

# *The Seven Churches of Revelation*

**Chapters 2 and 3**



**END-TIME COMMENTARY**

from

**The Testimony of Jesus**

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from

**The Testimony of Jesus**

**THE SEVEN CHURCHES  
OF  
REVELATION**

**REVELATION 2 AND 3**

A commentary focusing on spiritual applications to the  
time just preceding Jesus' return.

Franklin S. Fowler Jr., M.D., Editor

These conclusions are always tentative since new light constantly unfolds.

# Prophecy Research Initiative

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Understanding God's Word continually deepens. He designed that the beauty of truth expressed there would continually open to the relentless student. Armed with His Spirit, waves of new understanding would break upon the inquiring mind. The pages of this commentary represent only a few of those waves that have come to shore. We will never tire of discovery nor cease to open new thoughts to our readers. We ask all to pray that each viewpoint will ever move closer to the precise meaning God gave each thought to convey.

This document is a collaborative effort of a volunteer team of individuals who have a dedicated interest in understanding and sharing prophetic truth. An overriding objective in this research is to accurately portray eschatological concerns in the book of Revelation.

## Editorial Notice

Many cited quotations draw from ancient apocalyptic and Jewish literature. Though the editors of this commentary do not necessarily endorse these references as appropriate sources for *truth*, per se, they provide linguistic assistance with words, phrases and, at times, ancient understanding to help grasp Biblical expressions. For that reason they are preserved in many quotations inserted in the text of this document.

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## Cover Painting:

### **St. John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos**

MEMLING, Hans 1474-79 – Right Panel of a Triptych

#### **Painted on the “St John Altarpiece”**

Oil on oak panel, 173,6 x 173,7 cm (central), 176 x 78,9 cm (each wing)

Memlingmuseum, Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges

Together with the Gdansk Last Judgment and the Lübeck Passion, this is one of the three biggest triptychs that Memling ever painted. The three altarpieces are also distributed evenly throughout his career, and hence serve as crucial milestones in the development of his oeuvre. The St John altarpiece is dated 1479, and is thus located precisely half-way between the Gdansk (1467) and Lübeck (1491) triptychs.

There are three panels, a triptych. The two wings, each depict episodes from the lives of the standing figures of the two St Johns. The central panel focuses upon a *Sacra Conversazione*, a gathering of saints around the Virgin. However, the narrow vertical openings between the columns reveal a continuous landscape with ruins and buildings in which small episodes from the lives of the two male saints are enacted. The left wing features the Beheading of St John the Baptist and the right wing St John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos. In addition to these realistic portrayals, the carved groups on the two capitals above each saint also depict key moments from their lives.

The composition of the triptych as a whole is not only ingenious in narrative terms, with the different components interlocking spatially and thematically;. There is no sign of any other representation prior to Memling in which the Book of Revelation is played out before St John's eyes in its entirety in a single, undivided painting. Only in the Beheading of St John the Baptist did Memling prefer to paraphrase a Van der Weyden composition (St John altarpiece, Berlin, Staatliche Museum). However, the stylized terseness and enclosed character of the latter give way here to dramatic action in the open air, with a high degree of realism.

In view of the historical circumstances and iconography, there can be no doubt whatsoever that this triptych was painted for the High Altar of the chapel of St John's Hospital. An old inscription on the bottom member of the frame gives the date 1479 and the name of the artist Johannes Memling. With the exception of the Floreins triptych in the same hospital, this is the only work by Memling to be authenticated by an original (in this case subsequently overpainted) inscription. The donors were also identified. Jacob de Ceuninc was initially recorded as a monk at the hospital in 1469-70, and later as bursar from 1488 until his death in 1490. Antheunis Seghers was first mentioned in 1455-56 and appears to have been master from 1461 to 1465, bursar from 1466 to 1468, and then master again from 1469 until his death in 1475. Agnes Casembrood was first recorded in 1445-46, and subsequently appears as prioress from 1459 to 1463, and again from 1469 until her death in 1489. Clara van Hulslen makes her initial appearance in the records in 1427-1428, and died in 1479. Given that these are evidently intended as portraits, the altarpiece must have been ordered before the death of Antheunis Seghers in 1475, which means that its production may logically be linked with the expansion of the chapel's apse in 1473-74 though we lack details of Jacob de Ceuninc and Clara van Hulslen in those years.

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# INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION 2 AND 3

A glorified Savior appeared to John and gave to him a Sabbath message so important he was told twice to write it down. The sermon notes became chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. This message was made up of seven sermonettes which were to be delivered to seven of the many churches in Asia. As only God can do, each sermonette was filled with profound truths. These now provide insight into Christ's personality, His concerns for His people, what makes Him happy, warnings, rebukes, advice, promises and rewards.

The Bible makes it clear that these summary messages were needs specific to each of the seven named churches in Asia Minor (1:11; 2; 3). If those instructive "letters" had no meaning beyond a few local congregations, it would have been hardly worth including them in the final prophetic book of God's word. Something so consequential, so meaningful, is presented that Jesus Himself comes to dictate very precise words to John. The chain of command communication outlined early on in chapter 1 is broken. Gabriel ("his angel" – 1:1) was bypassed, and Jesus (John's bosom friend) visits him personally. This discourse was to become a collection of "notice" bulletins for God's people throughout the Christian dispensation.

"The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian Era. The number 7 indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world."<sup>1</sup>

Thus we see an application for the time they were written and we find they have prophetic significance through the Christian dispensation right to the very end. Another deep connotation is evident. There is an extraordinary focus on the end of time within the messages. Since the riveting concern is the Christian Church (the emergence of a new covenant people), these issues have the most urgent interest for the last generation who will live before Jesus comes again. In each church there is a special allusion to the people of the last segment of time.

Accordingly, we see these remarkable chapters fulfilling the Preterist and the Historicist interpretive views. However, there is a maranathic presence to this revelation. It is that apocalyptic reference that we want to analyze most deeply. There is an amazing thought in E. G. White's writings: "Each period of the fulfillment of prophetic history is a preparation for the advanced light which will succeed each period. As the prophecy comes to an end, there is to be a **perfect whole**."<sup>2</sup>

Is it possible that the unified collection of the seven letters presents a textbook of counsel to the last people of the last days?

"All who are preparing to meet their Lord should make this book [Revelation] the subject of earnest study and prayer. It is just what its name signified,—a revelation of the important events that are to take place in the last days of this earth's history."

"Christ visited John in his exile, and opened to him the *closing scenes* of this world's history."<sup>3</sup>

But what about those seven epistles to the churches? Is it possible that these messages are the final sermons to be preached to His people? Are these the remnant's last preparation discourses? Look at this exceptional insight and association: "The messages given to the churches in Asia, *portray the **state of things** existing in the churches of the religious world today*. The *names* of the churches are symbolic of the Christian church in different periods of the Christian era; the number of the churches – seven – indicates completeness and is symbolic of the fact

<sup>1</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 585.

<sup>2</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, p. 15 (emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Pacific Union Recorder*, 01/04/04, "The Study of Revelation" (emphasis added).

that the messages [plural] extend to the end of time, and **are enforced today**; while the figures used are symbolic of the **state** of God's professed people,—the wheat developing among the tares; truth standing on its own eternal basis in contrast with error."<sup>4</sup>

Here we find these seven executive dispatches:

1. Portray the state of the Christian (implied) churches of today
2. Indicate the advice and warnings are in force today
3. Indicate each church has a mixture of good or at least potential good mixed with the hopeless

"As we have followed down the *chain of prophecy*, revealed truth for *our time* has been clearly seen and explained. We are accountable for the privileges that we enjoy and for the light that shines upon our pathway. Those who lived in past generations were accountable for the light which was permitted to shine upon them. Their minds were exercised in regard to different points of Scripture which tested them. But they did not understand the truths which we do. They were not responsible for the light which they did not have. They had the Bible, as we have; but the time for the unfolding of special truth *in relation to* the closing scenes of this earth's history is during the last generations that shall live upon the earth. [We are now 5-6 generations since the "end of time" began to be preached in the early 1800's.]

"Hundreds of commentaries have been written upon the gospel by men who are called great, and as we near the closing scenes of this earth's history still more wonderful representations will be made. We need to study the scriptures with humble, contrite hearts. Those who will devote their powers to the study of God's word, and especially the prophecies referring to these last days, will be rewarded by the discovery of important truths. The last book of the New Testament scriptures is full of truths that need to be understood. Satan has blinded the eyes of men, and they have been glad of any excuse for not making a study of this book. Here Christ has declared through His servant John *what shall be in the last days*."<sup>5</sup>

We are invited to view the letters to the seven churches as a unique "book" for the last-day church. There, we will find warnings, advice, promises and hope apropos to every possible situation that exists or might arise. It is a pastor's handbook and a church administrator's manual, a parishioner's guidebook for this time.

"I wish to emphasize the fact, that the churches to which John was told to send the instruction given him represent all the churches in our world, and that this revelation to him is to be studied and believed and preached by the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Christ came personally to John to tell him 'the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter' (Revelation 1:19)."<sup>6</sup>

The self declaration of Jesus with each church varies and provides the imagery and authority for each unique church need. This is divided into two general themes: (1) the High Priest and pastor, serving, judging and disciplining, (2) the faithful martyr, now ruling as Eternal King, providing power to overcome (sanctification), who has a place on His throne for the redeemed. He is a functional Jesus, creating specific solutions for individual needs.

Finally, we find Jesus actively communicating from a conflict setting. Here we see the Redeemer/Advocate and the King/Judge choreographed in the final stand against the kingdom of darkness. What is seen at a local congregation level is a minuet of the greater saga throughout the whole book of power and control. One force (evil) seeks to coerce, hurt and destroy; the

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<sup>4</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 372 (1900) (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Bible Training School*, 01/01/13, "The Wonderful Gift of His Word" (emphasis added).

<sup>6</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 372.



other (good) invites and woos. Thyatira is the church of greatest evil. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the churches with the greatest good. Within these seven churches are the extremes of good and the vast expressions of evil. To each, Jesus makes it clear how He feels about their problems and offers counsel. With pastoral love, He always ends with eternal promises that will be theirs if they respond to His invitations.



# DANIELIC TIE

Within the vision called the *chazown* of Daniel 8–12 is another sub-vision called the *mareh*. The main time period of the *mareh* is 2300 days/years (8:14). Gabriel said that the sanctuary, representing God's community of people, would be restored after the end of that time prophecy, which ended in 1844. What happened to it? It was decimated by a horn power that represents the papacy (Daniel 8:9-25).

Within the *mareh* vision was a probation for Daniel's people (Daniel 9:22-27). Gabriel stated that they had 490 years (70 weeks) to meet a series of conditions to become a holy people. In the middle of the last week, three and a half years into that week, the Messiah was cut off or killed by the Jewish nation. They failed their test, lost their chance, and Jesus said that His kingdom would be taken from them and given to another nation (Matthew 21:43).

The *mareh* prophecy anticipated the Jewish rejection of its Messiah shown by the 2300-day/year prophecy. It emphasized this dramatically in Daniel 10 where the imagery of Jesus was given for the first time to this prophet (Daniel 10:5-6). Jesus had priestly evidences in His linen garb and golden girdle. He had judgeship status with his voice like many waters, arms and feet like polished brass, face like lightning and eyes like lamps of fire.

This picture of Jesus comes at the end of the *mareh*, which would be the 1844 era. Revelation 1 opens with the same imagery of Jesus but now with a two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. The time, once again, has come for God to develop a covenant people who adhere to the covenant standards that were outlined by Gabriel in Daniel 9:24. This time it will be enhanced with the precision of truth that the sword represents. That is to be so *clear* that no excuse for missing this final opportunity of being His covenant people will ever be made.

Thus, Revelation begins with end-time language (vss 1-3, 7) in an eschatological motif. This is further reinforced by the imagery of Jesus, which symbolizes, post-1844, the beginning of the judgment and restoration of spiritual Israel. The address to the seven churches has its greatest application in this time framework. These churches symbolize the community of faith that profess Christ.

The current status, the potential experience and reward is outlined for each church. The remainder of the book introduces the events, experiences and the Messianic triumph with a victorious covenant people. What Jesus has waited for, for thousands of years, becomes a reality. Paralleling this victory is a sharp portrayal of Satan's last attempt to seize and retain control of humanity. His defeat along with his followers become certain.

The book plays out what is introduced to the seven churches. Its messages are concentrated especially on the last three and a half years of this earth's history. That period was made very clear in Daniel 12. As the imagery of Jesus is carried forward from Daniel, so is this 1260 days. It will be repeated in Revelation several times beginning in the eleventh chapter. Though written for all of the Christian era, it is especially for the last generation. Jesus made such an observation to the disciples in Matthew 24:34. This framework adds urgency to the words that define the book in a timing setting. "Things" are revealed, which will "shortly come to pass" (1:1).

It is judgment time, intercessory time and the time-of-the-end setting in which the Christian church receives seven final warnings.



# STRUCTURE OF CHRIST'S MESSAGES

The information given to John about each church follows a defined outline. It represents a redemptive letter to each church. Though confined to just a few sentences, the implication to the individual church is profound. The churches are not numbered, but the total number is seven. This perfect number symbolizes the universal Christian church and all those claiming Christian roots. They are to be seen as a whole, yet the messages are church specific. As promised in chapter 1, He is with the churches, walking among them. He tenderly holds the leaders in His protective right hand. The Savior, like a wise counselor, begins the discourse with complements, revealing their positive points. Then He moves into the areas of weakness, but always brings them back up to a state of hope, revealing the potential rewards. Jesus does not leave these churches to the wiles of Satan. He brings warnings regarding their weaknesses and tells them what to do to change and gain eternal life.

A sad commentary is unfolded as one progresses through the book. Only two churches will remain (11:13) – Smyrna and Philadelphia. The others will be classed as Babylon. Many will come out at the final call (18:1-5), but the vast membership, comprising those five groups, will be forever lost.

Every person claiming to be Christ's is found somewhere in those seven churches. As the great decalogue covers every known sin, so this exposé of religious people covers every person called *Christian*.

Chapters 2 and 3, though written to contemporary churches and having historic ties, is a summation statement to all: "This is what I see. This is your last warning." The book is eschatological. It anticipates on every page the second coming (*parousia*). This book moves steadfastly forward in events that draw all of humanity to two classes: one, supporting Satan and two, those with unswerving loyalty to Jesus – in the face of death. To the seven churches He says, "This is the situation. This is what is going to happen. The great decision is who you give your heart to. Don't delay. The time to end everything has come."

What follows is a beautiful outline that Louis Brighton published in 1999, depicting the issues that Jesus presented (next page).

## ANALYSIS OF THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

### What Christ Sees

To	From	Good	Bad 1	Bad 2	Call to Repent (counsel)	Promise to the One Who Conquers
All seven churches 1:4, 11	1:5, 12-18					
Ephesus 2:1-7	Holds the seven stars in his right hand; walks among the seven golden lampstands	Have endurance cannot bear evil people; are not weary; hate the works of the Nicolaitans	Have left your first love	False apostles and Nicolaitans are there	Repent, do first works, or else I will remove your lampstand	I will grant to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God
Smyrna 2:8-11	The First and the Last, who was dead and came back to life	I know your suffering and poverty	Are afraid of suffering	Synagogue of Satan	Stop being afraid of coming suffering, poverty; be faithful to death and I will give you the crown of life	Will not be hurt by the second death
Pergamum 2:12-17	Has the sharp two-edged sword	Hold on to my name; did not deny the faith even when Antipas was martyred	Some hold to the teachings of Balaam (idolatry, immorality) and of the Nicolaitans	Satan's throne is there; Satan lives there; Antipas was martyred there; the teachings of the Nicolaitans are there	Repent, else I will war with the sword of my mouth	I will give of the hidden manna and a white stone and a secret name
Thyatira 1:18-29	The Son of God, who has eyes like fire and feet like brass; searches thoughts and hearts	Have love, faith, service, endurance; your last works are more than your first works	Tolerate the so-called prophetess Jezebel, who teaches people to commit sexual immorality and eat idolatrous food	The so-called prophetess Jezebel is there; some there have known the depths of Satan	Repent of adultery with Jezebel; her children will be killed; the faithful must hold fast to what they have	I will give authority to rule the nations with an iron scepter and will give the morning star
Sardis 3:1-6	Has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars	A few have not polluted their garments, are worthy to be dressed in white	I know your works; have a reputation of being alive but are dead	Have a reputation of being alive but are dead	Repent; keep what you received; watch, lest I return as a thief	Will be dressed in white; I will not remove his name from the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and his Angels

ANALYSIS OF THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES (conc'd)

What Christ Sees

	Good	Bad 1	Bad 2	Call to Repent (counsel)	Promise to the One Who Conquers
Philadelphia 3:7-13	I have placed before you an open door; have kept my Word and not denied my name		Have an open door for evangelism; Jews from the synagogue of Satan will acknowledge that I have loved you	Hold on to what you have; I will protect you during the testing of all the earth; I am coming quickly	I will place him as a pillar in God's temple; I will write on him God's name, the name of God's city, and my new name
Laodicea 3:14-22	The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the source of the creation of God		Are worldly, wealthy, but spiritually poor, naked, blind	I am about to spit you out; repent and receive purification and healing from me; I knock at the door; if anyone opens, I will enter and eat with him	I will grant to sit with me on my throne

Brighton, Louis A; *Revelation, Concordance Commentary* (Concordance Publishing House, Saint Louis), 1999, pp. 58-59.  
Clover, David; *Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3*, 2002, p. 12.





# REVELATION

## CHAPTER 2

### EPHESUS

#### INTRODUCTION

Ephesus church – inactive church (had love for self and legalism set in).

#### Geography

This city was built by the sea in a valley called Cayster. At the time of John and Paul, it was the capital of the province of Asia. Its harbor was filled with ships from all parts of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Sporting a population of 250,000, it was the largest and most important city of the Roman province of Asia.<sup>2</sup> Its markets extended easily into Asia proper by many roads. It claimed the most beautiful climate in the whole world. The citizenry was a mixture of Greek and Oriental. Because of its size and traffic, it became a favorable field for evangelism.

“Next to Rome, Ephesus was the principal seat of Paul’s labors. He devoted three years to that city. The commonly received tradition represents John as closing his apostolic career there. Nothing in early Church history is better attested than his residence and work in Ephesus, the centre of the circle of churches established by Paul.”<sup>3</sup>

“The city by other names was founded over 800 years before the Christian era. The city and its topography when well cared for looked beautiful. As it appears today the impressive ruins lie several miles from the Adriatic Sea. The fast flowing river that is a torrent in the Spring has silted the harbor so that only a flat, reedy marsh is all that one sees of the [once] magnificent harbor.”<sup>4</sup>

The inhabitants were morally degenerate, in a large part because of their *worship* experiences.

“Paul saw that ‘a great door and effectual’ was opening before him, although there were ‘many adversaries.’ 1 Corinthians 16:9. Ephesus was not only the most magnificent, but the most corrupt, of the cities of Asia. Superstition and sensual pleasure held sway over her teeming population. Under the shadow of her temples, criminals of every grade found shelter, and the most degrading vices flourished.”<sup>5</sup>

#### Religion

This city was devoted to the cult of *Artemis*, which in Latin is called Diana. This god was housed in a magnificent oriental temple. It was so vast and beautiful it was among

<sup>1</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), 1997, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent’s Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 436.

<sup>4</sup> Sheffield, Harold, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 286.

the seven wonders of the world. The temple was 425 x 220 feet in dimensions. “Each of its 120 columns was donated by a king.”<sup>6</sup>

The temple, by law, was a place of asylum for criminals, including an area around it of a furlong (1/8 mile). Its first inner chamber was filled with exquisite art and idols, in the middle room was the Shrine of Diana and in the third or back room was the richest and securest bank in the world.<sup>7</sup>

“Once a year, special ceremonies were held at Ephesus in honor of the goddess Diana. These attracted great numbers of people from all parts of the province. Throughout this period, festivities were conducted with the utmost pomp and splendor.”<sup>8</sup>

Spiritualism was integrated into the temple experiences at Ephesus. Voices from Satan’s realm gave messages to the inquiring patron. This added to the fascination and wonder of the power of the goddess Diana and the services within the temple.

“The magicians of heathen times have their counterpart in the spiritualistic mediums, the clairvoyants, and the fortune-tellers of today. The mystic voices that spoke at Endor and at Ephesus are still by their lying words misleading the children of men. Could the veil be lifted from before our eyes, we should see evil angels employing all their arts to deceive and to destroy. Wherever an influence is exerted to cause men to forget God, there Satan is exercising his bewitching power. When men yield to his influence, ere they are aware the mind is bewildered and the soul polluted. The apostle’s admonition to the Ephesian church should be heeded by the people of God today: ‘Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them’ Ephesians 5:11.”<sup>9</sup>

“The image of Artemis was one of the most sacred objects of worship in the ancient world, but it was not beautiful. It was grotesque, squat, black, many-breasted figure that was reputed to have fallen from heaven (cf. Acts 19:27, 35). Nevertheless, the citizens were fanatically devoted to worshiping the image. Prostitution thrived there because the immoral activities were looked upon as sacred, and the prostitutes themselves were viewed as priestesses.”<sup>10</sup>

### Christian Church

Paul founded this church around 52 A.D. and ministered there for three years (Acts 20:31).<sup>11</sup> Here, too, Apollos, Priscilla, Aquila and Timothy labored. This church was the object of the book of Ephesians. It is of the historic Christian era of 100-313 A.D. While Timothy ministered there, Paul wrote the two letters that bear this young evangelist’s name.<sup>12</sup> This was later the residence of John and apparently from where he was banished to Patmos.

This city is where Paul faced death:

“Paul informed the Corinthians of his trouble in Asia, where, he says, ‘We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.’ In his first epistle he speaks of fighting with beasts at Ephesus. He thus refers to the fanatical mob that clamored for his life. They were indeed more like furious wild beasts than men. With gratitude to God, Paul reviews his danger and his deliverance. He had thought when at Ephesus, that his life of usefulness was about to close, that the promise made

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), pp. 50-52.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, pp. 436-437.

<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 291-292.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

to him that he should at last die for his faith, was about to be fulfilled. But God had preserved him, and his remarkable deliverance made him hope that his labors were not at an end.”<sup>13</sup>

God, however, blessed Paul’s work in a special way there.

“The apostle Paul, in his labors at Ephesus, was given special tokens of divine favor. The power of God accompanied his efforts, and many were healed of physical maladies. ‘God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.’ These manifestations of supernatural power were far more potent than had ever before been witnessed in Ephesus, and were of such a character that they could not be imitated by the skill of the juggler or the enchantments of the sorcerer. As these miracles were wrought in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the people had opportunity to see that the God of heaven was more powerful than the magicians who were worshipers of the goddess Diana. Thus the Lord exalted His servant, even before the idolaters themselves, immeasurably above the most powerful and favored of the magicians.”<sup>14</sup>

An interesting caricature of the work there is afforded to us: “It was at this time that ‘a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.’ He had heard the preaching of John the Baptist, had received the baptism of repentance, and was a living witness that the work of the prophet had not been in vain. The Scripture record of Apollos is that he was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

“While in Ephesus, Apollos ‘began to speak boldly in the synagogue.’ Among his hearers were Aquila and Priscilla, who, perceiving that he had not yet received the full light of the gospel, ‘took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.’ Through their teaching he obtained a clearer understanding of the Scriptures and became one of the ablest advocates of the Christian faith.”<sup>15</sup>

There was a group of Jews who were involved with spiritualism that God rebuked.

“But the One to whom all the spirits of evil are subject and who had given His servants authority over them, was about to bring still greater shame and defeat upon those who despised and profaned His holy name. Sorcery had been prohibited by the Mosaic law, on pain of death, yet from time to time it had been secretly practiced by apostate Jews. At the time of Paul’s visit to Ephesus there were in the city ‘certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists,’ who, seeing the wonders wrought by him, ‘took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus.’ An attempt was made by ‘seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests.’ Finding a man possessed with a demon, they addressed him, ‘We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.’ But ‘the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”<sup>16</sup>

Paul’s work raised up a flourishing church at Ephesus. Because of this the gospel spread throughout Asia among both the Jews and Gentiles. “*This church was used by Jesus as a symbol of the entire Christian church in the apostolic age* (Revelation 2:2, 3

<sup>13</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 178.

<sup>14</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 286.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

quoted).<sup>17</sup> This is unique because it becomes an object of what God prizes in a church that is called Christian. It is the kind of passion and zeal that will fill the last-day church as it finishes the work.

“In the days of the apostles the Christian believers were filled with earnestness and enthusiasm. So untiringly did they labor for their Master that in a comparatively short time, notwithstanding fierce opposition, the gospel of the kingdom was sounded to all the inhabited parts of the earth.<sup>18</sup>

“Tradition indicates that John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, became the leader of this church, presumably after the breakup of the Christian headquarters at Jerusalem about A.D. 68, during the Jewish-Roman War. Thus, at the time the Revelation was written, Ephesus must have been one of the leading centers of Christianity. Consequently it was fitting that Christ’s first message by John should have been addressed to this church. Its central location with respect to the Christian world as a whole makes all the more understandable the fact that its spiritual condition could well be characteristic of the whole church during the apostolic period, the era of Christian history reaching approximately to the end of the 1st century (c. A.D. 31).<sup>19</sup>

Ephesus “is known as the Apostolic church which, as long as any of the apostles were alive, the church tended to flourish. The Apostle John himself, was the last survivor. Since the Revelation message was delivered sometime in 94 A.D., we can assume that John probably was laid to rest near that time.”<sup>20</sup>

It is exciting to sense the unrestricted power that worked with Paul and his supporters in this early work of Christianity. Stepping into the metropolis of a major commercial and shipping center, he stimulated the curiosity and then the loyalty of a growing number of newborn Christians. This must have brought deep satisfaction to Paul as he saw the fruit of his work, especially to the Ephesians since he bore a special letter to them, which is one of our New Testament books.

“The church at Ephesus in her earlier history had been made the dispenser of sacred truth. Rare means and privileges had been bestowed upon her.”<sup>21</sup> How Paul began his first outreach will be a fascinating study in the hereafter.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291-578.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 578.

<sup>19</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 743.

<sup>20</sup> Wood, Robert, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>21</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, May 31, 1887.

# REVELATION

## Chapter 2

**VERSE 1:** “Unto the angel of the church of Ephe-sus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;”

### Verse 1 – “Unto the angel of the church of Ephe-sus write; These things saith he”

Beginning a pattern which will be used in all seven churches, the message is addressed to the angel (*aggelos*), a leader in the church of Ephesus. This is a poignant issue because that person was to present this sacred communiqué from Jesus. It was church specific. Who was this person? What moral standards did they have to bear such solemn words? We aren't told, but we can be sure that as important as this book is, the process of choosing this person was done with heavenly guidance.

“It was concluded that the seven were men who represented their churches, but not in the sense of being sole leaders of the individual churches. These were moral representatives, so to speak, who as individuals epitomized the conditions of the churches they represented. Hence, each letter is addressed to the church's representative, not directly to the church itself.”<sup>1</sup>

The church's (*ekklesia*) (basic meaning is “calling out”), the body of believers were to separate from previous relationships and to have a special relationship with God (Romans 9:24, Acts 15:14). Paul previously referred to this unique spiritual community as the “church of God” (I Corinthians 10:32). It also denoted a specific assembly in a certain city such as Ephesus. Both ideas are implied in the message. This people was called out to be God's representatives. They were part of the early Christian church who was to represent Jesus. That representation is the focus of complement and concern.

The command to John to “write” has already been given in 1:11 and 19. It is now to a specific person. Because the command is often repeated, one gets the impression that John was to be very precise in what he was recording.

The “saith he” introduces an authoritative statement. Not only was John to be exact in his writing but its impact was to be felt since it came from Jesus Himself. They are His words of self-declaration. Christ's introduction of Himself alludes back to chapter 1 where we see Him in the role of *Yahweh*. “Write these things saith he” refers to what will follow, not to the past. “Indeed, this formula demands that chapters 2 and 3 be seen as a *group* of prophetic messages rather than as mere letters.”<sup>2</sup>

Ephesus became the center of evangelism in Asia (Acts 19:26). “The same inclinations *that made the people fanatic worshipers of Artemis also made them enthusiastic Christians.*”<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that God blessed Paul and his supporters. The sale of idols, a major business in the city, dropped drastically because of the impact of their work. A backlash developed, bringing early trial to the Ephesian church.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

“An extensive and profitable business had grown up at Ephesus from the manufacture and sale of small shrines and images, modeled after the temple and the image of Diana. Those interested in this industry found their gains diminishing, and all united in attributing the unwelcome change to Paul’s labors.”<sup>4</sup>

**Verse 1 – “that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;**

Jesus presents Himself as the One who holds the seven stars (pastors or leaders) in His hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands (churches). Christ protects all the churches in His hand and is pastorally active with each church, and all comprise the whole. “We do well to remember this. It is not only our church which is in the hand of Christ; the whole church is in His hand. When men put up barriers between church and church, they do what Christ never does.’ (Barclay) Each individual church is part of the Kingdom of God. While Christ is intimately involved with each one, ‘He is not confined to any one of them; wherever men are met to worship in His name, Christ is there.’ (Barclay)”<sup>5</sup>

Each church message is preceded by a description of Jesus that is apropos to that church. Most of these refer to a description of Him found in Chapter 1 – the preface to the whole book (see discussion on 1:13, 16, 20) and a forward to chapters two and three.

This imagery of Jesus calls one’s “attention to the fact that, while the church’s heavenly existence is secure in the sovereign care of Christ, he must visit the earthly counterparts to inspect and correct their conduct and attitudes. As a priest in the temple tends the lamps to keep them from growing dim or going out, Christ moves among the churches to attend to the purity and brightness of the light they give to the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is walking among the candlesticks, not simply standing, and being available whenever needed. This suggests His continuous activity on behalf of His Church.<sup>7</sup>

This picture is changed to some degree from chapter 1. There He is with and part of His church typified throughout Asia, through the ages of time right to the end – a vast perfect whole. Here in Ephesus, Jesus is working for His people. He is not passive. He is portrayed as being part of the process of their growing more perfectly into the body of Christ. This simple change between chapters brings attention to His majestic activity and His desire to guide His people. The implication is more of directing and instructing than simply protecting.

There is another subtle change between chapters 1 and 2 relative to the seven stars in His hand. In chapter 1 *echon* is used to describe the “hold” Jesus has on the stars. In Chapter two it is *kraton*, which changes the meaning.

“The shift to *kraton* from *echon* of the earlier part of the vision (1:16) is not viewed by all as a change in emphasis from ‘hold’ to ‘hold fast.’ The rationale is that if Christ is the Son of Man, the character of such a being guarantees that *echon* contains the idea of *kraton*. This is no mere man, they say (Charles). Yet it is indisputable that ... (*krateo*, ‘I hold fast’) is a stronger and more forceful word than ... (*echo*, ‘I have’). It is also true that

<sup>4</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 292.

<sup>5</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 437.

*krateo* is the opposite of ... (*aphiemi*, 'I let go'), whereas *echon* is not. *Krateo* is certainly intended to have this stronger sense in Rev. 2:25 and 3:11."<sup>8</sup>

"In the message to the church at Ephesus, Christ is represented as holding the seven stars in His hand, and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. He is represented as 'walking' among them, thus illustrating His constant diligence in behalf of His church. He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. Nor does He become indifferent. *These figures are to be carefully studied by the undershepherds, and faithfully applied to their own experience, that they may not lose sight of their great privilege of securing light from the Source of all light, and giving it in turn to those for whom they labor* (Letter 4, 1908)."<sup>9</sup>

"The sweet influences that are to be abundant in the church are bound up with God's ministers, who are to represent the precious love of Christ. The stars of heaven are under the control of Christ. He fills them with light. He directs their movements. If He did not do this, they would become fallen stars; so with His ministers. They are but instruments in His hand, and all the good they accomplish is done through His power. Through them His light is to shine forth. It is to the honor of Christ that He makes His ministers greater blessings to the church, through the workings of the Holy Spirit, than are the stars to the world. The Saviour is to be their sufficiency. If they will look to Him as He looked to His Father, they will do His works. As they make God their dependence, He will give them His brightness to reflect to the world.

"Let those who are as stars in the hand of Christ remember that they are ever to preserve a sacred, holy dignity. They are Christ's representatives. Simplicity in Christ is the pure, sacred dignity of the truth.

"God's servants are to preach His word to the people. Under the Holy Spirit's working they will come into order as stars in the hand of Christ, to shine forth with His brightness. Let those who claim to be Christ's ministers arise and shine; for their light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon them. Let them understand that Christ expects them to do the same work as He has done. Let them leave the churches that know the truth, and go forth to establish new churches, to present the word of truth to those who are in ignorance of God's warning message."<sup>10</sup>

"Because Christ is spoken of as walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, symbolizing His close relation to the churches, He knows their true state. With untiring wakefulness and unremitting vigilance, He watches to see whether the light of any of His sentinels is burning dim or going out. His continued care and sustaining grace are the source of life and light (AA 586)."<sup>11</sup>

"No candlestick, no church, shines of itself. From Christ emanates all its light. The church in heaven today is only the complement of the church on earth; but it is higher, grandeur-perfect. The same divine illumination is to continue through eternal ages. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light thereof. No church can have light if it fails to diffuse the glory it receives from the throne of God."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>9</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 956 (emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 413.

<sup>11</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, Revelation 2, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1118.

**VERSE 2:** “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:”

**Verse 2 – “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience.”**

Here, again, is a set of three or a trilogy as happened so frequently in chapter 1. It is a *crescendoing enforcement*. Here in single words, three positive characteristics of the Ephesian church stand out:

Works  
Labor  
Patience

This begins, as happens with each church, with a self-claim of knowledge: *I know – Oida*. This is time of judgment language. All things have come up in review and are now known.

“In contrast to ... (*ginosko*, ‘I know’), which speaks of progress of knowledge, *oida* reflects full or complete knowledge. It depicts absolute clearness of mental vision, which photographs all facts of life as they pass. It, not *ginosko*, is always the word used of Christ’s knowledge in Revelation (Swete). The concept of Christ’s absolute knowledge of the situation in Ephesus recalls v. 1 where He reminds the readers that He walks among the churches and consequently knows all things (cf. John 21:17), the areas deserving of commendation (2:2-3,6) and condemnation (2:5-6).”<sup>13</sup>

The three words chosen enlighten us as to why God commended the Ephesians. The “works” (*erga*) suggests the course or trend of their lives in doing good works or deeds. The “labor” (*kopos*) suggests working to the point of painful exhaustion, weariness or even pain. The “patience” (*hupomone*) means cheerful endurance. This was a quality which described Jesus in 1:9.

Putting this all together, we discover why Jesus commends the Ephesians. They share qualities He personally appreciates.

Works – dedicated service to Him  
Labor – working to the point of exhaustion and weariness  
Patience – through it all you cheerfully endure even when it brings suffering and you have to undergo trials

That is remarkable. What a dedicated group of people.

“In the days of the apostles the Christian believers were filled with earnestness and enthusiasm. So untiringly did they labor for their Master that in a comparatively short time, notwithstanding fierce opposition, the gospel of the kingdom was sounded to all the inhabited parts of the earth. The zeal manifested at this time by the followers of Jesus has been recorded by the pen of inspiration for the encouragement of believers in every age.

“At the first the experience of the church at Ephesus was marked with childlike simplicity and fervor.”<sup>14</sup>

“The True Witness bears testimony in commendation of the diligence of the church at Ephesus, declaring, ‘I know thy works;’ and all his commendations and reproofs are

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 578.



to be strictly regarded, for it is One who knows that speaks. Ardent, active piety in judicious work will show a moral strength in the church.”<sup>15</sup>

A personal application: “It will be found in the day of final settlement that God was acquainted with everyone by name. There is an unseen witness to every action of the life. ‘I know thy works,’ says He that ‘walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.’”<sup>16</sup>

A corporate application: “The eye of the Lord is upon all the work, all the plans, all the imaginings of every mind; He sees beneath the surface of things, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is not a deed of darkness, not a plan, not an imagination of the heart, not a thought of the mind, but that He reads it as an open book. Every act, every word, every motive, is faithfully chronicled in the records of the great Heart-searcher, who said, ‘I know thy works.’”<sup>17</sup>

**Verse 2 – “and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:”**

Here we have another trilogy of what kind of people are in the Ephesian church:

Not bear them which are *evil*  
Which say they are apostles and are not  
Hast found them liars

Combining the first list of qualities, we can summarize the Ephesian’s service:

They have good work — they despise evil doers.

“The church at Ephesus was to be commended for making a clear distinction between truth and error, whether in doctrine or in the life, and for taking a firm stand against error.”<sup>18</sup>

When Paul made his final visit to the Ephesian church he warned them of *wolves* that would come to disrupt and undermine the church (Acts 20:28). This indeed became a problem. The external “evil” that surrounded them, which they had to rebut and refute, became internal “wolves.” False teachers and doctrines were brought in.

“In the second century, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, commended this church for its loyalty to the truth that had effectively prevented any false sect from gaining a hearing among its members.”<sup>19</sup>

“‘And how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.’ While we should not find fault and accuse, we should never give encouragement to evil. There are those who are vain talkers. Their influence is misleading. Unless they repent, they will be weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Faithful reproof may save them.”<sup>20</sup>

Who the evil individuals were, that is alluded to, isn’t clear except in verse 6. The Nicolaitans were a thorn to this congregation. They are likely the lying apostles that this church dealt with.

<sup>15</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, May 31, 1887.

<sup>16</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 435.

<sup>17</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Life Sketches*, p. 322.

<sup>18</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 743.

<sup>19</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>20</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, May 26, 1903.

“Nevertheless, the Ephesians’ theological acumen penetrated this disguise and revealed the false ‘apostles’ for the ‘liars’ they were. Consequently, the emphasis is on persevering in guarding the internal doctrinal purity of the church’s faith. This was not an occasional strength of the church but an ever vigilant attitude toward inner purity, which the church maintained well into the second century in the face of continued threats from false teachers.”<sup>21</sup>

**VERSE 3: “And has borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted.”**

The complements that Jesus continues to share with the Ephesian church are obviously things that please Him. These represent corporate and personal qualities that heaven desires within a congregation of believers. We have once again a crescendoing enforcement of complements. It is different from the previous two in that this “list” emphasizes the works of the previous two trilogies. Note: The context of the original writing suggests the word “labor” is only implied.<sup>22</sup> This means the presentation of personal characteristics here would be:

You have borne  
 You have patience  
 You have not fainted

God is simply emphasizing the value of their church activities and recognizing their difficulties in putting evil out of the congregation. He is listing personal qualities that made the *works* and *labor* of the church in verse 2 possible. Patience and perseverance are enabling characteristics.

