a thriving center of commerce.

Smyrna also was famous for its reputation as a city of intellectuals, and as a center for sciences and medicine, although Pergamum seemed to be more dominant in the realm of medicine.

The region around the port was flat, but the city was surrounded by a series of hills and mountains that rose, one tier above the other, creating a beautiful environment.

Abundant springs east of the city produced the Meles river, which flowed past the city into the southeast extremity of the gulf. The river was worshipped as a representation of Kaystros, the river god. Homer was born in Smyrna and there was a cave near the Meles River in which Homer spent time while composing some of his most influential writings.

The main streets in Smyrna were broad, well paved, and laid out at right angles. Many were named after some pagan temple that was located on the street. The main street, called, *Golden*, ran straight across the city, from east to west, beginning with the temple of Zeus Akraios on the west slope of Mt. Pagus and ran around the lower slopes of Pagus (like a necklace on a statue) toward Tepecik outside of the city on the west, terminating at the temple of Meter Sipylene,<sup>35</sup> considered to be the patroness of the city.<sup>36</sup>

In 197 B.C., the city suddenly cut its ties with the Greek King Eumenes of Pergamum and allied itself with Rome. Smyrna created a new goddess named *Roma*. This cult deified Rome and as a result Rome and the Roman emperor became objects of worship throughout the Roman Empire. In 23 A.D., the Roman Senate declared Smyrna to be the center of Emperor worship. The refusal to worship the emperor became one of the reasons for the persecution of the church in Smyrna.

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<sup>33</sup> Izmir is an Arabic alphabetic rendering of the Greek, Σμύρνη (*Smurnay*) which became Romanized as Σμύρνα (*Smurnah*)

<sup>34</sup> This structure is called a *stoa*, consisting of a series of columns on one side of the walkway and a wall on the other side.

<sup>35</sup> Other cities worshipped this same goddess under the name of Cybele

<sup>36</sup> The name comes from the nearby Mount Sipylus, which bounds the valley of the city's backlands.

Smyrna was an important destination for Jews of the Jewish diaspora. The Jewish community was a very significant portion of the city's population. Many elaborate synagogues were constructed in Smyrna. This continued until about 150 years ago, when the Jewish population began to dwindle. Today, nine of the most elaborate synagogues are being rebuilt and have become major tourist destinations in western Turkey.

There is no New Testament record that specifically describes the founding of the church at Smyrna. However, the scene depicted in Acts 19 probably is a remote description of the origin of the Church in Smyrna.

*And he (Paul) entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup> But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.<sup>10</sup> And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in (the province of )Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:8-10)*

Although Pergamum was the capital of the province, Smyrna was the commercial/economic center. The relationship would have been similar to that between Washington D.C. and New York City or Chicago, in the U.S.

## **THE LETTER**

### **Revelation 2:8-11**

The Letter to the Church at Smyrna is one of only two that do not contain a warning of God's judgment against them. It also is the shortest letter.

#### **Jesus declares His Divinity and he describes Himself as the Victor over death - verse 8**

*And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

The Lord began each letter with a self-description that was appropriate for the church's setting and His message to the church. Three times in the Apocalypse the Lord referred to Himself as the first and last. This mirrors Isaiah 44:6 and Isaiah 48:12 where God calls Himself the first and last.

*"Thus says Jehovah, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. (Isaiah 44:6)*

*"Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. (Isaiah 48:12)*

In His making this declaration in the opening of the letter to Smyrna, the glorified Jesus was declaring His Divinity.

Since the Church at Smyrna was going to experience extreme persecution and martyrdom, the Lord's self-description as the one who conquered death would have been an encouragement to the believers in that city who were going to face the choice of denying Christ and worshipping the emperor – or facing execution.

#### **The Lord asserted His knowledge of the church's circumstances – verse 9**

*'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

The Greek term rendered, *I know*, is the perfect tense of the verb, οἶδα (*oidah*). The perfect tense refers to a completed action in the past that continues to the present. This means that the Lord knew all about this church, what had been happening to them for a long time and what was happening to them at the time He sent the letter.

Jesus declared to the messenger of Smyrna, that He, Jesus, was fully aware of their tribulation. The Greek term rendered, *tribulation*, is θλίψις (*thiliphis*). The term literally means, *persecution*.<sup>37</sup>

During His third tour of Galilee, in preparation for sending His disciples to visit the cities of Galilee in preparation for His visit, Jesus spoke of the certainty of the persecution they would encounter, along with assuring them of God's full knowledge of the disciples and what was happening to them,

*"And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."<sup>29</sup> "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."<sup>30</sup> "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."<sup>31</sup> "Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:28-31; also, Luke 12:4-7)*

Asserting this truth, Hebrews 13:5-6, quoted Deuteronomy 31:6, 8

*for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"<sup>6</sup> so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"* (Hebrews 13:5b-6)

*"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you....And the LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear, or be dismayed."* (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8)

In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus declared,

*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20)

Stephen, while being stoned to death by the enemies of the cross, experienced that presence of the Lord.

*But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;<sup>56</sup> and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."<sup>57</sup> But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse.<sup>58</sup> And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.<sup>59</sup> And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"* (Acts 7:55-59)

This truth is one of the most astounding and assuring truths in Scripture – Our God knows everything about us, and our churches. He is watching, but not only that, He experiences it with us, for what happens to us, as a result of our faith, also happens to Him. We are the Body of

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<sup>37</sup> Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press) 1957, page 362



Christ (Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 10:17; 12:27; Ephesians 4:12; 5:23; Colossians 12:4; Hebrews 13:3).

The term rendered as *poverty*, is πτώχεία (*ptohkeiah*), which does not refer to a general condition of poverty, but it refers to the poverty of a beggar.<sup>38</sup> Hebrews states that when some of the First Century Christians were persecuted, their persecutors seized their property.

*But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,<sup>33</sup> partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.<sup>34</sup> For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. (Hebrews 10:32-34)*

This statement in Hebrews is in total sync with the statements that Jesus made to the Church at Smyrna.

Yet, in spite of their earthly poverty, they were rich spiritually because of their faith in Christ. Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

- *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (Ephesians 1:3)*
- *and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, (Ephesians 2:6)*

Our salvation is so secure that Paul wrote that it is as if we are already there.

Peter wrote that believers have a reservation in heaven.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, (1 Peter 1:3-4)*

The term, *blasphemy*, refers to slander against God. The Jews sought to deny the source of Jesus' miracles, they slanderously rejected His claim to divinity. At His trial, when Jesus said that He was the Son of God, the Jewish leaders responded with mockery and intimidating violence (Matthew 24:63-67). They slandered Jesus at every opportunity.

Since these were members of a synagogue in Smyrna, who rejected Jesus, their Messiah, they hated Christians. They were a synagogue of Satan.

Paul wrote that real Jews are not simply descendants of Abraham, by flesh and blood, but, rather, spiritual Jews who were actively serving Christ.

*But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;<sup>7</sup> neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named."<sup>8</sup> That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. (Rom/ 9:6-8)*

*Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ....And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:16, 29)*

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<sup>38</sup> BAG, page 728

**Jesus declared that their suffering would continue and even become more severe – verse 10**

*'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.'*

As already noted, Jesus identified the source of their suffering – the Devil, i.e. Satan.

Paul exhorted the Ephesians,

*Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.* <sup>11</sup> *Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.* <sup>12</sup> *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.* (Ephesians 6:10-12)

An important truth that is presented in these statements is that Our Lord allows us to be persecuted. Peter wrote,

*Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ... Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;* <sup>13</sup> *but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.* <sup>14</sup> *If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.* <sup>15</sup> *By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;* <sup>16</sup> *but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.* (I Peter 4:1, 12-16)

The Christians in Smyrna certainly experienced that.

As stated earlier, Smyrna was the place where worship of Rome and the Emperor originated. In 23 A.D. Smyrna built the first temple to worship the Emperor Tiberius Caesar. Originally, Emperor worship was a voluntary spontaneous demonstration of gratitude to Rome; but toward the end of the first century, in the days of Domitian, the final step was taken, and Caesar worship became compulsory. This practice prevailed throughout the empire, but it especially was significant in Smyrna.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most famous martyrdoms of the early Church was the martyrdom of Polycarp, which took place in Smyrna, about sixty years after the writing of this letter. The date of his death usually has been set in 155 A.D., but some research now places it a decade later.

See ADDENDUM A for a description of Polycarp's martyrdom.

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<sup>39</sup> In 250 A.D., the Roman emperor, Decian, in an effort to destroy those whom he called, *atheists*, instituted the practice of giving a *libellus* to those who had completed the required worship of the emperor. Once a year the Roman citizen was required to burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar. Upon completion of sacrifice, individuals received a certificate called a *libellus*, a legal document proving conformity with Roman religion. All that the Christians had to do was to burn that pinch of incense, say, 'Caesar is Lord,' receive their certificate.

Many speculations have come forth concerning the meaning of the **ten days**.

- Some believe that the term refers to ten time periods of persecutions that Christians of the Roman empire would suffer. There is nothing in the text to support this creative idea.
- Another suggestion is that Christians would be in prison for ten days to prepare them to be involved in gladiatorial combat in an arena, where they most certainly would be killed by an experienced gladiator.

We are not given any details in the text other than that they would be in prison for ten days, then die. How they would die is not described in the text.

The promise of the waiting crown of life would give the Smyrna Christians strength to be faithful unto death. The scene pictured in Revelation Chapter 6 is very relevant to the letter to Smyrna.

*And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;<sup>10</sup> and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"<sup>11</sup> And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also. (Revelation 6:9-11)*

The answer that the Lord gave to the pleas of the martyrs to avenge their death catches our attention. It seems that Our Lord has looked down through history and seen those who would die for their faith. The end will not come until that list is completed.

Those on this list, will receive the crown of life, a special reward awaiting them in the Everlasting Kingdom.

Thus, the great lesson that comes to us from this letter is that nothing happens that escapes God's sight. He knows everything that is happening, He either causes or allows everything, and that those who persevere under trial have a blessed reward awaiting them.

### **The closing exhortation and a promised blessing – verse 11**

*'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'*

Each letter closes with an assuring promise:

Ephesus - *I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.*

Smyrna - *He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.*

Revelation 21:8 identifies the *second death*.