“It will require much diligence and a continual struggle to keep evil out of our churches. There must be rigid, impartial discipline exercised; for some who have a semblance of religion will seek to undermine the faith of others and will privily work to exalt themselves.”<sup>23</sup>

“And hast borne” (*bastazo*) means to persevere, to carry or take up the burden. Clearly, it refers to the challenge of dealing with apostasy within the church but could also refer to standing up against pressure for Jesus. Having patience is repeated again from verse 2. Here we perceive endurance under stress.<sup>24</sup> In this context the NIV ties together this thought: “You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name.” The KJV’s “fainted” is *kammo* and means faint or wearied. Thus, we can catch a deeper meaning in this crescendoing adage:

Borne – you have persevered, taken up the burden to keep the church pure  
 Patience – you have endured difficult opposition in this work for me  
 Fainted – you have not wearied in this special task

As we look at verses 2 and 3, a captivating *character illustration* of God’s ideal church surfaces.

<sup>21</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, pp. 229-230.

<sup>22</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 438.

<sup>23</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 538.

<sup>24</sup> Douglas, J. D.; *The New Greek English Interlinear New Testament* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; Wheaton, IL; 1990), p. 854.

1. He wants falsehood and apostasy removed from His church body.
2. He desires open sin to be taken from the congregation.
3. He leaves it up to the members to deal with this.
4. It must be dealt with in patience and without weariness.
5. Each person must realize that it is being done for the name of Jesus.
6. In this work we are never to forget that He is among us and is holding and protecting His ministers and leaders in this process.
7. Remarkable example of evangelism – This church is responsible for evangelizing the world!

Ephesians gives us lesson imagery of making the church pure.

“They had so persevered *dia to onoma mou*, ‘because of My name,’ says Christ. Here the name of Christ has in view the gospel revelation through which He makes Himself known (Lenski). The identical phrase occurs in Matt. 10:22 and 24:9 in contexts where Christ’s persecuted followers were engaged in spreading the gospel (Hort). Before leaving earth Jesus had predicted the very thing that Ephesian Christendom was now experiencing. They persevered for the sake of the purity of the message they preached.

“In spite of toil to the point of weariness (see *kopon*, v. 2) they had not grown weary (*ou kekopiakes*). This is a great paradox. Never did they entertain any thought of giving up (Scott). It was labor to the point of weariness without weariness setting in (Hort). Their loyalty to the Lord preempted weariness.”<sup>25</sup>

**VERSE 4: “Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”**

#### **Verse 4 – “I have *somewhat* against thee.”**

The word *somewhat* is supplied. Some translations say “I have *this* against thee.” A sudden contrast is injected into the message to the Ephesian church. The contrast is stark and jolting against the preceding two verses. Here are the “feelings” contrasted.

For my name sake (you labored)	I’m against ( <i>kata</i> )
You have untiringly worked to have My church pure/free from all wrong and evil	I’m opposed to you
I honor what you do	I’m dismayed over you

This is a statement of condemnation. “Everything is so good about your work. You function like an ideal congregation – but in this one issue I really oppose you.” Jesus is trying to isolate out significant principles of the Christian life they needed. Works and service do not satisfy the holy objectives in which He is trying to raise their motives.

The contrasts:

- They condemned falsehood and sin in the church.
- Jesus condemns a lack of compassion by church believers.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

The issue was deep and potentially devastating to the church.

“The church was defective and in need of stern reproof and chastisement, and John was inspired to record messages of warning and reproof and entreaty to those who, losing sight of the fundamental principles of the gospel, should imperil their hope of salvation.”<sup>26</sup>

Without this insight, we might easily minimize what is to follow. The issues Jesus wanted to address were deep and eternal. The imagery of gentle opposition was actually a “stern reproof” and reprimand.

#### **Verse 4 – “because thou hast left thy first love.”**

“In spite of their love of truth, their diligence, patience and hard work, the Ephesians had problems. They had left their first love. The word *love* is from the Greek word *agape*. This word is translated *charity* in I Corinthians 13 where Paul describes it as the source of untiring kindness, long-suffering, patience, and tender regard for others. Without it we ‘become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.’”<sup>27</sup>

Paulien suggests that this represents an imbalance between faith and works. Here the emphasis was on works. When this occurs the gospel is minimized. If it would be *only* on the gospel, obedience is minimized.<sup>28</sup> The significance of *agape* in this verse goes deeper than a simple loss of “compassionate interest” in others. Something was missing in their whole understanding of the gospel. It went right into the heart of its meaning. It addressed the trite use of faith.

For the “name of Jesus,” so many beautiful things were done. Clearly, they believed in Him. Likely His name was frequently on their lips. We can easily imagine enthusiastic praise services. But God was not satisfied.

“The loss of love is no minor defect, but constitutes a fallen state of the church.”<sup>29</sup> It suggests God’s attitude to ancient Israel at the time of Jeremiah:

“I remember thee; the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase.” Jeremiah 2:2, 3.

It’s interesting to note that at the time of this writing the church of Ephesus had moved into another generation. This was a second generation church. The early experience, when it started, had been lost.

“Furthermore, as the testimony of those who had personally associated with Jesus ended, as one by one they died, and the vision of the imminence of Christ’s return ... began to fade, the flame of faith and devotion burned ever lower.”<sup>30</sup>

Many commentators focus on love for fellow believers or for God and do an exegetical study of the two. One theologian (Beale) feels it was a loss of “zealous love for Jesus by *witnessing to him in the world*.”<sup>31</sup> He felt there was a tie in Matthew 24:12-14 where there is a relationship between the love of many waxing cold and the gospel of the kingdom going to all the world as a witness to all nations. All this represents what happened to that church.

<sup>26</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 587

<sup>27</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Paulien, Jon, Ph.D.; *Introduction to The Book of Revelation, The Bible Explorer Series* recording tapes (The Ambassador Group, Harrisburg, PA; 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 744.

<sup>31</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 230.

Another insight as to where this people veered is astutely expressed: “While the New Testament repeatedly admonishes God’s people to be on guard against Satan’s deceptive attacks upon the teachings of Christ, the counter attack must always be in the context of love. For the Ephesians it may well be that heresy-hunting had killed love and orthodoxy had been achieved at the price of fellowship. When that happens, orthodoxy has cost too much. All the orthodoxy in the world will never take the place of love.

“What is of primary importance is love, Christ’s instructions were to ‘love God with our whole being and our neighbor as our self.’ When love ceases to be the center of our very being we will inevitably move toward theological specialization and self-righteousness.

“The Ephesian problem did not happen over night. It is the result of a ‘gradual, imperceptible shift in focus.’ Satan tempts one to focus more on organization and self ambition. The focus changes from Christ to plans, themes, goals, doctrinal points and church policy.”<sup>32</sup>

A unique before and after picture is given to us in graphic imagery. The very core issues are exposed and a simple Bible phrase is turned into a powerful sermon, defining the *agape* love and the gospel in motion.

Ephesus in infancy: “At the first the experience of the church of Ephesus was marked with childlike simplicity and fervor. A lively, earnest, heartfelt love for Christ was expressed. The believers rejoiced in the love of God because Christ was in their hearts as an abiding presence. The praise of God was on their lips, and their attitude of thanksgiving was in accord with the thanksgiving of the heavenly family.

“And the world took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Sinful men, repentant, pardoned, cleansed, and sanctified, were brought into partnership with God through His Son. The believers sought earnestly to receive and obey every word of God. Filled with love for their Redeemer, they sought as their highest aim to win souls to Him. They did not think of hoarding the precious treasure of the grace of Christ. They felt the importance of their calling, and, weighted with the message, Peace on earth, good will to men, they burned with desire to carry the glad tidings to the earth’s remotest bounds.

“The members of the church were united in sentiment and action. Love for Christ was the golden chain that bound them together. They followed on to know the Lord more and still more perfectly, and brightness and comfort and peace were revealed in their lives. They visited the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and kept themselves unspotted from the world. A failure to do this would, in their view, have been a contradiction of their profession and a denial of their Redeemer.

“In every city the work was carried forward. Souls were converted, and in their turn felt that they must tell of the inestimable treasure. They could not rest till the beams of light which had illumined their minds were shining upon others. Multitudes of unbelievers were made acquainted with the reason of the Christian’s hope. Warm, inspired, personal appeals were made to the sinful and erring, to the outcast, and to those who, while professing to know the truth, were lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”<sup>33</sup>

“[Rev. 2:1-5 quoted.] In this scripture are outlined the conditions of acceptance with God. The first experience of the Ephesus church led to good works. God took delight in the fact that His church reflected the light of heaven by revealing the spirit of Christ in tenderness and compassion. The love that dwelt in the heart of Christ; the love that caused Him to give Himself a sacrifice for humanity, and to suffer with forbearance the reproach of men, even to the extent of being called a devil; the love that prompted Him

<sup>32</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 421-423.

to perform mighty works of healing during His ministry—this was the love that was to be revealed in the lives of His disciples.”<sup>34</sup>

Their lives had dramatically changed. Spiritualism had even been part of their daily life.

“By burning their books on magic, the Ephesian converts showed that the things in which they had once delighted they now abhorred. It was by and through magic that they had especially offended God and imperiled their souls; and it was against magic that they showed such indignation. By retaining these books the disciples would have exposed themselves to temptation; by selling them they would have placed temptation in the way of others. They had renounced the kingdom of darkness, and to destroy its power they did not hesitate at any sacrifice. Thus truth triumphed over men’s prejudices and their love of money. The influence of what had taken place was more widespread than even Paul realized. From Ephesus the news was widely circulated, and a strong impetus was given to the cause of Christ. Long after the apostle himself had finished his course, these scenes lived in the memory of men and were the means of winning converts to the gospel.”<sup>35</sup>

“The very first impulse of the renewed heart is to bring others also to the Savior. Those who do not possess this desire give evidence that they have lost their first love; they should closely examine their own hearts in the light of God’s Word, and earnestly seek a fresh baptism of the Spirit of Christ; they should pray for a deeper comprehension of that wondrous love which Jesus manifested for us in leaving the realms of glory and coming to a fallen world to save the perishing.”<sup>36</sup>

The members are now fallen because:

1. Their love for God and for one another waned.<sup>37</sup>
2. They didn’t keep the commandments of God.<sup>38</sup>
3. Differences sprang up between members.<sup>39</sup>
4. They started to criticize fellow believers.<sup>40</sup>
5. Masses were left unwarned.<sup>41</sup> (Their lack of interest in the salvation of souls showed that they had lost their “first love.”)
6. They possessed a legal religion.<sup>42</sup>

“A legal religion has been thought quite the correct religion for this time. But it is a mistake. The rebuke of Christ to the Pharisees is applicable to those who have lost from the heart their first love. A cold, legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. When fastings and prayers are practiced in a self-justifying spirit, they are abominable to God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies, the external humiliation, the imposed sacrifice—all proclaim to the world the testimony that the

<sup>34</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 956.

<sup>35</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Conflict and Courage*, p. 343.

<sup>36</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Welfare Ministry*, p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 421-423.

<sup>38</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 189.

<sup>39</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 421-423.

<sup>40</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 189; *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 298-299.

<sup>41</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 421-423.

<sup>42</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, pp. 387-388.

doer of these things considers himself righteous. These things call attention to the observer of rigorous duties, saying, This man is entitled to heaven. But it is all a deception. Works will not buy for us an entrance into heaven. The one great Offering that has been made is ample for all.”<sup>43</sup>

7. They were lovers of pleasure.<sup>44</sup>
8. They were ease loving.<sup>45</sup>
9. They cherished worldliness.<sup>46</sup>
10. They increased in knowledge of false theories.<sup>47</sup>

There is a hopeful note related to this church – it was not the *whole* church that was a problem.

“Early in the history of the church the mystery of iniquity foretold by the apostle Paul began its baleful work; and as the false teachers concerning whom Peter had warned the believers, urged their heresies, many were ensnared by false doctrines. Some faltered under trial and were tempted to give up the faith. At the time when John was given this revelation, many had lost their first love of gospel truth.”<sup>48</sup>

Many in the Ephesian church responded positively to this exhortation. (Ignatius; Ephesians 1:1, 9:1, 11:2).

**VERSE 5: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”**

**Verse 5 – “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works;”**

Remember  
Repent  
Do first works

They were not aware of what happened to them. But, they could effectively recall where they had been. Though second generation Christians, they would identify with the change and be able to repent – if they wished.

“In view of the many virtues enumerated, how striking is the charge brought against the church at Ephesus: ‘Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.’ This church had been highly favored. It was planted by the apostle Paul. In the same city was the temple of Diana, which, in point of grandeur, was one of the marvels of the world. The Ephesian church met with great opposition, and some of the early Christians suffered persecution; and yet some of these very ones turned from the truths that had united them with Christ’s followers, and adopted, in their stead, the specious errors devised by Satan.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 293.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 956.

<sup>48</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 587.

“This change is represented as a *spiritual fall*. ‘Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works’—as outlined in the preceding verses. The believers did not sense their spiritual fall. *They knew not that a change had taken place in their hearts, and that they would have to repent because of the noncontinuance of their first works*. But God in His mercy called for repentance, for a return to their first love and to the works that are always the result of true, Christlike love (MS 11, 1906).”<sup>49</sup> The chiasmic pair to Ephesus was Laodicea. They did not perceive a need either.

Jesus paid them many complements regarding their present work but now tells them their work is deficient. It would seem that most of their present works have been *church serving*. They have been internal servers. Jesus says repent and do your first works. Rekindle your flame of zealous witnessing.

The issue is the *light* that is to be diffused from the lampstand – the church. The light of divine presence comes from his witnesses. That light reflects the character of Jesus. It’s power comes from the Spirit. Jesus was not emanating from them. They were weak in power. They truly were servants of a church and not Jesus. Revelation 11:3-7 will clarify this further.

A special statement is made relative to this Ephesus issue: “The Lord Jesus must needs show them that they had lost that which was *everything* to them.”<sup>50</sup> Jesus is pleading with the wayward members, “Return unto Me, and I will return unto you.” Malachi 3:7.

**Verse 5 – “or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”**

In this phrase we have Jesus *coming* and we have Him *removing*. Much debate surrounds whether this “coming” is *the parousia* or coming to the church for something very negative. In 1:13 and 2:1 He is already among the churches. He *has come* to them in the missive setting. The coming is expressed in the present tense. The removing is placed in the future. It is the removing that is in a conditional setting – “repent ... come ... remove ... except thou repent.” The Greek words *ean me* means *except* or *unless*, suggesting He will come and the lampstand will be divinely moved – all conditional on human repentance. The second coming of Jesus is not conditional. It is for an “appointed time.” “Repent because I am coming quickly. If you don’t, when I come, I will remove thy candlestick out of its place.” Though He has come to them, there is implied a coming specifically to remove the lampstand.

Therefore, the *coming* must refer to a judgmental move on God’s part based upon the repentant heart. The results of the final investigative judgment is implied. Thus, *pre-parousia*; end-time is strongly suggested.

There is another issue. The light on the lampstand is the power for and the witnessing of the church. That light is a pre-Advent part in preparation for the second coming. If it is taken away, there will be no readiness for the *parousia*. Thus, the great consummation seals the judgment. Jesus began this message with “I know.” He has already judged. Here we find a final warning in the judgment. The removal of the Spirit would be final.

“Furthermore, the actual wording ‘I will remove your lampstand *from its place*’ indicates removal of the church as a light of witness to the world, which points to the removal of it *before* Christ’s final coming, since the churches’ witness is a relevant activity

<sup>49</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 957.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 956.



only before the final advent, not afterward. Indeed, part of the ‘witness’ is to the promise that Christ will return to judge and to redeem (see generally on 1:2, as well as the relation of ‘witness’ to the final coming in 19:7-21 [cf. vv 9-10]; 22:7-20 [cf. vv 8, 16, 20]). This also suits the visionary context of Christ walking in the midst of the lampstands as the priestly custodian who repairs or removes them according to their functioning. The analysis likewise fits 2:21-22, where Jezebel’s lack of repentance elicits from Christ a promise to send tribulation on her and her followers before the end of history, and appears to be limited to that particular situation [analogous to the shaking]. Ignatius’ report that the Ephesian church had repented and regained their love suggests that the early church also understood that the admonition of 2:4-5 was not tied exclusively to a second coming circumstance.”<sup>51</sup>

Again, if they don’t repent the effects of Christ’s judgment act appear irreversible.

“An extinguishing of the light through special judgment could entail, not destruction, but a loss of testimony. Light emanating from a lampstand is symbolic of testimony. *Kineo* (‘I remove’) is different from *aphaireo* (‘I destroy’). It denotes deliberation and judicial calmness in comparison to the other verb. It is not a sudden uprooting as in anger, but a gradual movement that results in loss of the place the church had once filled (Swete). It is quite possible for a church to remain but have no testimony, just as the Temple of Jerusalem was devoid of God’s glory after His judgment fell on it (cf. Ezek. 11:22, 23) (Beasley-Murray).”<sup>52</sup>

As noted above, there are two applications to the candlestick being removed out of its place. First, the Holy Spirit ceases pleading with the church members. Secondly, the light of truth that shone out of the life is extinguished.

“Christ, the true witness, addresses the church at Ephesus, saying, ‘I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.’ What effect have these words had upon the church? Have the professed people of God understood the import of the words, ‘I will come unto thee quickly [when you are at ease, careless, filled with spiritual negligence], and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.’ When warnings come no more to the people of God, when tender admonitions from the Spirit of God are silent, when the candle of heavenly illumination shines no longer upon their pathway, they will be left to kindle their own fire, and to walk in the sparks of their own kindling.”<sup>53</sup>

“Today many are as ignorant of the Holy Spirit’s work upon the heart as were those believers in Ephesus (see Acts 19:1-6); yet no truth is more clearly taught in the Word of God.”<sup>54</sup>

“The first experience of the Ephesus church led to good works. God took delight in the fact that His church *reflected the light of heaven by revealing the spirit of Christ* in tenderness and compassion. The love that dwelt in the heart of Christ; the love that caused Him to give Himself a sacrifice for humanity, and to suffer with forbearance the reproach of men, even to the extent of being called a devil; the love that prompted Him to perform mighty works of healing during His ministry—this was the love that was to be revealed in the lives of His disciples.”<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1055.

<sup>54</sup> White, Ellen G.; *This Day with God*, p. 252.

<sup>55</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 956 (emphasis added).

“If we refuse to let our light shine for the Master, if we do not do the works of God, others will do that very work which we might have done and could have done, but refused to do. When we cease to fulfill our mission, when the candlestick refuses to reflect light, and the great truths committed to us individually in trust for the world, are not given to them, then the candlestick will be removed.”<sup>56</sup>

God said, preceding the flood, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3). The imagery contemplates a possible termination in God’s relationship with man. Here Jesus is making it clear to the Ephesians that the time has come to act quickly (not much time left) or God’s presence and the resulting effectiveness of witnessing will be removed. The church will cease unless there is a change! His presence is conditional upon the Ephesian decisions regarding sin. The word repent (*metanoesate*) is in the aorist imperative. It addresses the volition of the will not simply the reason. It is a *command* to *immediately* change. “You repent, do it right now.”<sup>57</sup>

Probation did pass for five of the seven churches. In Revelation 11:4 only two are left. “As we analyze these messages, it will not be difficult to detect which two met God’s approval.”<sup>58</sup>

**VERSE 6: “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”**

A divine hatred for the Nicolaitans’ actions was in the Ephesian church. They were: “A sect springing, according to credible tradition, from Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch, one of the seven deacons of Jerusalem (Acts vi. 5), who apostatized from the truth, and became the founder of an Antinomian Gnostic sect. They appear to have been characterized by sensuality, seducing Christians to participate in the idolatrous feasts of pagans, and to unchastity. Hence they are denoted by the names of Balaam and Jezebel, two leading agents of moral contamination under the Old Testament dispensation. Balaam enticed the Israelites, through the daughters of Moab and Midian, to idolatry and fornication (Num. XXV.; XXXI. 16). Jezebel murdered the Lord’s prophets, and set up idolatry in Israel. The Nicolaitans taught that, in order to master sensuality, one must know the whole range of it by experience; and that he should therefore abandon himself without reserve to the lusts of the body, since they concerned only the body and did not touch the spirit.”<sup>59</sup>

This hatred is a continuation of the commendation of 2:2-3. It appears in stark contrast to the directive of verse 5. But, it also can be seen as a combined complement – warning: “As I am emphatically opposed to the Nicolaitan’s, as you are, I am emphatically warning you to immediately repent.” God uses strong language here as of old over such matters (Isaiah 61:8; Jeremiah 44:4; Amos 5:21; Zechariah 8:17).

Though sensual impurity is a pungent issue with this sect, a more erosive matter comes with the antinomian views of the Nicolaitans.

“The doctrine is now largely taught that the gospel of Christ has made the law of God of no effect; that by ‘believing’ we are released from the necessity of being doers of the Word. But this is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which Christ so unsparingly condemned (ST Jan. 2, 1912).”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, June 7, 1887.

<sup>57</sup> [www.crisispub.com/greek/3htm](http://www.crisispub.com/greek/3htm).

<sup>58</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 439.

<sup>60</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 957.

“Those who are teaching this doctrine to-day have much to say in regard to faith and the righteousness of Christ; but they pervert the truth, and make it serve the cause of error. They declare that we have only to believe on Jesus Christ, and that faith is all-sufficient: that the righteousness of Christ is to be the sinner’s credentials; that this imputed righteousness fulfills the law for us, and that we are under no obligation to obey the law of God. This class claim that Christ came to save sinners, and that He has saved them. ‘I am saved,’ they will repeat over and over again. But are they saved while transgressing the law of Jehovah?—No; for the garments of Christ’s righteousness are not a cloak for iniquity. Such teaching is a gross deception, and Christ becomes to these persons a stumbling block as He did to the Jews,—to the Jews, because they would not receive Him as their personal Saviour, to these professed believers in Christ, because they separate Christ and the law, and regard faith as a substitute for obedience. They separate the Father and the Son, the Saviour of the world. Virtually they teach, both by precept and example, that Christ, by His death, saves men in their transgressions.”<sup>61</sup>

“In the judgment, God will ask those who profess to be Christians, Why did you claim to believe in My Son, and continue to transgress My law? Who required this at your hands—to trample upon My rules of righteousness? ‘Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.’ The gospel of the New Testament is not the Old Testament standard lowered to meet the sinner and save him in his sins. God requires of all His subjects obedience, entire obedience to all His commandments. He demands now as ever perfect righteousness as the only title to heaven. Christ is our hope and our refuge. *His righteousness is imputed only to the obedient.* Let us accept it through faith, that the Father shall find in us no sin. But those who have trampled on the holy law will have no right to claim that righteousness. O that we might view the immensity of the plan of salvation as obedient children to all God’s requirements, believing that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, our atoning sacrifice (RH Sept. 21, 1886)!”<sup>62</sup>

**VERSE 7: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”**

**Verse 7 – “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;**

This idiomatic expression is found in each conclusion of the seven messages. It is a summation command to heed the advice preceding it. This phraseology is not new to Jesus: “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9, cf. Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8). It carries forward what Gabriel said in the first chapter, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep these things which are written therein. Why? For the time is at hand” (1:3). Later, in describing the terrible activity of the “sea beast” in chapter 13, the same powerful advice is given: “If any man have an ear, let him hear.”

The heavenly message comes: “If you have heard these warnings, instructions and messages, make sure you understand exactly what the Spirit is telling each church! Though church specific, they now become specific for all the churches.

It is a timing message. It is urgent. There is no room for delay. “The time is at hand.”

<sup>61</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Bible Echo*, 2/8/1897.

<sup>62</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1072-1073.

Though Jesus is speaking, the church was to listen to the Spirit “Because Christ is the speaker (cf. 2:1), the Spirit is functioning particularly as the Spirit of Christ in this instance (cf. Revelation 14:13; 19:10; 22:17).”<sup>63</sup>

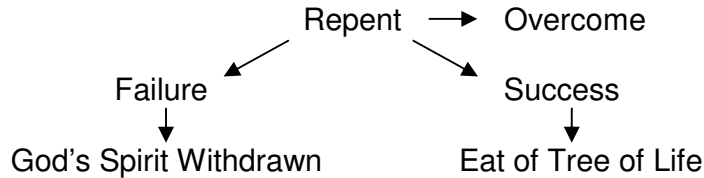
“The words, ‘He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,’ are repeated after these promises, weighty with importance to the children of God. It is for our eternal interest to know and understand what the Spirit saith unto the churches, and we should search carefully for light and knowledge that we may not be in ignorance of what God has commanded and promised in his precious word. We have souls to be saved or lost, and with the greatest earnestness we should inquire, ‘What shall I do in order to obtain eternal life?’ At the best, life is but short, and it is necessary that we should live this short life in harmony with the law of God, which is the law of the universe. We must have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”<sup>64</sup>

**Verse 7 – “To him that overcometh**

This carries forward the challenges, “If you follow all the advice and have victory over the issues addressed, you will receive a reward.” “The verb is used absolutely without any object expressed.”<sup>65</sup>

But the object is implied in the preceding verses, especially 4 and 5. The allusion of individual victory over sin comes to us in various ways: “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:14). “Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days” (Daniel 12:12).

It is clearly implying a course in life that never turns back but progresses forward. The thread of response:



When a church loses its love of service, two things often occur. The worship experience and liturgy become more important than the spiritual meaning of the dogma. The social fabric of the congregation is of greater value than spiritual unity. To prevent failure and the withdrawal of heaven’s presence, “listen to what the Spirit is saying.”

“It is appropriate that, if the Ephesian Christians overcome by being God’s lampstand of witness, then God will cause them to be identified with ‘the tree of life.’ Both the ‘the tree of life’ and the lampstand are partly symbolic of God’s presence. In particular, the light emanating from the lampstand represented God’s presence, which Israel was to mediate to the world. This notion of the lampstand denoting God’s presence with the church is confirmed by 11:4, where the ‘lampstands ... stand *before* the Lord of the earth.’ They are also equated there with ‘the two olive *trees*.’ The identification of the two OT emblems of lampstand and tree of life is enhanced as we recognize that the lampstand in the tabernacle represented the tree of life (probably from Eden).”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>64</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, June 15, 1891.

<sup>65</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 440.

<sup>66</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 235.

**Verse 7 – “will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”**

“Revelation speaks of the consummated restoration of this divine presence among humanity in the future (22:2-4), which has already been inaugurated in the present. Therefore, the ‘tree’ refers to the redemptive effects of the cross, which bring about the restoration of God’s presence, and does not refer to the cross.”<sup>67</sup>

What Adam and Eve once enjoyed can become yours to cherish. It contemplates eternal life.

“I have a most earnest desire that you shall enter the city of God, not as a culprit barely pardoned, but as a conqueror. My brother, will you think of this? If you are true and humble and faithful in this life, you will be given an abundant entrance. Then the tree of life will be yours, for you will be a victor over sin; the city whose builder and maker is God will be your city. Let your imagination take hold upon things unseen. Let your thoughts be carried away to the evidences of the great love of God for you. In contemplating the object of which you are in pursuit, you will lose the sense of pain brought by the light afflictions that are but for a moment.”<sup>68</sup>

“To every soul who is inquiring, ‘What shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ the answer comes from the divine Son of God, ‘If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’ Does Christ tell us to do that which it is not possible for us to do?—No, never. The path of obedience is possible, and it leads to the tree of life. This is the path that leads to the paradise of God. The requirement of God to obey and live was given to Adam. The only way to life is found through obedience to the commandments.”<sup>69</sup>

“Make haste, my brother, to cleanse your hands. Jesus is still pleading as your Intercessor. Commence the work of forsaking your sins without delay. Do not rest till you find pardon, for no soul can enter the paradise of God who has a single spot or stain in his character. Make thorough work for eternity.—Letter 51, 1886.”<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 125.

<sup>69</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, March 28, 1893.

<sup>70</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 21, p. 387.

## SUMMARY – EPHEBUS

The congregation under study at Ephesus was part of God's community of believers. They represent a class within God's last church that have distinct characteristics. Converting out of a sensuous form of worship that involved spiritualistic miracles, they made such a commitment to Jesus, this lifestyle was all put away. The former energies devoted to self-pleasing worship turned to serving others. Today, Jesus is looking for the same devotion in His people. But the Ephesians changed. They became unswerving devotes to church structure, doctrinal purity and activity. They lost interest in people and sharing Jesus. They lost Jesus.

### Chiastic Outline:

- No tolerance of evil, good deeds (vs 2)
- Was strong in love (vs 3)
- Left first love (vs 4)
- Remember from whence you fell (vs 5a)
- Repent (vs 5b)
- Hated Nicolaitans (vs 6)
- Overcome evil, goodly reward (vs 7)

### Spiritual Application

Jesus was pleased at their efforts to maintain doctrinal integrity. Church discipline was part of its administrative structure. That is what God also wants in the last days.

"Messages of a decided character must be borne to the people. Men must go forth reproving, rebuking every manner of evil.

"If there is given to the angel of any church a commission like unto that given to the angel of the church of Ephesus, let the message be heard through human agents rebuking carelessness, backsliding, and sin, that the people may be brought to repentance and confession of sin. Never seek to cover sin; for in the message of rebuke, Christ is to be proclaimed as the first and the last, He who is all in all to the soul."<sup>71</sup>

Initially, their zeal helped to inspire the surrounding cities, and eventually the gospel went to the whole world. But a change came in. They wanted a "pure" church but lost their desire to tell others about Jesus.

"The masses that might have been convicted and converted by a faithful practice of the truth, were left unwarned. Then it was that the message was addressed to the Ephesian church by the True Witness. Their lack of interest in the salvation of souls showed that they had lost their first love; for none can love God with the whole heart, mind, soul, and strength without loving those for whom Christ died. God called upon them to repent and do the first works, else the candlestick would be removed out of its place.

"Is not this experience of the Ephesian church repeated in the experience of the church of this generation? How is the church of today, that has received a knowledge of the truth of God, using this knowledge? When its members first saw God's unspeakable mercy for the fallen race, they could not keep silent. They were filled with longing to cooperate with God in giving to others the blessings they had received. As they imparted,

<sup>71</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, pp. 379-380.

they were continually receiving. They grew in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. How is it today?”<sup>72</sup>

Their careless loss of sharing Jesus was a fatal mistake that we are now confronted with.

“Leaving the first love represents a spiritual fall. Many have fallen thus. In every church in our land, there is needed confession, repentance, and reconversion. The disappointment of Christ is beyond description. Unless those who have fallen repent speedily, the deceptions of the last days will overtake them. Some, though they do not realize it, are preparing to be overtaken. Temptation comes suddenly, and the light is quenched. Henceforth light is to them darkness, and darkness light. God calls for repentance without delay. So long have many trifled with salvation that their spiritual eyesight is dimmed, and they cannot discern between light and darkness. Christ is humiliated in His people. The first love is gone; the faith is weak, there is need of a thorough transformation.

“My brethren, seek the Lord; humble your hearts before Him. I have an intense desire to see you walking in the light, as Christ is in the light. I pray most earnestly for you. But I cannot fail to see that the light God has given me is not favorable to our ministers or our churches. You have left your first love.”<sup>73</sup>

God’s mercy continued to bring invitations to repent. He wanted to mold circumstances to force a commitment in one or the other direction. But He gave a worrisome threat. If the candlestick or church is moved, it becomes devoid of heaven’s Spirit.

“Those who can ignore all the evidences which God has given them, and change that blessing into a curse, should tremble for the safety of their own souls. Their candlestick will be removed out of its place unless they repent. The Lord has been insulted. The standard of truth, of the first, second, and third angels’ messages has been left to trail in the dust. If the watchmen are left to mislead the people in this fashion, God will hold some souls responsible for a lack of keen discernment to discover what kind of provender was being given to His flock.

“Apostasies have occurred and the Lord has permitted matters of this nature to develop in the past in order to show how easily His people will be misled when they depend upon the words of men instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, as did the noble Bereans, to see if these things are so. And the Lord has permitted things of this kind to occur that warnings may be given that such things will take place.”<sup>74</sup>

Gabriel made it clear that these issues were of utmost time urgency because the end was near (1:3). Early on He reminded John of His soon coming (1:7).

“The opportunity now presented *may be short*. If this season of grace and repentance passes unimproved, the warning is given: ‘I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.’”<sup>75</sup>

### End-Time Metaphor of Ephesus

The stars in Jesus’ right hand symbolize those who will lead the many facets of the church in its final work just before probation closes. All the stars are in His hand at one time. This shows His care and protective guidance to the leaders of the whole body of Christian believers.

<sup>72</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 422-423.

<sup>73</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18, p. 192.

<sup>74</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 2, p. 394.

<sup>75</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 612 (emphasis added).

“It is significant that Jesus holds the stars in His right hand. Throughout scripture, the right hand *symbolizes power or strength, blessing, salvation, honor, judgment, and ownership*. In the sanctuary services, as part of the consecration rite for the priests, they would apply the blood of the consecration offering to their right earlobe, index finger, and big toe. In the book of Revelation, several things are associated with the right hand. The seven stars are in Jesus’ right hand. In Revelation 1:20, when John faints from the vision, Jesus touches him with His right hand. In Revelation 5:1, 7, Jesus takes the scroll from the Father’s right hand. In Revelation 10:5, the Angel raises His right hand to heaven when He makes His proclamation that there will be no more delay, but that the mystery of God will be complete when the seventh angel blows his trumpet. Finally, we note that the mark of the beast is given in the right hand or the forehead.”<sup>76</sup>

That mighty right hand does provide protection at the end of time. Collectively, He holds those leaders, protecting them and giving them power as they help to prepare and finish the work. By the imagery that He holds them together at one time and His movement among the churches all existing simultaneously mitigates against a historical sequence of those churches.

“If these stars represent human messengers, who are they specifically? Notice that it is not the churches themselves, but the angels to the churches that Jesus holds in His right hand. Remember that the right hand is a strong Biblical symbol for the blessing to the firstborn. In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is identified as the Firstborn of the dead. In I Corinthians 15:20, Paul says that ‘Christ has been raised from the dead, *the first fruits of those who are asleep*.’ When Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended to the right hand of God the Father (Colossians 3:1). Later in Revelation 14:4, the 144,000 are described as the ‘first fruits’ to God and the Lamb from among men. If the right hand represents the blessing to the firstborn, perhaps these angels represent the 144,000 as they are being commissioned by God to take the last word of warning to the church. In this case, they would be analogous to the angel of Revelation 18. It is also possible that they could represent the three angels of Revelation 14 as well.”<sup>77</sup>

The guiding hand of Jesus will direct in that last work. The 144,000 will experience the love which the Ephesians lost. They will have a passionate drive to bring Jesus and His saving message to all the world. Nothing then will impede that objective from being reached. The love that heaven seeks is an elevated spiritual state. The 144,000 will be blessed with a joint experience with heaven, bonding together in that final drive to win hearts for Jesus. The book of Revelation is about that joint effort.

One powerful thought: Jesus is among the candlesticks. They are the churches, the oil, the Holy Spirit, the flame, the light from the seven churches. In the daily ministry in the Holy Place, the flame, the oil and the lamps, were tended as a priestly function. Here Jesus is ministering to the lampstand, but the flame is dependent on each person’s reception of the Spirit. That, in turn, is dependent on the commitment of the life. In this imagery we find He wants to replicate the Ephesian ideals in the 144,000. To be completely filled with the Spirit will make perfect its final brilliance for witnessing.

Could Jesus’ coming (“I will come unto thee quickly”) to remove the lampstand have a second coming allusion?

“Preference for understanding this as a reference to Christ’s second advent attributes more importance to the broad context of the book. It notes that if this were merely a local and preliminary visitation, it would bear no relationship to the apocalyptic portion of

<sup>76</sup> Canter, Bryan; *Revelation, Part 2, Messages to the Seven Churches* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 19 (emphasis added).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis added).



the book (Rev. 4:1-22:5), nor would its connection with the theme of Rev. 1:7 be explicable. Seeing this as a reference to Christ's second coming, however, harmonizes quite well with the use of *erchomai* in this book and elsewhere to refer to His return (cf. 1:7; 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). A special coming or visitation, anything short of a personal coming of Christ, fails to satisfy the technical sense this verb must have in a book such as this. In addition, the metaphor chosen by John is the same as that used for the actual occurrence when the Roman conquerors removed the seven-branched lampstand from the Temple in A.D. 70 (Lee). The NT connects that Roman plundering of the Temple with Christ's second coming in a number of places (e.g., Luke 21:5-28). Another factor that gives weight to identifying this with the *parousia* is to note that abandoning the first love is one of the signs of the end (cf. Matt. 24:12) (Sweet). Reasons for associating this threat with the second advent of Christ are compelling, particularly those that relate to the Apocalypse's broad context and the use of *erchomai*.<sup>78</sup>

Evidence for an end-time application of the Ephesian church:

1. Jesus "knows" who they are. Thus the judgment has come.
2. There is an allusion to His coming quickly. This is the last call to repent.
3. If no repentance, the lampstand, or church, would be removed out of its place. The Holy Spirit would be withdrawn.
4. It was time to be filled with the Spirit to witness, for the time was short (1:3).
5. The allusion is to the 144,000 – their final work.
6. Repeatedly, the testimony of E. G. White applies this church to the last day.

**Promise to Ephesus:** "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." Revelation 2:7.

**Fulfillment:** "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 22:2.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

## SMYRNA

### INTRODUCTION

Smyrna church – the persecuted church (martyrdom occurred).

### Geography

This was the second largest city of the Providence of Asia. It was “reputedly the most beautiful city [of that area] and is the only city of the seven that is still in existence today.” It is now called Izmin with a population of several hundred thousand.<sup>1</sup>

Smyrna was 35-40 miles north of Ephesus. Located on flat land near the southeastern shore of the Aegean Sea giving it a good harbor.<sup>2</sup> An inlet from the sea ran thirty miles inland defining an enclosed harbor. The inlet drew its water out of the Hermus River.<sup>3</sup>

“Its picturesque natural surroundings were enhanced by its attractive and well-paved streets. In outlying areas the streets were lined with groves. The city was surrounded by sturdy walls, and on the Pagos (‘the Hill’) above the city were stately public buildings that, because of their orderly arrangement, were called ‘the crown of Smyrna.’”<sup>4</sup> This hill sloped gently up from the sea level. One could walk up to the crown without undue fatigue.<sup>5</sup>

Smyrna was known for its schools of rhetoric, philosophy, science and medicine. “It was one of the cities which claimed the honor of being Homer’s birthplace. A splendid temple was erected by the Smyrnaeans to his memory, and a cave in the neighborhood of the city was shown where he was said to have composed his poems.”<sup>6</sup>

### Religion of the City

In 195 B.C. a temple was built honoring “Rome,” which symbolized a positive longstanding relationship with that city. This later formed the basis for emperor worship. Under Domitian (A.D. 81-96) this became compulsory for every citizen.

“Failure to comply meant death. Each year every citizen had to burn incense on Caesar’s altar, after which he was issued a certificate. To be without a certificate, as must have been the case for Christians obedient to Christ, was to risk discovery and the death penalty.”<sup>7</sup>

The social standing and economic prosperity within the city had a direct bearing to this *imperial cult*.<sup>8</sup>

Because of compulsory emperor worship there was hatred of the Jews and the Christians. Persecution was part of the lot of God’s people in this city. Later, one of the

<sup>1</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), 1997, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), pp. 50-52.

<sup>3</sup> Sheffield, Harold, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>5</sup> Sheffield, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent’s Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 436.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 93

church leaders, Polycarp, would become the bishop of this church and eventually suffer martyrdom in the stadium in A.D. 166.<sup>9</sup>

“Polycarp was burned alive at the age of eighty-six as the ‘twelfth martyr in Smyrna.’ Joining hands with the Romans to oppose Christianity was a very large Jewish community in Smyrna. The Jews repeatedly informed against Christians or incited the local governor to attack them.

“It is safe to say that nowhere was life more dangerous for a Christian. If anyone refused to confess ‘Caesar is Lord’ along with his burning of incense, he was considered disloyal and became the object of persecution by the local and imperial governments. The martyrdom of Polycarp was not an isolated case; mass executions of Christians happened on numbers of occasions. It is no wonder that Jesus’ message to this church ‘drips’ with words of encouragement to believers in a very perilous situation.”<sup>10</sup>

No one is sure why the Jews were so anti-Christian here. These thoughts raise interesting possibilities.

“Perhaps Jews were motivated to inform on Christians because they were irritated that some of their Jewish brethren or Gentile ‘godfearers’ were converting to Christianity (Ignatius, *Smyrnians* 1:2). Jews would have viewed Christianity as a religion distorting the Jewish Law and offering a perversely easy way of salvation. They also considered the Christian worship of a crucified criminal as the divine Messiah a blasphemy (cf. Acts 26:9-10) .

“The mention of Roman persecution in v 10 directly following that of Jewish slander conforms to historical reports of Jews allying with and encouraging Romans and Gentiles to oppress Christians (e.g., Acts 13:45, 50; 142-7, 19; 17:5-9; 1 Thess. 2:14-16; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12:1-2; 13:1; Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 10).<sup>11</sup>

There was a “Street of Gold” that curved around the sloping hill just outside the city. At one end was a temple to Cybele (the mother of the gods) and at the other end, a temple to Zeus. Along the road were other temples to Apollo, Askepius and Aphrodote.<sup>12</sup>

### Christian Church of Smyrna

The “historical” period for the church is from approximately 100 A.D. to 313 when Constantine espoused the cause of the church. This is a time of transition from persecution to popularity.

“The region of Constantine the Great, 306-337, the first so-called Christian emperor of Rome, marks such a transition. Prior to his famous Edict of Milan in 313, Christianity was an illegal religion and experienced repeated periods of severe persecution by the state. That edict decreed equal rights for all religions throughout the empire and restored confiscated Christian property.”<sup>13</sup>

The name of Smyrna is not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures. There is evidence that John labored in Smyrna.

“The stay of Jesus in Samaria was designed to be a blessing to His disciples, who were still under the influence of Jewish bigotry. They felt that loyalty to their own nation required them to cherish enmity toward the Samaritans. They wondered at the conduct of Jesus. They could not refuse to follow His example, and during the two days in Samaria, fidelity to Him kept their prejudices under control; yet in heart they were

<sup>9</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 444.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 753.

unreconciled. They were slow to learn that their contempt and hatred must give place to pity and sympathy. But after the Lord's ascension, His lessons came back to them with a new meaning. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they recalled the Saviour's look, His words, the respect and tenderness of His bearing toward these despised strangers. When Peter went to preach in Samaria, he brought the same spirit into his own work. When John was called to Ephesus and Smyrna, he remembered the experience at Shechem, and was filled with gratitude to the divine Teacher, who, foreseeing the difficulties they must meet, had given them help in His own example."<sup>14</sup>

### General

Smyrna receives no warning or criticism, only praise. Its chiasmic companion is Philadelphia. Smyrna is a church of great persecution. Their commitment to Jesus has brought great difficulties and affected their lives. This is the shortest letter of the seven.

**VERSE 8: "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;**

### Verse 8 – "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write;

To the leaders of the church *write*. To the leaders of God's remnant people who will soon be persecuted – this message is especially directed. Could these also be angels that are assigned to the churches?

"If Jesus wanted to communicate to an angel, why would He send a letter through John? And why, since these 'guardian angels' are presumably sinless beings, would he find it necessary to send them rebukes?

"No, quite simply, these letters are written to sinful, fallen humans. The 'angel' must then simply be viewed as the head elder, pastor, or bishop of that congregation. This is the person that is primarily responsible for transmitting God's messages and counsel to the congregation, so the letter is addressed to him.

"This raises an interesting thought. In today's free-form culture, very little weight is given to the authority that comes with position. We tend to view it as artificial, arbitrary, and transitory. But here, Jesus gives us another view of things. Instead of addressing the messages to the churches *at large*, he sends them through the people whom He has caused to become the 'shepherds' of the local 'flocks.' To the degree that these people are cooperating with the work of God on earth, they are co-workers with Jesus and the angels, and are seen as part of His 'team.'"<sup>15</sup>

### Verse 8 – "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"

This title was used by Isaiah, "the first, and with the last" (Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12).

"In the role of the eternal and infinite one He launches His word of *encouragement* to a church exposed to fierce persecution. He was already in existence at the beginning of all things, and will be after all comes to an end. He is the eternal and abiding one."<sup>16</sup> His care and interest transcends time – someone who is beyond all time and above all experienced persecution, even unto death. Yet He is alive. It is that divine being that brings this message to you.

<sup>14</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>15</sup> David Clover, *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

“Two aspects of eternity are placed side-by-side to describe the Lord as eternal. Neither time nor things within time pose any limitation for Him.”<sup>17</sup>

“Brethren, it is no time now for mourning and despair, no time to yield to doubt and unbelief. Christ is to us not a Saviour in Joseph’s new tomb, closed with a great stone, and sealed with the Roman seal. We have a risen Saviour. He is the King, the Lord of hosts; he sitteth between the cherubim, and amid the strife and tumult of nations he guards his people still. He who rules in the heavens is our Saviour. He measures every trial. He watches the furnace fire that must test every soul. When the strongholds of kings shall be overthrown, when the arrows of God’s wrath shall strike through the hearts of his enemies, his people have the assurance that they are safe in his hands. In patience they are to possess their souls.”<sup>18</sup>

As Jesus experienced death and rose from martyrdom, so all those who die for Christ’s sake will rise to eternal life. He is a fellow brother in suffering – a faithful witness (martyr) (1:5). Because of this, the issues in this letter concern an unconditional attachment to the Lord Jesus.

**VERSE 9: “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”**

This verse has four trilogies with three general messages (note “works” is not in the original Greek).

I know your	tribulation poverty richness	They are oppressed and in poverty – but you are still richly blessed.
I know your	tribulation and poverty but you are rich	In spite of economic trials and stress from Jews – you are rich
I know the	blasphemy of some that hurt you	This is a judicial statement against Jewish claims to spiritual superiority. They belong to Satan.
That say they are Jews. But they are not. They are of the synagogue of Satan.		

A trilogy emphasizes contrast or the crescendoing of a point. Here they are under trial and persecution because of their poverty, which is partly due to the underhanded work of unbelieving Jews. This church suffered greatly. This is further dealt with in the next verse. In different ways through linguistic reinforcement, God is making it clear – I understand, I know.

Tribulation Poverty Blasphemy	I know how you are persecuted for your faith Your poverty and the stress from Blasphemous “Jews.”
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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, January 11, 1887.

**Verse 9 – “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty,”**

I know your tribulation, your affliction (*thlipsin*). This describes their anguish and persecution.

“That this church suffered great affliction is beyond dispute. *Thlipsin* denotes a restricting pressure that burdens the spirit. In the NT the word speaks of the calamities of war, of want, of the distress of a woman in childbirth, and of persecution from which Christ’s followers are not to shrink. The context of the message shows that persecution was causing their affliction. The church is commended for its endurance of this suffering (Swete; Beckwith).”<sup>19</sup>

From a historical perspective, the message to Smyrna was to be of growing value. Worse persecution soon ensued.

“Roman emperors characterized the experience of the church during this period. Under Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-138), and Marcus Aurelius (161-180), persecution was sporadic and localized. The first general, systematic persecution of Christians was conducted by Decius (249-251) and Valerian (253-259). Political oppression reached a bloody climax under Diocletian (284-305) and his immediate successors (305-313). Historically, the period represented by the Smyrna church may well be called the Age of Martyrdom. The centuries since have been fragrant ... with the love and devotion of the thousands of unnamed martyrs of this period who were ‘faithful unto death.’”<sup>20</sup>

The church is faced with a period of intense suffering but is encouraged here to be faithful. Persecution is one of the many methods used by Satan in his attempt to destroy Christ’s church.”<sup>21</sup> But it never works in his favor. Yet, he continually resorts to violence in his revenge against God’s subjects. This church is a metaphor for the remnant during the Little Time of Trouble when terrible persecution and martyrdom will once again be resurrected.

The Greek word for the poverty they experienced is *ptochei*. Common poverty (*penia*) is not used here. *Ptocheia* means severe abject poverty, indigent, having nothing.

“The origin of the poverty in Smyrna bears some relationship to the church’s affliction, according to the statement of v. 9. It is unlikely that it can be traced to the converts’ belonging to a poorer class of society. Smyrna was too rich a city for this (Swete). Nor is it probable that the Christians’ deprived condition came from losing their property when put out of the synagogues at conversion to Christ. In such a Gentile city the church population would have been mostly non-Jewish. Possibly their goods had been pillaged by Jewish or Gentile mobs (Swete), as seems to have been the fate of some (cf. Heb. 10:34). The context suggests that something of this nature was at least a contributing cause of their poverty (cf. 2:9-10). Without excluding this as a factor, the best explanation is that their poverty resulted from demands made of them because of their faith in Christ. The context of the message does not attribute violence to the opponents of Christianity in this city, but it hints that their slander and false accusations (cf. 2:9) brought pressure on the civil authorities to put Christians in prison (cf. 2:10). In such an antagonistic environment, making a living as a Christian would have been quite difficult and poverty would have resulted (Mounce).”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>20</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 746.

<sup>21</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 163.

Jesus experienced this same type of poverty (II Corinthians 8:9). “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty (*ptocheia*) might be rich.”

This poverty is so bad, one is not sure where the next meal is coming from.<sup>23</sup>

### **Verse 9 – “(but thou art rich)”**

Jesus’ poverty opened the way for the Smyrnians to be rich. Rich in spiritual matters.

“The humblest and poorest of the true disciples of Christ, who are rich in good works, are more blessed and more precious in the sight of God than the men who boast of their great riches. They are more honorable in the courts of heaven than the most exalted kings and nobles who are not rich toward God.”<sup>24</sup>

This contrasts deeply with the Laodicean church. Their claim: “I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

Spiritual wealth in the midst of economic poverty is mentioned elsewhere:

“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (II Corinthians 6:10).

“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5).

### **Verse 9 – “and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”**

The word blasphemy suggests words against God. But in the context, it suggests slander against the Christians.

“It was the kind of slander that exposed them to the penalties of the law (Simcox; Beckwith). In a city such as Smyrna with its strong ties to Rome, false charges laid before the magistrates could easily have resulted in imprisonment for those accused (Mounce).”<sup>25</sup>

The source of the slander was the Jews.

“Widespread animosity by Jews toward Christians is well known from the pages of Acts. Likewise the Jews at Smyrna were numerous and aggressively hostile: They took an active part in the martyrdom of Polycarp about fifty years later (Swete). A circular letter from the church at Smyrna to other churches in the Christian world relates how the Jews joined the heathen in demanding that Polycarp be cast to the lions or burned alive. They led the way in bringing firewood to burn him to death and in attempting to prevent his remains from being given to fellow Christians for burial.”<sup>26</sup>

These issues challenge us as to who these Jews were (part of the church, part of the community unrelated to the church or even racially not Jews). They claimed spiritual authority by saying they were “Jews.” They thus created a spiritual lineage. But Paul made clear who a Jew really was. “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that*

<sup>23</sup> Paulien, *Op. cit.*, *Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism*, chapter IV, *Symposium on Revelation – Book I*; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6; Frank B. Holbrook, Editor, (Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Springs, MD), 1992, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 682.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.” Romans 2:28-29. “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Philippians 3:3. Regardless, the concern is spiritual.

“The Jews’ attack against the Smyrnian church was ironic in that it demonstrated that the Jews were not only ‘false Jews’ but also ‘a synagogue of Satan,’ and that the church, by implication, was the ‘true Israel.’

“The false accusations against the saints that induced oppression identify the Jews with ‘Satan’ (‘false accuser’), since this is also a characteristic trait of the beast in persecuting God’s people (cf. [‘blasphemy’] in 13:1,5-56; 17:3-6; cf. John 8:44). Such collusion could lead to various economic measures taken by the Roman authorities against Christians, sometimes in the form of bans against practice of trades (e.g., expulsion from trade guilds) and often imprisonment (see Heb. 10:34, where Christians are said to suffer loss of property for their faith).”<sup>27</sup>

“Smyrna had the largest Jewish population of any Asian city.”<sup>28</sup> These unconverted Jews represented the devil. A similar situation existed in Jesus’ day.

“Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” John 8:44.

“Christ recognized no virtue in lineage. He taught that spiritual connection supersedes all natural connection. The Jews claimed to have descended from Abraham; but by failing to do the works of Abraham, they proved that they were not his true children.”<sup>29</sup>

Similar attitudes will emerge right at the end. The majority of Christians will claim Jesus as a personal Savior. They will claim to be the true people of God, but they will oppress those who don’t follow their beliefs. In the Jews against Smyrnian Christians we see an allusion to the eventual hatred of Babylon toward the committed remnant.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Matthew 7:21-23.

“I saw a very large company professing the name of Christ, but God did not recognize them as His. He had no pleasure in them. Satan seemed to assume a religious character and was very willing that the people should think they were Christians. He was even anxious that they should believe in Jesus, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. Satan and his angels fully believe all this themselves, and tremble. But if this faith does not provoke to good works, and lead those who profess it to imitate the self-denying life of Christ, Satan is not disturbed; for they merely assume the Christian name, while their hearts are still carnal, and he can use them in his service even better than if they made no profession.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 283.

<sup>28</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 268.

<sup>30</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings*, p. 227.



The words “Synagogue of Satan” represent the collective body of members who do not obey God’s divine law. The distinction between good and evil is blunted.

“Christ speaks of the church over which Satan presides as the synagogue of Satan. Its members are the children of disobedience. They are those who choose to sin, who labor to make void the holy law of God. It is Satan’s work to mingle evil with good, and to remove the distinction between good and evil. Christ would have a church that labors to separate the evil from the good, whose members will not willingly tolerate wrongdoing, but will expel it from the heart and life (RH Dec. 4, 1900).”<sup>31</sup>

God’s last people will be opposed by members of this synagogue. It is even active today.

“Remember that the nearer we approach the time of Christ’s coming, the more earnestly and firmly we are to work; for we are opposed by the whole synagogue of Satan.”<sup>32</sup>

“Satan has a large confederacy, his church. Christ calls them the synagogue of Satan because the members are the children of sin. The members of Satan’s church have been constantly working to cast off the divine law, and confuse the distinction between good and evil. Satan is working with great power in and through the children of disobedience to exalt treason and apostasy as truth and loyalty. And at this time the power of his satanic inspiration is moving the living agencies to carry out the great rebellion against God that commenced in heaven.”<sup>33</sup>

The Smyrniatim imagery is a *template* of the remnant experience.

“Those who love and keep the commandments of God are most obnoxious to the *synagogue of Satan*, and the powers of evil will manifest their hatred toward them to the fullest extent possible. John foresaw the conflict between the remnant church and the power of evil, and said, ‘The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.’ The forces of darkness will unite with human agents who have given themselves into the control of Satan, and the same scenes that were exhibited at the trial, rejection, and crucifixion of Christ will be revived. Through yielding to satanic influences, men will be transformed into fiends; and those who were created in the image of God, who were formed to honor and glorify their Creator, will become the habitation of dragons, and Satan will see in an apostate race his masterpiece of evil,—men who reflect his own image.”<sup>34</sup>

“In these times of special interest the guardians of the flock of God should teach the people that the spiritual powers are in controversy; it is not the human beings that are creating such intensity of feeling as now exists in the religious world. A power from Satan’s spiritual synagogue is infusing the religious elements of the world, arousing men to decided action to press the advantages Satan has gained by leading the religious world in determined warfare against those who make the word of God their guide and the sole foundation of doctrine. Satan’s masterly efforts are now put forth to gather in every principle and every power that he can employ to controvert the binding claims of the law of Jehovah, especially the fourth commandment, that defines who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 958.

<sup>32</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 475.

<sup>33</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, April 14, 1896.

<sup>35</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Kress Collection*, p. 34.

This is a fascinating segue into the final moments of the conflict of the ages. It will be a battle between the Synagogue of Satan and the remnant. God will interpose at the very last moment. Satan and his followers will be soundly defeated. The **battle**, the conflict of the Smyrnian Christians is strongly symbolic of the final conflict of God's people. They symbolize the remnant who will be martyred. The Philadelphia believers are those who will be translated.

"Soon we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus' coming. The living saints, 144,000 in number, knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake. When God spoke the time, He poured upon us the Holy Ghost, and our faces began to light up and shine with the glory of God, as Moses' did when he came down from Mount Sinai.

"The 144,000 were all sealed and perfectly united. On their foreheads was written, 'God, New Jerusalem,' and a glorious star containing Jesus' new name. At our happy, holy state the wicked were enraged, and would rush violently up to lay hands on us to thrust us into prison, when we would stretch forth the hand in the name of the Lord, and they would fall helpless to the ground. Then it was that the synagogue of Satan knew that God had loved us who could wash one another's feet, and salute the brethren with a holy kiss, and they worshiped at our feet."<sup>36</sup>

**VERSE 10:** "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

**Verse 10 – "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried;"**

This is in the future tense. It anticipates persecution. God is not promising relief from this but strength to endure – enough to be courageous and not fear.

"The Lord's advance knowledge of further persecution shows His sovereign wisdom in allowing it to happen, but the real author of it was Satan. The devil, working through his servants, the Jews and the Romans, instigated these and other unjustified actions against Christians (Beckwith). The early church was convinced that he was the one prompting persecutors of Christians to carry out their acts of violence."<sup>37</sup>

"Even if Christians at Smyrna were to perish in the coming trials, they are promised that death itself is bounded by the decisions of God. Christ disciplines but never persecutes."<sup>38</sup>

This would be the same message that would come to persecuted Christians throughout time. "Fear none of these things."

"Looking down through long centuries of darkness and superstition, the aged exile saw multitudes suffering martyrdom because of their love for the truth. But he saw also that He who sustained His early witnesses would not forsake His faithful followers during the centuries of persecution that they must pass through before the close of time."<sup>39</sup>

Lest any question should arise as to the loving interest that God has for His people, He makes it clear who is behind the persecution.

<sup>36</sup> White, Ellen G.; Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 588.

“The persecution of the Christians is thus traced to the direct agency of Satan, and not to the offended passions or prejudices of men. ‘Trench observes: ‘There is nothing more remarkable in the records which have come down to us of the early persecutions, than the sense which the confessors and martyrs and those who afterwards narrate their sufferings and their triumphs entertain and utter, that these great fights of affliction through which they were called to pass, were the immediate work of the Devil.’”<sup>40</sup>

“Notwithstanding the persecution and sufferings those Christians endured, they would not lower the standard. They kept their religion pure. I saw that Satan exalted and triumphed over the sufferings of God’s people. But God looked with great approbation upon his faithful martyrs, and the Christians who lived in that fearful time were greatly beloved of him; for they were willing to suffer for his sake. Every suffering endured by them increased their reward in heaven.”<sup>41</sup>

They were not to fear prison, but the threats and experiences had a profound effect on His people: “Imprisonment is not the primary affliction threatening some of the Smyrnian Christians, since typically in the Roman world imprisonment was the prelude to trial and execution of sentence, although sometimes it was merely a place of temporary detention (cf., e.g., Acts 16:23-40; 2 Cor. 11:23). The end of v 10 (‘become faithful unto death’) makes clear that the trial in mind is mainly that of capital punishment.”<sup>42</sup>

An interesting question is addressed relative to persecution. Jesus has made it clear that the devil is behind it, but He adds, “that ye may be tried.” These are part of a divine tool to strengthen His people and to divide the true believer from the false (I Corinthians 11:19).

“Because *peirasthete* (‘you may be tested’) is passive and no agent of the testing is stated, a question has arisen regarding the identity of the agent. Because of God’s purpose in allowing trials in the Christian life, a strong case to make God the agent exists. James 1:2, 3 and I Pet. 1:6, 7 elaborate upon God’s use of trials to bring growth in a Christian. Whatever Satan intends to accomplish through persecution, behind him is the divine intention to use suffering to ensure the approved character of those for whom the kingdom is being prepared.

“God’s indirect involvement in such treatment of Christians cannot be denied. He permits it, yet His part is not referred to directly in this context. The prominent thing is the declared role of Satan in soliciting Christians to sin by renouncing their faith.... [It is] a trial by way of enticing them to fall away. The same word refers to the demonic attacks destined to befall unbelievers on earth during the future hour of trial (cf. Rev. 3:10), but here its sense is that of testing by persecution (Alford; Charles).”<sup>43</sup>

“All who enter the City of God will enter through the strait gate—by agonizing effort; for ‘there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.’ Revelation 21:27.”<sup>44</sup>

“God’s love for His church is infinite. His care over His heritage is unceasing. He suffers no affliction to come upon the church but such as is essential for her purification, her present and eternal good. He will purify His church even as He purified the temple at the beginning and close of His ministry on earth. All that He brings upon the church in test and trial comes that His people may gain deeper piety and more strength to carry the triumphs of the cross to all parts of the world.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 444.

<sup>41</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>44</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 228.

**Verse 10 – “and ye shall have tribulation ten days:”**

The testing or tribulation is for ten days. This could be an allusion to Daniel 1:12-15 where Daniel and his three friends were put through a ten-day testing period. Ten literal days or ten prophetic years from that time still could not have a literal *application* to the time frame of the Smyrna church – whether contemporary in John’s day or historically as a church persecution time period. Nor can we find an apocalyptic link to the Little Time of Trouble in Revelation or Daniel that matches a ten-day structure. It must be seen as a figurative period, suggesting a “short time.” Since it is not linked to any symbolism or literal figure or nation, only a time of persecution, it should be taken as a “short season” – a reason why not to be afraid. Elsewhere in the Scriptures we find ten days as a period to complete something or represent the whole of something. For the four Hebrew captives it completed their test. For the disciples it was the time to set self aside and be in unity for Pentecost. “When they were of one accord” the blessing came. Ten is a number that suggests a short time in Genesis 24:55; Numbers 11:19-20; I Samuel 25:38 and Daniel 1:12. In symbolic prophecy when we have, as an example, ten horns, the significance is different. There it becomes crucial to identify specifically what it represents.

The “encouragement in ten” makes clear that “there is a limit to Satan’s reign of terror.”<sup>46</sup>

**Verse 10 – “be thou faithful unto death,”**

With all the negative issues that were addressed, Jesus, like an ideal leader and counselor, brings the message to a positive note before concluding. That persecution, though short, could lead to martyrdom. But – be faithful. Don’t waver, you will receive a crown of life.

“Be thou” is a command. The persecuted are to follow what is next, “be faithful unto death.” “Be” (*ginou*) has several suggestions as to its significance. One is “keep on being” faithful or “keep on becoming” faithful. But all these fall short of “keep on *proving* yourself faithful.” “Trepidation was to cease (*meden phobou*), but they were to continue demonstrating their faithfulness [under test].”<sup>47</sup>

Like Philadelphia, Smyrna was not asked to “repent.” It was a message of frankness but hopeful encouragement, “carry on, proving the wonders of Jesus in your life.”

“The extent to which faithfulness should go is given in the words *achri thanatou* (‘even to death’). Although *achri* can mean ‘until,’ this usage does not deal with the duration of the faithfulness, but with its degree. Christians should not shrink from dying for Christ’s sake, even if the death is to be a violent one. This charge to faithfulness does not necessarily mean that everyone in the church would die as a martyr, but it does mean that with each one in the corporate body there should be a willingness to make such a sacrifice (Lenski). One’s willingness to give his life is the ultimate proof of his loyalty as a Christian disciple.”<sup>48</sup>

Jesus the High Priest is near, walking up and down among His people. “I am with you always.” Remember, I was persecuted unto death also.

“Under the fiercest persecution these witnesses for Jesus kept their faith unsullied. Though deprived of every comfort, shut away from the light of the sun, making their home in the dark but friendly bosom of the earth, they uttered no complaint. With words

<sup>46</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

of faith, patience, and hope they encouraged one another to endure privation and distress. The loss of every earthly blessing could not force them to renounce their belief in Christ. Trials and persecution were but steps bringing them nearer their rest and their reward.

“Like God’s servants of old, many were ‘tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.’ Verse 35. These called to mind the words of their Master, that when persecuted for Christ’s sake, they were to be exceeding glad, for great would be their reward in heaven; for so the prophets had been persecuted before them. They rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the truth, and songs of triumph ascended from the midst of crackling flames. Looking upward by faith, they saw Christ and angels leaning over the battlements of heaven, gazing upon them with the deepest interest and regarding their steadfastness with approval. A voice came down to them from the throne of God: ‘Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.’ Revelation 2:10.”<sup>49</sup>

Once again we have a metaphor for God’s people during the Little Time of Trouble. That will be when the fifth Seal is broken, when everything will be tested “even unto blood” (Hebrews 12:4). Those accounted faithful will be sealed. The imagery is exactly what the 144,000 will go through.

“All humanity must be tested and tried. All of us must drink the cup and be baptized with affliction. But Christ has tasted death for every man in its bitterest form. He knows how to pity, how to sympathize. Only rest in His arms; He loves you, and He has redeemed you with His everlasting love. Be thou faithful unto death, and thou shalt receive a crown of life.

“All who live in our world from henceforth will know the meaning of trials. I know that God will give you grace, that He will not forsake you. Call to mind the promise of God: Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them’ (Rev. 14:13). Be of good courage.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Verse 10 – “and I will give thee a crown of life.”**

To receive the “crown of life” would exempt one from the second death. A crown – symbol of authority, achievement – is part of the faithful’s heavenly rewards.

“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (I Peter 5:4).

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” James 1:12.

The crown of life is not the *diadem* of royalty, rather it is the garland of victory – yet the crowns will be truly diadems. Why the Greek word *stephanos*? Jesus is making an incredible point. Do what I’ve outlined, and you will gain the victory and get a victor’s crown. The diadem of royalty is mentioned later, but here Jesus is promising them victory. Smyrna had Olympic games, the meaning of the victor’s wreath was well known. If there is any question as to the significance of this message, the next verse is explanatory. Jewish literature tells of garlands used at feasts to signify happiness and joy.

“The crown of righteousness is for the overcomer. Every one of you, think of this. In the morning think of it, now today I must look at that crown. I must run for it. I must run the race for it. And that crown is mine if I overcome. But if I do not overcome, and am

<sup>49</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 2, p. 256.

overcome of Satan, I lose that crown; another gets it. Shall we not try to win the crown of everlasting life? If we lose heaven, we lose everything. If we gain heaven, we gain everything.”<sup>51</sup>

“Then I saw a very great number of angels bring from the city glorious crowns—a crown for every saint, with his name written thereon. As Jesus called for the crowns, angels presented them to Him, and with His own right hand, the lovely Jesus placed the crowns on the heads of the saints. In the same manner the angels brought the harps, and Jesus presented them also to the saints. The commanding angels first struck the note, and then every voice was raised in grateful, happy praise, and every hand skillfully swept over the strings of the harp, sending forth melodious music in rich and perfect strains.”<sup>52</sup>

“What an example have the martyrs for Jesus left us in their lives of self-denial and sacrifice. They were faithful and true to principle. Although prisons, tortures, inquisitions, gibbets, and the stake threatened them, they counted not their lives dear unto themselves. Their love for the truth was here manifested. They chose to obey the truth at the expense of great suffering. The world was not worthy of these heroes of faith. They died for their faith. The pure gold was refined from all dross through trial and suffering. As these shall enter the portals of glory they will shout in triumph: *We overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of our testimony. We were faithful unto death, and now receive a crown of life.* Shouts of triumph will come from lips that never triumphed before. Those who were too timid to praise God vocally were not too timid to die for their Lord. They struggled and fought the good fight of faith. They were steadfast to the end. They will unite their glad voices in the universal songs of triumph and victory, praising God that they were accounted worthy to receive the heavenly benediction ‘well done’ from the Master they loved, and for whom they suffered. His own right hand will place upon their brows crowns of immortal glory that fade not away.”<sup>53</sup>

**VERSE 11:** “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

**Verse 11 – “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;”**

See under Ephesus for this phrase (2:7).

“Let the churches be aroused. ‘He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.’ This message concerns all our churches. You can never employ your faculty of hearing better than in hearkening to hear what the voice of God speaks to you in his word.”<sup>54</sup>

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” Again, the issue of victory – overcoming – faithfulness unto death. We have a trilogy of victory:

Be faithful – unto death  
Listen – hear the Spirit  
Strive – overcome

<sup>51</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 190.

<sup>52</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings*, p. 288.

<sup>53</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, December 2, 1875 (emphasis added).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 6/7/1887.

How are the Smyrnians faithful unto death? By listening to the Spirit – then overcoming all sin.

The second death is an “expression peculiar to the Apocalypse. See xx. 6, 14; xxi. 8. In those two passages it is defined as the lake of fire. The death awaiting the wicked after judgment.”<sup>55</sup>

For “the previous 4000 years of human history, nobody, even John, had ever heard of such a thing (second death).

“That is specifically the reason the Revelation was given, to reveal truth that hitherto was unrevealed. Consider that the word ‘Revelation’ is from ‘apokalupsis,’ meaning: ‘laying bare, making naked’ or ‘a disclosure of truth concerning things before unknown.’ The message of this book unquestionably lives up to its name and suggests more will yet be revealed. This also suggests that the things now revealed in this message were previously nonessential, but, now are essential for Christians to understand.”<sup>56</sup>

This victory over death is a victory for eternal life. Thus, the wreath becomes a crown of life – eternally.

“Said the angel, ‘Satan is the root, his children are the branches. They are now consumed root and branch. They have died an everlasting death. They are never to have a resurrection, and God will have a clean universe.’”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 446.

<sup>56</sup> Wood, Robert, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings*, p. 295.

## SUMMARY – SMYRNA

The word Smyrna means “bitter.” That was the lot of the early Christian church in that city. Persecution came in many forms. Jews claiming a true relationship with God brought slander onto the Smyrna believers. Their complaints created reprisals from the Roman government. Also, their work habits brought wrath from powerful trade unions. The results were oppression and poverty. Eventually, martyrdom ensued for many.

Looking at Smyrna as representing a time period of the early Christian church, it has been suggested that the time period of 100-313 A.D. would be apropos. Throughout this time pagan persecution crescendoed. From 303-313 A.D. Diocletian and his associates and successor Galerius conducted a campaign of annihilation.

Because of the terrible persecution that this church lived with, Jesus introduced Himself as the God – the Being – that transcends all time and has victory over the grave. Nothing could happen, even death, that He wasn’t capable of using for eternal good.

Jesus reassures them that He understands their persecution, their poverty, the slander that comes their way and that stress is coming directly from Satan. But – He doesn’t intercede to stop the persecution – He gives strength.

His summation challenge: Keep on being faithful because a crown of life is waiting. No matter what you must go through, you won’t experience the second death.

This expose’ not only addresses the pastoral interest of God, but teaches a powerful lesson to keep not only Jesus’ mediatorial interest in view but that the eye of faith looks beyond the grave to where eternity with Him is the ultimate hope. What a profound trust this church symbolizes. It illustrates an abject divorce from this world. It transcends the grave and orients itself to the forever.

### End-Time Metaphor of Smyrna

The instruction to John transcended the local church and the church of “time” to symbolize the church in the wilderness depicted in Daniel 7:25, Revelation 12:6 and Revelation 12:14. There the church of persecution and martyrdom could have an ear to hear what Jesus said to the churches, especially Smyrna. Apostasy, slander, civil authorities, prison and death reenact the life and hardship of poverty and continual uncertainty of the believers. The crown of life and never experiencing the second death were silent dreams of a people who had little desire to attach to this world.

The greater application of the Smyrnan church lies at the time of the end. The sanctuary imagery in chapter 1 to the seven churches puts all churches from 1844 on.

“While John was shown the last great struggles of the church with earthly powers, he was also permitted to behold the final victory and deliverance of the faithful. He saw the church brought into deadly conflict with the beast and his image, and the worship of that beast enforced on pain of death. But looking beyond the smoke and din of the battle, he beheld a company upon Mount Zion with the Lamb, having, instead of the mark of the beast, the ‘Father’s name written in their foreheads.’ And again he saw ‘them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God’ and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.”<sup>58</sup>

That is the imagery of Smyrna. From personal struggles to the cross to the crown, it is the story of persistence and victory.

<sup>58</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 752-753.



“The Lord Jesus sent a mighty angel to make plain to John, by the use of symbols, the things that were to come to pass until the coming of Christ. He was bidden to write the instruction in a book for the benefit of the seven churches. This writing we now have preserved in the book of Revelation, but this book is understood by only a very few. *It contains the message for the last days, and we are to dwell much upon these prophecies.*”<sup>59</sup>

“The words uttered were not alone for John on the Isle of Patmos; they were not for the churches alone; but through these churches was to come the inspired message for the people, to have its powerful impression in every age to the close of this earth’s history. Why is not this being done?”<sup>60</sup>

The end-time persecution appears to be all but obliterated in discourses. Evangelicals keep alive the dispensational tribulation. Prophecy has not only foretold an end-time persecution, it is clear that it will last 1260 days (Daniel 12:7, Revelation 12:14, 13:5). Those periods are different and follow sequences that bring us right down to the deliverance of God’s people (Daniel 12:1).

The church of Smyrna is a *template* for God’s remnant people right at the end. It specifically addresses the persecution and martyrdom issue.

“The apostle Paul declares that ‘all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.’ 2 Timothy 3:12. Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? The only reason is that the church has conformed to the world’s standard and therefore awakens no opposition. The religion which is current in our day is not of the pure and holy character that marked the Christian faith in the days of Christ and His apostles. It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin, because the great truths of the word of God are so indifferently regarded, because there is so little vital godliness in the church, that Christianity is apparently so popular with the world. Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled.”<sup>61</sup>

“The spirit of persecution manifested by paganism and the papacy is *again to be revealed*. Prophecy declares that this power will say ‘to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast.’ [1 Rev. 13:14.] The image is made to the first or leopard-like beast, which is the one brought to view in the third angel’s message. By this first beast is represented the Roman Church, an ecclesiastical body clothed with civil power, having authority to punish all dissenters. The image to the beast represents another religious body clothed with similar power.

“Then the true church will be assailed by persecution, as were God’s ancient people.”<sup>62</sup>

It is Jesus – the first and the last – the man–God – who speaks to the remnant: I have victory over the grave. The pastoral message will once again come through, “I know your works, your tribulation and your poverty.” Severance from all earthly ties will come through laws and circumstances. God’s final people – the remnant who are martyred – are symbolized by the Smyrnan believers. Slander, civil penalties, rejection and hatred will come.

Contempt is often heaped on those who decry persecution.

“They speak with contempt of the idea that there will be a revival of the past cruel persecution on the part of Romanists and those who affiliate with them. They do not

<sup>59</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, February 14, 1907 (emphasis added).

<sup>60</sup> White, Ellen G.; *1888 Materials*, p. 779.

<sup>61</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 48.

<sup>62</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 278.

recognize the fact that the word of God fully predicts such a revival, and will not concede that the people of God in the last days shall suffer persecution, although the Bible says, 'The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.'<sup>63</sup>

"The first thing recorded in Scripture history after the fall was the persecution of Abel. And the last thing in Scripture prophecy is the persecution against those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast."<sup>64</sup>

It is interesting that the same players will stalk the issues of old: backslidden brethren, civil authorities, the religious community, worship issues and penalties. Persecution and martyrdom will then come.

"The time is right upon us when persecution will come to those who proclaim the truth. The outlook is not flattering; but, notwithstanding this, let us not give up our efforts to save those ready to perish, for whose ransom the Prince of heaven offered up His precious life. When one means fails, try another. Our efforts must not be dead and lifeless. As long as life is spared, let us work for God. In all ages of the church God's appointed messengers have exposed themselves to reproach and persecution for the truth's sake. But wherever God's people may be forced to go, even though, like the beloved disciples, they are banished to desert islands, Christ will know where they are and will strengthen and bless them, filling them with peace and joy."<sup>65</sup>

This metaphor also reveals the opening of the fifth Seal.

"When the fifth seal was opened, John the Revelator in vision saw beneath the altar the company that were slain for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. After this came the scenes described in the eighteenth of Revelation, when those who are faithful and true are called out from Babylon [Rev. 18: 15 quoted] (MS 39, 1906)."<sup>66</sup>

"[Rev. 6:9-11]. Here were scenes presented to John that were not in reality but that which would be in a period of time in the future [Rev. 8:1-4, quoted]."<sup>67</sup>

Notice that after the fifth Seal comes the Loud Cry.