*"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM

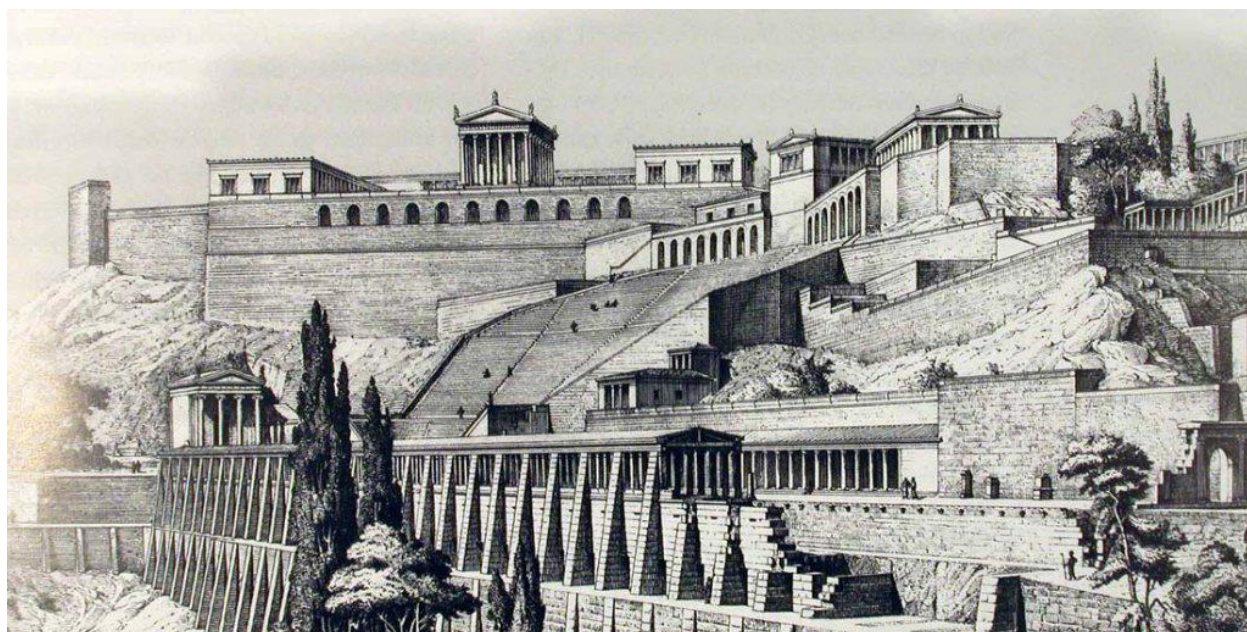
### PERGAMUM

The exact name of the city in New Testament times is difficult to determine. In Revelation 1:11 and 2:12 the form of the Greek terms used can be either feminine or neuter. Because of this, the city has been referred to as Pergamos, Pergamum, and Pergamon.

Pergamum was sixteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea, eighty miles north of Ephesus, and forty-five miles due north of Smyrna. Surrounded by a valley, Pergamum was built on a massive mountain, rising eleven thousand feet above sea level. The valley and the mountain consisted of volcanic rock. Three rivers surrounded Pergamum: the Caicus, the Selinus and the Cetus.



Above: a view of the city in its surroundings.<sup>40</sup> Below: a detailed view of the city<sup>41</sup>



<sup>40</sup> <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/3d/ca/8d/3dca8d98db0380a1fa64d2ff597927c6.jpg>

<sup>41</sup> Source [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library\\_of\\_Pergamum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Pergamum)



Throughout the centuries, Pergamum had been the site of conquest for various warring kingdoms. Pergamum had been under the control of Persians, followed by the Greeks, and then the Romans. In New Testament times, it was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia.

Even though in 23 A.D. the Roman Senate had declared Smyrna to be the center of Emperor worship in the province, Pergamum had been the first city to manifest an imperial cult. The worship of the emperor was strongly enforced in the city. In addition to the worship of the Emperor, many gods were worshipped in Pergamum. It was a city known for its temples and the fervency of the worshippers of the various gods.

The most famous structure in the city was the Great Altar, dedicated to Zeus and Athena. It was constructed to give the appearance of a giant throne.



The Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany, was constructed between 1910 and 1920 by Ludwig Hoffmann. Artifacts from Pergamum, as well as remaining portions of important structures were taken to the museum, where the buildings were reconstructed and restored. The Great Altar of Pergamon is seen in the above photo.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Photo from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pergamon>

Other major temples in the city:

- the Temple of Athena
- the Temple of Trajan
- the Temple of Dionysus
- the Heroon of Diodorus Pasporos
- the Temple of Hera
- the Temple of Demeter
- the Temple of Asclepius
- the Temple of Serapis
- the Temple of the Egyptian gods, Isis and Serapis

One of the prominent worship centers of the city, the sanctuary of Asclepius was down in the valley below the city. Asclepius was the god of healing. The sanctuary was approached by a 2,690-foot colonnaded sacred way. People with health problems would come to the sanctuary to bathe in the water of the sacred spring, and in the patients' dreams, Asclepius would appear to tell them how to cure their illness. Archaeology has found many gifts and dedications that people had made after the experience – such as small terracotta body parts, in the view of many, representing what had been healed. Galen, the most famous doctor in this period of ancient history, and personal physician to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, worked in the sanctuary for many years.

Clearly, Pergamum was a very religious city, with the worship of the emperor being the one that every citizen was required to practice.

The Library of Pergamum was the second largest library in the ancient world. Only the library of Alexandria was larger. The Pergamum library contained at least 200,000 scrolls. The scrolls were parchment, which were rolled up and stored on shelves. The library contributed to the city's reputation as an intellectual center.

Pergamum was a thriving center of parchment production. The word "parchment" itself is derived from Pergamum (via the Latin *pergamenum* and the French *parchemin*). The city so dominated the trade that a legend later arose indicating that parchment had been invented in Pergamon to replace the use of papyrus, which had become monopolized by the rival city of Alexandria. This however is a myth; parchment had been in use in Anatolia and elsewhere long before the rise of Pergamon. Parchment reduced the Roman Empire's dependency on Egyptian papyrus and allowed for the increased dissemination of knowledge throughout Roman-dominated Europe and Asia.

As noted earlier, in addition to the library, the fact that Pergamum was the birthplace of the famous physician, Galen, second only to Hippocrates in fame as a physician, enhanced the reputation of the city as a center of intellectual achievement.

## **THE LETTER**

### **Revelation 2:12-17**

**Jesus declares the effective weapon of his word – verse 12**

***"And to the messenger of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:***

As is true of each of the letters, Jesus identifies Himself as having a trait that fits the situation faced by the church. The sword of His mouth will wreak havoc on His enemies. This same truth is expressed in Hebrews 4:12.

*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

### **Jesus declares His full knowledge of their circumstances – verse 13a**

***13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.***

As was true in the first three letters, the Greek term rendered, *I know*, is the perfect tense of the verb, οἶδα (*oidah*). The perfect tense refers to a completed action in the past that continues to the present. This means that the Lord knew all about this church, what had been happening to them for a long time and what was happening to them at the time He sent the letter.

The many gods being worshipped, as well as the Great Altar which was deliberately constructed to look like a throne, fits well the description of Pergamum as, *where Satan's throne is*.

The Greek term rendered as, *witness*, is μάρτυς (*martus*), from which we derive the English, *martyr*. In the Second Century, μάρτυς began to be used regularly as a term to describe those who died for their faith.

We do not have any early clear information on Antipas, other than what is stated here, but what could be a greater accolade than, *My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells*.

Even though there is not any information concerning Antipas that is contemporary with his life and death, the Eastern Church has declared him to be a saint and has a vivid tradition concerning his death. For that tradition, see ADDENDUM B.

### **Even though the church at Pergamum had faithfully paid the price for refusing to deny Christ and worship the emperor, there were those in the church who were distorting the faith – verses 14-15**

***14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. 15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.***

Balaam was the prophet hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel. However, his utterances always came out as blessings (Numbers 22-24). Each time Balaam prepared to pronounce a curse, Yahweh always gave him a blessing to recite. Although the text in Numbers gives no details, the statement in Numbers 31:16 makes it clear that Balaam was the one who came up with the idea of having Moabite women seduce Israelite men into the licentious worship of the gods of Peor. Because of the bribes and the honors shown him, it seems that since Balaam was not able to pronounce a curse, he suggested this ploy.

In the New Testament Church, Balaam was viewed as the forerunner of all false teachers.

*forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, 16 but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a dumb donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. (2 Peter 2:15-16)*

*Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (Jude 11)*

In Numbers 25:1-2, the sequel to Balaam chapters, fornication with the daughters of Moab is described as an element of idolatrous worship. Also, the worship of idols involved the eating of flesh that had been sacrificed to idols. These two elements, fornication and eating meat sacrificed to idols, are connected in several New Testament passages with idol worship.

In Acts 15:29, two of the prohibitions communicated to the Gentile converts are to abstain from meat offered to idols and fornication.

*that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."*

In I Corinthians 6-10, Paul deals at length with these problems.

Again, the Nicolaitans come into the picture. They seem to have encouraged the two prohibited practices. In contrast to the Ephesian Church, which hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, the Pergamum Church seemed to tolerate them.

The charge against the Church at Pergamum brings to mind the strong statement made in I John 1:7-11, concerning the toleration of those who distort the truth. Even though the particular heresy addressed by John is not the same heresy being addressed in Revelation, the same principle applies.

<sup>7</sup> *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.* <sup>8</sup> *Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.* <sup>9</sup> *Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.* <sup>10</sup> *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;* <sup>11</sup> *for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.*

#### **A closing exhortation with a promise – verses 16- 17**

<sup>16</sup> *Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.* <sup>17</sup> *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'*

The Greek term rendered, *repent*, is μετανοέω, (*metanoehoh*), which literally means, *to change one's mind*. They were strongly exhorted to change their way of thinking about this matter and to act on that change. Those who were inclined to *hear what the Spirit says to the churches*, in other words, those who wanted to get things right, would change their thinking and act accordingly.

Then, as was true in the first two letters, a wonderful promise.

- To those in Ephesus who would overcome, the promise was that they would partake of the tree of life. (Revelation 2:7)
- To those in Smyrna who would overcome, in the face of persecution, the promise was the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)
- To those in Pergamum who would overcome, the promise was hidden manna and a white stone and a new name written on the stone. (Revelation 2:17)

Again, we face questions: what is the hidden manna, and what is the white stone with a name written on it?