Jesus' victory over sin and death, His eternal life gives Him authority and power to act as our mediator. The central sanctuary theme in chapter 1 is atonement. Jesus ministers on behalf of what He did as a persecuted and martyred man.

"Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.' [Revelation 1:17, 18.]

"In Revelation 1:4, 8 the parallel references were to God the Father. I, Jesus, proclaim here. He demonstrates His equality with the Father. This proclamation is the keystone of all that is to come in the book of Revelation. All the promises to the redeemed have their certainty in Jesus' proclamation in this verse. Jesus lifts John up from his death-like state and tells him, 'Do not be afraid.' Why is John not to be afraid? Because the promises of Jesus are absolutely certain. He has the power to deliver from both death and sin. Why? Because of the three things that Jesus proclaims in this statement. 1) 'I am God,' 2) 'I died in your place,' and 3) 'I rose from the dead and live forevermore.' These three facts form the firm foundation of the entire Christian faith. Salvation is available to us because of the Deity/Humanity, death, and resurrection of Christ."<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, February 19, 1894.

<sup>64</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Ellen G. White Materials*, p. 1013.

<sup>65</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 227-228.

<sup>66</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 968.

<sup>67</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 20, p. 197.

<sup>68</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

Jesus is our High Priest and ever ready to use His cleansing blood to justify and sanctify. To the Smyrnan church, to all persecuted Christians He says, “I’ve been there, I’ve done that. I know exactly what you are experiencing. I will lead you to life eternal.”

Because of this He can serve as *our* leader, intercessor, defender, friend, helper, sympathizer and spiritual strength – all as High Priest to all mankind. Revelation presents Jesus in the final phase of the Atonement and, finally, as executor of justice.

“And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Mel-chiz’-ed-ek there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, *Thou art a priest for ever after* the order of Mel-chiz’-ed-ek. By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, *who is holy*, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;” Hebrews 7:15-26.

“Now of the things which we have spoken *this is* the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” Hebrews 8:1.

Jesus is shown as a divine-human friend to all those who are persecuted and face martyrdom. He is a link between earth and heaven. His pastoral redeeming words: “Be faithful unto death” gives us the crowning imagery of One who will never let us go. Soon the divine grasp that tenaciously holds the saints will draw all heavenward. The One who experienced the second death now extends eternal life.

**Promise to Smyrna:** “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.” Revelation 2:11.

**Fulfillment:** “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” Revelation 20:6.

## PERGAMOS

### INTRODUCTION

Pergamos church – the apostate, compromising church (tolerates sin).

### Geography

Pergamos (often Pergamum) was located 55 miles north of Smyrna and 20 miles from the Aegean Sea. The name means “parchment.” It was here that parchment was first manufactured from animal skins.<sup>1</sup> It was also known for ointments, pottery and tapestry.

Today, the city of *Bergama* stands where the ancient Biblical city existed. Pergamos was the capital of a providence called by that name – later the provincial capital of all Asia. “It had the second largest library in the world, containing 200,000 volumes, exceeded only by the library at Alexandria, Egypt.”<sup>2</sup>

All the major roads of Asia converged on Pergamos. Built on a hill 1000 feet high, it became known as a citadel. Pliny even called it “by far the most illustrious of Asia.”<sup>3</sup>

### Religion of the City

“When the Persians overthrew Babylon, they gave the inhabitants of the city their freedom. But the Babylonian priests later led a revolt and were driven from the city. ‘The defeated Chaldeans fled to Asia Minor, and fixed their central college at Pergamos, and took the palladium of Babylon, the cubic stone, with them. Here, independent of state control, they carried on the rites of their religion.’— William B. Barker, *Lares and Penates*, pages 232-233. Pergamos, therefore, became the ‘seat’ of the satanic system of the Babylonian ‘mysteries.’

“This counterfeit religion was built on the claim that it made a bridge between heaven and earth. The ruling monarch became the head of the system. He had many titles, one of which, ‘Pontifex Maximus,’ is significant. *Pont* means a bridge; *factio*, I make; and *maximus*, greatest. Put together, it simply means The Greatest Bridge Builder.” Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation – Revised*; “Christ’s Messages to Smyrna and Pergamos”<sup>4</sup>

The temple of Aesculapus (Asclepius) housed a living serpent that was worshiped. This was the god of Pergamos. Coins showed a rod with a living serpent wound around it to honor Aesculapus.

“The shrine of Asclepius, who was noted as a ‘god of healing,’ attracted people from all over the world. Feeding a living serpent in the temple was the manner of practicing this worship. The sick spent the night in the darkness of the temple where nonpoisonous snakes were allowed to roam. If a person was touched by one of these snakes (i.e., by the god himself), he was cured of his illness.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), 1997, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 446.

<sup>4</sup> Pacific Press Publishing Association [LID], 1983, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 179.

This city was the home of Galen, second only to Hippocrates as a renowned physician.

The *Nicephorium* was a beautiful grove area surrounded by many other temples.<sup>6</sup>

One temple was erected in 29 B.C. to Caesar Augustus, the first Asian city to give such an honor.

“Caesar-worship was the most intense here. In other cities a Christian might be in danger on only one day a year when a pinch of incense had to be burned in worship of the emperor. In Pergamum, however, Christians were in danger every day of the year for the same reason.”<sup>7</sup>

Refusal to pay public homage to Caesar as a deity was considered high treason to the state.<sup>8</sup> In this atmosphere it would be very difficult for Christians to maintain a high profile of their faith.

### Christian Church at Pergamos

What we know is basically isolated within the context of this letter. Thus, what follows will formulate that picture.

**VERSE 12: “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;”**

#### Verse 12 – “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write;

See chapter 1:11, 19 and 2:1 dealing with “angel” and “write.”

#### Verse 12 – “These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;”

Reference is drawn from 1:16 where Jesus is among the churches with a double edged sword protruding from His mouth. This instrument symbolizes the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12). In this setting it depicts what the Word of God will do. Jesus, the Priest, the divine pastor of Pergamos wants the Testimony of Jesus to prevail but will correct or cut out the wrongs that exist in this church.

If the sword cannot correct, it executes judgment. The sword is sharp. The work will always be complete. God’s Word is powerful and effective. The two edges show that God will not be impartial.

Since His ministers, His stars, are to give this message, truth now becomes a pointed straight testimony! This symbolizes the final work of God’s leaders. There is to be correction and cleansing within His apostate church. All such boldness brings a shaking, a purification.

“The plain *straight testimony must live in the church or the curse of God will rest upon His people* as surely as it did upon ancient Israel because of their sins.”<sup>9</sup>

“God’s ministers have a most solemn, sacred work to do in our world. The end is near. The message of truth must go. As faithful shepherds of the flock, God’s servants are to bear a clear, sharp testimony. There is to be no perverting of the truth. Divine

<sup>6</sup> Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent’s Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 446.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 246.

<sup>9</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 676.

grace never leads away from mercy and the love of God. It is the power of Satan that does this. *When Christ preached, His message was like a sharp, two-edged sword, piercing the consciences of men and revealing their inmost thoughts. The work that Christ did His faithful messengers will [future] have to do.*<sup>10</sup>

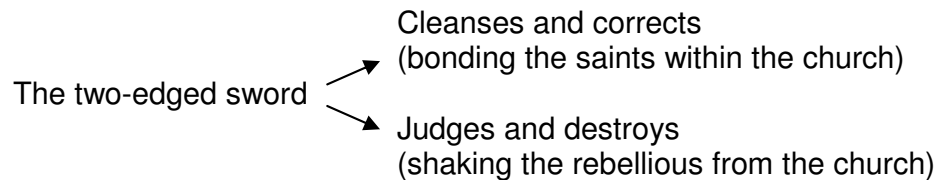
A “message which is as a two-edged sword must be given to the people, *to clear away the evils that are seen among them.* A living testimony that will awaken the paralyzed conscience is to be borne.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Pergamos becomes a symbol of the apostate church right at the very end. The sword of truth and the Spirit is to come to correct or cleanse.

“I saw that the testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. *This testimony must work deep repentance; all who truly receive it will obey it and be purified.*”<sup>12</sup>

The leader of Pergamos represents those last-day ministers and leaders who are invited by the True Witness to bring forth a precise message *to its own people.* The True Witness is Jesus – with all authority He is also the faithful witness (1:5) that has penetrating truth.

Part of the end-time message will begin at the house of God! This imagery sets the stage for specific counsel which follows. What in Pergamos needed to be cleansed, removed, clarified, corrected? Does Jesus come as a threatening “Savior?” Has judgment already started? “Remember John’s first imagery of Jesus. When he turned to see the “voice,” he saw the *churches.* First, the predominant focus of these messages. But, nestled within those candlesticks was Jesus like unto the Son of man. That is the picture we are to see. Jesus is on a mission. For the rebellious, the *word* will bring condemnation and shaking. For those who repent, the sword of the Spirit will transform.



That sword has a secondary function: “The judicial power of Christ’s sword is not only intended to judge apostates in the church (cf. 2:16), but also stands as a polemical image against the satanic center of Roman justice in Pergamum, which misuses its power to persecute Christians (Roman governors had the ultimate ‘right of the sword’ [*ius gladii*, i.e., capital punishment]). Christ’s throne is sovereign over Satan’s, and Satan’s representatives who wrongly use the God-ordained power of the sword (Rom. 13:1-4) will themselves be judged by the heavenly law court (Dan. 2:37-38; 5:18-21). This very judgment, the destruction of the pagan nations, is portrayed in 19:15, 21 in the same image of the sword. In this light, oppressed Christians could be encouraged that their cause would be vindicated on the last day.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 2, p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, December 1, 1896 (emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings*, p. 270 (emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

“It is written,—the Word of the living God,—this is your weapon. This Word is ‘the sword of the Spirit,’ ‘sharper than any two-edged sword.’ [1] It is the ‘sharp arrow’ by which the wicked are slain. [2] It is ‘the power of God unto salvation.’”<sup>14</sup>

Since Pergamos is the place where Satan dwells, it is here that the power of God’s Word will meet head on with the very center of Satan’s power. Many commentators focus heavily on the sword against the pagan environment. That can only be a secondary application. This *is* a letter to an apostate church! The sword is, however, a reminder to the beleaguered Pergamos church that God’s power will ultimately prevail.

“Satan’s throne may have been there but Christ’s kingdom was also established there. Rome may have thought that they had the ‘right of the sword’ but in reality Christ was and is the ultimate victor. This ‘letter bids the Christian not to forget that the last word is still with the Risen Christ.’ Jesus Christ is still the same today.”<sup>15</sup>

“There are times when words of reproof and rebuke are called for. Those who are out of the right way must be aroused to see their peril. A message must be given that shall startle them from the lethargy which enchains their senses. Moral renovation must take place, else souls will perish in their sins. Let the message of truth, like a sharp, two-edged sword, cut its way to the heart. Make appeals that will arouse the careless, and bring foolish, wandering minds back to God.”<sup>16</sup>

“Those who stand before the people as teachers of truth are to grapple with great themes. They are not to occupy precious time in talking of trivial subjects. Let them study the Word, and preach the Word. Let the Word be in their hands as a sharp, two-edged sword. Let it [1] testify to past truths and [2] show what is to be in the future.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, it cleanses, it judges and it is predictive. That’s what unfolds all the way through the book of Revelation.

An even more provocative picture comes in Revelation 19:13: “And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called the Word of God.” More than the sword, He is the Word of God! He is truth. The sword shows what truth will ultimately do.

**VERSE 13:** “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan’s seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, *even* in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”

“Before confronting them with the sin that plagues them, he commends the church members for something in which they have been loyal.”<sup>18</sup>

What powerful lessons! Simply looking at the order of the message we learn compassion and tenderness, tact in our teaching and love in our message of rebuke.

“What course shall the advocates of truth pursue? They have the unchangeable, eternal word of God, and they should reveal the fact that they have the truth as it is in Jesus. Their words must not be rugged and sharp. In their presentation of truth they must manifest the love and meekness and gentleness of Christ. Let the truth do the cutting; the word of God is as a sharp, two-edged sword, and will cut its way to the heart.

<sup>14</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Pacific Union Recorder*, 11/17/1904.

<sup>15</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Evangelism*, p. 151.

<sup>18</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 246.

Those who know that they have the truth should not, by the use of harsh and severe expressions, give Satan one chance to misinterpret their spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Verse 13 – “I know thy works.”**

Jesus once again makes it clear that He knows this church. His technique is psychologically unique. It is a beautiful gesture to deal with strengths before problems are addressed. He deals also with this introduction in such a way that it reinforces the bonding between Himself and His people. You hold fast my name and have not denied my faith. The Pergamonian people uphold Jesus.

In a trilogy a major complement is paid:

I know	He’s acquainted
Where you dwell	Seat of Satan
My name you hold fast	Haven’t denied God

This is a remarkable complement. In spite of living in the hotbed of iniquity, the very center of Satan’s kingdom, and in spite of martyrdom occurring in the church, they uphold the Savior’s name. They are true to the faith.

In the original, “thy works” is omitted. Yet, it has a lesson that can be drawn upon. E. G. White noted:

“There is not a deed of darkness, not a plan, not an imagination of the heart, not a thought of the mind, but that He reads it as an open book. Every act, every word, every motive, is faithfully chronicled in the records of the great Heart-searcher, who said, ‘I know thy works.’”<sup>20</sup>

### **Verse 13 – “and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is:”**

“Where thou dwellest” can have more than one significance. Here, it appears to represent the place they have a home, their residence. The central point Jesus is making – you live in the same city where Satan lives. He doesn’t advise this church to move away.<sup>21</sup>

Intriguingly, “seat” is *thronos* (throne) or could be seen as the center of authority. This city was a hotbed of satanic power. This is so significant that at the end of the verse Jesus repeats “where Satan dwelleth.” It creates a dramatic contrast between the “right” of Christians to be loyal to Jesus and the iniquity of their surroundings. Satan has control of this city. The people are letting God be in control of their lives.

What made this city the “seat of Satan?” Clearly, Jesus suggests it is worse than the other six cities mentioned. But why Pergamos houses the satanic throne remains unanswered. Suggestions, however, include:

1. This was the seat of worship of the snake Askepios, symbolic of Satan (12:9, 20:2). It was symbolic of a power in direct competition with Christianity. Askepios was even called “Savior” (though a serpent was symbolized elsewhere by the god of Zeus).

<sup>19</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 322.

<sup>21</sup> Diop, Ganoune; “Jesus Christ in the midst of His people: A study of Revelation 1:9-3:22,” *J Adventist Theological Society*, 8/1-2 (1997), p. 52.



2. An altar of enormous proportions was set up to Askepios.
3. It was the home of the spirit of persecution (though, likely, this comes more from Roman influence) and martyrdom.
4. The number of gods worshiped there
5. It ties in with the beast worship mentioned later in the book.
6. Its emperor worship with power to wield the sword if resisted

“Since this church was in the Roman capital [for the whole of Asia], the persecution that claimed the life of Antipas likely was carried out by Roman authority. This may account for Christ’s identifying himself as he who has the sharp two-edged sword (v. 12), a reminder that the sword of Christ (v. 16) was more powerful than that of Rome.”<sup>22</sup>

Other commentators lean in this direction also. The Romans had life and death over these people, including in the area of worship.

“At the very time John wrote these words Christians were suffering persecution for refusing to worship the emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96), who insisted on being worshiped as ‘lord and god.’”<sup>23</sup>

Satan’s seat is also a metaphor for any place that is a hotbed of iniquity. Examples: “Heavenly beings cooperate with us in the battle as we advance against fallen angels and fallen men to press the battle into new territories, even where Satan’s seat is.”<sup>24</sup>

“Before Christ’s first advent, the world seemed indeed to have become the grave for all piety. It was Satan’s seat; man was in the power of the great apostate, helplessly receiving his lies in regard to God and to Christ, as truth.”<sup>25</sup>

“Satan’s seat is in Boston, as well as in other wicked cities; and he is a wily foe to contend with.”<sup>26</sup>

“The Waldensian missionaries were invading the kingdom of Satan, and the powers of darkness aroused to greater vigilance. Every effort to advance the truth was watched by the prince of evil, and he excited the fears of his agents. The papal leaders saw a portent of danger to their cause from the labors of these humble itinerants.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Verse 13 – “and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith,”**

Holding fast or to the name of Jesus suggests “staying power.”<sup>28</sup> In a wicked environment they don’t deny the name of Jesus. Holding fast suggests loyalty and faithfulness to Him. In fact, in face of threats, they were unwilling to call anything or anybody else Savior.

To what degree this commitment was is found in Jesus’ illustration:

### **Verse 13 – “even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”**

<sup>22</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>23</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 749.

<sup>24</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> White, Ellen G.; Bible Echo and *The Signs of the Times*, March 8, 1897.

<sup>26</sup> White, Ellen G.; *PH159*, “Testimony to the Church,” p. 138.

<sup>27</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Paulien, *Op. cit.*, *Revelation 1-5, Seven Churches and a Heavenly Vision, The Bible Explorer Series recording tapes, tape 4* (The Ambassador Group, Harrisburg, PA; 1996).

The words used here for Antipas “faithful martyr” is exactly what was said about Jesus in 1:5, “faithful witness.” For the two, both applications indeed are descriptive.

Nothing is known about Antipas – BUT – Jesus used his name in the Holy Word to illustrate the depth of faithfulness He appreciates. In fact, Jesus said “my” faithful martyr. “Jesus dignifies him with [this] ... eulogy.”<sup>29</sup>

“Specific information about this particular persecution through which the church had displayed such loyalty locates it ‘in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness.’ Apparently Antipas was part of the resistance to imperial pressure upon Christians to compromise their loyalty to Christ. Nothing certain is known about this man except what this passage tells (Simcox), but tradition suggests that he was burned to death in a bronze bull during the reign of Domitian (Swete).”<sup>30</sup>

“How does this meaning distinguish Antipas from other faithful believers? By the third century A.D., *martyrs* had developed the meaning *martyr* because so many witnesses of Christ had given their lives for the Christian cause. The end of the first century may be too early to attach this developed meaning to the word, but this also may be the beginning of a transition in the word’s meaning from witness to martyr.”<sup>31</sup>

“Where Satan dwells” is Jesus’ repeated reinforcement of how wicked this place was.

**VERSE 14:** “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Ba’-laam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”

**Verse 14 – “But I have a few things against thee.”**

At first there were strong complements but now in contrast come stern complaints.

“The church is [charged with] ... harboring a group of compromisers.”<sup>32</sup>

This is fascinating information. Here is a church with impeccable loyalty to Jesus, but they tolerate sin within its ranks. They have been negligent to uphold truth and discipline sinful behavior.

This is very important to study. The whole church was *not* evil or degraded; but, like cancer, the presence of falsehood and evil practices among some members required the sword of the Spirit.<sup>33</sup> A cleansing needed to be instituted. The implication of Christ’s words make it clear that the positive strengths will be temporary unless this problem is corrected.

**Verse 14 – “because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Ba’-laam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”**

The leaders appear to have a Christ oriented commitment. But they were not spiritual leaders of the flock. The purity and integrity of the church was not a burden. “The fault

<sup>29</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas, J. D.; *The New Greek English Interlinear New Testament* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; Wheaton, IL; 1990), p. 855.

of the church as a whole was not adherence to the teaching or doctrine of Balaam, but rather indifference to those within who were in sympathy with it (Moffatt).<sup>34</sup>

By church leaders, sin must be addressed. The stars, the angels, the ministers are to do all to present to God a pure church. Do these spots and stains of wrong cause God to reject Pergamos? No – He has already said what the remedy is – His Word.

What is this doctrine of Balaam? It is fitting that Jesus represented the first problem in this church as having the doctrine of Balaam. “Balaam had been a prophet of God, and a good man; but he apostatized.”<sup>35</sup> Apostasy was creeping into Pergamos because they retained a “stumbling block” within the church over two sins:

1. Eating food sacrificed to idols
2. Adultery

The whole church, nation, Israel, stumbled and suffered because of sin, from the counsel given by Balaam to King Balak. Did everyone eat things sacrificed to idols and commit adultery? No. But the whole church was held responsible. “By swift-coming judgments the people were awakened to the enormity of their sin. A terrible pestilence broke out in the camp to which tens of thousands speedily fell a prey.”<sup>36</sup>

“The act of sacrifice, among all ancient nations, was a social no less than a religious act. Commonly only a part of the victim was consumed as an offering, and the rest became the portion of the priests, was given to the poor, or was sold again in the markets. Hence sacrifice and feast were identified. The word originally used for killing in sacrifice ... obtained the general sense of *killing* (Acts x.13). Among the Greeks this identification was carried to the highest pitch. Thucydides enumerates sacrifices among popular entertainments. ‘We have not forgotten,’ he says, ‘to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil. We have regular games and sacrifices throughout the year’ (ii., 38). So Aristotle: ‘And some fellowships seem to be for the sake of pleasure; those of the followers of Love, and those of club-diners; for these are for the sake of sacrifice and social intercourse’ (‘Ethics,’ viii., 9, 5).”<sup>37</sup>

These two sins were named separately, but were part of pagan religious and secular festivities in Pergamos. This group of people in that church were symbolic of Balaam’s advice.

“Just as Israel was influenced to fornicate both sexually and spiritually, the same was true of Christians in Pergamum.

“Like Balaam, this was a group of false prophets who were encouraging participation in idol feasts by teaching that such permission was permissible for Christians.”<sup>38</sup>

“The focus here is on eating such food in the context of idolatrous worship (which was also a problem in Corinth: 1 Cor. 10:1-22). This is clear from the parallels drawn with Balaam and later with Jezebel (cf. 2:20), both of which concern blatant idolatry.”<sup>39</sup>

Some have suggested that these sins are metaphors for those who commit spiritual fornication against God since this is alluded to elsewhere in Revelation. Any sin ultimately will bring this condemnation. But: “To limit the meaning to a general similarity by saying that literal idolatry and fornication happened only to ancient Israel does injustice

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>35</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 320.

<sup>36</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 448.

<sup>38</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

to the natural sense of v. 14, however. The sins of participation in idolatrous feasts and sexual immorality were so characteristic of the pagan surroundings in Asia Minor that a literal sense is preferable (Moffatt; Johnson).<sup>40</sup>

“The two practices here mentioned had been expressly prohibited by the council at Jerusalem (see on Acts 15:29; Rom. 14:1; 1 Cor. 8:1). Balaam influenced Israel to commit ‘whoredom with the daughters of Moab,’ to sacrifice to Moabite gods, and to ‘eat,’ presumably of the meat sacrificed to these gods (Num. 25:1, 2; 31:16).”<sup>41</sup>

“Balaam knew that the prosperity of Israel depended upon their observance of the law of God.”<sup>42</sup>

“Almost imperceptibly the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian church. The spirit of compromise and conformity was restrained for a time by the fierce persecutions which the church endured under paganism. But as persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and His apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions. The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church.”<sup>43</sup>

In the last days a similar compromise will visit God’s church. As of Pergamos, the cry to repent will be firm and full of pleading. Many will spurn that final invitation and, instead of a church that becomes tainted, it is purified by the shaking. The sword of truth coming out of Jesus’ mouth will change from a clear call to repent to a sword of judgment. The fate of rebellious apostates will be sealed, never to return.

This will be the same issue in the final purification of the church before the sealing. The church is called a hospital for sinners, but it must be a school to produce saints.

“Here are lessons which God’s people at the present day should take to heart. There are grievous sins indulged by individual members of the church,—covetousness, overreaching, deception, fraud, falsehood, and many others. If these sins are neglected by those who have been placed in authority in the church, the blessing of the Lord is withheld from his people, and *the innocent suffer with the guilty*. The officers in the church should be earnest, energetic men, having a zeal for God, and they should take the most prompt and thorough measures to condemn and correct these wrongs. In this work they should act, not from selfishness, jealousy, or personal prejudice, but in all meekness and lowliness of mind, with a sincere desire that God may be glorified. Inhumanity, false dealing, prevarication, licentiousness, and other sins, are not to be palliated or excused; for they will speedily demoralize the church. Sin may be called by false names, and glossed over by plausible excuses and pretended good motives, but this does not lessen its guilt in the sight of God.”<sup>44</sup>

“The church must suffer in consequence of the sins of its individual members.”<sup>45</sup>

Though persecution was symbolic of the loyalty to Jesus in this church, it quickly ceased when Constantine came to power. This created a time of greater temptation to God’s people because synonymous with peace came compromise. Celebration, ease and outward display in the worship experience brought a marriage between Christianity and paganism. The very issue of concession with sin that Jesus warned the Pergamian

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>41</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 749.

<sup>42</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 326-327.

<sup>43</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>44</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1881.

<sup>45</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, February 19, 1889.

church about came to fruition under the historic application of this prophecy. This church merged into the Roman Catholic tradition, never to return to its purity.

**VERSE 15:** “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nic-o-la-i-tans, which thing I hate.”

### **Verse 15 – “So hast thou also them”**

This is similar language used in reference to Balaam. There are arguments that say the Nicolaitans and Balaamites are the same group, but most commentators subscribe to two separate entities. Apparently both groups were involved with eating food offered to idols and adultery. They disobeyed the decision of the Council of Jerusalem. Nicolaitans went further in minimizing the need to obey the law.

“But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.” Acts 15:20, 29.

Nicolaitans were in the Ephesian church also (2:6). Jesus makes it clear that He hates and despises their beliefs.

“The Nicolaitans appear to be an early Christian sect that had somehow fallen into acts of immorality. Beyond this point, conjecture is required. Easton’s Bible dictionary has the following entry:

“Nicolaitans – The church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:6) is commended for hating the ‘deeds’ of the Nicolaitans, and the church of Pergamos is blamed for having them who hold their “doctrines” (15). They were seemingly a class of professing Christians, who sought to introduce into the church a false freedom or licentiousness, thus abusing Paul’s doctrine of grace (comp. 2 Pet. 2:15, 16, 19), and were probably identical with those who held the doctrine of Balaam (q.v.), Rev. 2:14.”<sup>46</sup>

How could “Christians” be involved with an adulterous life style, even incorporating it into their religious practice? Antinomianism claims that in the gospel dispensation the moral law is no longer binding. Only faith is salvic. Thus, the door is opened for sensuous practices without guilt or alleged condemnation. This postmodern idea started nearly 2000 years ago.

It is interesting to look at the word “hate” used in these verses describing Jesus’ attitude towards them. The Greek word is *miseo* (hate or detest). It is an *active* reaction of Jesus towards a belief and lifestyle.

There is deep identity with this *word* to never “hate” others, but profound acceptance to always hate wrong.

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Proverbs 8:13).

It is evil or an evil act that God demands we hate. Evil is anti-God, and He makes it pointedly clear that He hates it.

Jesus is not only giving strong advice, but setting moral parameters on His church. He wants Pergamos to clearly understand His standards of rightness. And just before He develops an ultimatum, He makes it clear that God’s people are to hate evil too.

Jesus said: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). The world may exhibit this evil response. Jesus propounds the antithesis: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you” (Mat-

<sup>46</sup> David Clover, *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 9.

thew 5:44). A corollary exists in His counsel as to how to deal with those who hate us – love them.

**VERSE 16:** “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

**Verse 16 – “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly.”**

This is definitive language in a trilogy setting:

Repent or else  
I will come quickly  
Fight against them

Jesus has moved with a rapidly progressive message toward this church.

- a Jesus has sharp sword (vs 12)
- b I know your work (vs 13)
- c You dwell where Satan reigns (vs 13)
- d You hold fast my name (13)
- d<sup>1</sup> Antipas my faithful martyr (13)
- c<sup>1</sup> I hate doctrines of Nicolaitans and Balaam (15)
- b<sup>1</sup> I will come to you quickly (16)
- a<sup>1</sup> Jesus will fight with sword (vs 16)

Jesus, the bearer of truth, the standard of righteousness, because of evil, now turns to warn His people of judgments. Though the sword is to fight those who are engaged in evil, the warning is directed to the “faithful.” It is intimated that they will experience adversity as the result of tolerating evil within His church – therefore, repent. Change these things within My church or I will have to deal with you harshly. “Failure to repent of this uncleanness in her midst must evoke the punishing sword of Christ upon the whole church.”<sup>47</sup>

There is urgency in the message: Repent – or else I will come unto thee quickly. Is this a special coming of judgment? Some contend it is and justify it by the language and that no traces of the Balaamites or Nicolaitans exist today. But the logic is based on “could have” or “might have” reasoning.

“Yet the coming of Christ as the theme of the apocalypse is clearly a reference to His second advent, as the earlier discussion of *erchomai* (‘come’ in 2:5 has shown. This conclusion is strengthened in the present verse by the addition of *tachy*. Every other combination of *erchomai tachy* in this book refers to Christ’s second advent (cf. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). The adverb is equivalent to the ... (*en tachei*, ‘soon’) of 1:1 and 22:6. Both teach the imminence of Christ’s return. *Polemeso met auton en te rhomphaia tou stomatos mou* is further confirmation of a reference to Christ’s eschatological return rather than a special coming to this church. This is the language of 19:11-15, especially v. 15, which is the full prophecy of Christ’s triumphant return. It shows that at the final moment of truth this church will be on the wrong side unless it repents (Charles; Swete). That faithful believers will have access to the tree of life (2:7) and receive the crown of life (2:10) is no argument for making this a historical judgment rather than the second com-

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 197.

ing. Unwillingness to repent shows that a person is not a faithful believer. Little doubt can be entertained that from the perspective of the first century, *erchomai* referred to the second or final coming of Christ (Mounce).

“The issue of whether *tachy* denotes imminence or swiftness of action has been discussed at 1:1 in connection with *en tachei*. The conclusion must be the same here, that the coming is imminent.”<sup>48</sup>

Does that mean He won’t come quickly if they repent? That is not suggested. “Whenever I come – and it is imminent – if you haven’t repented, my judgments will come upon you like a sword.”

What is there to repent of? Clearly, three things are in evidence:

1. Tolerating evil – the “faithful”
2. Doctrine of Balaam – the unfaithful
3. Doctrine of Nicolaitans – the unfaithful

### **Verse 16 – “and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”**

This is very strong language. It is God’s response to sin. He begins gently but concludes His cleansing challenge with “fight” (*polemos*), suggesting war or a battle.

He will fight “them” (*auton*), the heretical sects within the church. But, as noted above, the tolerance of the faithful is an issue with God showing that they too will suffer if they fail to act.<sup>49</sup>

The warning is urgent, with alluding ties to the second coming. Fail to act – everyone will suffer. Why the urgency? Wrong will overcome right when *tolerated!*

“If action were not taken quickly, the whole church could be captivated by these teachers. The two teachings are identified further by the similarity of the etymology of their names: ... means ‘he overcomes the people,’ and in rabbinic literature ‘Balaam’ ... was etymologized to ‘he who consumes the people’ ... or it could be construed as ‘rule over the people’ ... Actual participation in idolatrous situations was the problem in Pergamum, and this problem needed to be rectified immediately.”<sup>50</sup>

This is a compelling proclamation, the final moves to eradicate sin are presented in Revelation. It is God’s final bulletin in how He will deal with a sinful world.

The two-edged sword initially comes as a convictor of truth. It eventually becomes a weapon of executive judgment if changes are not made. The atoning priest becomes the cleansing king.

“And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations” (Revelation 19:13, 15).

This verse concludes, once again, with imagery of the second coming. Jesus the Word of God, executes final judgment and justice.

“Take a closer look at Jesus’ warning again. Jesus says, ‘Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.’ First of all, we notice that Jesus portrays Himself to this church as the One who has the sharp two-edged sword. As we have noted before, this is a reference to the Word of God, which is the standard of discernment between truth and error. How appro-

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>50</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 251.

appropriate for Jesus to appear this way to a church that is struggling with doctrinal error. Take a look at the passage again. Jesus says two things that let you know that this must be a reference to the end time. First He says, 'I am coming to you quickly.' When the New Testament speaks about Jesus' coming it always indicates His personal return at the Second Coming. There is only one reference that talks about Jesus' coming in merely a spiritual sense. That is John 14:16-23, and it really refers to Jesus' presence through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and not Jesus personally. But if there was ever any doubt that this is an eschatological reference, the next phrase wipes it away. 'I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.' The cross-reference to this phrase is Revelation 19:11-16."<sup>51</sup>

**VERSE 17:** "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden man'-na, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*."

**Verse 17 – “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”**

See under Ephesus (2:7) and Smyrna (2:11). This is Jesus' way of introducing the concluding thoughts to each church.

**Verse 17 – “To him that overcometh”**

Promises to the overcomer are just ahead. Does overcoming suggest victory over sin in its broad meaning or specifically the issues to Pergamos?

"Like the Ephesians, the Christians in Pergamum have their own sin to 'overcome,' and they are admonished now to do just that. If they can 'overcome' their sin of toleration and execute discipline on both groups, Christ promises them an inheritance."<sup>52</sup>

This insinuates overcoming is message-specific.

The Pergamos trilogy of promise:

Hidden manna  
White stone  
New name

These are rewards of overcoming and incentives to overcome. Jesus, personally addresses those tolerating the sins of adultery and honoring idols through eating food sacrificed to them. Here He presents opposites of their sin! This imagery is one of utmost love, fairness and kindness. "Transfer your love to what I offer – it is so much superior!"

heavenly food [no adulterated food] – manna  
heavenly stone (no inanimate gods) – white stone  
heavenly family name (no adulterous relationship) – new name

<sup>51</sup> Canter, Bryan; *Revelation, Part 2, Messages to the Seven Churches* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 251



These are remarkable substitutes for the defined sins within this church. The beauty of the concept of integration in these remarkable messages is amazing!

**Verse 17 – “will I give to eat of the hidden man’-na,”**

“There was a tradition among the Jews that Jeremiah had taken the ark of the covenant, containing a golden pot of manna, with him when he fled to Egypt before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. Some taught that, at the initiation of the kingdom age, Jeremiah would return, bringing the ark with him, and would serve a feast of the manna that had been hidden for centuries in the ark. Some Jews of Jesus’ day thought He might be Jeremiah (Matt. 16:14). When He fed the multitudes with a few loaves, the people began to say, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world’ (John 6:14). Jesus responded that He was the true manna that came down to give life to the world (John 6:32-33). The Pergamos overcomers are promised that they will commune with Him at His feast in the kingdom, since they refuse to commune with demons at the idolatrous meals (see 1 Cor. 10:14-22).”<sup>53</sup>

This gives us another end-time picture of what is imminent for the faithful. We not only will have manna to eat physically,<sup>54</sup> but Jesus’ presence to imbibe eternally. Overcome these evils, and we will enjoy His intimate association forever.

“The manna, falling from heaven for the sustenance of Israel, was a type of Him who came from God to give life to the world. Said Jesus, ‘I am that Bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.’ John 6:48-51. And among the promises of blessing to God’s people in the future life it is written, ‘To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.’ Revelation 2:17.”<sup>55</sup>

“The allusion may be partly to the pot of manna which was laid up in the ark in the sanctuary. See Exod. xvi. 32-34; compare Heb. ix. 4. That the imagery of the ark was familiar to John appears from ch. xi. 19. This allusion however is indirect, for the manna laid up in the ark was not for food, but was a memorial of food once enjoyed. Two ideas seem to be combined in the figure:

“1. Christ as the bread from heaven, the nourishment of the life of believers, the true manna, of which those who eat shall never die (John vi. 31-33; 48-51); hidden, in that He is withdrawn from sight, and the Christian’s life is hid with Him in God (Col. iii. 3).  
2. The satisfaction of the believer’s desire when Christ shall be revealed. The hidden manna shall not remain for ever hidden. We shall see Christ as He is, and be like Him (1 John iii.2). Christ gives the manna in giving Himself.”<sup>56</sup>

The manna – the bread of heaven – Jesus – is an allusion to “life.” John 6:33.

“The promise of ‘hidden manna’ is a metaphorical portrayal of end-time fellowship and identification with Christ, which will be consummated at the marriage supper of the Lamb and which those refusing to participate in pagan feasts will be rewarded with (cf. John 6:31-35 and the conclusions for the promise of ‘eating from the tree of life’ above on 2:7).

<sup>53</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings*, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 297.

<sup>56</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 450.

“That the manna is ‘hidden’ means that it will be revealed to God’s people at the *end of time* ... Though no tangible evidence of this promise can be seen overcomers must place their hope in the unseen word of God (cf. Hebrews 11).”<sup>57</sup>

“The manna, falling from heaven for the sustenance of Israel, was a type of Him who came from God to give life to the world. Said Jesus, ‘I am that Bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven. And among the promises of blessing to God’s people in the future life it is written, ‘To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.’ Revelation 2:17.”<sup>58</sup>

Arresting is the thought that the message began with the imagery of Jesus – with the name, The Word of God – having the sword of truth. And now as this message is concluding, truth is precious spiritual food and we not only will receive it in fullness but a new name will be given to us, embodying a pure friendship with Him. It will be eternal because it is embossed in a white stone.

### **Verse 17 – “and will give him a white stone.”**

What this white stone means is the subject of many *opinions*.

1. Greeks used stones as counters in calculations – if faithful, we will be counted among the righteous.
2. Symbolizes a happy day – day of victory
3. Oral tradition of rabbis: when manna fell, it was accompanied by precious stones.
4. Allusion to stones in breastplate of High Priest, signifying priestly dignity
5. Allusion to the Urim stone hidden beneath the twelve stones of the priest’s breastplate – a precious private gift
6. Stones often had special inscriptions on them.
7. Ancient juries threw either a white stone (acquittal) or a black stone (guilty) into an urn.
8. White stones with names were used as tickets to events in the ancient Roman Empire.<sup>59</sup>
9. Portrays the righteousness of saints, affording them admission to the banquet expressed in 19:8, 9.<sup>60</sup>
10. “In short, the commentators are utterly divided, and the true interpretation remains a matter of conjecture.”<sup>61</sup>

Hidden in the vast inspired text of the Spirit of Prophecy are two very simple thoughts: “Before entering the City of God, the Saviour bestows upon His followers the emblems of victory and invests them with the insignia of their royal state. The glittering

<sup>57</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>58</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 297.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>60</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>61</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 452.

ranks are drawn up in the form of a hollow square about their King, whose form rises in majesty high above saint and angel, whose countenance beams upon them full of benignant love. Throughout the unnumbered host of the redeemed every glance is fixed upon Him, every eye beholds His glory whose ‘visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.’ Upon the heads of the overcomers, Jesus with His own right hand places the crown of glory. *For each there is a crown, bearing his own ‘new name’* (Revelation 2:17), and the inscription, ‘Holiness to the Lord.’ In every hand are placed the victor’s palm and the shining harp.”<sup>62</sup>

Notice there are emblems (plural) of victory – and – an insignia of their royal state. One clear emblem of victory is the palm branch. The insignia of their royal state – just promised in 1:6 – is the crown. We know the crown has precious stones signifying the souls they influenced to enter the heavenly portals. The crown bore each individual’s new name (Revelation 2:17 referenced) and the beautiful inscription “Holiness to the Lord” – a remarkably elevating designation. Could the crown be that “white stone?”

“Upon what ground may we claim the full and rich promises of God? We can claim them only when we have fulfilled the conditions prescribed in his word. The Lord is constantly giving. He pours down the rain and the sunshine. He promises to give to his people the privilege of eating of the tree of life, and the hidden manna. He holds forth the *crown of life, the white stone* with the new name written therein.”<sup>63</sup>

Is the white stone the crown of life we each receive? Yes – that is what is portrayed.

I will give him “in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

“In the ancient world and the OT, to know someone’s name, especially that of God, often meant to enter into an intimate relationship with that person and to share in that person’s character or power. To be given a new name was an indication of a new status. And when God’s name was applied to a place in the OT (e.g., the temple), it often indicated that his presence was there. When someone gave a name to another person or thing it meant that they possessed that person or thing.

“Therefore, believers’ reception of this name represents their final reward of consummate identification and unity with the ultimate, end-time presence and power of Christ in his kingdom and under his sovereign authority.

“Therefore, the ‘new name’ is a mark of genuine membership in the community of the redeemed, without which entry into the eternal ‘city of God’ is impossible.

“This conclusion is also indicated by the fact that the ‘new name’ of 2:17 is an allusion to the prophecy of Isa. 62:2 and 65:15 about Israel’s new standing in the future (cf. [‘to call’] + ... [‘new name’] in both texts; cf. perhaps Isa. 56:5). The saints of Israel are referred to figuratively (by metonymy) as Jerusalem, which ‘will be called by a new name’ (not new personal names!). There the ‘new name’ designates Israel’s future kingly status (62:3) and restoration to Yahweh’s covenantal presence (62:4a; cf. the same significance for ‘name’ in 56:4-8; 65:15-19) and especially emphasizes its newly ‘married’ relationship with the Lord (cf. 62:4b-5, which also refers to Israel as a ‘bride’ and God as the ‘bridegroom’). The promised blessings of this prophecy will be fulfilled among those in the church, the latter-day Israel, who do not compromise. Isaiah’s prophecy of Israel’s restoration to God’s latter-day presence is also the basis for all the other references in the Apocalypse to the believers’ ‘name’ (3:12; 14:1; 22:4) and God’s or Christ’s ‘name’ (3:12 and 22:4, as well as 19:12-13, 16).”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, December 17, 1889

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, pp. 254-255.

## SUMMARY – PERGAMOS

Jesus comes as the messenger with the two-edged sword protruding from His mouth, first seen in 1:16. This symbolizes God's Word which does a thorough work of either convicting or executing judgment. His messengers are to use the same sword of truth to bring conviction.

This church received strong complements for not denying their faith even though living in the center of Satan's activity. Jesus eulogized this loyalty by naming Antipas as a faithful man who was martyred for his faith.

Jesus was very displeased, however, with this "faithful" congregation over an issue that threatened their eternal reward. They tolerated within the church false doctrine and evil behavior with two distinct sects. The very thing they resisted in the community they permitted in the church. The outcome would be eventual corruption of everyone.

Jesus decries the cults of Balaam and the Nicholaitans and intimates guilt on the faithful if sin continued to be tolerated. They were warned to repent of this or God would take the matter into His own hands. A church of compromise means God's blessings are withheld. Hatred for sin not only must reach a point where it is kept out of the life, but they must ensure that it is kept out of His church.

The eternal rewards of receiving a crown (white stone) and the character of Jesus embodied in that crown were offered to the overcomer. It suggests that tolerating sin was an issue that needed to be "overcome."

Pergamos has a preterist interpretation, a historical application (312-578 A.D.) and a compelling eschatological understanding.

### End-Time Metaphor of Pergamos

There are powerful end-time allusions given to this congregation. These special messages are addressed to everyone anticipating His return.

Because of tolerating sin within the body of Christ, the body was tainted. Though part of the congregation were loyalists, God's displeasure was focused on Pergamos.

The sharp two-edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth symbolized the type of truth-filled message Christ preached. His words pierced the consciences of men. This is symbolic of the way the final message will be preached as a "sharp" testimony.<sup>65</sup> That internal message either bonds the saints in truth or shakes them out of the church.

One of the end-time challenges will be the toleration of sin within the ranks of God's church. The congregation at Pergamos made no resistance to "members" who were idolators and adulterers. In fact, these cultish Balaamites and Nicholaitans even justified their behavior under antinomian thinking.

"It is Satan's work to mingle evil with good, and to confuse the distinction between good and evil. *Christ would have a church that labors to separate the evil from good, whose members will not knowingly tolerate wrong-doing, but will expel it from their own hearts and lives.*"<sup>66</sup>

"In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord. *She must say about sin what God says about it.* She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. He who despises the authority of the church despises the authority of Christ Himself."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 2, pp. 158-159.

<sup>66</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Special Testimony to Battle Creek Church*, p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 806.

The application is for God’s last church. Willful sin that is tolerated will mar the purity of the church and its members. A startling Pergamosian matter has entered God’s end-time church.

“While I study God’s word, I am alarmed for the Israel of God in these last days. They are exhorted to flee from idolatry. I fear that God’s people are asleep, and so conformed to the world that we can hardly know them, or discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. The distance is widening between Christ and his people, and lessening between them and the world. The marks of distinction between Christ’s professed people and the world, have almost disappeared. They follow after the abominations of the nations around them, as did ancient Israel.”<sup>68</sup>

“By men and women who appear to delight in religious exercises, who profess to be followers of Christ, whose names are on the church record, there are embezzlements, fraud, licentiousness, adultery, and all kinds of wickedness. At such a time as this the Lord has commanded, ‘Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach.”<sup>69</sup>

The issue of Balaam’s influence transcending the influence of John. It is a metaphor of much that can adversely affect the church at the end of time, emphasized by the apostles.

“[II Peter 2:13-22 quoted] This warning by Peter is about false prophets who specifically lead Christians astray and cause them to lose their salvation. The cross-reference in the message to the Church of Pergamum has several connotations. It once again highlights the end-time application of this message. Just as Peter’s warning was in the context of end-time counsel, so is the message to Pergamum. This is further emphasized by Jesus’ words, ‘Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.’”<sup>70</sup>

This is an allusion to Jesus’ second coming. This eschatological imagery is profound. The matter of tolerating sin was given urgency when Jesus said He would come quickly. He asked for immediate action. Jesus’ words of “coming soon” (*erchomaitachy*) refers to His second coming used elsewhere in the book of Revelation. Tied in with this is the teaching of its imminence.

Wrong must be addressed and called publicly (within the congregation) by its right name. Jesus demands repentance or else their time will run out. He will step into the scene and deal the sword in executive judgment. All this is end-time imagery – repent, coming soon, judgment and executive judgment.

His people are given the opportunity to overcome the problems Jesus addressed. He offers three promises to those who accept His challenge and warnings:

<sup>68</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4b, p. 68.

<sup>69</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, June 5, 1894.

<sup>70</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

1. They will eat heavenly manna (not the adulterated food offered to idols).
2. Be given a white crown (not the idols of satanic worship)
3. Obtain a new name (not the many names from adulterous relationships)

**Promise to Pergamos:** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that 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.” Revelation 2:17.

**Fulfillment:** “And they shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads.” Revelation 22:4.

## THYATIRA

### INTRODUCTION

Thyatira church – the compromising congregation (symbol of Babylon).

### Geography

This city was the smallest of the seven cities mentioned but receives the longest of the seven messages. It was 40 miles from Pergamos situated in a long valley which made it a rich area for agriculture.<sup>1</sup>

As with other Asian cities, the working populace was “unionized” into “guilds.” These included potters; tanners; weavers; robe-makers; wool, linen and leather workers; bakers; slave dealers; bronze smiths and dyers.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Lydia, the seller of purple from Philippi originally came from Thyatira (Acts 16:14).<sup>3</sup> She was one of Paul’s early converts. She was a saleswoman for the Thyatian dye industry.<sup>4</sup>

This dye was obtained from the “madder” root, a local shrub. Today the red dye is still extracted and used as “Turkish red.” “Purple” for dying cloth was extremely expensive. A pound would sell for about \$35,000 [in today’s market].<sup>5</sup>

The city was not of great political or cultural significance. Today Thyatira is buried beneath the modern city of *Akhisar* with a populace of 20,000 people.<sup>6</sup>

### Religion of the City

Apollo was the city’s main god. It was worshiped as a god of the sun, prophecy and archery. It was often called *Tyrimnas*.

Captivating idolatrous rites were practiced at their labor guild gatherings. In fact, each guild had a guardian god. Thus, work trades and idolatrous practices were intermeshed, making it difficult for Christians to pursue an occupation without compromise.<sup>7</sup>

“Membership in a guild was compulsory if one wanted to hold a position.”<sup>8</sup>

### Christian Church

Historically, Thyatira is said to have covered the 6th to the 16th centuries. Some commentators specifically put 538-1798 A.D or the “Dark Ages” as this period.

With the labor guilds and religion intermeshed, idolatry was difficult to escape. The church became known as the “church of compromise,” but is best identified as the “apostate church.”

“Guild members were expected to attend the guild festivals and to eat food, part of which had been offered to the tutelary deity and which was acknowledged as being on

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent’s Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 453.

<sup>4</sup> Zollinger, Ruth; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Sheffield, Harold, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>6</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), 1997, p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 207-208.

the table as a gift from the god. At the end of the feast grossly immoral activities would lay a [Christian] person open to ridicule and other kinds of persecution, a situation well reflected in the message to the church in this city. The moral issue of whether Christians were justified in participation in such common meals with their associated activities was a major one for this church (Charles).

“The defects of the local church were related to those at Pergamum, but were far worse. Not only did the Christians lack zeal for godly discipline and correct doctrine; they also obliged those who erred in these ways and condoned their errors. Falsehood and idolatry permeated almost the whole church.”<sup>9</sup>

**VERSE 18:** “And unto the angel of the church in Thy-a-ti’-ra write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass;”

**Verse 18 – “And unto the angel of the church in Thy-a-ti’-ra write;”**

See thoughts on this introduction phraseology under the church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1).

**Verse 18 – “These things saith the Son of God,”**

This imagery diverges from all other six churches by Jesus identifying Himself as the Son of God. In Chapter 1, the introduction to the whole book, is given explicit imagery of Jesus, which defines His character and authority. In 1:13 Jesus is called by a pastoral name, Son of man. In John 1:14-18 He is the “only begotten son” (of the Father). Here in Thyatira Jesus wishes to be first seen as presenting a message directly from the Godhead itself. “God speaks.” An exegetic link ties with 19:13. “His name is called the Word of God.” In Pergamos He had a sword as the Word of God; now He *is* the Word of God.

All this alludes back to Daniel 3:24-25 when Nebuchadnezzar had miraculous spiritual discernment. He saw a fourth person in the *fiery furnace* and said he was “like unto the Son of God.” In Daniel’s day He protected them in the midst of fiery persecution. This picture invites the Thyatirians to have faith that this God is a saving, protecting God.

“The alteration of Christ’s name to ‘Son of God [from ‘Son of man] also has roots in a Jewish and Christian interpretative tradition that understood the Son of man from Daniel 7 as identical to the Son of God of Daniel 3, so that the two titles were sometimes interchangeable.”<sup>10</sup>

There is another reason that is argued persuasively for this imagery. Speaking of the god Apollo Tyrinnaeus: “The picture of Christ in this letter was meant as a polemic against this god, as well as against the mixture of local and imperial religion, since this god also appears on imperial coins and on coins from Thyatira, the latter depicting the god together with the Roman emperor. This point may be corroborated further from coins memorializing the deification of Domitian’s son, who died in A.D. 83, which portray the child sitting on a globe surrounded by seven stars (cf. Rev. 1:16, 20; 2:1). And so John also polemically identified Jesus as the ‘Son of God’ in this letter (cf. Ps. 2:7). The

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 259.



fact that this is the only place in the whole book where this christological title occurs points further to a polemical intention.”<sup>11</sup>

A third reason that comes to bear of this self-identification by Jesus before the message: “A reiteration of His deity is necessitated by the seriousness of this church’s diversion from the true worship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Walvoord). This is the first instance in these messages when the self-identification of the speaker takes the form of a title rather than a descriptive attribute.”<sup>12</sup>

That self-identification, intriguingly, brought Jesus indictment before the Sanhedrin. Now, the risen Lord comes with awesome authority where it used again – the God above all gods has a message for you, Thyatira!

**Verse 18 – “who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;”**

Jesus’ eyes appearing as flaming fire is a distinctive functional allusion to Jesus. From Daniel 10:6, where the *mareh* vision is about to be concluded, to the opening of Revelation, this imagery is continued. In Revelation 19:12, as He returns as a victorious king, His eyes appear as a flame (*phlox*), a blaze of fire. This is imagery of a Christian judgment, first introduced in this book in 1:14 (see discussion under 1:14).

Those eyes search His children thoroughly. Nothing is hidden from His view – even the thoughts and intents of the heart are read. They also find those in need. But for the rebellious, these eyes will met out judgment.

“He whose eyes are ‘as a flame of fire’ is searching every church in the world. His gaze is piercing every heart. He is measuring the temple and the worshipers thereof, weighing all their actions in the golden scales of heaven, and registering the result in the books of record. All things are open to the eye of Him with whom we have to do. He is a ‘discerner of the thoughts, intents and purposes of the heart.’ No deed of darkness can be screened from his view. Sin, undetected by man, unsuspected by human minds, is noted and registered by the great Heart searcher.”<sup>13</sup>

For the receptive heart, those eyes also “mean light for her spiritual darkness.”<sup>14</sup>

The brass feet bring an emphasis on purity, moral purity that is moving among the churches, ready to purge out the dross as alluded to in verse 27, but ever so ready to minister to the needs of His people (see discussion under 1:15).

**VERSE 19: “I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”**

**Verse 19 – “I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works;”**

The trilogy pattern is broken in this list of commendations. Though the repeated “I know” is here, His penetrating knowledge is already imagined through His “eyes like a flame of fire.”

This is the first church to be commended for its love and service. Their *works* (*erga*) for the first time are part of the Greek in Jesus’ commendation, suggesting that they are

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> White, Ellen G.; Elder Daniels and the Fresno Church, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Zollinger, *Op. cit.*, 1:18.

an active church. The *love (agapen)* brings the quality of putting others first. “*Faith*” (*pis-tis*) opens the thought of confidence in Jesus, and faithfulness follows. The *service (dia-kona)* reveals actively helping those in need voluntarily. The *endurance* or *patience (hupomone)* shows they are persistent and do not falter in their outreach. Much of this likely came from mutual support towards one another in a hostile city towards Christianity. It is interesting that “works” are constantly the thermometer that gauges the character of the church 2:2, 5, 22, 26; 3:1, 8, 15. James said, “I will show thee my faith by my works.” James 2:18b. The central hub of activity for the Thyatirian church is reaching out to others. Surrounding it are the things that verify their genuine commitment and faith in Jesus. To push the logic further, if faith without works is dead (James 2:20), then this church’s faith would be alive. This church appears like a perfect model of Christianity.

“A faith that is not sustained by works is worthless. Says the apostle, ‘What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say, thou hast faith, and have not works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.’ That faith if cherished in our hearts will necessarily draw after it the good works which justify and endorse the faith of the believer. Good works are indispensable as the fruit of faith, and are the sure evidence that we have passed from death unto life, because we love our believing brethren. This is not to say that our brethren are to step exactly in our footprints. True faith in God will lead us to understand that each is a worker. God works upon human minds, and all who love God will love their brethren. They will be zealous of good works.”<sup>15</sup>

Why is the centrality of service and faith so vital? True faith brings to us the presence of God. That presence is a benefactor as it works through us. The sense of that presence can also carry us through the most trying circumstances.

“And the church is growing in these attributes for ‘the last is more than the first.’ A visitor to this church would be impressed. [But] ‘Here is a warning. A church which is crowded with people and which is a hive of energy is not necessarily a real church. It is possible for a church to be crowded because its people come to be entertained instead of instructed, and to be soothed instead of confronted with the fact of sin and the offer of salvation. (Barclay).’<sup>16</sup>

This church has apparently not yet suffered open persecution. Their activity as a functioning church is crescendoing. Jesus deeply identifies with that. This is directly opposite to what was happening at Ephesus where love and service were waning. “Jesus tells them, ‘I know your love.’ The deeds that this church performs spring from the right motive – from love. The deeds are no doubt imbued also with the love of Christ, and so affect the people that receive the acts of charity in a positive way, drawing them to Jesus.”<sup>17</sup>

There are not two Christian churches at Thyatira with one being totally devoted to Jesus and His work and the other a church steeped in sin and cultish practices. This church had both characteristics. That is why it is so important as a last-day metaphor. In spite of all the remarkable God-pleasing things they did, they still had heart trouble. Something was terribly wrong in their deeper understanding of loyalty to Jesus. For the first time, Jesus brings threats against one of His churches.

<sup>15</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Bible Training School*, 6/1/1915.

<sup>16</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Canter, Bryan; *Revelation, Part 2, Messages to the Seven Churches* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 39.

**VERSE 20:** “Notwithstanding I have a *few things* against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jez’-e-bel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”

**Verse 20 – “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee,”**

The praise of verse 19 is suddenly turned to condemnation in verse 20. “A few things” is not in the original text. First, the complement, then the need. Though heavy concerns were expressed for Ephesus and Pergamos, Thyatira has deviancy so terrible, Jesus conveys extremely harsh action against it. This loving, service-oriented church is about to experience the wrath of God.

**Verse 20 – “because thou sufferest that woman Jez’-e-bel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”**

The Thyatiran Christians are tolerating a “woman” identified as Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess.

“*Aphets* (‘you tolerate’) is quite revealing. It shows that the dangers to this church were not external but internal, not a pagan deity but a false prophetess (Charles).”<sup>18</sup> It also suggests that they knew it was wrong and did nothing to rectify the situation.<sup>19</sup>

Is this an individual, a church within its ranks, a false doctrine or an allusion to the Old Testament (I Kings 16:30-31; 21:25-26) – Jezebel and her type of worship?

We have a distinct answer to this in verse 24. It is a doctrine (*didache*), something that was being taught or promoted within this church. Since this doctrine claims the authority of a prophetess, an inspired woman, one gets the imagery that there is a subculture, a movement within the church that is poisoning the Thyatira congregation. Their cultish influence claims to be religious and speaks with authority, claiming to represent God.

“Another meaning attached to Jezebel is that she is a personification of heresy. This notion is supported in connection with the view that the *angelos* (‘messenger’) of the church is a personification of the church. Since the allusion here is to I Kings 21:25, the thought is suggested that this Jezebel was to the church in Thyatira what the other Jezebel was to Ahab (Alford). Thyatira allowed the Nicolaitans the position of being a teaching sect with the power to persecute, just as Ahab allowed Jezebel to teach and persecute (Lee). This understanding also lends itself to the inclusion of the pronoun *sou* and observes that the choice of the name Jezebel and its coupling with *ten gynaike sou* proves that an actual woman cannot have been meant. Therefore the statement moves from fact to symbolism (Alford).”<sup>20</sup>

Calling herself a prophetess here suggests that she assumes the garments of a servant of God and claims to speak with God’s authority, not necessarily that she tells the future.

“For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>19</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 213-214.

Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. II Corinthians 11:13-15.”<sup>21</sup>

The problem? Teach and seduce to commit fornication along with eating things sacrificed to idols.

What characteristics does Jezebel represent? These intriguing thoughts are noted:

1. Erecting heathen symbols within the church.<sup>22</sup>
2. Promoted seductive forms of idolatry and worship.<sup>23</sup>
3. Arranged for marriages between church members and non-believers.<sup>24</sup>
4. Molding the character of others.<sup>25</sup>
5. Promoted mysticism.<sup>26</sup>
6. Adherents have a determined spirit to promote wrong.<sup>27</sup>
7. Threatens God’s true people.<sup>28</sup>
8. Not consecrated to God, even defies God.<sup>29</sup>
9. Special agent of Satan.<sup>30</sup>

Amazing as it may seem, all of the qualities of Jezebel are those of the papacy during the historic tenure of this church (538-1798 A.D.)!

Thus, by looking at the name alone, we immediately tie together the attributes of Jezebel – a false religious system of worship, with a seductive doctrine. Canter suggests that the teacher or teachings of this falsehood were perhaps things the people wanted to hear. Paul warns us that this will be a characteristic that will be prominent in the very last days.

“I CHARGE *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (II Timothy 4:1-4 – KJV)”<sup>31</sup>

Here, the danger lies with Thyatira. Falsehood became possessive. Christianity and paganism merged into a reprehensible form of worship.<sup>32</sup>

“During the early years of medieval history, ‘*Paganism*, while appearing to be vanquished, became *the conqueror*. Her spirit controlled the church. Her doctrines, cere-

<sup>21</sup> Zollinger, *Op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1038.

<sup>25</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 262.

<sup>28</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, October 16, 1913.

<sup>29</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1033.

<sup>30</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 262.

<sup>31</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> Zollinger, *Op. cit.*

monies, and superstitions were incorporated into the faith and worship of the professed followers of Christ.’ (GC 50) That led to the apostate state of the church.”<sup>33</sup>

This carries us deeper into end-time territory. The prophetic deception with blasphemous powers are also related to a harlot, a beast, a false prophet and Babylon.

“Thyatira in connection with later chapters was consciously intended and is discernible from the reexpression in the present tense of the letters’ exhortations where the false prophet’s deceiving activities and the worship of those who follow the beast are narrated (13:9; 14:12 [based on 2:13, 19]; 16:15 [based on 3:2-4]). The idolatrous facets of Roman society with which Jezebel was encouraging association are thus horrifically portrayed later in the book.... (‘lead astray’) occurs outside 2:20 only in the visionary segment of the book, where it refers exclusively to the activity of satanic agents – yet another indication that the visions are parabolic of the churches’ situation.

“Indeed, those who followed Jezebel’s teaching would ultimately become virtually identified with the idolatrous world system. Jezebel herself was a representative of this system, which is later labeled ‘Babylon,’ and, therefore, her party was a fifth column movement within the church. In this light it may not be too speculative to propose another connection between this letter and the later visions. The tirade against Babylon in ch. 18 portrays the coming latter-day judgment of that system and of all in the church who identify with it (cf. 18:4). The forecast of judgment on Jezebel and her followers may be an anticipation of the judgment narrated in ch. 18.”<sup>34</sup> The following parallels undergird this connection:”

	Little Time of Trouble – Three and a Half Years			Jacob’s Trouble
Elijah:	Sun-god Jezebel	Period of warning Probation	Standoff between good and evil Showers	Confronts trial of faith
Remnant:	Sun-day worship Papacy	Period of warning Probation	Standoff between good and evil Latter Rain	Confronts trial of faith

“As Elijah pointed out errors to Israel regarding Jezebel, the remnant will bring a straight testimony to the last church. God was pleading with the messenger of Thyatira to bring a straight testimony to that congregation. During the Dark Ages, faithful individuals and groups kept the truth alive. The Reformers were messengers against the practices and doctrines of “Jezebel” – the papacy. At the end, the remnant, the 144,000 will once again be voices to decry the sins of Babylon – come out of her My people! Jezebel, claiming religious authority, brought Baal (the sun-god) worship into Israel. This is *no* proclamation from God. It is a self-proclamation! She corrupted God’s people by leading them into broad deceptions with sun worship. So the papacy, during the Dark Ages and at the end of time, brought and will bring demoralizing influences into the religious realm over sun-day worship. This will be done by self-proclamation of authority. This led to persecution in the Dark Ages and will soon do the same again. A counterfeit

<sup>33</sup> Wood, Robert, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 262.

system for the things of God was made to appear as though they came from God, the 'prophetess' claim.<sup>35</sup>

Jezebel painted her face and attired herself just before she was hurled from her high position through the window to the dust (II Kings 9:30, 33). In 1798 the papacy was hurled to the dust. At the end she also will come to an end – a final end. Babylon is seen decked and attired just before she is suddenly destroyed. Jezebel must be equated with the harlot of Revelation, chapter 17, who is also an adulteress (with the kings of the earth) and a church. The prostitute offers all the benefits of the marriage relationship without the commitment. It is spiritual adultery. There, one doesn't need the covenant relationship based on the law, just grace.

"In spiritual adultery you have seed planted from man other than Christ and thus have false life growing in woman. This one has children. Or if good man, she will corrupt his seed. Historically, Jezebel brought paganism into the Christian church."<sup>36</sup>

Jezebel becomes a metaphor for the papacy! In the end, a symbol for the antichrist.

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come," These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you." I John 2:18, 25.

"The teachings of Jezebel to this church are not just getting the people to disobey God and to go against His will, they are actually enticing the members away to worship another god. The true church is depicted in Scripture as the bride of Christ. We are betrothed to Jesus. He has gone away to prepare a home for us and will return to take us to be with Him. But just as Israel of old, many in the church of Thyatira are entering into a relationship with a false god. It is important to note that there is another entity involved. These people are not simply falling out of a relationship with God, they are not just becoming secular or atheistic. They are being enticed away to worship a false god. Let's take a look at some cross-references for this idea."<sup>37</sup>

- Jesus plans for His bride – Revelation 19:7-9, Ephesians 5:25-27, II Corinthians 11:2-4.
- Harlotry of false gods – Hosea 4:11-14, Ezekiel 16:26-42.
- God's bride are virgins – 144,000. Revelation 14:1-5.

The end-time tie continues to deepen. Because Israel forsook God's commandments and followed a false sun-god, Baal promoted by Jezebel, Israel was given three and a half years of drought as a warning and probation. This came to an end with a heavy outpouring of rain. So God's final warning and probation will last three and a half years. Then the Latter Rain, the Loud Cry; just as Elijah cried, "Go up ... for there is the sound of the roar of a *heavy* shower." Jezebel propagated the first deviancy – the papacy will do the last (I Kings 18:16-19, 21; I Kings 19:1-21; Daniel 12:7-11; Revelation 12:12-17; Revelation 13:4-10).

"Here Elijah flees in fear from Jezebel. God strengthens him with bread from heaven and that carries him for forty days and nights. In the midst of his flight to the mountain of God – his refuge – God asks Elijah, 'Why are you here?' or, in other words, 'What are you fleeing from Jezebel for?' Elijah then discovers the presence of God not in a mighty storm or in an earthquake, but in a gentle breeze. God then commissions Elijah to anoint a new king over Israel and to get Elisha. This story parallels the great tribulation. God's wrath is poured out on the wicked in the destruction of the false prophets after the

<sup>35</sup> Zollinger, *Op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

close of probation. This enrages Jezebel against the proclaimer of God's Elijah message. Elijah then flees into the wilderness, where he confronts his faith. Notice that he is supernaturally strengthened and fed in the wilderness by God."<sup>38</sup>

This analogy is profound!

Prostituting truth is fornication. The papacy is the great prostitute of truth.

"God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh, sanctifying this day, and setting it apart from all others as holy to Himself, to be observed by His people throughout their generations. But the man of sin, exalting himself above God, sitting in the temple of God, and showing himself to be God, thought to change times and laws. This power, thinking to prove that it was not only equal to God, but above God, changed the rest day, placing the first day of the week where the seventh should be. And the Protestant world has taken this child of the papacy to be regarded as sacred. In the Word of God this is called her fornication [Rev. 14:8].—7BC 979 (1900)."<sup>39</sup>

"The word ... *to seduce* is found oftener in the Apocalypse than elsewhere in the New Testament. It never means mere error as such, but *fundamental departure from the truth*."<sup>40</sup>

"The second sin that is mentioned in the messages to the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira is that they eat things sacrificed to idols. Remember that Jesus told the church at Pergamum that He would give those who overcame some of the hidden manna. This was a reference to the true word of Scripture. The Scriptures often refer to reading and understanding the Word of God as eating. Both Ezekiel and John were told in vision to eat a scroll, and then to go out and prophecy to the people. (See Ezekiel 3:1 and Revelation 10:9) Eating the scroll represented digesting the Word of God. This sin of eating food sacrificed to idols represents adopting false scriptures and false doctrines. Although eating foods sacrificed to idols was an issue among many Jews in New Testament times, Paul told the church that the issue was meaningless because those gods were not gods at all."<sup>41</sup>

"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we by him. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." I Corinthians 8:4-6, 8.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find *it*." Amos 8:11-12.

**VERSE 21: "And I gave her space to repent of their fornication; and she repented not."**

Jezebel, the intrachurch "Christian" group that was apostate believers, did not heed obvious *prior* warnings to repent. The first admonition placed this congregation on probation. God gave her a "space" (*chronos*) of time. It was an undefined length of time.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Last Day Events*, p. 123.

<sup>40</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 455.

<sup>41</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 42.

But clearly, God judges it to have been adequate to change the spiritual adultery committed by this people.

“Textual evidence attests (cf. p. 10) the reading ‘is not willing to repent,’ meaning that she refuses to do so. Here was no case of unenlightened, nor even of willful ignorance, but of insistent and defiant rebellion.”<sup>42</sup>

“The word ‘repent’ is a word of hope for those who are willing. For Jezebel this was a blunt and final appeal. Judgment was imminent. It would come to her and to those involved with this compromised life-style. ‘The doom of the offender was to be known widely as the scandal had been.’ (Robertson).”<sup>43</sup>

Where did the first invitation to repent come from? Perhaps from John in one of his “love” letters or in his ministry to the various churches.

Wood makes a fascinating observation about this defiant Jezebel: “Jezebel was probably the most truculent character in the Bible. In spite of the overwhelming evidence from God as to the superiority of Elijah’s God over Baal, she vowed to take the life of God’s courageous prophet, making her the example of the *avowed rebel*. Her marriage to Ahab represents the admixture of Paganism with apostate Christianity, which we know today as the Roman Catholic church.

“So the metaphoric Jezebel is *not* the worst enemy of the church. We read that ‘The great mass of *professing Christians* ... dishonor God far more than the avowed unbeliever. They grope in darkness, when they might be walking in the noonday light of the Word, under the guidance of One who never errs’ (7BC 970). So, there is one thing we can say in favor of Jezebel, she was not a hypocrite. Such was not true of Ahab nor of apostate Christians.”<sup>44</sup>

That is precisely the imagery of Roman Catholicism. They arrogantly defy scriptural truth, claim salvation is only through the church, hold tradition equal to or higher than the inspired Word and, in humanity, presume many of the roles only claimed by God Himself. The prophetic Jezebel lives within that “persuasion.”

Another cry will go out to Babylon at the end to “come out of her my people.” There will be a period of time to repent, but this time it will be short – it will be *kairos*, a defined set period (Revelation 12:12, 14).

Throughout history we find God providing time to make a decision to repent. From the six days of probation for the inhabitants of Jericho to the ten days of preparation and repentance before the Day of Atonement, all were defined periods of mercy opened by heaven’s plea for the erring.

How determined will this defiance be to stamp out truth? The story of Jezebel is symbolic of what will happen right at the end. The Elijah message will not only be proclaimed throughout the earth, but the Elijah experience will come to His people because of the Jezebelian hatred.

“Elijah came to maintain the honor of God, but he was rejected by the people. Because of the sins of the nation God sent a drought upon the land. The suffering of men and animals was terrible; but this did not lead Ahab, the ruler of the people, to repentance. Instead it provoked him to sullen defiance. His and Jezebel’s anger was kindled against Elijah and the prophets of the Lord; and they slew all that they could find. Jezebel served Satan with all the idolatrous devotion of her nature. She was the agency through whom he wrought to eclipse every ray of light that God designed should come

<sup>42</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 p. 751.

<sup>43</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.



to the nation. She was determined to uproot the religion so hateful to her, and which, as she thought, was the cause of the drought.”<sup>45</sup>

“The transgressors were given many opportunities to repent. In their hour of deepest apostasy and greatest need, God’s message to them was one of forgiveness and hope. ‘O Israel,’ He declared, ‘thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help. I will be thy King: where is any other that may save thee?’ Hosea 13:9, 10.”<sup>46</sup>

**VERSE 22:** “Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”

**Verse 22 – “Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation.”**

Behold – attention – see what is about to occur. The Greek word *ballo* (“cast”) suggests a rather violent act. “I am throwing”<sup>47</sup> her into bed. God is dramatically drawing attention to the judgment that is about to occur. Is this a plague or sickness that He is about to bring to these apostates? Or, is this an ultimate final end to a people refusing to repent?

The “bed” God will throw her into is *klinen*, which is a general term for a bed that one sleeps on. At first the imagery is one where she is punished in the same place where she sinned.<sup>48</sup> Debates rage over the meaning. Is the bed here a symbol of hell? a figure of the bed of sickness? or, perhaps, the bed within a funeral bier? The answer is in the key word “tribulation” (*thlipsis*), suggesting anguish, persecution or trouble – “I am going to throw her into a bed of anguish, affliction and suffering.”

There is an allusion to the “great tribulation” in this judgment or punishment. An exegetic tie occurs with 3:10, “The hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world,” and 7:14, “these are they which came out of great tribulation.” This links directly back to Daniel 12:1, “and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was.”

“A final proposal is that *klinen* is figurative language for the period of eschatological tribulation that comes in conjunction with Christ’s second advent. If ... (*thlipsin megalen*, ‘great tribulation’) with which the noun stands in parallel has such an eschatological connotation, this meaning is probable, because the woman and her following would then have the same destiny (Lenski). The bed sometimes is emblematic of pestilence and death and even of eternal perdition. If eschatological tribulation eventually leads to perdition, arguments favoring the figurative meaning of hell are applicable here also. Further evidence for the eschatological nature of the warning stems from similar conclusions reached in connection with the church in Ephesus (cf. 2:5) and particularly in connection with the one in Pergamum (cf. 2:16). Furthermore, the word of encouragement to the faithful at Thyatira is based on the note of the Lord’s eschatological coming (cf. 2:25), making it probable that the word of warning to the unfaithful is looking to the same future coming. The probable accuracy of this interpretation will become more evident in conjunction with the discussion of the parallel *thlipsin megalen* later in v. 22. The severity of future pain, to be described in detail later in the Apocalypse, furnishes a more forceful warning to Jezebel and her ‘children’ than does the threat of mere sickness.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, February 17, 1898.

<sup>46</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 283.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas, *Op. cit.*, p. 856.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 455.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.

There is a clue as to when this might occur. The phrase “except they repent of their deeds.” The pre-probation Trumpets are God’s last means of bringing those who ever claimed to be Christian followers back to Him. This will be a violent time of warning. Many lives will be lost. For those who don’t repent, the immediate following post-probation, great tribulation, often called Jacob’s Trouble, will fulfill the prophecy of verse 22.

“During that period of distress, the Lord ‘will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall *not* find it’ (Amos 8:11, 12). Such distress and anxiety cannot be imagined! Complete and total hopelessness is the thing that can happen to human beings.”<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly similar apocalyptic terminology is used by Jesus in the New Testament for casting or throwing into a final place of judgment – *balloeiss* (Matthew 3:10; 5:29; 7:19; 13:42, 50; 18:8-9; Mark 9:45, 47; Luke 3:9; John 15:6). This suggests, therefore, that the final end is death.

Though retribution is promised on some in the Thyatira church for apostasy, it has no counterpart for the Dark Ages. “We must look to the future for its ultimate fulfillment.”<sup>51</sup> This is a crucial *parousial* point!

There is still an exception that is made for the daughters of Jezebel. Jezebel’s end is clear. Before the final punishment, those who followed her still have a chance.

### **Verse 22 – “except they repent of their deeds.”**

What deeds? Adultery – spiritual adultery that Jezebel and her followers shared. The outcome of Babylon’s rebellion is sure. Those who have been deceived will have, right at the end just before probation closes, one final chance. The same tribulation judgments await them unless they repent of their deeds. They have been sinful, but the door of mercy is still open. God hates sin but craves the sinner’s repentance.

“All false worship is spiritual adultery. The second precept, which forbids false worship, is also a command to worship God, and Him only serve. The Lord is a jealous God. He will not be trifled with. He has spoken concerning the manner in which He should be worshiped. He has a hatred of idolatry; for its influence is corrupting. It debases the mind, and leads to sensuality and all kinds of sin (MS 126, 1901).”<sup>52</sup>

But, and God is making this clear, “There is a limit beyond which the judgments of Jehovah can no longer be delayed.”<sup>53</sup>

Note the fascinating structure of verse 23: The “death” bed is the final place for Jezebel. The “great tribulation” is the judgment of those in spiritual adultery. Though the final outcome would be the same, Jesus is tempering His accusative words at Jezebel’s followers. “You have been deceived. You have a chance to be undeceived. Great anguish and suffering will come unless you repent.” Jesus moves, as does His imagery at the beginning of the letter, between judge and the concerned pastor over His people.

“Since the encouragement to the faithful in 2:25 refers to His second advent, the case for a technical eschatological meaning of *thlipsin megalen* is still stronger. In consideration that the main body of the Apocalypse (Revelation 4-19) includes a detailed

<sup>50</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1106.

<sup>53</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 417.

description of this future period, it is exegetically sound to conclude that the threat to the followers of Jezebel is that of being thrust into this period of unparalleled misery.”<sup>54</sup>

The repeated way of escape is repentance.

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Ezekiel 33:11.

**VERSE 23:** “And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

### Verse 23 – “And I will kill her children with death;”

This verse continues the judgment message to Thyatira. There is a judgment chiasm here, a trilogy of information.

- a throw her into death bed (no escape)
- b cast into great tribulation (no escape possible)
- a<sup>1</sup> kill her children with death (no escape)

Some commentators say that this is a “threat” to her children.<sup>55</sup> “Her” refers to Jezebel – her offspring. They are just like her. Similar linguistics are used under the fourth Seal (6:8). Death is a sure outcome. In the Old Testament, Ahab’s seventy sons met with death (I Kings 21:17-29; II Kings 9:30-37; 10:1-11) (though they were not Jezebel’s). Similar imagery is given of the harlot in Revelation 17:2.