As we have seen in the previous sections, apocalyptic literature features symbolism and imagery in its presentation of prophecy. The *hidden manna* mentioned in the letter to Pergamum is one example of such symbolism.

The manna was the bread from heaven that the Israelites miraculously received in the wilderness (Exodus 16). The manna sustained them throughout their troubled journey. Some manna was placed in a golden pot and kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the sacred tent and later, in the Temple.

*And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations."<sup>34</sup> As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept throughout your generations." (Exodus 16:33-34)*

*And behind the second veil, there was a tent which is called the Holy of Holies,<sup>4</sup> having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. (Hebrews 9:3-4)*

In 597 B.C. the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and in 586 B.C. forced the people of Judah into exile in Babylon. The Babylonians twice sacked the Temple, before destroying it. There are Babylonian bas-reliefs of their carrying treasures taken from the Temple, but in none of these is the Ark of the Covenant pictured. The location of the Ark and its contents, including the golden pot of manna are an unsolved mystery. When the Jews returned to Palestine and rebuilt the temple, in place of the ark, a stone slab was placed in the Holy of Holies.

The Jews who returned to Palestine after the Babylonian exile, believed that in the last days, the days of the Messiah, the gift of the manna would be repeated.<sup>43</sup> Jesus stated that in Him, that expectation for the Bread of Life was fulfilled.

*So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?"*

*"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'"<sup>32</sup> Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.*

*<sup>33</sup> "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."*

*<sup>34</sup> They said therefore to Him, "Lord, evermore give us this bread."*

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*

*"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh." (John 6:30-35, 51)*

Many contemporary commentaries state that the hidden manna is the Bread of Life – received spiritually through faith.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the Bread of Life would not be something that we physically eat. It is ingested spiritually by faith in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>43</sup> T.F. Glasson, *The Revelation of John, the Cambridge Bible Commentary* (London, Cambridge University Press) 1965, page 29

<sup>44</sup>Dallas Theological Seminary, GotQuestions.org

The manna is hidden, in that it is given exclusively to believers in Christ. The recipient of the hidden manna is the who overcomes. The overcomer is one who endures in his faith, despite trials and hardships – even enduring martyrdom rather than rejecting Christ.

I John 5:4-5 states, *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.*<sup>5</sup> *And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Even as the manna sustained the Israelites in the wilderness, those who remain faithful to Jesus and overcome the world, will be sustained by the Bread of Life – the hidden Manna.

However, even though this explanation of the meaning of the hidden manna makes sense, biblically, it is open to challenge. The promise in the letter to Pergamum is that the hidden manna would be given to those who overcome. It is given to them because they overcame – a reward for overcoming, not as the means whereby they overcome.

We are forced once again to acknowledge that there are many attempts to explain what the figure of the hidden manna represents – but to take a position on the matter requires an arbitrary decision, not a firmly locked-in conclusion.

The same is true of the white stone with a mysterious name written on it. Many explanations have been presented, but none of them are entirely satisfactory. Three of these are,

- Giving a white pebble as ticket of admission to a feast. Based on this understanding, when one receives the white pebble, he therefore will be admitted to the heavenly feast.
- A white stone is associated with happiness. Pliny, in his lengthy dissertation on gems and valuable stones, speaks of a glad day marked with a white stone.<sup>45</sup>
- The stones in the Urim and Thummim, which were in the breastplate worn by the High Priest and used to determine the will of God in uncertain situations.<sup>46</sup> There was a Jewish tradition that the name of God was inscribed on the stones.<sup>47</sup>

As has been true with other elements in these letters, we must once again recognize that any conclusion concerning the stone and the name written on it is an arbitrary decision and has no bearing on the underlying lesson of the letter.

Two lessons prevail in this letter –

- The exhortation to faithfulness, in spite of severe consequences
- The exhortation to root out those who are distorting both the truth of the Gospel and the life associated with that Gospel.

Each of us should evaluate our church and our private lives, to make certain that these exhortations are heeded.

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<sup>45</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*- Book 37, sections 1-106

<sup>46</sup> G. F. Moore, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, (Legare Street Press) col. 5236

<sup>47</sup> Glasson, page 29

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

### THYATIRA<sup>48</sup>

Of the seven cities to which letters were sent, Thyatira was the smallest city. Yet, somewhat surprisingly, the Letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven letters.

Thyatira was a little less than twenty miles southeast of Pergamum. The city lay on a small hill, on the banks of the Lycus river. Although it never did become a metropolis, it was a city of great wealth. It derived its wealth from manufacturing and commerce that grew out of the many trade guilds<sup>49</sup> that operated in Thyatira. Among the ancient ruins of the city, inscriptions have been found relating to,

- Wool-workers guild
- Linen-workers guild
- Makers of outer-garments guild
- Dyers guild
- Leather-workers guild
- Tanners guild
- Potters guild
- Bakers guild
- Slave-dealers guild
- Bronze-smiths guild.<sup>50</sup>

The trade guilds were more completely organized than in any other city. Every artisan belonged to a guild and every guild was an incorporated organization which possessed property in its own name. The guilds were so numerous and powerful, that they largely determined the nature of life in Thyatira. Two of the most powerful were the coppersmith's guild and the guild of dyers.

The Thyatira dyers used madder-root,<sup>51</sup> to make the purple dye unique to Thyatira. Most other regions used shell-fish to make a purple dye.



The Madder Root Plant<sup>52</sup>

All of the guilds were closely connected with the Asiatic religions of the region. The pagan feasts, which were a part of these religions, all included immoral practices. Because of this, no Christian could be a member of a guild, resulting in great opposition to Christianity in Thyatira.

<sup>48</sup> Θυατείρα (*thuateira*)

<sup>49</sup> The term for the guilds was συντεχνία (*suntechnia*) the origin of the English word, *syndicate*.

<sup>50</sup> W. M. Ramsey, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (London, Hodder and Stoughten publishing) 1904, pages 324-325

<sup>51</sup> The Madder plant is of a genus related to coffee and gardenias. The root of the plant was used to create a reddish-purple dye that was used to dye leather as well as various forms of cloth. Today, the color is called, *Turkish Red*.

<sup>52</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubia\\_tinctorum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubia_tinctorum)

Because of the wealth and commerce, Jews began to immigrate to Thyatira and a substantial Jewish community developed in the city.

Lydia, a purple dyer from Thyatira, was merchandizing her products in Philippi when Paul and Silas came to the city and began to evangelize. Lydia would have been rather prosperous because only the wealthy could afford garments dyed with the Thyatira purple. She also would have been a Jewess, given the practice of taking her household to the riverbank to pray, daily. This was a custom of the Jews when they were in lands where there was no synagogue.

Paul and Silas went to the riverbank, looking for a group gathered for prayer, and when they found the praying women, they presented the Gospel to them. Lydia and her household heard the gospel, and all were immersed into Christ.<sup>53</sup> At her insistence, Paul and Silas stayed in her home until they were cast into prison. When Paul and Silas were released from prison, they returned to her home before departing to their next destination.

One has to wonder what Lydia's fate might have been when, after her conversion to Christianity, she returned to Thyatira and could no longer be a part of a guild.

Thus, three words describe Thyatira:

- Very prosperous
- Very religious
- Very licentious

Early on, in spite of the community-wide opposition, a strong church developed in Thyatira. The origins of the church are not clear, but it is probable that it was born in the same manner as were other churches of the region - through the preaching of Paul when he was at Ephesus.

*And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, ... But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.<sup>10</sup> And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:1, 9-10)*

## **THE LETTER**

### **Revelation 2:18-29**

Peter wrote, *For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* (1 Peter 4:17)

We have seen this judgment exercised in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, now we see it exercised in Thyatira, to which the label, *the tolerant church*, aptly fits.

### **Christ's self-description – verse 18**

***"And to the messenger of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:***

Jesus first asserts His authority to judge the churches – He is the Son of God, the Messiah.

When Jesus visited Peter's mother-in-law and healed her of a fever, great crowds began gathering at the home and Jesus healed all of them. Those who were demon possessed were

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<sup>53</sup> Acts 16:11ff

delivered and the demons, using the same terminology that Jesus used in this introduction, asserted the Divinity of Jesus,

*And demons also were coming out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Son of God!" And rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ. (Luke 4:41)*

The label, *Son of God*, thus becomes a synonym for *Messiah* (i.e., *Christ*)

*Eyes like a flame of fire*, certainly would be an intimidating thing to behold. A flame of fire penetrates between cracks in a structure and consumes everything combustible in its path. When flames reach out to us, we instinctively flinch. Nothing was going to escape the purifying gaze of the Son of God.

*Feet like burnished bronze*, the Greek term rendered, *burnished bronze is*, χαλκολίβανον (*chalkolibanon*), which was the term used for the bronze work for which Thyatira was famous.

Although some argue that bronze always is a biblical symbol of judgment,<sup>54</sup> that is a bit of a stretch. Bronze was the medium used for several instruments in the biblical narrative. In some instances, it was the materials used to make something that was an instrument for reconciliation with God.

In the Temple, bronze was the material from which several sacred instruments were constructed:

<b>Vessel</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Bronze Altar	Offering burnt sacrifices
Bronze Laver	Ritual cleansing of the priests
Bronze Censers	Burning incense before God
Bronze Bowls	Collecting blood during sacrifices

One powerful example of the use of bronze is the serpent raised by Moses, which symbolizes God's healing and redemption. When the people of Israel, during their wilderness sojourn became to complain against God, He allowed serpents to come among the people and to inflict fatal wounds. When the people repented and asked Moses to cry out to God, Moses did just that and God gave the Israelites an instrument of healing – a brazen serpent on a pole.

*So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. <sup>8</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live." <sup>9</sup> And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numbers 21:7-9)*

Rather than trying to invent spiritual symbolism in the elements themselves, it is more responsible to realize that the visual appearance of the Son of God, on this occasion was one of striking power and intimidation.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://calvarychapel.com.posts/five-ways-a-church-becomes-tolerant>, page 2

**Christ declares His intimate knowledge of the positive elements in the Thyatira Church – verse 19**

*<sup>19</sup> 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.*

Instead of just treading water, so to speak, and resting on its laurels, the Thyatira Church increased its efforts to do the work of Christ.

Even though their deeds were motivated by their strong faith in Christ, the Church at Thyatira was known for its actions, not just its faith/beliefs. The Thyatira Church was an example of a church that did not find its worth merely in what it had done, but continued to press forward, seeking to exist to fulfill the purposes of Christ in each decade. One has to wonder how many converts the Thyatira Church immersed into Christ during its existence, as it did more and more with each passing year.

The Church at Thyatira is the only church that Christ commended for its love. However, its distorted love for many people seems to have contributed to its downfall – it tolerated, rather than rebuked those who promoted apostasy.

One manner in which that love was shown was Thyatira's patience.

This description of Thyatira gives the picture of an ideal church – however....

**In spite of the wonderful story of the Thyatira Church's activities, it had become tolerant and allowed a false prophetess to seduce many into wicked practices – verses 20-23**

*<sup>20</sup> 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My slaves astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> 'And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. <sup>22</sup> 'Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. <sup>23</sup> 'And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.*

We do not know whether or not the woman's name was Jezebel, or if that were the label that Christ put on her because she was repeating the sins of the idolatrous woman in I Kings (I Kings 16:31-II Kings 9:37). Jezebel was the wife of Ahab who promoted idolatry in Israel and sought to kill all of God's true prophets.

Whether or not Jezebel was her name or an imposed name, the point is that a false prophetess was seducing God's people into idolatrous acts that included sexual immorality as a means of worship. It is possible that she looked at the idolatrous practices of the trade guilds, which included such immorality, and conforming somewhat to the culture, began to offer a Christian form of such, so called, worship.

This Jezebel must have been a very dominant woman, with a strong and persuasive personality that could call people to follow her and believe anything that she said.

Rather than rebuke this woman and follow the process outlined in several Scriptures (for example, I Corinthians 5:1-13), the leadership of the Church at Thyatira "lovingly" tolerated her.

One might view the first appearance of some heresy in the church as one would view the first occurrence of a weed in a flower garden. If that weed is not immediately plucked up, it will grow and more and more weeds will appear, until the situation is reached in which to pull up weeds also will destroy the flowers next to it.

Satan is focused on trying to destroy every church. If he cannot do it by persecution, as he attempted to do in Smyrna, and if he cannot destroy it by heresy, then he will seek some means of corrupting it with evil – in Thyatira his instrument was a heresy that seduced church members into licentious and immoral conduct.

One as to wonder if the surrounding culture of immorality in the various guilds, which really defined the social life of Thyatira, had an influence on the church i.e., “come join us, we are Thyatirans just like you.” A mistake is made by church leadership that becomes more concerned about church growth – attracting members – than remaining true to the biblical pattern and biblical standards.

Elders and others of responsibility in the local church must be diligent in their monitoring of the doctrines and practices espoused by those who influence the Church. When such aberrations first present themselves, those who are guilty of the infraction should be confronted and told to cease their heretical teaching and behavior. If such repentance and retraction does not take place, the offenders must be removed from the church. Usually, this is a horribly unpleasant event, but it must be done.

Jesus stated that He had given this Jezebel time to repent. No information is given to us as to how the call to repentance was executed, but He followed the pattern of confronting, giving time to repent, and if that is not heeded, then to take drastic action.

What a serious consequence of their obstinacy awaited Jezebel and those who followed her.

*'Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. <sup>23</sup> 'And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.*

The one who has eyes like a flame of fire sees all that Jezebel and her cohorts have been doing and He offers the opportunity to repent, but if repentance does not come, this is what they chose – sudden and immediate judgement, resulting in horrible consequences imposed on them by the one who has eyes like a flame of fire.

There will be a positive result to Christ's acting clearly and decisively, *and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.*

**Those who choose to refuse to follow the leading of Jezebel are given a wonderful promise – verses 24-29**

*<sup>24</sup> 'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them-- I place no other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. <sup>26</sup> 'And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; <sup>27</sup> and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

The statement, *I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces,* requires an understanding of the terms involved.

The term rendered, *rule*, is the Greek term, ποιμαίνω (*poimainoh*) which literally means, *to shepherd*. Immediately comes to mind the beautiful 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm,

*The LORD is my shepherd, .... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:1,4)*

The Palestinian shepherd carried a staff that had a curved hook on the top, that that could be used to pull a sheep out of a dangerous place and back to the safety of the flock.

He also carried a rod, with which he could punish sheep or force them to go a particular direction.

This is the sense of the statement that *I will give authority over the nations; and he shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces.*

Exactly what is meant by giving authority over the nations, depends on which of the four schools of interpretation of the Apocalypse one adopts. For example, those who accept the Futurist view, state that Revelation Chapter 20 describes a one-thousand-year (millennium) time of peace on earth, following the great Tribulation. During this millennium, Christ will reign supreme and those who have been faithful to Him, throughout the ages, will rule with Him.

Since there is much disagreement concerning how to interpret this promise, I (JWG) choose to not have an opinion, but to wait eagerly for the time when this will be fulfilled and then, I will know the meaning of the promise.

The promise of the morning star probably refers to the joyous event of Christ's second coming. He labelled Himself as the Morning Star in Revelation 22:16.

*"I, Jesus, have sent My messenger to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star."*

Those who have been faithful to Him, in spite of all of the challenges and threats of the enemy, will rejoice with great gladness, when the dead in Christ rise from the grave and greet the wonderful Morning Star, Jesus Himself.

*Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.<sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.<sup>54</sup> But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory."<sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;<sup>57</sup> but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)*

We must not become so obsessed with trying to solve the puzzles involved in the allegorical and figurative language of the letter, that we miss the important points made in the letter:

- God is pleased with a church that, year by year, increases its deeds of righteousness.
- God is pleased with a church in which the relationships among the members is one of love and patience.
- Church leaders must be diligent to root out any violation of orthodoxy or orthopraxy that seeks to find a home in the local church.
- Those who remain faithful to God and to His standards will receive a reward that is beyond description.



## THE LETTER TO SARDIS

### SARDIS

Sardis was located 60 miles northeast of Ephesus. Now an active archaeology site, it was located near present-day Sart ,in modern Turkey.

The city has a very illustrious history. It was settled before 1500 B.C. and was the capital of the Lydian Empire. After the fall of the Lydian Empire, it was the capital of the Persian satrapy of Lydia, and later a major center of Greek culture. Sardis had a reputation as a place of wealth and splendor. One thing that contributed to its wealth was its favorable position on the central trade route from the Aegean Sea to the interior of Asia.

Croesus, who ruled Lydia (585-485 BC) before being defeated by the Persians, was one of the wealthiest men to ever have existed. Even in our era, the colloquialism, “As rich as Croesus,” is heard from time to time.

Sardis was the first city to mint coins, under King Alyattes (ruled 635-585 B.C.), However, Croesus was the first man in history to mint pure gold and silver coins, some of which have been found by archaeologists.



Foreparts of a lion and a bull confronting one another, on a gold stater, from Sardis, on display at the Met 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Museum, gallery 152.<sup>55</sup>

The citadel of Sardis was on top of a high mountain that was surrounded by insurmountable cliffs. It could be accessed only by a narrow passageway. The citadel/acropolis was considered to be the strongest fortified place in the world.



Contemporary view of the citadel from below

Even so, due to Sardis self-confidence and lack of watchfulness, it had been attacked and conquered twice.

<sup>55</sup> The photographs and images of Sardis are from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardis>

The lower city contained many elaborate buildings, one of which was the gymnasium and bathhouse. The gymnasium complex occupied more than five acres. Its western section consisted of large, vaulted halls for bathing. The eastern part was a palaestra – a large open courtyard for exercise.



Contemporary view of the Greek Gymnasium in Sardis

Sardis had a sizeable, wealthy, Jewish population, that several years after the New Testament era, built a sizeable synagogue in the center of the urban center of the city. It is a major tourist site today.

Even though Ephesus was the center of the worship of Artemis, Sardis had a Temple of Artemis that was much more elaborate and larger than the one in Ephesus. It was one of the seven largest Greek temples to be built – it was more than double the size of the Parthenon.

Sardis was devoted to the mother-goddess, Cybele, and no temple worshipper was allowed to approach the temple with soiled or unclean garments. A white, clean robe was required to approach the temple. However, the moral conditions of this idolatry were of the most despicable type. Andrew Tate wrote,

“Her worship was of the most debasing character and orgies like those of Dionysos were practiced at the festivals held in her honour. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions; and when we think of a small community of Christians rescued from such abominable idolatry, living in the midst of scenes of the grossest depravity, with early associations, and companionships, and connections, all exerting a force in the direction of heathenism, it may be wondered that the few members of the church in Sardis were not drawn away altogether, and swallowed up in the great vortex.”<sup>56</sup>

Given these facts, we see a culture that surrounded, and to a degree, influenced the Church in Sardis. The letter reflects this influence.

## THE LETTER

### Revelation 3:1-6

**As with the previous letters, Christ began by identifying Himself and His authority – verse 1a**

***"And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this:***

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Tate, *The Messages to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor*, p. 299, quoted by Walvoord in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1966, p. 79.

The one who is speaking has control of the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

**Again, the tense of the Greek rendered, “I know,” is perfect active, meaning that He knows all about the church’s past, and present – He has total knowledge – verse 1b**

*I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*

That which might be invisible to men, was/is perfectly clear to the Lord who is in the business of revealing our true condition, regardless of outward appearance.

They were a church full of active church programs and church activity, that which men see and which results in a reputation of being a lively church. By the world’s standards they were successful and possibly even proud of their reputation.

Perhaps they even were accepted by the community as an important element in the culture of the city. Of note is the fact that in this letter, there is no mention of any persecution against the church. They seemed to be imminently successful.

Even so, they were without true spirituality - they were dead - and this is what the Lord saw.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians contains a similar exhortation: *But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.* <sup>14</sup> *For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."* (Ephesians 5:13-14)

**The Lord issued a call to repentance and strengthening what life remained in the church, with a warning that the failure to do so would result in Christ’s personally coming against the church – verses 2-3**

*<sup>2</sup> 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. <sup>3</sup> 'Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.*

The warning had been given and another warning would not be given. If the church failed to respond positively to Christ’s demands, then He would come upon the church without warning.

The Greek term rendered, *repent*, is μετανέω (*metanoehoh*), which means, *to change one’s mind – change how you think about these matters.*

Exactly what He would do when He came upon the church is not spelled out, but it obviously would have been a very severe action taken against them.