The Greek word here for death is *thantos*, interpreted in Hebrew to mean pestilence or a plague (cf. Paulien; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*; Thomas).

“The threat to Jezebel’s children is that they were to be killed with pestilence. This must be killing in a physical sense, because the whole expression is almost duplicated in Ezek. 33:27, LXX, where physical death through pestilence is in view. *Thanatq* most probably means pestilence rather than its more common meaning of death. This is so not only because of the Ezekiel parallel (Charles), but also because of having this meaning elsewhere in the Apocalypse (cf. Rev. 6:8; 18:8; cf. 2 Sam. 24:13, LXX) (Lee; Moffatt; Bullinger). Though ... (*thanatos*) is used to translate ... (*mut*, ‘die’) and ... (*mawet*, ‘death’) most often in the LXX, it almost always (35 times) is used to translate ... (*deber*, ‘pestilence’; Hort).”<sup>56</sup>

The allusion to pestilence or plagues again brings up the apocalyptic end.

“Being killed with ‘death’ seems redundant, but the terminology is significant. The word ‘kill’ is from [the Greek] *apokteino*, meaning ‘to destroy, to allow to perish.’ In the metaphoric sense, it means ‘to inflict mortal death’ or ‘to deprive of spiritual life.’ ...

“So, while physical death is certainly involved, a fate worse than death awaits those who partake of Jezebel’s paganistic doctrines. There is only one thing worse than death: total loss of hope; a living death, as it were ... ‘In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst ... even they shall fall, and never rise up again.’ (Amos 8:13, 14).”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>55</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, pp. 70-72.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>57</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

“Jezebel played a unique and treacherous role in the story of God’s people. Let’s examine a few summary verses showing how she ‘taught’ and ‘seduced.’ Then we can see how this applies to the corrupt church.

“When Ahab became king over Israel, he ‘did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that *were* before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.’ (I Kings 21:25).

“Ahab took Jezebel from the Caananite tribe of the Zidonians to be his wife as we have just seen. She brought heathen worship into Israel. Taking the initiative to promote her religion, she got Ahab, her king husband, to put political force behind her ideas. During the Middle ages, the dominant Christian church influenced civil authorities just like Jezebel got Ahab to support her native pagan worship. It was a church–state union.”<sup>58</sup> This is a template for the final end of time when the Roman Catholic Church will once again be the dominant church, committing spiritual adultery.

Jezebel is not only a metaphor for the papacy but is again reintroduced as the treacherous papal Mother of Harlots in Revelation 17.

**Verse 23 – “and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts:”**

The judgments on Thyatira were to be lessons for all the churches. Those dealings were to become public knowledge among God’s people.

“Some have understood ‘all the churches’ to mean all the churches everywhere to the end of time (Alford). The broader scope is seen as necessary to lift the whole of this threatening and its accompanying encouragements beyond proconsular Asia and to furnish a glimpse of the ecumenical character of these messages. The problem with this idea is that Jezebel would hardly have been known outside proconsular Asia because of limited communications with other parts of the Roman Empire (Ladd). The immediate reference is to these seven churches, but in the broader purpose of the book the seven represent the church universal of all times.”<sup>59</sup>

There is not only a final cleansing message to Thyatira but the great “I Am” wants His identity known. It is very specific what Jesus wants this church to understand. The imagery introduces the swiftness of His feet to bring and encourage purity of truth, but judgment is ready to penetrate the church with His eyes of fire. He – the great “I Am” – is always ready to help but will judge severely if the church doesn’t repent.

“It is Christ who searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men. All things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight.”<sup>60</sup>

“He who sifts all motives and reads all hearts is proving, and trying, and sifting His people, especially those who have light and knowledge, and who are engaged in His sacred work. God is a searcher of hearts and a trier of the reins, and will accept nothing less than entire devotion to the work and consecration to Himself.”<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Ted Wade, *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 121 (1901); White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1110.

<sup>61</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 191-192.

“Some kind of special emphasis belongs to *ego eimi* (‘I am’), either used absolutely to function as a title for Christ or to identify Him more emphatically with the participial *predicae nominative*, *ho eraunon nephrous kai kardias* (‘the one who searches the reins and hearts’), than would have been the case with *eimi* (‘I am’) alone. In the former case, it would be a self-declaration of deity (cf. John 8:24, 28, 58), and in the latter, an introduction of a Messianic or divine title. The latter function is more obvious because the absolute use would result in an emphasis on deity (*ego eimi*) and omniscience (*ho eraunon nephrous kai kardias*). At the beginning of this message. He has already asserted His deity (... [*ho huios tou theou*, ‘the Son of God’]), and another statement of the same is unnecessary.”<sup>62</sup>

Jesus appears in this context to be addressing the Messianic authority to execute judgment. For those following Jezebel or for those thinking about it – the Deity – Jesus, Son of God, reads every motive and thought. He will judge.

### **Verse 23 – “and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”**

This is a judgment theme, “I will give you what your behavior deserves.”<sup>63</sup>

“In His divine arrangement, through His unmerited favor, the Lord has ordained that good works shall be rewarded. We are accepted through Christ’s merit alone; and the acts of mercy, the deeds of charity, which we perform, are the fruits of faith; and they become a blessing to us; for men are to be rewarded according to their works. It is the fragrance of the merit of Christ that makes our good works acceptable to God, and it is grace that enables us to do the works for which He rewards us. Our works in and of themselves have no merit. We deserve no thanks from God. We have only done what it was our duty to do, and our works could not have been performed in the strength of our own sinful natures.”<sup>64</sup>

This is remarkable. He is addressing the church and makes sweeping judgmental declarations. Yet, He suddenly contrasts this by His personal interests in each one. “I will give.” He – personally – will extend the final rewards of life “unto every one of you.” He has gone from a corporate focus to an individual one. His declarations must be taken very personally.

Though we might tie this backward to the evil in the church and see “not one person will escape the warnings!” we can tie this to the subsequent verses where His true and faithful will receive “the morning star.”

When “the Lord come, ... [He] will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts:” I Corinthians 4:5.

**VERSE 24: “But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thy-a-ti’ra, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.”**

### **Verse 24 – “But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thy-a-ti’ra, as many as”**

The NIV seems to capture the correct essence of this grammatically confusing Greek verse: “Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who.” Jesus is here addressing a different group in the Thyatira church. Up until this verse, we seem to have

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>63</sup> Zollinger, *Op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> White, Ellen G.; *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 244.

two groups – the Jezebelian faction and those who tolerated them. There is a third group that have not sympathized or been led astray by this seductive teaching.

“The adversative *de* (‘but’) marks a shift from pronouncing judgment upon the ungodly in the church to words of encouragement for the godly remnant among them. For the first time in these messages, a group within a local church is singled out as bearing a continuing true testimony for the Lord (Walvoord).”<sup>65</sup>

“The word ‘rest,’ from ‘loipoy,’ could be translated ‘remnant’ as it is in Rev. 11:13; 12:17 and 19:21. The ‘remnants’ in Rev. 11:13 and 19:21 are Satan’s people. In contrast, those of Rev. 12:17, as well as those who ‘have not this doctrine’ of Jezebel’s, are God’s faithful. It would seem, judging from the word ‘remnant,’ that the number of the faithful are necessarily small. But, God does not put a limit on number. Note that He says ‘as many as’ emphasizing that ALL are welcome to come unto Him instead of Jezebel.”<sup>66</sup>

The word “remnant” is used as a special designation for God’s end-time people.<sup>67</sup> Though, as noted, it has more than this application in Greek.

“The people of God, symbolized by a holy woman and her children [not Jezebel with her children], are greatly in the minority. In the last days only a remnant exists. John speaks of them as those that ‘keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ’ [REV. 12:17 quoted.]”<sup>68</sup>

“As the end of all things earthly should approach, there would be faithful ones able to discern the signs of the times. While a large number of professing believers would deny their faith by their works, there would be a remnant who would endure to the end.”<sup>69</sup>

The faithful in the Thyatirian church are a symbol of God’s last people who will be “called out” of Babylon and join the 144,000. They are symbolic of the black horse under the third Seal, waiting to be called out of darkness. As we shall shortly see, Jesus was so pleased, He had no further recommendation – “I will put upon you none other burden.”

### **Verse 24 – “have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak;”**

Jesus recognizes – He distinguishes – a group of individuals who were faithful to Him. They remained pure from the Jezebelian doctrine, which Jesus now describes in a new way. We have seen “wrath against sin” language above. The full significance of this has been cognitively and emotionally elusive until now. With forceful simplicity Jesus refers to the false doctrine as so grievous that those who are involved know the very depths of Satan!

Can anything be worse or more despicable or reprehensible to God than to have a church member experimenting with issues that are close to the heart of Satan! This involves the demonic-satanic realm.<sup>70</sup>

What are the depths of Satan? Is it simply knowledge? Or, is it experiencing satanic behavior? Or, is it believing that they could indulge in idol feasts with their associated immorality and be without sin?

<sup>65</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>66</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> Paulien, *Op. cit.*, Revelation 1-5, Seven Churches and a Heavenly Vision, The Bible Explorer Series recording tapes, tape 5 (The Ambassador Group, Harrisburg, PA; 1996).

<sup>68</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 276.

<sup>69</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 535.

<sup>70</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 265.

The Greek word for “depths” is from *bathos*, which suggests a profound distance – “going down deep.”

“Tradition reveals that a number of pagan religions and heretical sects boasted of their knowledge of ‘the deep things.’ The Ophites who worshiped the serpent and later Gnostic sects such as the Cainites, Carpocratians, and Naasenes are among them. They used the very language about Satan (or the serpent) as Paul had in reference to God (cf. I Cor. 2:10). *Ta bathea* (‘the deep things’) is a substantive that designates matters that are hidden and beyond man’s scrutiny. It amounts to a claim of esoteric knowledge, perhaps even a superior morality, a higher law (Hort). If man is to know them, he must have supernatural help.

“It is more convincing to conclude that this was their way of claiming they could indulge in idol feasts, including their immorality, without sinning.”<sup>71</sup>

This remarkable insight swings wide open our understanding into Thyatira and its deeper meaning at the end! Here is opened to us the very foundation of spiritualism. From its earthly origins in Eden, Satan has sought to convince the world that defying God’s commands is not sin. His deceptions went even further – disobedience would not bring death. Actions of the Thyatira church promote this original deception of the devil. This is the masterpiece of satanic deception!

“The teaching of the demon-gods, in ancient times, fostered the vilest license. The divine precepts condemning sin and enforcing righteousness, were set aside; truth was lightly regarded, and impurity was not only permitted, but enjoined. Spiritualism declares that there is no death, no sin, no judgment, no retribution; that ‘men are unfallen demi-gods;’ that desire is the highest law; and that man is accountable only to himself. The barriers that God has erected to guard truth, purity, and reverence, are broken down, and many are thus emboldened in sin. Does not such teaching suggest an origin similar to that of demon worship?—Signs of the Times, June 30, 1890.”<sup>72</sup>

“Little by little he has prepared the way for his masterpiece of deception in the development of spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. Says the prophet: ‘I saw three unclean spirits like frogs; ... they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.’ Revelation 16:13, 14. Except those who are kept by the power of God, through faith in His word, the whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion. The people are fast being lulled to a fatal security, to be awakened only by the outpouring of the wrath of God.”<sup>73</sup>

The very foundation of spiritualism and satanic delusion was at the core of the Jezebelians! Now we have **dual** end-time imagery of this horrifying cultish doctrine. In one we see the papacy – in the other, spiritualism.

“And now, as in former ages, he has worked through the church to further his designs. As the religious organizations of the day have refused to listen to unpopular truths plainly brought to view in the Scriptures, they have sown [and] broadcast the seeds of skepticism. Clinging to the papal error of natural immortality and man’s consciousness in death, they reject the only defense against the delusions of Spiritualism. Nor is this all. As the claims of the fourth commandment are urged upon the people, popular teachers find that the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is there enjoined; and as the only way to free themselves from a duty which they are unwilling to perform, they declare that

<sup>71</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.

<sup>72</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Evangelism*, p. 608.

<sup>73</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 561-562.

the law of God is no longer binding. Thus they cast away the law and the Sabbath together. As the work of Sabbath reform extends, this rejection of the divine law to avoid the claims of the fourth commandment will become well-nigh universal. Upon those religious leaders whose teachings have opened the door to infidelity, to Spiritualism, and to contempt for God's holy law, rests a fearful responsibility for the iniquity that exists in the Christian world."<sup>74</sup>

The Ephesian church – to their early credit – burned the books of magic. They had been steeped in the clutches of satanic power. By this one act, a release came. Not so with Thyatira. Their commitment to sinful practices went so deep, they joined the pagan community in veneration of a serpent, which became part of their idolatrous worship.

"The serpent, therefore, who tempted mankind to sin, is no longer their destroyer but their benefactor. He is the symbol of intellect, by whose means the first human pair were raised to the knowledge of the existence of higher beings than their creator. This conception, consistently carried out, would have resulted in a direct inversion of the whole teaching of scripture; in calling evil good and good evil; in converting Satan into God and God into Satan."<sup>75</sup>

How voracious is Satan's appetite to be like God. In Revelation we see the extremes as they emerge right at the end. The mystery of iniquity will be contrasted with the mystery of godliness. We find the loyalties of people to the very depths of Satan when God wants them to grasp the deep things of Himself. I Corinthians 2:10.<sup>76</sup>

The wrath of God has just been described in verses 22 and 23. Thyatira is a metaphor for the end of time!

The term "as they speak" appears to refer to these apostate Christians. They not only live and worship in sin but they justify their behavior with their mouths.

"These teachers may have held that if one's relationship with God was close enough, even involvement with sin and the demonic realm could not hurt that relationship. Perhaps the false teachers reasoned that God's grace could be appreciated most fully by learning the real nature of sin by experiencing it in the midst of Satan's stronghold.

"However, what may have appeared to the false teachers as depths of esoteric knowledge revealed by God about Satan was truly nothing more than 'the depths of Satan,' which only the ungodly fathom (like the beast who 'ascends *the abyss*' in 9:1-2). In this respect, 'the depths of Satan' is an adjectival genitive: 'satanic depths.'"<sup>77</sup>

What a contrast is drawn here in verse 24! This is a refreshing Thiatirian interlude. He begins by addressing His faithful, then describing them as not having a doctrine He abhors, finally ending with beautiful words:

### **Verse 24 – "I will put upon you none other burden."**

What burdens rest on God's faithful? In the context of the whole message this picture appears: "The best explanation is that the 'burden' upon the faithful is that of resisting the pressure of Jezebel and her group. Choosing to abstain from her evil practices doubtless resulted in ridicule. Christ promises to place upon them no burden other than continuing to stand against her. Jezebel and her followers must bear the wrath of Christ, but all the faithful must endure is the social pressure resulting from their stand against

<sup>74</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, p. 403.

<sup>75</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 457.

<sup>76</sup> Zollinger, *Op. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 266.



fornication and eating meat sacrificed to idols.”<sup>78</sup> The imagery is complete when tying it to the next verse.

**VERSE 25: “But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come.”**

What do the faithful Thyatirians have to hold onto? Jesus began His discourse by commending their charity, service, faith and patience. He also noted that they continued to expand these special works. Also, they resisted Jezebel and her satanic doctrines. “That which ye have already – hold fast.” Don’t change this course you are on. Stand firm.

“‘Hold fast.’ This does not mean, Hold fast to your sins; but, hold fast to the comfort, the faith, the hope, that God has given you in His Word. Never be discouraged. We are to ‘hold fast’ and live up to all the light we receive from heaven. Why?—Because God wants us to grasp the eternal truth, and act as His helping hand by communicating the light to those who are not acquainted with His love for them. When you gave yourself to Christ, you made a pledge in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,—the three great personal Dignitaries of heaven. ‘Hold fast’ to this pledge.”<sup>79</sup>

“To those who know the messages from the Lord, I would say, Hold fast; for soon all will be fulfilled. Hold fast to the Bible.”<sup>80</sup>

This challenge will soon be given the Sardis church also (3:3). This urgent invitation actually ties in with the last phrase of verse 24.

“In light of the pressure upon the faithful, it is a ‘weighty admonition’ that the Lord is about to deliver in v. 25, ‘Hold fast what you have until I come.’ Grammatical usage permits a merging of the two statements to result in the following sense: ‘I put upon you no other weighty admonition [*baros* (922) – burden] than this: Hold fast what you have.”<sup>81</sup>

During the Dark Ages this church had its parallels of faithfulness in face of the papacy.

“The very existence of this people, holding the faith of the ancient church, was a constant testimony to Rome’s apostasy, and therefore excited the most bitter hatred and persecution. Their refusal to surrender the Scriptures was also an offense that Rome could not tolerate. She determined to blot them from the earth. Now began the most terrible crusades against God’s people in their mountain homes. Inquisitors were put upon their track, and the scene of innocent Abel falling before the murderous Cain was often repeated.”<sup>82</sup>

As with all the churches and with powerful ties already mentioned, the Thyatirian church is symbolic of the time we are now in. Jesus told John to write in this particular letter – “hold fast till I come.” In light of the imagery already discussed, this is the final *parousia*.

“The length of the period during which the perseverance is required is set by the indefinite temporal clause *achris hou an hexo* (‘until I come’). *Hexo* is used in place of ... *erchomai*, (‘I am coming’) to refer to Christ’s second advent here and twice in the mes-

<sup>78</sup> *bid.*, p. 230.

<sup>79</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 351.

<sup>80</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Southern Union Worker*, 10/30/1913.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>82</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 76.

sage to Sardis (cf. 3:3). The nearness of His coming is held up as an incentive to stand true in the face of pressure to compromise right standards of behavior.”<sup>83</sup>

“The ‘blessed hope’ (see Titus 2:13) of the soon coming of Christ has ever been the stay of Christians in affliction.”<sup>84</sup>

As with the blessed hope, the challenge is to always be ready, right up to the end.

“God will have a people zealous of good works, standing firm amid the pollutions of this degenerate age. There will be a people who hold so fast to the divine strength that they will be proof against every temptation.”<sup>85</sup>

“Theories will be continually agitated to divert the mind, to unsettle the faith. Those who have had the actual experience in the unfolding of the prophecies, have been made what they are today, Seventh-day Adventists, by these prophecies. They are to stand with their loins girt about with truth, and with the whole armor on. Those who have not had this experience are privileged to hold the message of truth with the same confidence. The light that God has been pleased to give His people will not weaken their confidence in the path in which He has led them in the past, but will strengthen them to hold fast the faith. We must hold the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end.”<sup>86</sup>

**VERSE 26-28:** “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.

### **Verse 26 – “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end.”**

The word “works” take us back to the first part of the message to this church regarding their works (vs 19). The introduction to the promises makes it clear that they are conditional (as with all seven churches). The reward goes to the overcomer who maintains these works right to the end.

The word “end” (*telos*) suggests the final goal, the conclusion, the uttermost. It is only used two other places in Revelation, both in the context of “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the *end*” (21:6, 22:13). The message is similar to Jesus’ previous words, “He that shall endure unto the *end* shall be saved.” This is in the context of dual end-time signs (Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13). Paul uses *telos* when he says that “afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the *end*” (I Corinthians 15:23, 24). Peter also said, “But the end (*telos*) of all things is at hand” (I Peter 4:7).” Thus, we must conclude that it has a primary application to the second coming, but a secondary one to the end of life.

### **Verse 26 – “to him will I give power over the nations:”**

To him that perseveres, Jesus will grant a share in the messianic kingdom. This is brought to view in Psalm 2:6-12. Intriguingly, Jesus is called the Son of God to the

<sup>83</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>84</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 752.

<sup>85</sup> White, Ellen G.; *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 36

<sup>86</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 2, pp. 115-116.

Thyatirians. In Psalms 2 He, for the first time, is called the same: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."<sup>87</sup>

The reward of having power, or better, authority begins in Revelation 1:6 – we shall be kings and priests. It is a theme carried through the book (12:5, 19:15, 20:4).

"The overcomers are co-heirs with Jesus and co-regents with Jesus. This reference to rulership is probably a reference to the judgment by the saints during the millennium. The supreme authority of a monarch was his authority to sit in judgment over the people. The saints are told that they will arise at the beginning of the millennium and sit in judgment over the nations.

"Luke 22:29-30: and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, *and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

"I Cor 6:2-3: *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent {to constitute} the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? And Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I {saw} the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.'*"<sup>88</sup>

"During the thousand years between the first and the second resurrection, the judgment of the wicked takes place. Daniel declares that when the Ancient of days came, 'judgment was given to the saints of the Most High.' At this time the righteous reign as kings and priests unto God. John in the Revelation says, 'I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.' 'They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.' It is at this time that, as foretold by Paul, 'the saints shall judge the world.' In union with Christ they judge the wicked, comparing their acts with the statute book, the Bible, and deciding every case according to the deeds done in the body. Satan also and evil angels are judged by Christ and his people."<sup>89</sup>

"He who cooperates with God, striving earnestly to separate himself from the world and its corrupt influences, becomes a partaker of the divine nature, 'having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' Can those who realize that they are members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, degrade a nature that, through the merits of Christ, is related to angels, to Christ, yea, and to God Himself? Can those who realize the possibilities before them, who know that they are called to receive an immortal inheritance, to reign as kings and priests on the earth, fail to use every power of their being in an effort to become one with Christ?"<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 267.

<sup>88</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>89</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Southern Watchman*, 3/14/1905.

<sup>90</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 339.

**Verse 27 – “and he shall rule them with a rod of iron;”**

This phraseology is from Psalm 2:9. The Greek word here for rule is *polmaino*, which really means to “tend as a shepherd.” So the rod must be what a shepherd uses. *Rhabdos* is a stick or staff; it could also mean a baton of royalty – a scepter. But why the “iron?” (*Sidereos*)? Before we answer this question, let’s look at the next phrases:

**Verse 27 – “as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.”**

There is a paradox here. Authority is given to the saints just like authority came to Christ from His Father. That authority included power to wield a shepherd’s rod to keep things in order. Because the rod is of iron and because its mission is destructive (the pottery is shattered), it must be a scepter dealing with a final act.

“The dashing to pieces of the vessels of the potter indicates in ‘ferocious detail’ a rule of destruction (Moffatt). [It] more accurately portrays violence necessitated by this context.”<sup>91</sup>

“The Messiah will shatter the power of all His enemies, allowing the overcomers to share this dominance with Him, a feature of His conquest that is developed further in 17:14 and 19:14 (Beckwith).”<sup>92</sup>

We have exegetic links to Daniel which will help us see the significance of this.

“This verse continues the last thought of verse 26 where Jesus says to those who overcome and persevere ‘unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.’ The sentence then continues into this verse with the thought that the faithful members of Thyatira will rule ‘the nations ... with a rod of iron.’ Obviously, no such conquest has ever taken place in history and is clearly applicable to the future when ‘the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.’ ‘And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him’ (Dan. 7:18, 27).

“Even earlier than that in Daniel’s career, Nebuchadnezzar saw ‘till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, *broken to pieces* together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.’ (Dan. 2:34, 35).

“Note also in Revelation 12:5 that the ‘rod of iron’ is what Christ Himself has had in His possession ever since He was ‘caught up unto God, and to his throne’ in A.D. 31. It will be wielded when ‘the armies which were in heaven [follow] him, and he shall rule [the earth] with a *rod of iron*: [as] he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” (Rev. 19:14, 15).

“Therefore, this ‘rod of iron’ is a metaphor for the execution of judgment. But, the texts in Revelation 2:26 and 27 assign that duty to the overcomers in the church of Thyatira!

“Bear in mind that, before administering justice, God always takes His subordinates into His counsel. Consider how the decision was made to cause Nebuchadnezzar to

<sup>91</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

become insane for seven years. The king himself beheld 'a *watcher* and an *holy one* [come] down from heaven' to announce the 'decree of the *watchers*, and the demand by the word of the holy *ones*' (Dan. 4:13, 17).

"Furthermore, Daniel described the beginning of the Investigative Judgment in 1844, where he not only saw 'thrones' of God's counselors thrown down around that of 'the Ancient of days,' but beheld 'ten thousand times ten thousand' of others gathered around to witness the proceedings.

"The same picture is presented in Revelation where we also see 'many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;' (Rev. 5:11).

"Finally, at the point Jesus referred to in verse 27, John says he 'saw thrones, and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them' (Rev. 20:4) which will be exercised for the next thousand years. Then it will be that the faithful Thyatirans will have 'power over the nations; And [they] shall rule them with a rod of iron.' (verses 26, 27)."<sup>93</sup>

The imagery of the pottery being broken into shivers suggest the fragments collapsing into a heap.<sup>94</sup> They are useless. They are destroyed. They have no future.

We are now drawn into Thyatirian contrast. The remnant have power and authority to rule. The wicked will be utterly destroyed. The faithful will become part of His kingdom. The Jezebelian group will become nothing. God's people will have eternal presence with Jesus. Those who join Satan to the very depths will come to an end.

### **Verse 28 – "and I will give him the morning star."**

The star was the ancient emblem of sovereignty.<sup>95</sup> This caps off the wonderful ruling gifts to God's faithful.

"The righteous will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matthew 2:2.

"This idea is enhanced from the fact that the 'morning star' (Venus) was a symbol of sovereignty in the ancient world and especially in Rome. Roman emperors claimed to be descended from the goddess Venus, Roman generals built temples dedicated to the star, and it was a sign carried on the standards of the Roman legions."<sup>96</sup>

The star also represents Jesus. Thus, we find a remarkable duality of meaning. Jesus' presence becomes the remnant's eternal gift. He shares not only His throne but also His power. Just to share a geographical area with the Savior would be eternal glory! But in this rendition of ultimate love to the redeemed He promises to share part of His administration of the universe! Wonder of wonders that He can love us let alone offer this remarkable blessing.

Jesus said, "I am the bright and morning star" (22:16). Wood<sup>97</sup> points out a special thought. He becomes an eternal "star" partner with each person.

The morning star is given at Jesus' second coming, but we can experience part of that gift today.

"Those who are truly the followers of Christ's love as brethren, and are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Every true believer catches the beams from the Morning Star, and transmits the light to those who sit in darkness."<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>94</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 460.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 269.

<sup>97</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>98</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Home Missionary*, 8/1/1895.

“As workers, let us seek the Lord together. Of our own selves we can do nothing; but through Christ we can do all things. God intends that we shall be a help and blessing to one another, and that we shall be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. In the hour of our deepest trial, Jesus will be our ‘bright and morning star.’”<sup>99</sup>

“This meaning of the image is confirmed from Num. 24:14-20, where the future eschatological (cf. v. 14) ruler of Israel is described as a ‘rising star’ and ‘scepter’ (cf. *sebet* in v 17 and Ps. 2:9) who will ‘crush the princes’ of the ‘nations’ (so also Ps. 2:9), ‘rule’ over them, and receive them as an ‘inheritance’ (so also Ps. 2:8). In addition to the parallels between the Psalm and Numbers 24, the Numbers prophecy is a natural fit to combine with that of Psalm 2 in Rev. 2:26-28, since the prophecy was issued by Balaam, and Balaam is a symbol in Rev. 2:14 for the same heresy as is described in 2:20.”<sup>100</sup>

It is an extraordinary gesture on the part of Jesus as to what He does for the saved. He shares His home, His throne, His scepter, His authority, His rule, His glory, His universe!

“The perils of the last days are upon us, and in our work we are to warn the people of the danger they are in. *Let not the solemn scenes which prophecy has revealed be left untouched.* If our people were half awake, if they realized the nearness of the events portrayed in the Revelation, a reformation would be wrought in our churches, and many more would believe the message. We have no time to lose. Advance new principles, and crowd in the clear-cut truth. It will be as a sword cutting both ways. But be not too ready to take a controversial attitude. There will be times when we must stand still and see the salvation of God. Let Daniel speak, let the Revelation speak, and tell what is truth. But whatever phase of the subject is presented, uplift Jesus as the center of all hope, ‘the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.’”<sup>101</sup>

**VERSE 29: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”**

The summation statement for each church – see discussion on 2:11.

“Again and again the true Witness says, ‘He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.’ But it is evident that some who have ears will not hear, will not receive, and will not become wise in regard to sacred truth. The Lord Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, gave the message to John in regard to the church. He understood the danger of their neglecting their God-given work. ‘The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.’ When God’s people hear to a purpose the things that are revealed to the churches, when they get the burden of the message, and say to others, ‘Come,’ they are laborers together with God.”<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 129.

<sup>100</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, pp. 268-269.

<sup>101</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Maranatha*, p. 23.

<sup>102</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 21, p. 452.

## SUMMARY – THYATIRA

The preterist application would put the complete message to the Thyatirian congregation at that time. The historicist will see (and correctly so) imagery of the Christian church of the Dark Ages and papal power (538-1798 A.D.) period. During this time the papal church with its growing pagan and spiritualistic rites knew the “depths of Satan.” But out of it came the Protestant Reformation, and tucked into history are records of many groups of people who preserved the purity of the apostolic gospel message. A more direct and complete application can be made to the last period of Christian history. The *pre-parousial* conflict between good and evil is embodied in its description of the three groups reported in Thyatira.

Among the seven churches, Thyatira is the chiasmic center.

Ephesus  
Smyrna  
Pergamos  
Thyatira  
Sardis  
Philadelphia  
Laodicea

Divine wisdom has put it there for a purpose. This congregation represents the three final groups of the Christian world that will comprise the whole world just before Jesus’ return. It reviews major issues involving those groups.

1. 144,000 remnant
  2. Catholicism
  3. Apostate Protestantism
- } **Babylon**

### End-Time Metaphor of Thyatira

The whole book of Revelation is addressed to those seven congregations (22:16). Chapter 1 is a *preface*. Chapters 2 and 3 are the *introduction*. Thyatira is a *summary* of Christian people right at the end. Though each church represents a peculiar attribute that will comprise different segments of the body of Christ, this particular congregation, as the center of all, reveals a picture of the churches as they will look at the end.

The imagery of Jesus begins as God’s Son. The picture is of a being with kingly authority. The visual message moves deeper – this divine authority is self-proclaimed. Before John, the Thyatirians and us today is presented the awesome authority of heaven itself as a preamble to the message, “I am **the** God.”

Jesus’ symbolism early on is the appearance of a judge. That immediately catapults us to the time when the investigative judgment begins. Though we have secondary and tertiary applications for the time in which it was written and for the Dark Ages, its primary allusion is post-1844.

It is judgment time. Of great interest, Christ’s penetrating eyes pierce the very motives of an individual’s heart, but His feet of blazing purity are swift to move among His people as their pastor and intercessor. This imagery is the role He is in today – our judge in the investigative judgment time and our mediator and friend. This is a Most Holy Place picture – the place He will be right to the close of probation.

The faithful group within the church caught the heart of Jesus. He appreciated their service to Him, their charity towards others and their personal faith in Him as well as their utmost patience – presumably towards the wayward divisive situation within the church.

The corporate body was ill. There were satanic beliefs and behavior within its ranks. Jesus addressed it boldly with precision. Jezebelian doctrines were being promoted as though they were approved of God. This related to idols, spiritual fornication and enjoying the fruits of sin. Sin was even considered necessary to understand what it really was like. The Jezebelian apostasy is a metaphor of everything the papacy stands for.

How do we know? A search of the Spirit of Prophecy defining Jezebel is exactly what the Bible depicts for the beast, the antichrist and the end-time papacy. Though applicable to the Roman Catholic compromise of the Dark Ages, its primary application is end-time. The horrors of what Jezebel stood for can only be exceeded by the description given the Roman Catholic Church and what the papacy was like historically when it resumes its end-time power for a short time.

Jesus accuses them of knowing the very depths of Satan. This portrays spiritualism in its deepest expression. The invitation for this group was to change – but it didn't.

For the first time in this series of church messages, God threatened death to all Jezebel's "children" (and any other church that follows this doctrine). There will be a terrible tribulation period unless this group repents. That tribulation has an allusion to the time of Jacob's Trouble.

This is a specific prophecy applicable to the very end. Papal influence will be global. Spiritualism will be grasped even by the Protestant world. A final Loud Cry will go out to repent and come out of Babylon. As at the time of Elijah, the Elijah message went to Ahab over the apostasy within Israel. There was a time of trouble and, finally, the last warning – then came rain. So it will be just before the close of probation.

Jesus revisits the faithful and tells them He is searching, judging and watching every heart. He reiterates that judgment is according to works.

His faithful ones can almost hear between the lines the enormous appreciation of the Hugonots, and Waldensians of the past. They become a metaphor for a similar group, the 144,000 right at the end. He says He doesn't have any special suggestions for those. Stay on course. Hold fast *till* "I come."

This is a reference to His second coming or an allusion to the end of life.

God reaches out to promise the victor a remarkable gift. To those who have experienced such a time of trouble, to the 144,000, they will share administrative thrones, judges' seats and guidance of the affairs in the universe with Him! Most of all His sovereign presence would be theirs forever.

We have a powerful allusion of the final church of Babylon with that of Thyatira. It is made of members of the extremes – the extremes that will be separated out by circumstance, invitation and a time of trouble.

"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (Revelation 2:20, 22-23).

"And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:



Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts” (Revelation 9:20-21).

“And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe” (Revelation 14:18).

“And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration” (Revelation 17:4-6).

“And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong *is* the Lord God who judgeth her.” Revelation 18:1-8.

What does Thyatira look like chiastically?

- a Son of God (vs 18)
- b Judgment eyes of flaming fire (vs 18)
- c I know thy works (vs 19)
- d Works are improving (vs 19)
- e Against the woman Jezebel (vs 20)
- f She was asked to repent (vs 21)
- g She didn't repent (vs 21)
- h Except they repent (vs 22)
- g<sup>1</sup> I will kill her children (vs 23)
- f<sup>1</sup> Will be rewarded (vs 23)
- e<sup>1</sup> Against the doctrine of knowing depth of Satan (vs 24)
- d<sup>1</sup> No other advice to give (vs 24)
- c<sup>1</sup> Overcome and keep my works (vs 26)
- b<sup>1</sup> Judgment rod of iron (vs 27)
- a<sup>1</sup> Morning star (vs 28)

Incredible! The action, the reaction, the reaction, the action. But – at the center of it all(!) is Jesus still pleading, the final Loud Cry – repent.

**Promise to 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, and I will give him the morning star” (Revelation 2:26-28).

**Fulfillment:** “And there shall no longer be *any* night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5). “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16). “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6).

# REVELATION

## CHAPTER 3

### SARDIS

#### INTRODUCTION

Sardis church – the congregation of hypocrisy (form without power, promoting a false gospel).

#### Geography

Fifty miles northeast from Smyrna and 33 miles south of Thyatira was Sardis, capital of the providence (kingdom) of Lydia. Intriguingly, this city comes into history around the 7th century B.C. known through coins that it made for monetary exchange. It is believed that this was the first time in history that coins were introduced. These were made of a silver and gold alloy. It is felt that these precious metals were discovered in the vicinity. Though plundered many times militarily and badly damaged by an earthquake in 17 A.D., Sardis remained a leading metropolis until 1402 when it was destroyed by a fierce Mongolian named Timur.<sup>1</sup>

Sardis was perched on a plateau 1500 feet above the valley floor. The plateau limited initially the size of the city. Its steep walls made it a natural fortress. This served well until the city expanded to the lower plains. The upper city became the acropolis to the very large city surrounding three sides of the hill. Dying wool red was the major industry, for which it was said they were the first city to perfect the art.<sup>2</sup>

Today “the modern city of Sardis occupies the site of ancient Sardis.”<sup>3</sup>

#### Religion

There appears to have existed a wealthy Jewish community within Sardis. A temple was erected for emperor worship after the 17 A.D. earthquake to honor the help the Romans gave. The main religion appears to be Anatolian that honored the forces of nature. Cybele was the patron deity, and a temple was built to the god of Artemis. There was a fixation on life and death. Their god was allegedly able to bring life to people through hot springs near the city.<sup>4</sup>

#### Christianity

Christianity was wiped out of Sardis when Islam exterminated Christians there in the middle ages.<sup>5</sup> Most of what we know is found directly in Jesus’ testimony to John. The church was dead.

“Of the one who has been working with intensity of effort to keep up a name, God says, ‘I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.’ He has

<sup>1</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

been so occupied with keeping up a name that he has neglected responsibilities of a most solemn character. God looks upon the name as dead, so far as correct influence is concerned. Those who follow in his tread will be dead, destroyed by false representations. There is nothing more dangerous to a professing Christian than to have merely a 'name.'"<sup>6</sup>

Today, a small Byzantine Christian Church is nestled among the broken pillars of the Temple of Artemus (330 x 165 feet in size). A living church among the ruins symbolizes the Sardis church alive but dead.<sup>7</sup>

**VERSE 1:** "And unto the angel of the church in Sar'-dis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

**Verse 1 – “And unto the angel of the church in Sar'-dis write;”**

Unto the leader(s) and members of the Sardinian church, John, write this message. The same introductory wording as 2:1. Using the historical interpretation referred to in *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 585, this time framework would likely cover 1798-1844, though somewhat artificial in its application. The Bible commentary states this is “the church of the Reformation times, and as such could be thought of as beginning” as early as 1517 A.D.<sup>8</sup> A more accurate picture is given by Wood.

“It is difficult to harmonize the thought depicted in these verses with Reformation times when the church was revitalized; a movement which certainly met with God’s approval. Note that the accusations leveled at Sardis [are] *almost* entirely negative with pretended piety seeming to be the most outstanding character defect. That should remind us that these ‘messages extend to the end of time, and are enforced today.’”<sup>9</sup>

We will discuss later how artificial the historical designation really is.

**Verse 1 – “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;”**

This is fascinating language. He has the seven Spirits of God (which are before the throne, 1:4). Revelation 1 further states that the message is also *from* those Spirits. Those seven spirits are from seven eyes of the Lamb sent forth unto all the earth (Isaiah 53:7, Revelation 5:6). Here they are tied in with the seven stars that 1:16 says are in His right hand. These stars which represent the angels or leaders of His seven churches are here associated with the full and perfect expression of His Spirit.

What does this association mean? Jesus is saying to Sardis, “The power of heaven, My power and Spirit, is yours to use when leading out in your churches.” “You have strength to address contemptible ways.” “Everyone has an equal chance through the working of the Spirit.”

“The promise of the gift of the Spirit of God is left as a matter to be little considered by the church. It is not impressed upon the people, and the result is only that which might be expected,—spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Minor matters occupy the mind and soul, but divine power which is necessary for the

<sup>6</sup> White, Ellen G.; *A Message to Our Physicians*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Smart, Lois, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002)

<sup>8</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 754

<sup>9</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, Revelation 3, p. 2.

growth and prosperity of the church, which would, if possessed, bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, although it is offered to us in infinite plenitude. Just as long as the churches are satisfied with small things, they are disqualified to receive the great things of God. But why do we not hunger and thirst after the gift of the Holy Spirit, since it is the means whereby the heart may be kept pure? The Lord designs that divine power shall co-operate with human effort. It is all-essential for the Christian to understand the meaning of the promise of the Holy Spirit just prior to the coming of our Lord Jesus the second time. Talk of it, pray of it, preach concerning it; for the Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit than parents are to give good gifts to their children."<sup>10</sup>

We begin with a question. Are the Sardinians lacking in the working of His Spirit?

"The messages to the church of Ephesus and to the church in Sardis have been often repeated to me by the One who gives me instruction for His people."<sup>11</sup>

"We read in the Revelation made to John, of some who had a name to live while they were dead. Yes, there are many such among us as a people, many who claim to be alive, while they are dead. My brethren, unless the Holy Spirit is actuating you as a vital principle, unless you are obeying its prompting, depending on its influences, laboring in the strength of God, my message to you from God is: 'You are under a delusion which may prove fatal to your souls. You must be converted. You must receive light before you can give light. Place yourselves under the bright beams if the Sun of Righteousness.'"<sup>12</sup>

The same messages that came for the Ephesians and Sardinians has been redirected to God's people today. How sacred and awesome this is! Here we find the perfect expression of the Holy Spirit ready to bond with the church leaders. This creative power of His Spirit is available also to all the churches because all seven stars are in His guiding and protecting right hand.

"The Holy Spirit implanted in the disciples, enabled them to stand firmly against idolatry, and to exalt the Lord alone. The Holy Spirit guided the pens of the sacred historians that the record of the precious words and works of Christ might be presented to the world. The Holy Spirit is constantly at work seeking to draw the attention of men to the great sacrifice made upon the cross of Calvary, to unfold to the world the love of God to man, and to open to the convicted soul the precious promises in the Scriptures. It is the Holy Spirit that brings to the darkened minds the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. It is the Holy Spirit that makes men's hearts burn within them with an awakened intelligence of the truths of eternity. It is the Holy Spirit that presents before the mind the moral standard of righteousness and convinces of sin. It is the Holy Spirit that produces godly sorrow which worketh repentance that needeth not to be repented of, and inspires faith in Him who alone can save from all sin. It is the Holy Spirit that works to transform character by withdrawing the affections of men from those things which are temporal and perishable, and fixing them upon the immortal inheritance, the eternal substance which is imperishable. The Holy Spirit recreates, refines, and sanctifies the human agents, that they may become members of the royal family, children of the Heavenly King."<sup>13</sup>

Sardis needed a special outpouring of His Spirit. Jesus is represented here not among the candlesticks but *directly dealing with the leaders* of His church. We can see

<sup>10</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 11/15/1892.

<sup>11</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selections from the Testimonies for the Church*, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>13</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, April 17, 1893.

in this church a metaphor for a *testimony to ministers*. He is offering the fullness of power from heaven to them in the work He is about to announce.

**Verse 1 – “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”**

You have a name  
 You appear to live  
 You are dead

This is the church of hypocrisy. They have verbal assent to Christianity and truth but without Christ in their hearts. His declaration that they were dead is blunt and incriminating. Jesus’ response to this “trait” has always brought pointed rebukes:

- “Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites.”
- “Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites.”
- Jesus repeated this seven times in one discourse. Matthew 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29.

The accusation was so serious it led to a declaration of rejection, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (vs 38). They had “a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof” (II Timothy 3:5).

Their reputation, their “form” or external religious presence was “life” – “alive unto God,” but internally they were without a connection to heaven.

“The ‘name’ or reputation of this church is to the effect that they live, i.e., they have spiritual life. *Zes* (‘you live’) is from the verb ... (*zao*, ‘I live’), which needs to be distinguished from the word-group of ... (*bios*, ‘life’). The former refers to inner life, the latter to external. In John’s writings *zao* is life that belongs primarily and essentially to God and Christ (cf. 1:18). This is the word’s connotation here. The recipients of the message had a semblance of possessing eternal life.

“Herein lies the deception, however. ‘And yet you are dead’ reflects the superficiality of their Christianity.”<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting, Sardis and Laodicea had no foes in or out of the church. Persecution was not a concern. Yet, they were “dead.” They had the freedom to worship uncompromisingly, yet their faith was empty. The very appearance of their church life was a “life” towards God – even further, a life like God’s.

Historically, this begins a fascinating era – post-1798. The fires of persecution had recently gone out. It was then that the insidious roots of compromise began to enter the Christian world. It was during this time that cultish sects arose, futurism made a comeback and Darwinianism got its start. Sardis is a metaphor for the church then and for the Christian church today. This church would precede the second coming of Jesus. “The condition of the church at this time is pointed out in the Saviour’s words in the Revelation: ‘Thou has a name that thou livest, and art dead.’”<sup>15</sup>

“As a people, we are backsliding from God. The hearts of his professed children are being estranged from him. While they have a name to live, the true, vital energies of the soul have become spiritually dead. To such, Jesus speaks: ‘If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!’ Christ does not say days, but ‘day,’—‘this thy day.’ That last meeting may be the very day of the special visitation of Christ,—a day of rare privileges and blessings so much needed by them.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>15</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 309-310.

<sup>16</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 07/10/1879.

“Of the one who has been working with intensity of effort to keep up a name, God says, ‘I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.’ He has been so occupied with keeping up a name that he has neglected responsibilities of a most solemn character. God looks upon the name as dead, so far as correct influence is concerned. Those who follow in his tread will be dead, destroyed by false representations. There is nothing more dangerous to a professing Christian than to have merely a ‘name.’”<sup>17</sup>

**VERSE 2: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”**

**Verse 2 – “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die:”**

Literally, become awake and on the watch.<sup>18</sup> Jesus used similar words three decades before: “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master ... cometh.” Mark 13:35.

“The divine prescription for curing the church’s spiritual malady was watchfulness: ... (*ginou gregoron, kai sterison ta loipa ha emellon apothanein*, ‘prove yourself to be watchful, and establish the remaining things that are about to die’). *Ginoia* possibly conveys the idea of ‘be watchful’ but this meaning more likely would have been conveyed by a form of ... (*eimi*, ‘I am’). The sense of ‘become watchful’ with the connotation of ‘prove yourself to be watchful’ is preferable. Compliance with such a command is by its nature an ongoing process. In paraphrase the sense might be given as ‘wake up and keep on watching.’ The call to be constantly alert was an invitation to a radical reversal of the Sardian believers’ current attitude. Their complacency had lured them into surrendering their identification with Christ and His cause in favor of allowing their lives to blend more completely with their non-Christian surroundings (Johnson). Two notable incidents in the city’s past history served as vivid reminders of the results of a lack of vigilance (Charles; walvoord; Ladd; Hemer). Both in the fall of the city to the Persians (549 B.C.) and in its later conquest by Antiochus the Great (195 B.C.), local tragedies could have been averted through even a minimal amount of watchfulness, but there was none. The same was about to happen to the Christian community at the hands of its spiritual enemy. A quick return to vigilance was needed.”<sup>19</sup>

With Sardis on a high plateau, they repeatedly assumed they had need of no precautions against the enemy. They only guarded the narrow strip of land that led to the plateau. Each time they were defeated, it was from scaling the cliffs surrounding the plateau. The call goes out literally and spiritually, “be watchful.”

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die’ (Rev. 3:2). This is our work. There are many ready to die spiritually, and the Lord calls upon us to strengthen them. God’s people are to be firm to duty. They are to be bound together by the bonds of Christian fellowship and are to be strengthened in the faith by speaking often to one another about the precious truths entrusted to them. Never are they to

<sup>17</sup> White, Ellen G.; *A Message to Our Physicians*, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent’s Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 461.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 248-249.

quarrel and condemn. They are to unite upon the importance of obedience to God's law."<sup>20</sup>

Those who are strong, those who have a genuine experience with Jesus, work to strengthen those who don't. Watch for every opportunity you have to bring new faith, hope and trust to those dying in sin.

"Jesus also commands the Sardian Christians to establish the worthwhile elements that remained from healthier days of their Christian experience. *Ta loipa* ('the remaining things') carries the force of 'that which survives,' a rather unusual meaning that is paralleled in Rev. 8:13; 9:20; 11:13 (Hemer). Being neuter gender, it obviously includes 'those few remaining graces, which in your spiritual deadly slumber are not yet quite extinct' (Alford). The neuter can also include individuals viewed as living realities too, however. The pressing need was for a reconstruction of both persons and principles on a solid foundation (Charles). That Jesus would issue such a command as is found in the urgent *sterison* ('establish') shows that 'you are dead' of v. 1 does not have an absolute sense. Starting with wholesome spiritual principles and individuals that yet remained in the congregation, the church was to erect once again the impressive spiritual fortress that had once stood in this pagan city.

"The remaining values were still declining as Jesus issued this command. In *ha emellon apothanein* He notes the Christians' imminent death. The tenses of the verbs picture them as having been on the verge of dying in the past and continuing up to the present moment with the imminent possibility of losing the last spark of life. To respond positively to this command would be to avoid this approaching death. A glimmer of hope is extended to this faltering church."<sup>21</sup>

"Many have heard and received the word of life, and have been strongly moved by the truth, but have allowed their souls to become cold, their faith dim, through self-righteousness, self-importance, and *pride in the possession of a knowledge of truth which they fail to practice*. The truth which is not put in practice, loses its power. The heart is closed to its divine influence, and those who should be workers for Christ are idle, and souls whom they might help are left in discouragement and darkness and despair."<sup>22</sup>

We have an additional fascinating insight into these first two verses.

"A warning is given of a time *when errors would come in as a thief to steal away the faith of God's people*, when they must watch diligently and be constantly guarded against the delusions of the enemy.

"In Sardis many had been converted through the preaching of the apostles. The truth had been received as a bright and shining light. But some had forgotten the wonderful manner in which they had received the truth, and Jesus found it necessary to send reproof.

"One after another of the old standardbearers had fallen, and *some had become wearied of the oft-repeated truths*. They desired a new phase of doctrine, more pleasing to many minds. They thought they needed a wonderful change, and in their spiritual blindness did not discern that their sophistries would uproot all the experiences of the past.

"But the Lord Jesus could see the end from the beginning. Through John He sent them the warning, 'Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold

<sup>20</sup> White, Ellen G.; *In Heavenly Places*, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>22</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 352-353.



fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief' (MS 34, 1905).

"[Rev. 3:1-3 quoted.] Among the people to whom this message was sent, there were those who had heard and been convinced by the preaching of John the Baptist, but who had lost the faith in which they once rejoiced. There were others who had received the truth from Christ's teaching, and who were once ardent believers, but who had lost their first love, and were without spiritual strength. They had not held the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end. They had a name to live, but as far as exerting a saving influence is concerned, they were dead. They had a form of godliness without the power. They quibbled about matters of no special importance, not given by the Lord as tests, till these matters became as mountains, separating them from Christ and from one another.

"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' With God outward show weighs nothing. The outward forms of religion, without the love of God in the soul, are utterly worthless.

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.' This is our work. There are many ready to die spiritually, and the Lord calls upon us to strengthen them. God's people are to be firmly united in the bonds of Christian fellowship, and are to be strengthened in the faith by speaking often to one another about the precious truths entrusted to them. Never are they to spend their time in accusing and condemning one another (RH Aug. 10, 1905)."<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting that many had grown weary of truths that were repeated over and over. This is a contemporary malady. New truths, fancy psychological theories nor entertaining ways to teach are needed. Deeper understanding of the truths already known is needed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the "seven-fold Holy Spirit"<sup>24</sup> to stimulate curiosity and interest. What remained a vast resource for deeper views of truth was shunned and replaced by debating superficial issues. The power of the gospel was nearly thwarted. The saving grace of heaven found few channels into their hearts. We are admonished to study these verses as a warning for God's people today."<sup>25</sup>

In place of cherishing the graces of truth they once held, they became superficial in their interest in truth and conversation. Often religious dialogue was quibbling over minutia.

### **Verse 2 – “for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”**

This phrase lifts the sight from any human reaction to Jesus' rebuke and makes clear where the standard lies. These people were self-serving, loved like the pharisees the outward accolades to religiosity and, likely, were busy in "doing." Spiritual lethargy stalked their very being. Yet, they seemed blind to their problems.

Jesus makes clear that the standard is "before God." The intense bustle of church life is deficient activity (works) when weighed against God's spiritual ideals.

"Though they were sufficient to give them a name before men, they were sadly deficient before God. Works that please God must proceed from a motivation of living faith, such a faith as was obviously missing in this church (Alford; Mounce). This is not the picture of a church in Sardis that was on its way and had not yet arrived. Unfortunately, it was stagnant and going nowhere. 'Before My God' is a reminder that God's evaluation

<sup>23</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 958-959.

<sup>24</sup> Smart, *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 959.

is quite different from man's. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God on the heart (cf. 1 Sam 16:7)."<sup>26</sup>

**VERSE 3:** "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

**Verse 3 – "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."**

Remember – there is something commendable in their past that they can refer back to. It was something that they had heard and received as important. We have a remedy for backsliding. Jesus gives a trilogy to guide the Sardis church back into a relationship He desires:

Remember – what you heard and received  
 Hold fast – what you heard and received  
 Repent – of your waywardness

Remember (*mnemoneuo* – recall), bring to the forefront in your thinking.

"The Greek perfect and aorist tenses are used in the two verbs *eilephas* ('you have received') and *ekousas* ('you heard'), indicating that the hearing of the gospel was a momentary act and that results from the reception still abide. The deposit of doctrine that the church received was permanent (Alford; Swete; Charles; Mounce)."<sup>27</sup>

Nothing has changed about the gospel truth. What you received over a short period of time in the past remains the ideal still today. Bring those eternal truths back into your heart and hold tightly to them. Repent of the waywardness you've had – urgently.

"On the basis of what he has just said, John issues an emphatic exhortation to the reader to respond to their spiritual lethargy by recalling their earlier faith commitment before it is too late (note the use of *ouv* ['therefore'], indicating an exclamatory inferential expression)."<sup>28</sup>

The imagery is one suggesting that their probation was getting short. The invitation is exactly what comes to us today. Lay hold of the former waymark of our faith and repent, turn away from sin.

"'Thou hast received,' in the perfect tense, means the truth heard is permanent. It remains with them regardless of following it or not."<sup>29</sup>

**Hold Fast** – "We are to 'hold fast' and live up to all the light we receive from heaven. Why?—Because God wants us to grasp the eternal truth, and act as His helping hand by communicating the light to those who are not acquainted with His love for them. When you gave yourself to Christ, you made a pledge in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,—the three great personal Dignitaries of heaven. 'Hold fast' to this pledge."<sup>30</sup>

**Repent** – "*Metanoeson* ('repent') gives the third step on the road to spiritual recovery for this church. In contrast to the first two commands, which require a continued mental

<sup>26</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>28</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 274.

<sup>29</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 461.

<sup>30</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 351

perspective, this one calls for a quick and decisive change of thought and behavior. The Sardians needed to remember continually how they had received and heard the gospel, to give continued earnest attention to the need to strengthen the remnants of spiritual vitality, and to repent at that very moment in confession of and in turning away from their spiritual lethargy. Like the Ephesian church (2:5), they were to recall their former outlook and achievements, and do an immediate aboutface in order to return to that condition. In the NT ... (*metanoëo*, 'I repent') and its cognates take on the meaning of a regret over wrongdoing in the past, which regret results in a change of lifestyle for the better. It contrasts with another verb, ... (*metamelomai*, 'I regret'), which refers to a remorseful desire to undo things already done but has no implication of a change of heart as does *metanoëo*.<sup>31</sup>

“‘And repent.’ The life we live is to be one of continual repentance and humility. We need to repent constantly, that we may be constantly victorious. When we have true humility, we have victory. The enemy never can take out of the hand of Christ the one who is simply trusting in His promises. If the soul is trusting and working obediently, the mind is susceptible to divine impressions, and the light of God shines in, enlightening the understanding. What privileges we have in Christ Jesus!”<sup>32</sup>

How urgent is this message for us today? A specific message came from heaven related to this Sardinian message for us, God’s last people.

“*I have been instructed to speak with authority to our people, to cry aloud and spare not; for there are many who are as those described in the message to the church in Sardis.*”<sup>33</sup>

“We are now living in the great day of atonement. In the typical service, while the high priest was making the atonement for Israel, all were required to afflict their souls by repentance of sin and humiliation before the Lord, lest they be cut off from among the people. In like manner, all who would have their names retained in the book of life should now, in the *few remaining days of their probation*, afflict their souls before God by sorrow for sin and true repentance. There must be deep, faithful searching of heart. The light, frivolous spirit indulged by so many professed Christians must be put away.”<sup>34</sup>

“Christ offers resuscitation by calling them to awaken. There are signs of life, but only a little. With what strength they have left they are to exercise by remembering the teaching that was given to them at first. Jesus instructs them to hold firmly to it while turning from sin. What was the Church of Sardis to turn to, to remember? Barclay translates verse 3 thus: ‘Remember, then, how you received and heard the *gospel* and keep it, and repent.’”<sup>35</sup>

“Human interpretations, the reception of fables, will spoil your faith, confuse your understanding, and make of none effect your faith in Jesus Christ. Study diligently the third chapter of Revelation. In it is pointed out the danger of losing your hold upon the things that you have heard and learned from the Source of all light. ‘Remember how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent.’ ***Why repent? Because there have come in faults, in the form of theories so subtle that by the influence of mind upon mind, through the agency of those who have departed from the faith, the wily foe will cause you imperceptibly to be imbued with the spirit that will draw you away from the faith.***”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>32</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 959.

<sup>33</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1795

<sup>34</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 489-490.

<sup>35</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Paulson Collection of Ellen G. White Letters*, p. 74 (emphasis added).

The Sardis church had drifted away from the true gospel. New views of Christianity enticed them. Faith in Jesus and its restoring transactions were almost lost. The lesson is firmly marked for us today. They harbored false ideas of salvation.

**Verse 3 – “If therefore thou shall not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”**

This is His incentive, His coming unto them. This has a tie to 1:7 which relates to the second coming (cf. I Thessalonians 5:2, 4; II Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:15; Luke 12:39). The return of Jesus has always been an issue of urgency. “Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

There is a linguistic challenge in this “coming” phraseology. It is presented as “conditional.” But a close look at “If therefore you do not *watch*” (interlinear Greek)<sup>37</sup> suggests that His coming is not conditional (as some commentaries question), but His coming is as a “thief.” Paul verifies this concept: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” I Thessalonians 5:4. The options are being prepared and have His coming either expectant or as a surprise.

“To come as a thief is a proverbial expression for unexpectedness. The figurative lesson of unexpectedness is reinforced by an explicit statement to this effect at the end of v. 3: *kai ou me gnos poian horan hexo epi se* (‘and you will in no way know what hour I will come upon you’). In no uncertain terms, the Lord declares the church’s ignorance of the timing of His return. No one will be able to pinpoint the hour of His return, and so everyone will be caught by surprise. Of all people, citizens of this city could appreciate what it was to be completely surprised by the arrival of an opponent. The city had been captured twice in its history, once in 549 B.C. by Cyrus of Persia and again in 195 B.C. by Antiochus the Great, while its inhabitants were indifferently resting in its supposed impregnability. Would Christians there allow the same to happen to them at the hands of one whom they had made their spiritual opponent?

“Jesus here repeats teaching that John had heard Him give many years before, lessons recorded in Matt. 24:42-43 and Luke 12:39. The difference here is the obvious application to a specific case where the watchfulness He had earlier commanded had been completely disregarded. Both this verse and Rev. 16:15 are based on this synoptic gospel tradition (Hemer). There are a remarkable number of allusions to the teachings of Christ in the gospels in this brief message to Sardis.”<sup>38</sup>

There is a legitimate question, however, that some commentators have raised about the coming. The confusion lies in the application of the ‘conditional’ message.

“*Gregoreses* (‘you watch’) alludes to their needed response in the same terms as in v. 2, but with a shift in emphasis to the initial act of recovery. The action of the aorist verb is well portrayed in ‘if you do not *wake up*.’ They were still spiritually dead (cf. v. 1), not yet having awakened from their lethargy (Alford).

“Failure to wake up exposed them to a possible surprise coming of the Lord. His coming as a thief to Sardis has been the object of the same two interpretations as His coming to Ephesus (2:5). Some have made it a special coming in judgment upon this church at Sardis. Acknowledging that the formula of coming as a thief usually applies to the suddenness of Christ’s second coming, they see the formula applied here to a partial and special advent for judgment of a single church (Alford; Lee; Beasley-Murray).”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Douglas, *Op. cit.*, p. 858.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

These astute observations are remarkable insights into the eschatologic period. Are there two comings at the end? Here again comes the insightful revelations given in the Spirit of Prophecy:

### Coming One: Coming to Judgment

“Solemn are the scenes connected with the closing work of the atonement. Momentous are the interests involved therein. The judgment is now passing in the sanctuary above. For many years this work has been in progress. Soon – none know how soon – it will pass to the cases of the living. In the awful presence of God our lives are to come up in review. At this time above all others it behooves every soul to heed the Savior’s admonition: ‘Watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is’ (Mark 13:33). ‘If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.’ (Rev. 3:3).”<sup>40</sup>

Here we are clearly given a judgment application which Thomas alluded to from his research of Alford, Lenski and Totford.

“Even though the ‘Sardinean’ condition could be thought of as lasting nearly 50 years until 1845 when the light on the heavenly sanctuary burst upon God’s church, the heavenly council session depicted in Daniel 7:9 and 10 had been waiting long enough. It, in view of the above quote, was, even then assembling to begin its work of judgment after ‘one like the Son of man [came] to the Ancient of days’ (verse 13).”<sup>41</sup>

### Coming Two: Second Coming

The second eschatologic time-period application, “the time of the end” of Daniel 8 and 12 is:

“The evil servant says in his heart, ‘My lord delayeth his coming.’ He does not say that Christ will not come. He does not scoff at the idea of His second coming. But in his heart and by his actions and words he declares that the Lord’s coming is delayed. He banishes from the minds of others the conviction that the Lord is coming quickly. His influence leads men to presumptuous, careless delay. They are confirmed in their worldliness and stupor. Earthly passions, corrupt thoughts, take possession of the mind. The evil servant eats and drinks with the drunken, unites with the world in pleasure seeking. He smites his fellow servants, accusing and condemning those who are faithful to their Master. He mingles with the world. Like grows with like in transgression. It is a fearful assimilation. With the world he is taken in the snare. ‘The lord of that servant shall come ... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.’

“‘If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.’ Rev. 3:3. The advent of Christ will surprise the false teachers. They are saying, ‘Peace and safety.’ Like the priests and teachers before the fall of Jerusalem, they look for the church to enjoy earthly prosperity and glory. The signs of the times they interpret as foreshadowing this. But what saith the word of Inspiration? ‘Sudden destruction cometh upon them.’ 1 Thess. 5:3. Upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth, upon all who make this world their home, the day of God will come as a snare. It comes to them as a prowling thief.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Lift Him Up*, p. 330.

<sup>41</sup> Wood, Robert, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 635.

This end of time application is remarkably set with this thought: “The condition of the church *at this time* is pointed out in the Saviour’s words in the Revelation: ‘Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.’ [2 Rev. 3:1, 3.] And to those who refuse to arouse from their careless security, the solemn warning is addressed: [2 Rev. 3:1, 3 quoted.]”<sup>43</sup>

**VERSE 4: “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”**

The trilogy for this new thought:

There are a few names (people) in Sardis who:

Have not defiled garments  
Shall walk with me in white  
Because they are worthy

Suddenly Jesus introduces a new group of people. Somehow they are worthy to be with Him because of their garments.

#### **Verse 4 – “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis”**

Jesus now comes to a refreshing interlude in the Sardis message. This congregation does have something for which He commends them. There are a “few” (*oliga*), meaning small amount or number, people in that church that are *fully* committed to Him. The language He uses, the imagery painted, refer to individuals ready for translation.

“3:4 In recording the Lord’s message to this church, John uses the strong adversative ... (*alla*, ‘but’) to contrast the general character of the church with those few members who had not soiled their garments: ... (*alla echeis oliga onomata en Sardesin ha ouk emolynan ta himatia auton*, ‘But you have a few names in Sardis that have not defiled their garments’). The church had a reputation for being alive (v. 1), but only a few of its number lived up to that reputation. The majority of members were a contradiction to what they as a church supposedly were.

“*Onomata* (‘names’) takes the sense it has in Acts 1:15 and Rev. 11:13, that of ‘persons,’ a meaning common in Koine usage. The frequent use of this noun is one of the unusual characteristics of this message (cf. also 3:1, 5 [twice]). In each verse, however, it carries a different sense.”<sup>44</sup>

Striking insight is given regarding these “few” individuals whom Jesus affirms, “they are worthy” – they are ready.

“Here is brought to view a little company that is confessed before the throne of God as ‘worthy.’ They have not had a hit-and-miss religion, but an experience that has proved them as true to principle as the compass to the pole.”<sup>45</sup>

Then comes the appeal: “Who is so favored as to be numbered among these few in Sardis? Are you? Am I? Who are among this number? Is it not best for us to inquire into this matter, in order that we may learn to whom the Lord refers when He says that a few have not stained their white robes of character (MS 81, 1900)?”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 309.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>45</sup> White, Ellen G.; *General Conference Bulletin*, 6/6/1909

<sup>46</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 959.

“While multitudes are devoted to mammon, and serve not the Holy One of Israel, there are a few who have not defiled their garments, but have kept them unspotted from the world; and these few will be a power. This class will have that faith which works by love and purifies the soul. They will exemplify lofty Christian principles. They will seek for personal connection with the Source of light and will endeavor to make constant improvement, cultivating every faculty to its fullest extent.”<sup>47</sup>

**Verse 4 – “which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”**

They have pure white garments already on – the righteousness of Jesus is covering them. They are justified. How are these garments made so white? By washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:13-14.

“White garments are also characteristic of the inhabitants of heaven (see Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:4; 6:11; 19:14), and thus, for the saints, figurative of their ‘spiritual body’ (1 Cor. 15:40-44; cf. vs. 51-54).<sup>48</sup>

“The language refers to those who have not soiled the purity of their Christian lives by falling into sin (Alford; Beckwith). This aligns with references to soiling in Rev. 7:14 and 22:14, both of which suggest contamination in general (Moffatt; Beckwith). Because the source of the potential contamination is nowhere indicated, it is best to adopt the broadest explanation and note that any sin into which Christians may fall can contaminate. The refreshing thing about this remnant in Sardis is that members had not fallen into sinful practices and so had remained pure in contrast to most of their fellow churchmen.”<sup>49</sup>

The captivating promise from Jesus that went to the Sardis church was to those few names: “they shall walk with me in white.” Those garments of white are the wedding garments. This group is ready for that wonderful event. It is a futuristic promise, “they ... shall walk with me in white, in the world that I have prepared for them.”<sup>50</sup>

“Christ has carried his humanity into eternity. He stands before God as the representative of our race. *When we are clothed with the wedding garment of his righteousness, we become one with him, and he says of us, ‘They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.’* His saints will behold him in his glory, with no dimming veil between.”<sup>51</sup>

“It is right to love beauty and to desire it; but God desires us to love and seek first the highest beauty, that which is imperishable. No outward adorning can compare in value or loveliness with *that ‘meek and quiet spirit,’ the ‘fine linen, white and clean’* (Revelation 19:14), which all the holy ones of earth will wear. This apparel will make them beautiful and beloved here, and will hereafter be their badge of admission to the palace of the King. His promise is, ‘They shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.’ Revelation 3:4.”<sup>52</sup>

These thoughts are vital to the Christian experience. Jesus is revealing man’s part in the process of salvation. In fact, as we look at all the seven churches, the problems presented are deficits in the Christian life. How did the *few* here become worthy?

“Amid the moral pollution that prevailed on every hand, they held fast their integrity. And why? They were partakers of the divine nature, and thus they escaped the corrup-

<sup>47</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 481.

<sup>48</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 757.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>50</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, August 10, 1905.

<sup>51</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Youth’s Instructor*, October 28, 1897

<sup>52</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 523-534.

tion that is in the world through lust. They became rich in faith, heirs to an inheritance of more value than the gold of Ophir. Only a life of constant dependence upon the Saviour is a life of holiness.”<sup>53</sup>

“Because of their faith this honor is bestowed on them. In this life they did not boast, nor lift up their souls unto vanity. With intensity of desire, with a pure, holy faith, they grasped the promise of eternal riches. Their one desire was to be like Christ. Ever they kept the standard of righteousness uplifted. To them is given an eternal weight of glory, because on the earth they walked with God, keeping themselves unspotted from the world, revealing to their fellow beings the righteousness of Christ.”<sup>54</sup>

There is a beautiful distinction here related to the issue of works verses faith verses Christ’s merits. Man’s worthiness for the kingdom is never based on his own merits. This would be foreign to the rest of the book (5:9, 10) and the messages of the apostles. It is always the merits of Christ. But our part is to *activate* step by step the process of taking on His merits. From the above insights we can see the part these faithful Sardinians played.

1. They avoided sinful practices.
2. They were consistent in the Christian walk.
3. Their faith was a confiding trust.
4. They knew Jesus and followed what they knew.
5. They *intensely* desired to be with Jesus.
6. Their lives were pure and holy.
7. They revealed Jesus to others in their lives.

If one keeps his garments (character) from being spotted, he will have the kingdom. Revelation 7:9, 19:7-8.<sup>55</sup> They will walk with Jesus in “white” – with a character just like His.

**VERSE 5:** “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

### Verse 5 – “He that overcometh,”

See comments on 1:7; 1:11 and 1:17. Overcoming precedes the reward.

“All heaven rejoices over the weak, faulty human soul that gives itself to Jesus, and lives a life of purity. Those who overcome much, love Jesus the most, and are put next to Christ, next to the great white throne, within the inner circle; yes, greatly honored. ‘Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.’”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Counsels on Health*, p. 424.

<sup>54</sup> White, Ellen G.; *In Heavenly Places*, p. 294.

<sup>55</sup> Paulien, Jon, Ph.D.; *Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism*, chapter IV, *Symposium on Revelation – Book I*; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6; Frank B. Holbrook, Editor, (Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Springs, MD), 1992, p. 76, Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>56</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Bible Training School*, 5/1/1915.



What incredible promises to those who persevere! Here we find hope within Sardis. Jesus goes way beyond that and brings those who struggled against the greatest odds, closest to His throne. Like Peter, James and John, the “inner circle” of disciples, they will be greatly honored.

“The expression, ‘He that overcometh,’ indicates that there is something for every one of us to overcome. The overcomer is to be clothed in the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness, and of him it is written: ‘I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.’ O, what a privilege it is to be an overcomer, and to have our names presented before the Father by the Saviour himself! And when, as overcomers, we shall be ‘clothed in white raiment,’ the Lord will acknowledge our faithfulness as verily as in the days of the early Christian church he acknowledged the ‘few names even in Sardis’ who had ‘not defiled their garments;’ and we shall walk with him in white, for through his atoning sacrifice we shall be accounted worthy.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Verse 5 – “the same shall be clothed in white raiment;”**

This begins a trilogy of promises to the overcomer:

Clothed in white raiment  
Name in Book of Life  
Confessed before the Father and angels

Clothed (*periballo*) “denotes a solemn investiture” by throwing or wrapping around the person the white raiment.<sup>58</sup> Some have suggested that this is being clothed with immortality. The context, however, implies that Jesus will *invest* His people with His character. They will be ordained as being like Him.

“The source of the image is doubtless Zech. 3:1-10 where the filthy garments of Joshua the high priest are replaced with clean ones. Overcomers are linked to the priesthood and priestly functions through this promise (cf. Ex. 28:39, 42; Ezek. 44:17, 18) (Alford; Lee; Moffatt). The thought pertains to their acceptability to God and the divine recognition of their office and ministry as priests of God (Walvoord).”<sup>59</sup>

“The fine linen, says the Scripture, ‘is the righteousness of saints.’ Rev. 19:8. It is the righteousness of Christ, His own unblemished character, ... Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God’s presence.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Verse 5 – “and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.”**

“This is the first mention in Revelation of the ‘book of life.’ It will be depicted six times more. We will hear of it next in Revelation 13:8 in the context of a time when ‘all that dwell upon the earth (whose names are not found in the book of life) shall worship’ the beast and his image.”<sup>61</sup>

The names already in the Book of Life will remain for the overcomer. The implication suggests that a name could be removed. Without that possibility, the promise would be

<sup>57</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 7/9/1908.

<sup>58</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 463

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 260 (cf. 1:6).

<sup>60</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 310-312

<sup>61</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

empty. What a warning, what an invitation, what an incentive to overcome. To have a name *remain* is a promise of deliverance.

“Revelation 20:12 shows that the absence of a person’s name from the book means exclusion from the kingdom (Lee; Moffatt). Those whose loyalty to Christ wanes have no claim on eternal life (Johnson). The exalted Lord has power to strike names from the pages because He wrote the book of life (cf. 13:8; 21:27) (Beasley-Murray).”<sup>62</sup>

“The book here referred to is the book of records in heaven, in which every name is inscribed, and the acts of all, their sins, and obedience, are faithfully written. When individuals commit sins which are too grievous for the Lord to pardon, their names are *erased* from the book, and they are devoted to destruction (ST May 27, 1880).”<sup>63</sup>

“The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names are *retained* in the Lamb’s book of life, enrolled among the faithful of all ages. They have resisted the wiles of the deceiver; they have not been turned from their loyalty by the dragon’s roar. Now they are eternally secure from the tempter’s devices. Their sins are transferred to the originator of sin. A ‘fair miter’ is set upon their heads.”<sup>64</sup>

“The names of all those who have once given themselves to God are written in the book of life, and their characters are now passing in review before him. Angels of God are weighing *moral worth*. They are watching the development of character in those now living, to see if their names can be retained in the book of life. A probation is granted us in which to wash our robes of character and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Who is doing this work? Who is separating from himself sin and selfishness? ‘Ye are dead,’ says the apostle Paul of the true followers of Christ, ‘and your life is hid with Christ in God.’ When we are alive to God, we are dead to self. May God help us to die to self. Whose names will not be blotted out of the book of life? Only the names of those who have loved God with all the powers of their being, and their neighbors as themselves.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Verse 5 – “but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”**

“This is the second clear echo in this fifth message of the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the synoptic gospels (cf. Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8-9) (Beckwith; Charles; Caird). The other conspicuous echo is the likening of Christ’s coming to a thief (Rev. 3:3 with Matt. 24:42; Luke 12:39). Additional echoes from Jesus’ earlier ministry include the command to watch (Rev. 3:3 with Matt. 24:42; 25:13; 26:41) and the blotting of a name from the book of life (Rev. 3:5 with Luke 10:20). This message contains more of such references than any of the other six.”<sup>66</sup>

“Oh, how precious is that ‘not!’—‘I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.’ When the gates of the city of God swing back on their glittering hinges, and the nations who have kept the truth shall enter in, Christ will be there to welcome us, to call us the blessed of the Father, because we have overcome. He will welcome us before the Father, and before His angels. As we enter the kingdom of God, there to spend eternity, the trials and the difficulties

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>63</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 987

<sup>64</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 591.

<sup>65</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Lift Him Up*, p. 326.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 264.

and the perplexities that we have had here will sink into insignificance. Our life will measure with the life of God.”<sup>67</sup>

This “is the scene that began at the end of the ‘two thousand and three hundred days’ of Daniel 8:14 when ‘one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days’ (Dan. 7:13) ‘And he came and took the *book* out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne’ (Rev. 5:7). All the names of every man, woman and child who ever lived, who are living and who ever will live upon the earth will come up for consideration in that judgment. The evidence in that ‘*book*,’ will either condemn or justify.”<sup>68</sup>

“Everyone therefore who will confess me before people, I will confess him before my Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32. Luke 12:8 emphasizes confession before angels; cf. II Tim. 2:12.

“[Why] Before his angels[?] The ‘broader and deeper purpose’ of the plan of redemption is ‘to vindicate the character of God before the universe’ (PP 68; cf. DA 19). When Christ in His role as intercessor and high priest presents His ransomed people before the throne of God, He thereby provides the angelic hosts with a convincing testimony that the ways of God are just and true.”<sup>69</sup>

**VERSE 6: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”**

Jesus repeats seven times a similar invitation. He wants not only the individual church message to be a personal letter of instruction, counsel and warning, but every church is to profit from the instructions given to the others.

“Christ calls upon us to hear His words, that we may know Him. ‘He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.’ We are not to hear as did those of whom the apostles said, ‘The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.’ Those who hear savingly are those who hear in faith, and who give earnest heed to the things which they have heard, lest at any time they should let them slip.”<sup>70</sup>

“So the One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars said, ‘Listen to what I say.’”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> White, Ellen G.; The General Conference Bulletin, 4/6/1903.

<sup>68</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 757

<sup>70</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, January 27, 1898.

<sup>71</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

## SUMMARY – SARDIS

This church was well thought of publicly, but God saw them as hypocrites. His language is blunt, Jesus said they were “dead.” Before this indictment He portrayed the Sardinians as being offered the fullness of spiritual power, but they remained in spiritual darkness.

“What commendation can be given a corpse. In John’s day the city of Sardis was wealthy but degenerate. So like the city was the church; physical trappings, an appearance, but inside spiritually dead. There was no persecution from the Jews or pagans. Who wants to fight over a dead body? No heresy present. The saints were too lazy to think about the great truths of the Gospel. ‘A church which is so lethargic as to fail to produce a heresy is mentally dead; and a church which is so negative as to fail to produce opposition is dead in its witness to Christ. (Barclay).’<sup>72</sup>

### End-Time Metaphor of Sardis

Sardis is a symbol of the last-day Christian church which is heavily invested as being a good “church” but lacks faithful individuals. The Testimony came repeatedly regarding Ephesus and Sardis as being applicable to the last-day church.