**Even though the Church in Sardis had a poor reputation before Christ, there were those in the church that had not fallen into the deceitful self-opinion that characterized the church. These were given a wonderful promise of fellowship with Christ – verses 4-5**

*<sup>4</sup> 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> 'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.*

Revelation 19:7-8 describes the marriage of the lamb – the Bride is the Church, which is attired in white linen.

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." <sup>8</sup> And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

The figure of the Church as the Bride of Christ certainly is relevant to this letter. The Church consists of those faithful Christians, who will wear the white garments.

Furthermore, there is the assurance that their names are permanently inscribed in the Book of Life and Jesus will acknowledge them before the Father and His angels.

**The letter closes with the customary exhortation – verse 6**

*<sup>6</sup> 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

The lesson contained in this letter for the contemporary American church is obvious.

- Through exciting programs and Sunday morning entertainment – humorous and entertaining sermons, a professional style Sunday morning musical concert, etc., a church can gain a sizeable following and be accepted as an influential element in the community ----yet--- be dead spiritually.
- Leaders and members of the church *say* beautiful prayers - rather than *pray* prayers with a deep sense of speaking reverently and intimately with God.
- Merchandizing methods are used to promote church growth, rather than allowing God to grow the church, through the church's focus on bringing damned lost souls to repentance, immersion into Christ, and then, disciplining converts.

This is a very subtle trap and church leadership must be alert to not allow the church to fall into that trap.

## THE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA

### PHILADELPHIA<sup>57</sup>

Philadelphia, in the Roman province of Asia, was not as ancient as many of the other cities of Asia. It was founded 189 BC. Philadelphia contends with Thyatira for the title of the smallest of the seven cities addressed in Revelation.

It was located about 75 miles inland from the Aegean Sea and was on one of the main highways leading east that linked Europe to Asia. It would have been equivalent to Chicago on route 66, the Mother Road of America (1926- mid 1940's) that ran from Chicago to Los Angeles. Because of its location and strong fortifications, Philadelphia became quite prosperous.

Philadelphia stood upon a small hill, 650 feet above sea level. Behind it were volcanic cliffs which the Turks later named, *inkwells*.

A significant Jewish population existed in Philadelphia and had an influence on the culture.

In addition to the name, Philadelphia, the city was known by other names, depending on who was doing the talking:

- Decapolis, because it was one of the ten cities located in the plain of Lydia
- Neo-kaisaria (Neo-Caesarea), during the First Century – (this is the name on coins that were struck in the city in the First Century)
- Flavia, during the reign of Vespasian (69-79 AD)

Currently, the Turkish name of the city is, Alashehir.

The city was given the name, Philadelphia (City of Brotherly Love) by Eumenes II, the king of Lydia (ruled 197-159 BC). He named the city Philadelphia to honor the loyalty of his elder brother, Attalus II.

Philadelphia sometimes was called, "Little Athens," because of the magnificence of the temples and other public buildings that adorned the city.

Philadelphia was located at the southern end of the long valley of the Gediz River, at the foot of the Bozdag Mountains. The region was subject to recurrent earthquakes. The twenty-year period, 17 AD – 37 AD, was a season of recurrent earthquakes.

The earthquake of 17 AD totally destroyed the city. The Roman Emperor, Tiberius, suspended taxes in Philadelphia for five years. Because of Tiberius' generosity, the inhabitants began to call the city, Neo-kaisaria. However, after five years, the Roman taxes resumed. When the citizens appealed to Tiberius for more help, their request was rejected. The citizens felt betrayed and reverted to the name, Philadelphia.<sup>58</sup>

The cost of repairing the often earthquake-shaken city became a heavy financial burden on the citizens. In spite of its key location on the trade route, and the prosperity derived from that, for an extended time poverty prevailed. When the city finally was restored, and its prosperity restored, it was smaller than before. Even so, as the coastal cities declined, Philadelphia grew in power and retained its importance.

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<sup>57</sup> Philadelphia, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, Mich, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) 1952, page 2366

<sup>58</sup> <https://hiddencitphila.org/2012/09/lydia-or-neo-caesarea-or-alashehir-just-call-it-philadelphia>

The fertile plain adjacent to the city (on the side opposite the volcanic cliffs) became known for its excellent grapes and wines. The wineries were some of the most important industries in the city. Philadelphia's chief deity was Dionysus, the Greek mythological god of wine. The Roman name of Dionysus was Bacchus and later coins cast in Philadelphia bore the head of Bacchus and the figure of a Bacchante (a female priestess of Bacchus). Its products were shipped throughout the world.

Roman Emperor, Domitian (81-95 AD), noted for being cruel grabbed the vineyards from the Philadelphians. This was a part of his efforts to reduce the production of wine, especially in vineyards outside of Italy. Suetonius wrote,

"Once, upon the occasion of a plentiful wine crop, attended with a scarcity of grain, thinking that the fields were neglected through too much attention to the vineyards, he [emperor Domitian] made an edict forbidding anyone to plant more vines in Italy, and ordering that the vineyards in the provinces be cut down, or but half of them at most be left standing; but he did not persist in carrying out this measure."<sup>59</sup>

Commenting on this edict, Philostratus wrote,

"Politicking was everywhere in the manipulation of the business activities surrounding the Roman staples of grain, wine, and olive oil. In A.D. 90, when Domitian's edict was issued, Asia Minor certainly was in the grips of a famine crisis, so its purpose appears to have been to increase grain production throughout the Empire. But Domitian may have had two ulterior motives as well; first, of simply reducing pressure on vine-growers on the Italian peninsula, and second, of limiting the availability of wine in Asia Minor where it might enflame some revolutionary minds among the starving."<sup>60</sup>

Even though the implementation of this edict concerning the vineyards was limited, it had a significant impact on the financial health of the city.

At the time of Jesus' letter to Philadelphia, the Jews of Philadelphia were given an exemption to the requirement to worship the Roman Emperor and Christians had a degree of safety as long as they were identified with the Jews. When it became obvious that Christians were not cohesively connected to the Jews, they lost that exemption and were subject to persecution because of their failure to comply with the demand to worship the Roman Emperor.

## THE LETTER

### Revelation 3:7-13

The letter to Philadelphia is one of only two that does not contain any warning of God's judgment against them – the other being the letter to Smyrna. He only had words of approval and encouragement.

**The author identified Himself and the basis of His authority to write the letter – verses 6-7**

***"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:***

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<sup>59</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* VIII: Domitian. vii

<sup>60</sup> Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 520

This self-identification is derived from Isaiah 22:22,

*"Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open.*

In Isaiah, the description referred to Eliakim, the treasurer of the royal household.<sup>61</sup> Here, these words describe Christ Himself, who admits people to the New Jerusalem.

**The keys also open a door of opportunity for witness – verse 8**

***<sup>8</sup> 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.***

As in the other letters, *I know*, is in the perfect active tense, meaning thorough knowledge from the past to the present.

Paul used the open door terminology in this same sense in his letter to Corinth,

*But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; <sup>9</sup> for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.* (1 Corinthians 16:8-9)

The fact that the Philadelphian church had little power, i.e. slender resources, was not something for which the church was blamed – it evidently was due to causes outside of the church's control.

The church is praised for having made good use of the resources that she had and its location on the highways to the interior gave it special opportunity to evangelize the surrounding region.

**The same label that was given to the Jews of Smyrna – synagogue of Satan – is given to the Jewish community of Philadelphia – verse 9a**

***<sup>9</sup> 'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie--***

The same comment made concerning the situation in Smyrna is appropriate here.

Since these were members of a synagogue in Philadelphia, who rejected Jesus, their Messiah, they hated Christians. They were a synagogue of Satan.

Paul wrote that those who are truly Jews are not simply descendants of Abraham, by flesh and blood, but, rather, spiritual Jews who were actively serving Christ.

*But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; <sup>7</sup> neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named."<sup>8</sup> That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.* (Rom/ 9:6-8)

*Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ....And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* (Galatians 3:16, 29)

**Those who were members of the synagogue in Philadelphia – the haters of Christians – will be made aware of the fact that Christians are loved of Christ – and will be forced to bow before those whom they have persecuted – verse 9b**

***behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.***

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<sup>61</sup> II Kings 18:18

We can only speculate how this would be carried out and if it is to be done literally, when and how it will be done is not revealed. The important point is that the members of the synagogue who have persecuted Christians, at some point will know that the Christians are the true people of God and, no doubt, long to have the same relationship with Christ that those whom they persecuted had at the time they were persecuted.

This brings to mind Philippians 2:10-11

*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

At some point in the hereafter, every enemy of Jesus, including those who crucified Him and those who throughout the ages have persecuted Christians, who are the Body of Christ, will bow down before Him and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He will be vindicated.

In some fashion, all who are followers of Christ and have suffered humiliating persecution, also will be vindicated. We will have to wait and see exactly how this will take place.

**The Philadelphian's faithfulness will be rewarded by delivering them from the disastrous events that are about to come upon the earth – verse 10**

*<sup>10</sup> 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of the trial, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.'*

The Greek syntax τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου (*ton logos tays hupomonays*) indicates that the perseverance refers to Christ's perseverance. Christ is in control, and He was persevering in behalf of this church. The Philadelphians believed in Christ's perseverance in their behalf and therefore did not flinch in the presence of persecution.

We face another difficult question as to the meaning of, *I also will keep you from the hour of the trial, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.*

- Those who advocate the Preterist interpretation of Revelation consider this to refer to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
- Some who hold to the Historical view of Revelation consider this to refer to the reign of Diocletian, who was the last and one of the worst persecutors of the Church (Diocletian reigned as Emperor of Rome, 284-305 AD).
- Those who advocate the Futurist view consider this to refer to the Rapture, followed by the Great Tribulation.

The third of these views, the Futurist view, encounters difficulty in the Greek terminology. The Greek, τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης (*tays horas tou peirasmou tays mellousays erchesthai epi tays oikoumenays holays*) states,

*the hour of the trial the about to come upon the inhabited earth, whole (i.e. the entire inhabited earth)*

Two important points are:

- The trial was about to come – it was immanent, not something in the distant future.
- The trial would come upon the entire inhabited earth to test those who dwell upon the earth.



The fact that the trial was about to take place, causes us to discount the Futurist view, because 2000 years have passed and the so called, Rapture, has not taken place. Furthermore, there is no present-day church in Philadelphia to participate in the Rapture. Indeed, if such Tribulation is coming, the Philadelphia Church has escaped it, but not through the Rapture.

#### THE MODERN FATE OF THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

With the establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Church at Philadelphia became a part of that denomination.

At the beginning of the 18th century, with the demographic and financial revival of the Orthodox communities in Anatolia, new prelates were sent to Philadelphia, and in 1725 the metropolis of Philadelphia was re-established. The increase of the Christian population continued until the 19th century. According to Greek estimates, published in 1905, the metropolis of Philadelphia included 19 Orthodox communities, most of them Turkish-speaking Christians, consisting of 14,003 people, 25 parishes and 23 priests. The most numerous and active communities, apart from the one found in the city of Philadelphia itself, were in Kula region, Uşak, Denizli, Salihli and Afyon Karahisar.

Most of the metropolis became part of the Greek-controlled Smyrna Occupation Zone in 1919. However, due to the developments of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922, the local Orthodox element evacuated the region entirely in the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1923. From 1990, the titular metropolitan of Philadelphia, appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, is Meliton Karras.<sup>62</sup>

NOTE: titular metropolitan refers to the title given to an ecclesiastical official over a region where there is no church.

Furthermore, what did Christ mean when he said the trial would come on the whole inhabited earth? Given the history of that era, several events could be seen as fulfilling that in a portion of the civilized world, but is the term, dwellers on the whole earth, satisfied with that limited understanding?

Honesty requires us to leave this as another question that has to remain unanswered and remain in the realm of speculation. The important point is that whatever the meaning might be, the Church at Philadelphia would be rewarded by escaping the trial.

**Christ states that His coming will be without warning, but will occur quickly and that the Philadelphians are urged to not lose the reward that awaited them – verse 11**

<sup>11</sup> *I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.*

The term, *quickly*, can mean that the event is just about to happen, or it can refer to the manner in which the event will happen. Given statements made by Jesus, as recorded in Matthew, the second of these is the best understanding in this passage.

- *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."<sup>37</sup> "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. (Matthew 24:36-37)*
- *"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:42)*
- *"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25:13)*

<sup>62</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolis\\_of\\_Philadelphia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolis_of_Philadelphia)

In essence, Christ was urging them to continue in their present pattern – faithful perseverance in the face of severe opposition. To do otherwise, was to lose the reward awaiting them.

**An unusual promise, that reflected the surrounding culture – verse 12a**

*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore;*

In contrast to the earthquakes that shook and destroyed the beautiful temples in Philadelphia, the figure of a pillar in the indestructible spiritual temple of My God, emphasized permanence in the midst of the impermanence of the surrounding culture.

**Permanence is further emphasized through the indelible inscription of God’s name being written on the heart of the overcomers – verse 12b**

*and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.*

A widespread belief of that period was that to be ignorant of a god’s name meant that one had no ability to worship that *unknown god*. Yet, to know the correct name of a god meant that one had the power to enter into fellowship with that God. Thus, it was a practice to write the name of a god on the walls of that god’s temple.

This cultural practice is reflected in the spiritual promises given to those who overcome all of the obstacles and persecution that the Christians of Philadelphia faced.

**The closing that is repeated in each of the letters – verse 13**

<sup>13</sup> *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

What are the important lessons of this letter?

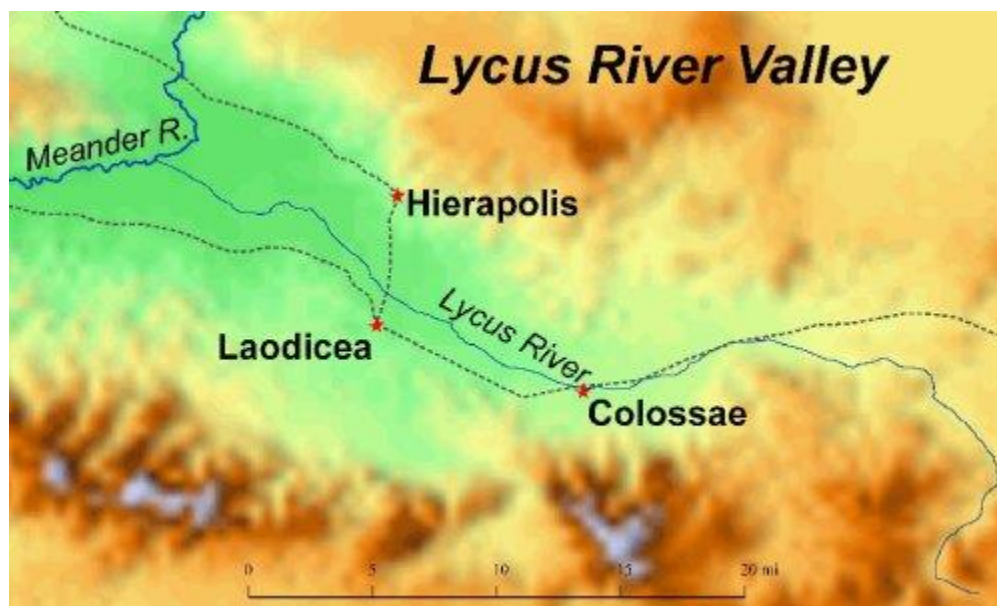
- A church’s effectiveness does not depend on its apparent assets, but on whatever door Christ opens to that Church.
- Churches and individual Christians must remain faithful in spite of the severity of the persecutions and hardships imposed on them by enemies of Christ.
- Indescribable rewards await those who do not lose their way but, rather, remain faithful unto death.

## THE LETTER TO LAODICEA

### LAODICEA

According to Pliny the Elder, the town was originally called *Diospolis*, "City of Zeus", and afterwards *Rhoas*. When the Seleucid king, Antiochus II Theos, king of the Seleucid Empire, in 261-253 BC, took control of the city, he renamed the city in honor of his wife, Laodice I. Laodice I was a powerful and ruthless queen who was instrumental in the assassination of her rivals and in starting the Third Syrian War (Laodicean War).<sup>63</sup>

Laodicea was located on a small hill on the south bank of the Lycus River. Two small rivers, the Asopus and Caprus flowed on either side of the hill, emptying into the Lycus.



The Lycus River Valley.<sup>64</sup>

The Lycus river began several miles southeast of Colossae. It flowed through the valley to join the Meander River. The Meander flowed west to the Aegean Sea at Miletus. The dotted lines show the major roads traversing the valley (see map on page 8 of these notes for the relationship between Laodicea and the other churches of the Apocalypse).

Hierapolis and Laodicea were six miles apart, on opposite sides of the river. As seen in the above map, Colossae was a few miles upriver on the same side of the river as was Laodicea.

Hierapolis is mentioned only once in the New Testament. Paul commended Epaphras, who was from Colossae, for his concern for the churches of the Lycus River Valley.

*Epaphras, who is one of your number, a slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness, that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.* (Colossians 4:12-13)

<sup>63</sup> Dr. Titus Kennedy, <https://drivethruhistory.com/laodicea/>

<sup>64</sup> The map was created by Ferrill Jenkins. <https://ferrelljenkins.blog/2009/02/17/hierapolis-and-the-lycus-river-valley/>

Paul also expressed his own concern for those of the Lycus River Valley, even though he never had seen any of them.

*For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, (Colossians 2:1)*

An example of Paul's concern for Laodicea is seen in his instructing the Colossian Church to pass his letter on to the brethren in Laodicea,

*And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. (Colossians 4:16)<sup>65</sup>*

Laodicea, though only a midsized city, competed with Smyrna as to which was the wealthiest city of the province. As was true of Smyrna, Laodicea was on the central trade route from the Aegean Sea to the interior of Asia, and this contributed to its wealth.

Laodicea served as a textile production center as well as a center for banking. Many wealthy merchants made their home in Laodicea.

Archaeologists have discovered buildings that were used to dye wool, as well as inscriptions related to this industry. An inscription found at the north theater described guilds of traders and craftsmen, one of which was "The Most August Guild of the Wool Washers."

The city became well-known for its production of beautiful black woolen garments.

The black wool, spun into dark yarn, was added to yarn dyed in other colors and made some very intricately patterned colored clothing, which sold for a high price in Rome. Tunics manufactured in Laodicea, called *trimata*, were so well-known that the city had the nickname of *Trimataria*.

The mineral water from Hierapolis helped to lock in the color dyes so that the color did not fade after being washed multiple times.

Laodicea also was well known for its flourishing medical school. One medical product that had its origin in the city was a balm that would heal eye problems. People came from all over the Roman Empire to purchase this eye salve from the Laodicean medical school.

An example of Laodicea's wealth and self-sufficiency was the conduct of the city following a major earthquake in 60 A.D. Roman Emperor, Nero, offered assistance in rebuilding the city. Recall that when Philadelphia was destroyed by an earthquake, it received help from Emperor Tiberias and then asked for more help.

In contrast to Philadelphia, the proud city of Laodicea refused Nero's aid, and rebuilt the city at its own expense.

Hellenistic Emperor, Antiochus III, in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. transplanted 2000 Jewish families from Babylonia to the region.<sup>66</sup> These families were led by former Jewish military leaders who had faithfully served Antiochus in Babylonia and Mesopotamia.

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<sup>65</sup> There is much evidence that supports the view that the Epistle to the Ephesians was a circular letter that was passed from church to church in the Lycus valley, beginning with Ephesus. S.D.F. Salmond, D.D. *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, Volume III, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapid, Eerdmans Publishing), 1976, pages 227-233; H. G. Moule, *Studies in Colossians and Philemon*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications) 1977, pages 41-47

<sup>66</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II, Chapter 3

An example of the wealth and size of the Jewish community in Laodicea is seen in an episode in 62 B.C. The proconsul Flavius seized more than 20 pounds of gold that the Laodicean Jews were preparing to send to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Laodicea also strongly sought to enforce the worship of the Roman Emperor, which, as elsewhere, forced the Christians to make a choice between compromising their faith or remaining faithful to the only true God, and facing the consequences imposed by the local community.

In many ways, Laodicea was similar to modern cities, in structure and amenities. For example, many of the ancient city's main streets were supplied with a subsurface drainage system and they were flanked on either side with colonnaded porticoes.

The city had at least five decorative fountains and an elaborate water distribution system. In 2015, a rare marble rock was found with the inscription of the water law. Issued in 114 A.D., the law regulated the use of water that was imported via aqueducts from the mountains to Laodicea. A fine of 5000 to 12500 denarii could be imposed on anyone who polluted the water, damaged one of the channels, or opened one of the water pipes.<sup>67</sup>

A church building, built some years after the writing of the Apocalypse, had a water channel running down the middle of the church. It supplied the water for the baptistry and a two-seat latrine.

Laodicea had four public bath complexes and five agoras (open marketplaces).

It also had the largest stadium in the province, as well as several temples.

The Church at Laodicea was surrounded by a culture of opulence, a sense of self-sufficiency, and community pride. This culture is reflected in the attitudes that prevailed in the church.

## THE LETTER

### Revelation 3:14-22

#### The author of the letter identified Himself – verse 14

*"And to the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:*

The term, *amen*, has a dual meaning:

- *So be it*, which is the sense in which it is used as a close to prayer.
- *Truth*, which is the sense in which the term is used in Isaiah 65:16, *Because he who is blessed in the earth Shall be blessed by the God of truth; And he who swears in the earth Shall swear by the God of truth.* The Hebrew in both of these instances states, *the God of Amen.*<sup>68</sup> When the Jewish scholars produced the Septuagint Version (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures), they rendered the Hebrew term, *amen*, in this passage by the Greek term, ἀληθινός (*alathinos*), which is the Greek word for *truth*. Following the Septuagint, all English versions have followed the Septuagint in rendering the term, *amen*, in Isaiah 65:16, as, *truth*.

The use of the term in Isaiah is the sense in which the term is used here. He is the *Amen, the faithful and true witness*. He will speak the truth and His assessment is flawless.

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<sup>67</sup> Wikipedia, *Laodicea on the Lycus*

<sup>68</sup> Hebrew אָמֵן

The author also identifies Himself as the creator. The fact that the Second Member of the Godhead, the Son, was co-creator with God the Father is clearly stated in the New Testament.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.<sup>3</sup> All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1-3)*

*yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Corinthians 8:6)*

The Apostles Creed is flawed in how it describes the Godhead: *I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth, and of His Son, Jesus Christ, His only Son and Our Lord.* This statement does not include the Son in the act of creation.

### **Having established His credentials and thus His authority, Christ declared His assessment of the Laodicean Church's spiritual state – verses 15-17**

***<sup>15</sup> 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,***

As has been true in the other letters, the Greek term rendered, *I know*, is in the indicative perfect active tense, indicating a thorough knowledge, from the past to the present.

The description, *neither hot nor cold*, calls to mind the culture in which I spent my childhood (JWG). Almost everyone was a member of a church and what you did on Sunday morning was, *go to church*. It was just the custom of the community. In most church attenders' lives, there was not much evidence of fervor. Church attendance was just a custom, perhaps a habit.

Christ used the figure of someone who took a drink of a beverage and found that because of its lukewarmness – neither hot nor cold – is distasteful and therefore is spit out of the mouth.

- The language of the rebuke indicates something that was quite relevant to their lukewarmness: The members of the church reflected the financial condition of the community – in this world's goods, they were rich and that seemed to be a part of their identity.
- They also seemed to be impressed with their self-sufficiency – *I have need of nothing*. The picture given is of a congregation that was so self-sufficient that it had no sense of needing God. They were so conscious of their self-sufficiency that they were oblivious to the fact that spiritually, they were poverty stricken.

Because a great deal of Laodicea's wealth depended upon trade, the Christian merchants of Laodicea would have been in a quandary. Would they cooperate with the imperial cult and maintain their membership in the trade associations, which deified the emperor? Or would they forswear Emperor Domitian's worship and reaffirm their faith in Christ – suffering the financial consequences of their act? They had a lot to lose. We recall the words of Jesus,

*"And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:24)*

*And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. <sup>17</sup> "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" <sup>18</sup> "And he said, "This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> "And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many*

*goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.*"<sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'"<sup>21</sup> "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21)

Given the description of the lukewarmness of their commitment to Christ, it suggests that some, perhaps many, compromised their faith, by continuing their membership in the church, while also cooperating with the trade association and reverencing the Roman Emperor, and the church tolerated such action - causing Christ to say, *I will spit you out of my mouth.*

**Christ said that the answer to their sad spiritual state was to turn to Him as the source for their true riches as well as the medicine for their spiritual healing – verse 18**

*I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.*

Again, we see the image of the surrounding culture reflected in Christ's offer:

- The fleeting wealth of this world is contrasted with the eternal wealth of Gold that is of the highest quality. When gold was being refined, it was placed in a vessel and the heat was increased until all impurities had been removed and the goldsmith could see his face reflected in the liquid gold. Such a high quality of eternal gold is offered by Christ, to those who would turn to Him without reservation.
- In contrast to Laodicea's raven black woolen garments, Christ offered white garments that would be a covering for the shame that lurked in their consciences.
- In contrast to the Laodicean medical school's well-known Phrygian powder/salve for eye complaints, Christ offered a spiritual eye salve that would cause the Laodiceans to lose their spiritual blindness and to see their true condition. Then, they could see the nature of a truly spiritually healthy life.

<sup>19</sup> *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.*

The first step was for them to recognize their condition – to repent. As noted in the letter to Sardis, the Greek term rendered, *repent*, is μετανέω (*metanoehoh*), which means, *to change one's mind – change how you think about these matters.*

The exhortation was to no longer look to their self-sufficiency but acknowledge their spiritual poverty and look to Christ as the only source of true wealth.

Because of His love for the members of the Laodicean Church, In order to being about that repentance, Christ was ready to impose some sort of undefined discipline.,

**Christ eagerly stood at the door of everyone's heart. He was knocking at the door asking to be let in – verse 20**

<sup>20</sup> *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.*

No one needs to pray and beg Christ to receive them. Quite the opposite. He is eager to enter the heart of the repentant sinner and waiting for the invitation.

**This calls to mind the familiar invitation song, *The Saviour is Waiting*.**

The Savior is waiting to enter your heart, Why don't you let Him come in? There's nothing in this world to keep you apart, What is your answer to Him? Time, after time, He has waited before, And now He is waiting again- To see if you're willing to open the door, Oh, how He wants to come in.	If you'll take one step t'ward the Saviour my friend, You'll find his arms open wide; Receive Him, and all of your darkness will end Within your heart He'll abide. Time, after time, He has waited before, And now He is waiting again- To see if you're willing to open the door, Oh, how He wants to come in.
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**As in the previous letters, a wonderful promise to overcomers – verse 21**

***21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.***

This promise is almost identical to the promise given to the overcomers in Thyatira, *'And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; (Revelation 2:26-27)*

The same comment made on this statement in the letter to Thyatira applies here:

Exactly what is meant by giving authority over the nations depends on which of the four schools of interpretation of the Apocalypse one adopts. For example, those who accept the Futurist view, state that Revelation Chapter 20 describes a one-thousand-year (millennium) time of peace on earth, following the great Tribulation. During this millennium, Christ will reign supreme and those who have been faithful to Him, throughout the ages, will rule with Him.

Since there is much disagreement concerning how to interpret this promise, I (JWG) choose to not have an opinion, but to wait eagerly for the time when this will be fulfilled and then, I will know the meaning of the promise.

Whatever the meaning of that promise, it does mean a glorious and wonderful eternal future for all who overcome all of the challenges that Satan puts upon us in this present life.

**The letter closes with the same exhortation that has ended the previous letters – verse 22**

***22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"***

**WHAT IMPORTANT LESSONS HAVE THESE LETTERS IMPARTED TO US?**

Ephesus –

- True Christianity is a relationship, not just a religion. Each believer should be diligent in maintaining that relationship, through prayer and devotional reading of the Holy Word.
- The local church, especially the elders, must be diligent to oppose aberrant teaching, regardless of how spiritual or appealing it might be.

Smyrna –

The great lesson that comes to us from this letter is that nothing happens that escapes God's sight. He knows everything that is happening, He either causes or allows everything, and that those who persevere under trial have a blessed reward awaiting them.



## Pergamum -

- We are exhorted to persevere in faithfulness, in spite of severe consequences
- We are exhorted to root out those who are distorting both the truth of the Gospel and the life associated with that Gospel.

## Thyatira –

- God is pleased with a church that, year by year, increases its deeds of righteousness.
- God is pleased with a church in which the relationship among the members is one of love and patience.
- Church leaders must be diligent to root out any violation of orthodoxy or orthopraxy that seeks to find a home in the local church.
- Those who remain faithful to God and to His standards will receive a reward that is beyond description.

## Sardis-

- Through exciting programs and Sunday morning entertainment – humorous and entertaining sermons, a professional style Sunday morning musical concert, etc., a church can gain a sizeable following and be accepted as an influential element in the community ---yet--- be dead spiritually.
- Leaders and members of the church *say* beautiful prayers - rather than *pray* prayers with a deep sense of speaking reverently and intimately with God.
- Merchandizing methods are used to promote church growth, rather than allowing God to grow the church, through the church's focus on bringing damned lost souls to repentance, immersion into Christ, and then, discipling converts.

## Philadelphia –

- A church's effectiveness does not depend on its apparent assets, but on whatever door Christ opens to that Church.
- Churches and individual Christians must remain faithful in spite of the severity of the persecutions and hardships imposed on them by enemies of Christ.
- Indescribable rewards await those who do not lose their way but, rather, remain faithful unto death.

## Laodicea –

- It is important for each believer to be aware of any tendency to practice Christianity as merely a cultural custom.
- Each believer must recognize the difference between the temporary financial prosperity that one can experience in this life, and the eternal prosperity that those who overcome this world and its allurements will experience in the hereafter.
- It does not require some huge pleading effort on our part to persuade Christ to accept us. He is eagerly waiting to enter our hearts, even knocking on the door, sometimes through sorrow, pain, and tragedy, because He loves us and wants to fill our lives with His Presence through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**He who has an ear, let him hear what the  
Spirit says to the churches**

## ADDENDUM A

### The Martyrdom of Polycarp

The following are excerpts from a letter describing the martyrdom early Christians. The section below describes the martyrdom of Polycarp, the leading elder of Smyrna. Polycarp was a companion and student of John the apostle. His death occurred in around 150 A.D. The closing salutation includes the notation that the letter is written by Caius, who transcribed it from a document written by Irenaeus.

#### Chapter 5. The departure and vision of Polycarp

But the most admirable Polycarp, when he first heard [that he was sought for], was in no measure disturbed, but resolved to stay in the city. However, in deference to the wish of many, he was persuaded to leave it. He departed, therefore, to a country house not far distant from the city. There he stayed with a few [friends], engaged in nothing else night and day than praying for all men, and for the Churches throughout the world, according to his usual custom. And while he was praying, a vision presented itself to him three days before he was taken; and, behold, the pillow under his head seemed to him on fire. Upon this, turning to those that were with him, he said to them prophetically, I must be burnt alive.

#### Chapter 6. Polycarp is betrayed by a servant

And when those who sought for him were at hand, he departed to another dwelling, whither his pursuers immediately came after him. And when they found him not, they seized upon two youths [that were there], one of whom, being subjected to torture, confessed. It was thus impossible that he should stay hidden, since those that betrayed him were of his own household. The Irenarch then (whose office is the same as that of the Cleronomus ), by name Herod, hastened to bring him into the stadium. [This all happened] that he might fulfil his special lot, being made a partaker of Christ, and that they who betrayed him might undergo the punishment of Judas himself.

#### Chapter 7. Polycarp is found by his pursuers

His pursuers then, along with horsemen, and taking the youth with them, went forth at supper-time on the day of the preparation with their usual weapons, as if going out against a robber. Matthew 26:55 And having come about evening [to the place where he was], they found him lying down in the upper room of a certain little house, from which he might have escaped into another place; but he refused, saying, The will of God be done. Matthew 6:10; Acts 21:14 So when he heard that they had come, he went down and spoke with them. And as those that were present marveled at his age and constancy, some of them said. Was so much effort made to capture such a venerable man? Immediately then, in that very hour, he ordered that something to eat and drink should be set before them, as much indeed as they cared for, while he besought them to allow him an hour to pray without disturbance. And on their giving him leave, he stood and prayed, being full of the grace of God, so that he could not cease for two full hours, to the astonishment of those who heard him, insomuch that many began to repent that they had come forth against so godly and venerable an old man.

#### Chapter 8. Polycarp is brought into the city

Now, as soon as he had ceased praying, having made mention of all that had at any time come in contact with him, both small and great, illustrious and obscure, as well as the whole universal church throughout the world, the time of his departure having arrived, they set him upon an ass, and conducted him into the city, the day being that of the great Sabbath. And the Irenarch Herod, accompanied by his father Nicetes (both riding in a chariot ), met him, and taking him up into the

chariot, they seated themselves beside him, and endeavoured to persuade him, saying, What harm is there in saying, Lord Cæsar, and in sacrificing, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety? But he at first gave them no answer; and when they continued to urge him, he said, I shall not do as you advise me. So they, having no hope of persuading him, began to speak bitter words unto him, and cast him with violence out of the chariot, insomuch that, in getting down from the carriage, he dislocated his leg [by the fall]. But without being disturbed, and as if suffering nothing, he went eagerly forward with all haste, and was conducted to the stadium, where the tumult was so great, that there was no possibility of being heard.

#### Chapter 9. Polycarp refuses to revile Christ

Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, Be strong, and show yourself a man, O Polycarp! No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, Have respect to your old age, and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], Swear by the fortune of Cæsar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists. But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, Away with the Atheists. Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, Swear, and I will set you at liberty, reproach Christ; Polycarp declared, Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?

#### Chapter 10. Polycarp confesses himself a Christian

And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, “Swear by the fortune of Cæsar,” he answered, “Since you are vainly urgent that, as you say, I should swear by the fortune of Cæsar, and pretend not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and you shall hear them.”

The proconsul replied, “Persuade the people.” But Polycarp said, “To you I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God. Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1 But as for *these*, I do not deem them worthy of receiving any account from me.”

#### Chapter 11. No threats have any effect on Polycarp

The proconsul then said to him, “I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast you, unless you repent.”

But he answered, “Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous.”

But again the proconsul said to him, “I will cause you to be consumed by fire, seeing you despise the wild beasts, if you will not repent.”

But Polycarp said, “You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you tarry? Bring forth what you will.”

#### Chapter 12. Polycarp is sentenced to be burned

While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.

This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods.”

Speaking thus, they cried out, and besought Philip the Asiarch to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But Philip answered that it was not lawful for him to do so, seeing the shows of wild beasts were already finished. Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. For thus it behooved the vision which was revealed to him in regard to his pillow to be fulfilled, when, seeing it on fire as he was praying, he turned about and said prophetically to the faithful that were with him, I must be burnt alive.

#### Chapter 13. The funeral pile is erected

This, then, was carried into effect with greater speed than it was spoken, the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and fagots out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it. And when the funeral pile was ready, Polycarp, laying aside all his garments, and loosing his girdle, sought also to take off his sandals — a thing he was not accustomed to do, inasmuch as every one of the faithful was always eager who should first touch his skin. For, on account of his good behavior he was, even before his martyrdom, adorned with every kind of good. Immediately then they surrounded him with those substances which had been prepared for the funeral pile. But when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, Leave me as I am; for He that gives me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile.

#### Chapter 14. The prayer of Polycarp

They did not nail him then, but simply bound him. And he, placing his hands behind him, and being bound like a distinguished ram [taken] out of a great flock for sacrifice, and prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering unto God, looked up to heaven, and said,

“O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of You, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before you, I give You thanks that You have counted me, worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Your martyrs, in the cup of your Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before You as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as You, the ever-truthful God, have foreordained, have revealed beforehand to me, and now have fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise You for all things, I bless You, I glorify You, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, with whom, to You, and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen.”

#### Chapter 15. Polycarp is not injured by the fire

When he had pronounced this *amen*, and so finished his prayer, those who were appointed for the purpose kindled the fire. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury, we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved that we might report to others what

then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odour [coming from the pile], as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there.

#### Chapter 16. Polycarp is pierced by a dagger

At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near and pierce him through with a dagger. And on his doing this, there came forth a dove, and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished; and all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp was one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the universal church which is in Smyrna. For every word that went out of his mouth either has been or shall yet be accomplished.

#### Chapter 22. Salutation

We wish you, brethren, all happiness, while you walk according to the doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; with whom be glory to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of His holy elect, after whose example the blessed Polycarp suffered, following in whose steps may we too be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ!

These things Caius transcribed from the copy of Irenæus (who was a disciple of Polycarp), having himself been intimate with Irenæus. And I Socrates transcribed them at Corinth from the copy of Caius. Grace be with you all.

And I again, Pionius, wrote them from the previously written copy, having carefully searched into them, and the blessed Polycarp having manifested them to me through a revelation, even as I shall show in what follows. I have collected these things, when they had almost faded away through the lapse of time, that the Lord Jesus Christ may also gather me along with His elect into His heavenly kingdom, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

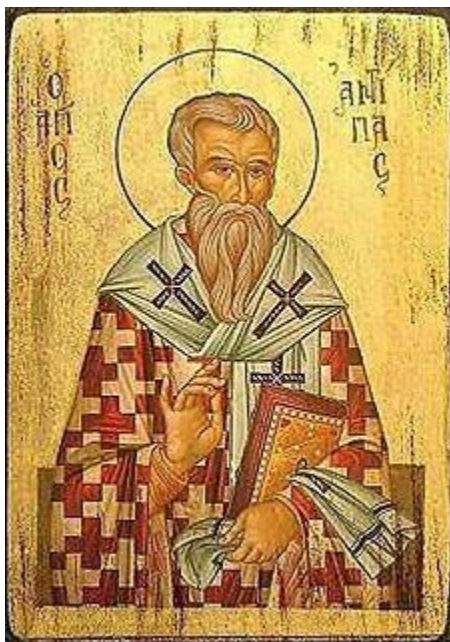
**Source.** Translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0102.htm>>.

## ADDENDUM B

### The Martyrdom of Antipas

The Eastern Orthodox tradition, concerning the death of Antipas, is described in the following document from the Orthodox Church website, [Home / The Orthodox Faith / Lives of the Saints](#)

#### **Hiero-martyr Antipas, Bishop of Pergamum and Disciple of Saint John the Theologian**



Commemorated on April 11

The Hiero-martyr Antipas, a disciple of the holy Apostle John the Theologian, was bishop of the Church of Pergamum during the reign of the emperor Nero (54-68).

During these times, everyone who would not offer sacrifice to the idols lived under threat of either exile or execution by order of the emperor. On the island of Patmos (in the Aegean Sea) the holy Apostle John the Theologian was imprisoned - he to whom the Lord revealed the future judgment of the world and of Holy Church.

“And to the angel of the Church of Pergamum write: the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know where you live, where the throne of Satan is, and you cleave unto My Name, and have not renounced My faith, even in those days when Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells” (Rev 2:12-13).

By his personal example, firm faith and constant preaching about Christ, Saint Antipas began to turn the people of Pergamum from offering sacrifice to idols. The pagan priests reproached the bishop for leading the people away from their ancestral gods, and they demanded that he stop preaching about Christ and offer sacrifice to the idols instead.

Saint Antipas calmly answered that he was not about to serve the demons that fled from him, a mere mortal. He said he worshipped the Lord Almighty, and he would continue to worship the Creator of all, with His Only-Begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit. The pagan priests retorted that their gods existed from of old, whereas Christ was not from of old but was crucified under Pontius Pilate as a criminal. The saint replied that the pagan gods were the work of human hands

and that everything said about them was filled with iniquities and vices. He steadfastly confessed his faith in the Son of God, incarnate of the Most Holy Virgin.

The enraged pagan priests dragged the Hiero-martyr Antipas to the temple of Artemis and threw him into a red-hot copper bull, where usually they put the sacrifices to the idols. In the red-hot furnace the martyr prayed loudly to God, imploring Him to receive his soul and to strengthen the faith of the Christians. He went to the Lord peacefully, as if he were going to sleep (+ ca. 68).

At night Christians took the body of the Hiero-martyr Antipas, which was untouched by the fire. They buried him at Pergamum. The tomb of the hiero-martyr became a font of miracles and of healings from various sicknesses.

We pray to the Hiero-martyr Antipas for relief from toothache, and diseases of the teeth.