“It is to these members who are in the church in the last days that Jesus directs the message to the church of Sardis. Jesus counsels these people to wake up! Fortunately, Jesus is the one, through the agency of the Holy Spirit Whom He holds in His Hands, Who is able to raise the dead back to life, and to breathe new life into dried bones. The church of Sardis has a chance at new life, if they will only restore their waning relationship with Jesus. Notice that they once had such a relationship. Jesus had begun a good work in them, but they had not allowed Him to complete it. There is something good that remains in Sardis, and Jesus counsels them to strengthen that good thing ... Notice that Jesus ... [asked] them to *remember* what they have received and heard and to keep it.”<sup>73</sup>

This brought a warning to “be watchful,” “repent” and “hold fast” to what you knew to be right or “I’ll come to you” at an hour when you will be unprepared.

A similar appeal was heard 900 years before: Joel was given this message:

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: *for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.*’ ‘Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children: ... let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar.’ ‘Turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.’ Joel 2:1, 15-17, 12, 13.”<sup>74</sup>

This has second-coming language. Also, there is another end-time application in Sardis. Jesus would come to judge them, as a thief, if a change did not occur.

“[Rev. 3:3 quoted.] How perilous is the condition of those, who, growing weary of their watch, turn to the attractions of the world. While the man of business is absorbed in the pursuit of gain, while the pleasure-lover is seeking indulgence, while the daughter of fashion is arranging her adornments,—it may be in that hour the Judge of all the earth

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

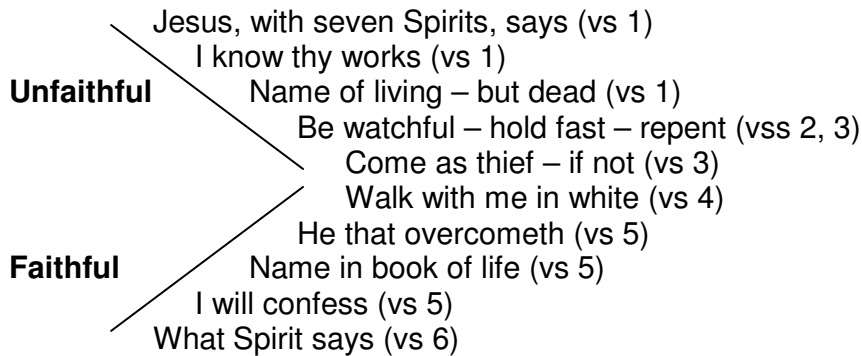
<sup>74</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 311.

will pronounce the sentence, ‘Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.’”<sup>75</sup>

There were many problems that can be identified in this church. But perhaps of greatest concern was that the old standard bearer doctrines were falling by the wayside. They wanted a new phase of doctrine that was pleasing to the mind. This problem is also to be in God’s church right at the end. The ancient antinomian tradition is to become appealing.

God did recognize a core of faithful believers in the midst of this congregation. They had Jesus’ righteousness covering them. They were clothed with the wedding garment. The summation focus of the Sardis message relates to obtaining and retaining the character of Jesus.

A simple chiasm of contrast exists in this message:



The depth of having “white” for one’s garments is profound. As Eve concluded that a touch and a taste were too trite to be significant, many issues that might stain the character may appear inconsequential. We have been advised that those white garments are unblemished – they are right-ness of character.

“‘Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.’ Thank God, He can keep His people in a place where they shall not defile their garments. If we submit to Christ, we shall be kept unspotted from the world. ‘Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord, that His goings forth are prepared as the morning.’ We are to follow on. We are not to rest content with the capabilities and the knowledge of to-day. All the inhabitants of the universe are watching, as in these last days God is preparing a people to stand in the judgment. Let us ask God to clothe us with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, that we may be prepared for the coming of the Son of man.”<sup>76</sup>

“‘Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.’ How are their garments defiled? – By eating of that which brings disease and infirmity. ‘And they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.’”<sup>77</sup>

Thus, Sardis becomes an example of the remnant who will have pure garments, reflecting the purity of Jesus’ character. Not one issue will impede our devotion to Jesus. Not one “Tree of Knowledge” will entice the landscape of our hearts.

<sup>75</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 315.

<sup>76</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The General Conference Bulletin*, 04/06/1903.

<sup>77</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Gospel of Health*, 11/01/1897.

“Says the True Witness: ‘Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.’ Are you of this number? Have you held fast your integrity? As drowning men, have you clung to Jesus, who is your refuge? Are you obeying Him, living for Him, loving Him? Is each member pure and holy and undefiled, one in whose mouth there is no guile? If so, you are most happy; for you are, in the sight of God, ‘more precious than fine gold; even ... than the golden wedge of Ophir.’ While multitudes are devoted to mammon, and serve not the Holy One of Israel, there are a few who have not defiled their garments, but have kept them unspotted from the world; and these few will be a power. This class will have that faith which works by love and purifies the soul. They will exemplify lofty Christian principles. They will seek for personal connection with the Source of light and will endeavor to make constant improvement, cultivating every faculty to its fullest extent. God would have you bring into your life the most unbending uprightness and integrity; this will distinguish you before the world as children of the most high God.”<sup>78</sup>

Who were those “few names”? “Their one desire was to be like Christ. Ever they kept the standard of righteousness uplifted. To them is given an eternal weight of glory, because on the earth they walked with God, keeping themselves unspotted from the world, revealing to their fellow beings the righteousness of Christ. Of them the Saviour declares, ‘They shall walk with me in white, in the world that I have prepared for them’ [Rev. 3:5 quoted] (RH Aug. 10, 1905).”<sup>79</sup>

The panorama of ideas that Jesus portrays shows a congregation that would get honors for structure and appearance. But the waymarks of truth were carelessly attended to. The church appears more like a secular club with members “in good standing.” Jesus warns of His soon coming and urgently invites them to remember the spiritual concerns of the past. The goal is to replicate the character of Jesus and put away all sin. If that is done, Jesus invests them with His robe of righteousness. Though given to the Sardis church and weakly applicable historically, this message is the three angels’ messages that will go to all just before Jesus returns! The beautiful image presented shows Jesus with the “fullness” of the Holy Spirit ready to work with His leaders and messengers. It is a message of power to those who “remember.” It is leadership preparation for the Loud Cry where the seven Spirits will be revealed through the remnant in its fullness.

**Promise to Sardis:** “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 3:5).

**Fulfillment:** “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 21:27).

<sup>78</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 481

<sup>79</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 960.

# PHILADELPHIA

## INTRODUCTION

Philadelphia church – the righteous church (144,000 metaphor from judgment to eternity).

### Geography

Twenty-five miles Southeast of Sardis, Philadelphia was situated on a high plateau 5000 feet above Hermus Valley. “Located on the Caogemus River, it controlled two of the most important river valleys of Asia Minor – the Hormus (Gedia) and the Meander (Menderes).”<sup>1</sup>

A main highway connected this city to Smyrna at 100 miles distance which was due west. This was a major trade path and became the greatest trade route during the Byzantine era.<sup>2</sup>

It was a strong fortress and known for textiles, leather and wine. It went through many name changes after it was rebuilt following a 17 A.D. earthquake. Philadelphia was retained for awhile as a secondary name, but eventually it was replaced by Alasehir [Allah Shehr – city of God.<sup>3</sup>], which it is called today.<sup>4</sup>

The word Philadelphia is used six times outside of Revelation in the New Testament. In all references it refers to the meaning of “brotherly love” [Romans 12:10; I Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; I Peter 1:22; II Peter 1:7 (twice), cf. Revelation 1:11]. It came from the loyalty of Attalus II of Pergamum to his brother Eumenes II, who had preceded him on the throne.<sup>5</sup>

“The word ‘Philadelphia’ ... is similar to the word ‘phileo’ in the New Testament, which describes the intimate love of family members as compared to the more general ‘agape’ love, which we are to share with all people. When Jesus appeared to Peter, James and John at the Sea of Galilee after His resurrection, He asked Peter twice if Peter loved (agape) Him. Peter’s response each time was, ‘Lord you know that I love (phileo) You.’ In essence he was saying, ‘Lord I don’t just love you as one should love His neighbor, but I love you as a brother.’ The third time Jesus asked Peter the question, He said, ‘Do you love (phileo) Me?’

“This kind of ‘phileo’ love seems to be the kind of love that characterizes the church of Philadelphia. This church has learned the ultimate lesson that Jesus seeks to teach. It is the antithesis of the church of Ephesus, which had lost its first love.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Smart, Lois, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent’s Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 463

<sup>4</sup> Gaebelein, Frank E.; *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI), 1984.

<sup>5</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> Canter, Bryan; *Revelation, Part 2, Messages to the Seven Churches* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 52.

## Religion

The principle deity was Dionysium – god of wine. There was a sizable Jewish community, but no evidence for a synagogue has ever been discovered.

## Christian Church

Little is known of the early Christian church in Philadelphia. The city, however, became predominantly Christian over the years!

“Even when the whole country was eventually taken over by the Turks [1390 A.D.], and Christianity in Asia Minor died a slow but certain death, Philadelphia remained, like Smyrna, a Christian city. It is a remarkable coincidence that the two cities, Smyrna and Philadelphia, which retained their Christian character and population longer than any other cities of Asia Minor, are the same cities whose churches were so pure and blameless in John’s time that the letters written to them are the only ones containing no words of rebuke.”<sup>7</sup>

When was the Christian era that was typified by Philadelphia?

“According to the Commentary, ‘Inspiration has presented this as the church of the great second advent awakening. Various beginning dates have been suggested as appropriate for this period. Some propose the year 1833, which witnessed the last great sign in the heavens foretold by our Lord (see on Matt. 24:33), and which was closely connected in point of time with the early proclamation of the advent message by William Miller. Others suggest 1798 the beginning of the ‘time of the end’ of Dan. 11:35, which would also be acceptable. Still others favor the date 1755, which is commonly accepted as marking the first of the specific signs of the end foretold in Rev. 6:12, considering that this choice comports well with the character of the Philadelphia church as the church of the advent awakening. There is general agreement among Seventh-day Adventist expositors that the year 1844 should be considered as marking the close of the Philadelphia period and the opening of the Laodicean period.’ (7BC754).

“While the point is not theologically crucial, we can see that there are many likely beginning points and cannot rule out a rather large overlap between the Sardian and Philadelphian periods.”<sup>8</sup> The same would be true for the transition between Philadelphia and Laodicea. The historical divisions are general at best.

There is something very important regarding this church – it not only drew out God’s favor but their influence brought nearly the whole city to Jesus.

**VERSE 7: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;”**

## **Verse 7 – “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he”**

This is followed by a self description of Jesus that varies from the previous five churches. Here we have no duplicate portrayal of Jesus found in chapter 1. “He” is described by a trilogy of Jesus’ portrayal to Philadelphian believers.

<sup>7</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Wood, Robert, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 6.



He that is holy  
 He that is true  
 He that hath key of David

“He that openeth ... and shutteth” describes what Jesus says he uses the key of David for.

### **Verse 7 – “he that is holy, he that is true.”**

The Greek word used for “holy” is *hagios*, suggesting sacred or “separation from evil.”<sup>9</sup>

“*Ho hagios* (‘the holy one’) is a title that sometimes names the Father in this book (cf. Rev. 4:8; 6:10), but throughout the NT it is a common title for the Messiah (cf. Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 4:27, 30; 1 John 2:20).”<sup>10</sup>

“In the letter Christ attributes to Himself the title of ‘saint’ (*ho hagios*, the holy one). This is the only place in the book of Revelation where the title is applied to Him. Elsewhere, this title is God’s prerogative (Rev 4:8; 6:10). This shows the high Christology of the book.”<sup>11</sup>

“In the NT a similar ascription is applied repeatedly to Christ, implying His deity (see Luke 1:35; Acts 4:27, 30; cf. on John 6:69).”<sup>12</sup>

“God [Christ] was often referred to in the Old Testament as ‘the Holy One of Israel.’ Even some of the demons that Jesus confronted in his walk on earth recognized Him as ‘the Holy One of God’ – Mark 1:24. So this description is again a reference to the divinity of Jesus. Also, God is often referred to as the one true God. This is, in fact, a commonly recurring theme throughout the book of Revelation – the distinction between the false and the true.”<sup>13</sup>

“Isaiah uses ... (‘holy’) almost exclusively of Yahweh as part of the title ‘the Holy One of Israel’ (20 occurrences). This background is probably present here in anticipation of the Isa. 22:22 quotation and of the Isaiah allusions in 3:9, where Jesus assumes the role of Yahweh and his followers represent the true Israel (see on 3:9; ... [‘the holy one of God’] is also a messianic title in contexts of fulfillment: Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69).”<sup>14</sup>

The descriptive Greek word for “true” is *alethinos* – meaning true, genuine or real in contrast to false gods as Canter noted above.

“In the Old Testament God is repeatedly referred to as ‘Holy;’ that is, He is different or separate from mankind. ‘Now that title is given to the Risen Christ.’ (Barclay) Jesus Christ is equal to the Father, possessing the same qualities.

“Jesus Christ is He who is truth. ‘When we are confronted with Him, we are confronted with no shadowy outline of the truth but with the truth itself’ (Barclay).”<sup>15</sup>

To the church where there is no message of condemnation, Jesus reveals himself as holy and divine. He is not the disciplinarian, judge or stern leader here but a supreme

<sup>9</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 464.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> Diop, *Op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 757.

<sup>13</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 283.

<sup>15</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 7.

being. The imagery goes further, showing in one sense that the Philadelphian people also had a personal God.

Thomas brings out a unique thought that because the Philadelphian church was persecuted so severely, it was helpful to lean on the promises for relief from a *genuine* Messiah who was *true*. This God can be fully trusted.<sup>16</sup>

“*Alethin*os is not merely *genuine* as contrasted with the absolutely false, but as contrasted with that which is only subordinately or typically true. It expresses the *perfect* realization of an idea as contrasted with its *partial* realization. Thus, Moses gave bread, but the Father giveth the *true* bread ... Israel was a vine of God’s planting (Ps. 1xxx.8), Christ is the *true* ... vine (John xv. 1). The word is so characteristic of John that, while found only once in the Synoptic Gospels, once in a Pauline Epistle, and four times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it occurs nine times in the fourth Gospel, four times in John’s First Epistle, and ten times in the Apocalypse, and in every instance in these three latter books in its own distinctive signification.”<sup>17</sup>

The self-declaration by Jesus that He is “true” has profound theological importance to God’s remnant. It is over this defining issue that the final conflict will be waged. This proclamation is a segue into the question: “How do we know He is true?”

“We may go to the heathen and say to them that we love the truth and serve the true God; and they will tell you that they worship the true and living God. We have no other way to tell who the true and living God is, only as we turn to this commandment. That God who made the lofty trees and every thing that is lovely and beautiful under the heavens, He that weighs the hills in the balances—that God is the true and living God; He created the whole universe. And these commandments tell us who the true God is. If Satan can get this fourth commandment out of the Decalogue, then you will not be able to tell who the true and living God is.”<sup>18</sup>

This is fascinating and instructive. That point will become a pivotal issue in the final struggle between truth and error as we progress deeper into Revelation.

### **Verse 7 – “he that hath the key of David”**

Jesus has keys in Revelation 1:18, but there “keys” is plural, which are to hell and death. The key of David is different. It ties directly with Isaiah 22:21-22.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant E-li’-a-kim the son of Hil-ki’-ah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” Isaiah 22:20-22.

Shebna was King Hezekiah’s steward, treasure and palace official. He was a selfish man. He hewed an elaborate sepulcher out of a rock for himself, presumably with misappropriated funds. Isaiah pronounced a curse on him. Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, was appointed to take his place. This new steward was given major responsibilities:

1. He was clothed with the robe and girdle of the palace.
2. The government was put into his hands.

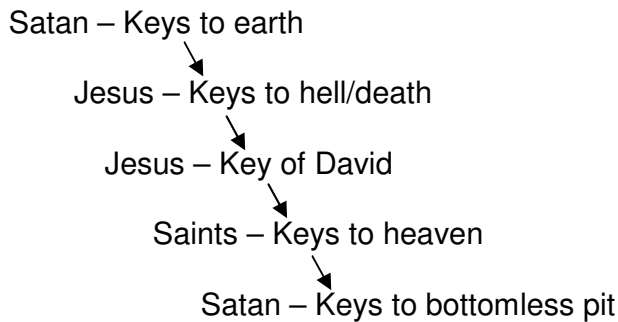
<sup>16</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 464.

<sup>18</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sermons and Talks Volume One*, pp. 17-18.

3. He became a father figure to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah.
4. He was given the key to the house of David.
5. He judged who came in and went out of the palace.

Shebna is symbolic of Satan – ruler of the world. Eliakin was a metaphor for Jesus. By His death He earned the right to be the royal king over the kingdom. He was a loving father and advocate for all people. Judgment was given to Him as to who would enter Jerusalem – the remnant fold. Some Biblical keys:



Because Jesus has the key of David, because He is the true embodiment of Eliakim, soon He will pass on the key to heaven to all His faithful followers.

“David is the type of Christ, the supreme ruler of the kingdom of heaven. See Jer. xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23; xxxvii. The house of David is the typical designation [for] the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Ps. cxxii, 5). The holding of the keys, the symbols of power, thus belongs to Christ as Lord of the kingdom and Church of God. See on Matt. xvi. 19:11.”<sup>19</sup>

Jesus has already alluded to his earthly linkage in Revelation 1:5a as Prince of the Kings of the earth. Now our sights are raised to the eternal kingdom.

“The Jews, whose hostility is prominent in 3:9 of this message, denied that Jesus was the Messiah and claimed that they alone, not Jesus’ followers, had access to the kingdom of David. The opening words of this message emphasize that the opposite is true. He is the genuine Messiah, and in the coming reign of glory His power to open the door to His own and close it to the self-styled ‘children of the kingdom’ is established (Beckwith). With an authority like what He has over Hades (cf. Rev. 1:18), heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18), and His own house (cf. Heb. 3:6), He has regal dominion over the house of David.”<sup>20</sup> – Over all who claim to be His.

Thus, we find the key symbolizes authority.<sup>21</sup> Jesus not only begins by addressing His own divine goodness and sacredness but here affirms His unquestioned supremacy over all the church and even in the world.

“‘Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.’ 1 John 3:2. Our Redeemer has opened the way so that the most sinful, the most needy, the most oppressed and despised, may find access to the Father. All may have a home in the mansions which Jesus has gone to prepare. ‘These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man

<sup>19</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 464.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 275.

<sup>21</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; ... behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.' Rev. 3:7, 8."<sup>22</sup>

Why does Jesus simply have David's key and not a heavenly key or a key made by His Father's hands?

"In what sense could David, a mere man, give Christ such awesome power and authority? Of course, he could not except indirectly. Looking further, a strange paradox appears. In Rev. 5:5, Jesus, 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah' is also declared to be 'the Root of David' while in Rev. 22:16 He declares Himself to be 'the offspring of David.'

"Jesus presented the same paradox to the Pharisees as they gathered around to embarrass Him. But, Jesus beat them to the punch. He 'asked them, ... What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.' (Matt. 22:41-46).

"Although that stumped the Pharisees, it should not puzzle us. The Apostle Paul explained the concept very clearly: 'But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death ... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; ... For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.' (Heb. 2:9, 14, 16-18) Although Paul alluded to 'the seed of Abraham,' he could just as well have said 'the seed of David' as he did in Romans 1:3 and 2 Timothy 2:8.

"Therefore, from that passage, Jesus by virtue of having descended from the line of Abraham (or David) and bearing the sinful nature of man (but without committing sin), was enabled to: (1) taste death for every man; (2) defeat the devil; (3) be a 'merciful and faithful high priest' (4) make reconciliation for the sins of the people; and (5) help the tempted. *None of those things would have been possible had he not claimed 'the key of David' or 'Abraham.'*"<sup>23</sup> These give Him the authority to judge. He has earned the right to be the standard." In turn, the key shows His role as "gatekeeper" to the eternal world.

Jesus in turn has provided for His people a key. Those faithful in Philadelphia appear to have grasped that key.

"There is no need for us to hunger; there is no need for us to thirst, while the storehouse of heaven is open for us, and the key is given into our possession. What is the key?—Faith, which is the gift of God. Unlock the store-house; take of its rich treasures. May God help us to lay hold upon the eternal realities, and 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.'"<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 3/15/1892.

**Verse 7 – “he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;”**

Because He holds the key, He is in charge of the door or entryway to the kingdom, to the Most Holy Place, to the Father’s throne and to heaven.

“The point of the quotation is that Jesus holds the power over salvation and judgment. In 1:18 the stress is on his sovereignty over death and judgment, while in 3:7 the emphasis is on his authority over those entering the kingdom.”<sup>25</sup>

This helps to solidify timing of Philadelphia more clearly. Judgment by the holy and true is noted. He has *authority* to judge.

“But clearer light came with the investigation of the sanctuary question. Now was seen the application of those words of Christ in the Revelation, addressed to the church at this very time: ‘These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth; I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.’ [1 REV. 3:7, 8.] Here an open as well as a shut door is brought to view. At the termination of the 2300 prophetic days in 1844 [Daniel 8:14], Christ changed his ministration from the holy to the most holy place. When, in the ministration of the earthly sanctuary, the high priest on the day of atonement entered the most holy place, the door of the holy place was closed, and the door of the most holy was opened. So, when Christ passed from the holy to the most holy of the heavenly sanctuary, the door, or ministration, of the former apartment was closed, and the door, or ministration, of the latter was opened. Christ had ended one part of his work as our intercessor, to enter upon another portion of the work [Daniel 7:13]; and he still presented his blood before the Father in behalf of sinners. ‘Behold,’ he declares, ‘I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.’”<sup>26</sup>

“Jesus takes men to the very threshold of heaven, and opens before them the sanctuary, flooded with the glory of the Lord of hosts, sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and the train of his glory filled the temple.”<sup>27</sup>

“Looking down the stream of time to the *last days*, the same infinite power proclaimed through John: [Revelation 3:7 quoted].”<sup>28</sup>

This phrase has deep bearing on the remnant at the end of time.

“In vision, Mrs. White ‘saw two companies, one bowed down before the throne, deeply interested, while the other stood uninterested and careless. Then [she] saw an exceeding *bright light* come from the Father to the Son, and from the Son it waved over the people before the throne. But few would receive this *great light*. [Then she] saw the Father rise from the throne, and in a flaming chariot go into the holy of holies within the veil, and sit down. Then Jesus ... stepped into [a] chariot and was borne to the holiest, where the Father sat. Those who rose up with Jesus would send up their faith to Him in the holiest, and pray, ‘My Father, give us Thy Spirit.’ Then Jesus would breathe upon them the Holy Ghost. [Then she] turned to look at the company who were still bowed before the throne [in the holy place]; they did not know that Jesus had left it. *Satan appeared to be by the throne*, trying to carry on the work of God. I saw them look up to the throne, and pray, ‘Father, give us Thy Spirit.’ *Satan would then breathe upon them an*

<sup>25</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 284.

<sup>26</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, pp. 268-269

<sup>27</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, March 28, 1895.

<sup>28</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 63.

unholy influence [it was his] object ... to keep them deceived and to draw back and deceive God's children' (EW 54-56).

"So, that 'bright light,' that 'great light' represents the knowledge that Christ had closed the door to the holy place and opened the door to the most holy place.

"Consider Mrs. White's first vision when she 'saw a straight and narrow path, cast up high above the world. On this path the Advent people were traveling to the city, which was at the farther end of the path. They had a *bright light* set up behind them at the beginning of the path, which an angel told me was the midnight cry [the same 'bright, great light' depicted in EW 54-56]. This *light* shone *all along* the path and gave *light* for their feet so that they might not stumble. But soon some grew weary, and said the city was a great way off, and they expected to have entered it before. Then Jesus would encourage them by raising His glorious right arm, and from His arm came a *light which waved* over the Advent band, and they shouted, 'Alleluia!' Others rashly denied *the light* behind them and said that it was not God that had led them out so far. The *light* behind them *went out*, leaving their feet in perfect darkness, and they stumbled and lost sight of the mark and of Jesus, and *fell off the path down into the dark and wicked world below.*' (EW 13-15)."<sup>29</sup>

**VERSE 8:** "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

#### Verse 8 – "I know thy works:"

With each church Jesus makes this personal declaration: "I know what kind of people you are." This puts everyone on notice, everything is laid open. It is meant to create a response question: "Does He out ...?" Jesus' next words here become a declaration of curious interest. The churches' attention becomes riveted.

The sequence in this verse is unusual. What Jesus knows is in part "c" of the verse. He introduces a promise (part "b") before He shows His understanding insight. This is a somewhat awkward interjection."<sup>30</sup>

The promise:

#### Verse 8 – "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."

That is interesting. This suggests something very good will follow. His key has opened the door. The way Jesus presents this it must be a promise of something the believers in Philadelphia want or would like. But – where does that open door lead? Verse 7 brought us the answer.

Jesus, holding the key to the kingdom, controls its entry door. That door is symbolized by the portal to the Most Holy – where God's throne is. *Our* key is the nature of our faith. Jesus is so excited to bring the message to the Philadelphia leaders and people, He says, "I know you – you now have access to the kingdom and the very throne of my Father."

This is doubly instructive, because it was in 1844, the end of the 2300-year prophecy, that the door opened for Jesus to go into the Most Holy place to begin the Investigative Judgment. He is telling these people, "you can enter there with me." "You can be by

<sup>29</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> Gaebelein, *Op. cit.*, p. 452.

my side as I minister the redemption plan.” That promise is so sure, He tells them that no one will ever shut the door. The way is wide open to be in His presence. Jesus honors their sterling qualities with this promise.

Referring to Revelation 3:7-8: “Here *an open as well as a shut door* is brought to view. *Those who by faith follow Jesus in the great work of the atonement, receive the benefits of his mediation in their behalf*; but those who reject the light that brings to view this work of ministration, are not benefited thereby.”<sup>31</sup>

How does all this apply to the Key of *David*?

“This entrance into covenantal life is also referred to as entry into the ‘house of David’ (v 7) and into the city and temple of God (v 12), all of which can likewise be understood as images for the kingdom of God. [Wilcock].”<sup>32</sup>

“The use of David’s name just before recalls the Messiah’s prerogative of admitting to or turning away from David’s future kingdom (Rev. 5:5; 22:16; cf. Luke 1:32) (Johnson). David is always the type of the supreme ruler of the theocracy (cf. Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23; 34:24; Hos. 3:5) (Lee). Furthermore, ... (‘opened’) is a form of ... (*anoigo*, ‘I open’), which is used twice at the end of v. 7 in describing Jesus’ administration of His messianic office. If He who controls the opening and closing of access to the Davidic kingdom speaks of an opened door in the same breath as describing messianic prerogative, the inevitable conclusion is to see a reference to admission to that kingdom (Johnson). It is natural to refer to this final reward for fidelity immediately after ‘I know your works,’ because these works amounted to the church’s faithful stand for Christ (Beckwith) ... The words *hen oudeis dynatai kleisai auten* (‘which no one can shut,’ 3:8) recall the words *oudeis kleisei* (‘no one will shut’) from v. 7 and come into play in connection with v. 9. This promise amounts to a promise of deliverance from their Jewish adversaries, a deliverance that will come at Christ’s second advent (cf. 3:11). Added affirmation of this solution comes in noting that it makes this *idou* clause a promise, thus paralleling the two *idou* clauses of v. 9. It also matches the distinctly eschatological tone of this message to Philadelphia.”<sup>33</sup>

Though we have a view of the Savior telling this congregation the door is open for you into the kingdom and though it is the beginning of the judgment scene, there is additional hope with a deeply spiritual message that Jesus is conveying. To this persecuted church, this group of people who know what trials mean comes the assurance the door will not be shut!

“He knows just what we need, just what we can bear, and He will give us grace to endure every trial and test that He brings upon us. My constant prayer is for a greater nearness to God.

“Every provision has been made to meet the needs of our spiritual and our moral nature. Light and immortality are brought to light through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has said that He has set before us an open door, and no man can shut it. The open door is before us, and through the grace of Christ, beams of merciful light stream forth from the gates ajar.”<sup>34</sup>

Our prayers go through that open door.<sup>35</sup>

“Those who are seeking to be faithful to God may be denied many of the privileges of the world; their way may be hedged up and their work hindered by the enemies of

<sup>31</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, pp. 268-269 (emphasis added).

<sup>32</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 285.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 278.

<sup>34</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 19

<sup>35</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 467.

truth; but there is no power that can close the door of communication between God and their souls.”<sup>36</sup>

**Verse 8 – “for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”**

A trilogy of complements is now given. God summarizes and reinforces His positive thoughts of this people: Thou (the Philadelphia congregation):

hast a little strength  
hast kept my word  
hast not denied my name

In spite of weakness, they were faithful to His word and upheld the name of Jesus.

They have some power but it is small. Jesus sees them as weak. Commentators guess on what this means. Opinions range from poor in worldly goods to weakness because the congregation is small in number.<sup>37</sup> The weakness can be understood through the trilogy. *Hoti milsran echeis dynamin* – that you have little power, is contrasted with keeping His word and not denying His name. In the very contrast, Jesus is revealing what this congregation is doing with a small amount of power – they are pleasing Him. That power can be none other than the *will to persevere*, the will to *obey* and the will to *witness*. They were a persecuted church, felt the strong arm of oppression – yet with what strength they could exhibit, they pleased God. The door of heaven was open to them.

Fascinating is the historical application of this church. The 1843 and 1844 *movement* looked to the heavens and saw an open door. Though it was to the Most Holy place, their *parousial* expectancy set that movement with a will to persevere and please Jesus.

“Of all the great religious movements since the days of the apostles, none have been more free from human imperfection and the wiles of Satan than was that of the autumn of 1844. Even now, after the lapse of many years, all who shared in that movement and who have stood firm upon the platform of truth still feel the holy influence of that blessed work and bear witness that it was of God.”<sup>38</sup>

This is a segue into a final application where a Philadelphian counterpart will be sealed and ready to go through the open door.

The word was kept or *thou didst keep* my word.<sup>39</sup> They were among those that were endeared to Jesus in His remarkable prayer:

“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.” John 17:6, 8.

“Contrasting with the church’s little power is its obedience to Christ’s word in a particular situation when members had been called upon to deny His name. *Eteresas* (‘you kept’) and *ouk ernesō* (‘you did not deny’) are aorist tense verbs that, in contrast to the present tense *echeis* (‘you have’) just before, point to a specific historical trial faced by

<sup>36</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 960-961.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>38</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 401.

<sup>39</sup> Vincent, *Op. cit.*, p. 465.



these people, a trial through which they passed victoriously. The Lord commends them for this.”<sup>40</sup>

The notable thing about this group of individuals is their influence. It was profound. The Christian faith became the predominant religion in Philadelphia for a long period. The weak ones brought a forceful transformation to that city.

**VERSE 9: “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”**

*Idou* – “Behold.” This is the second time this word is used in the Philadelphia message. Jesus is drawing attention to a challenge the Philadelphia church has.

*Is Jesus telling the faithful He will humiliate these enemies or that this group will be converted and become part of them?* Commentators vary greatly as to what Jesus is trying to say. There are clues and references that help solve the problem.

**Verse 9 – “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie;”**

This whole picture is similar to the contentious problem the Smyrna church had. “I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer [persecution].” Revelation 2:9-10 (NIV).

This first exegetic clue to begin to answer the question above is simply that what Philadelphia experienced was disparaging. The second clue comes in the linguistic flow Jesus uses. He has already made endearing comments about His faithful members (verse 8). Suddenly He says, “Behold” – *idou*. A contrast is introduced suggesting there was a separate strident bunch in the Philadelphia church. There is a contrast to their goodness.

“They are not real Jews in Christ’s sight because ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham’ (John 8:39), and ‘He is not a Jew who is one outwardly ... but he is a Jew who is one inwardly’ (Rom. 2:28f).”<sup>41</sup>

“These ethnic Jews claim to be the true Israel, though they are not. In reality, they are liars because they do not believe in Jesus, the true Jewish Messiah, and they persecute those who are faithful witnesses to him (see on 3:14 and cf. Prov. 14:5).”<sup>42</sup>

The third clue comes with this observation: The word “synagogue” suggests this group was entirely religious in nature.<sup>43</sup> Thus, we have a religious body. Jesus said He would “make them of the synagogue of Satan,” paralleling Smyrna.

The fourth clue comes from an observation by Beale. Translators vary in how the phrase begins. “I will give” or “I will make.” The implication of each is vastly different.

“The parallelism ... supports the translation of [*poieso autous*] not as ‘I will give’ but ‘I will make’ (so KJV, RSV, NIV, etc.), which is supported by similar LXX uses of the verb in literal renderings of Hebrew. This second clause demonstrates both that the unbeliev-

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>41</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>43</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

ing Jews are not true Israel and that the believing church now represents God's true people."<sup>44</sup>

Thus the NIV makes a concise accurate rendering.

"I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I love you." Revelation 3:9 (NIV).

Something would adversely happen to this group.

"The synagogue of Satan' was apparently composed of professing Jews, worshiping in the synagogue and claiming to be the true Israel (cf. John 8:31 ff.). Satan is named as the leader of such a synagogue because of the persecuting habits of this group (cf. 2:9) (Moffatt).

"The author of these messages notes emphatically the falsity of the pseudo-Jewish claim with the words *kai ouk eisin alla pseudontai* ('and they are not but they lie'). The earlier part, 'and they are not,' constitutes a sufficient denial of their claim, but the issue is forcefully closed with the addition of 'but they lie.' In typically Johannine style (cf. John 8:44; 1 John 1:10; 2:4) an additional contrast is drawn between these false professors and the one who identifies Himself as 'the true one' (v. 7)."<sup>45</sup>

"Satan has a large confederacy, his church. Christ calls them the synagogue of Satan because the members are the children of sin. The members of Satan's church have been constantly working to cast off the divine law, and confuse the distinction between good and evil. Satan is working with great power in and through the children of disobedience to exalt treason and apostasy as truth and loyalty. And at this time the power of his satanic inspiration is moving the living agencies to carry out the great rebellion against God that commenced in heaven."<sup>46</sup>

A fifth clue that this dissonant group of Jews is a metaphor for evil and would be punished comes from an end-time application of Philadelphia made in the Spirit of Prophecy which follows.

**Verse 9 – "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."**

This does not mean that evil people will fall down and worship the righteous. It is an allusion that the lost will come to a point where they will admit our worship was true, the truths we hold are correct and God's blessings are upon us.

"You think, that those who worship before the saint's feet, (Rev. 3:9), will at last be saved. Here I must differ with you; for God shew me that this class were professed Adventists, who had fallen away, and 'crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.' And in the 'hour of temptation,' which is yet to come, to show out every one's true character, they will know that they are forever lost; and overwhelmed with anguish of spirit, they will bow at the saint's feet."<sup>47</sup>

At the time of deliverance of God's people, the wicked backslidden Adventists admit our trust and faith was true. This occurs just days before Jesus returns. A provocative thought: "That statement not only moves the Philadelphian 'synagogue' to the future, it places it squarely in post-probationary time. Although the Smyrnan 'synagogue' may not begin that far in the future, it can easily be seen to begin during probationary time, per-

<sup>44</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>46</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> White, Ellen G.; *A Word to the Little Flock*, p. 12.

haps when the Sunday law is enforced; and will extend up to the time the ‘synagogue of Satan’ is forced to acknowledge its blasphemous error during postprobationary time. As for the final disposition of the Philadelphian ‘synagogue of Satan;’ ‘Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!’ (Isa. 5:21).<sup>48</sup>

“No language can express the longing which the disobedient and disloyal feel for that which they have lost forever—eternal life. Men whom the world has worshiped for their talents and eloquence now see these things in their true light. They realize what they have forfeited by transgression, and they fall at the feet of those whose fidelity they have despised and derided, and confess that God has loved them.”<sup>49</sup>

“God’s hand at that time will be stretched out still in wrath and justice and will not be brought to Himself again until His purposes are fully accomplished, and the hireling priests are led to worship at the feet of the saints, and to acknowledge that God has loved them because they held fast the truth and kept God’s commandments, and until all the unrighteous ones are destroyed from the earth.”<sup>50</sup>

“Perhaps new consideration should be noted at the statement concerning the Jews. ‘I will make them (Jews) come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.’ Barclay states, ‘The church was the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). It was, therefore, now true that all the promises which had been made to Israel had been inherited by the church. It was to her that one day all men would humbly make their submission. The promise is a reversal of all that the Jews had expected; they had expected that all nations would kneel before them; but the day was to come when they with all nations would kneel before Christ.’ Perhaps renewed interest should be made to Isaiah’s promises coupled to the words of Christ to the Philadelphia church.”<sup>51</sup>

“The Jews had rejected their Messiah and had forfeited their right to be called Jews. This is the language of eschatological judgment rather than an anticipation of blessing. It simply says that the Jews will acknowledge their mistake in denying Christians a place in the kingdom. The understanding that views the exaltation of the Philadelphian church but does not see the conversion of the professing Jews is rather convincing.”<sup>52</sup>

An Old Testament allusion to this is found in Isaiah 45:14; 49:23, 60:14 and Psalms 86:9. This will be fulfilled at the time God’s people are delivered. It will fulfill Jesus’ prophetic wish that ‘the world might know’ that God loves his disciples. John 17:23.

**VERSE 10: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”**

### **Verse 10 – “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience.”**

The linguistics of this phrase is difficult. It is put in such a way to be a condition that the Philadelphia church met to receive the promise which follows. Gaebelein suggests it this way, “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently.”<sup>53</sup> (Exactly as NIV.)

<sup>48</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 655.

<sup>50</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, p. 124

<sup>51</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>53</sup> Gaebelein, *Op. cit.*, p. 434.

To endure suffering and delay is enjoined in Luke 21:19, II Thessalonians 3:5 and Hebrews 12:3. In Hebrews 10:36 is the allusion that one must endure till He returns. This thought is even carried further, suggesting His chosen must endure as He endured.

“Now it is especially the word of Christ’s endurance (*ton logon tes hypomones mou*) that they have kept. With *mou* understood as a subjective genitive, this may be the endurance that Christ requires or the endurance that He Himself displayed (Beckwith). The genitives following ... (*hypomone*, ‘endurance’) in Rev. 13:10 and 14:12 support the latter meaning, as do the references to Christ’s own endurance in 2 Thess. 3:5 and Heb. 12:3. The preferable understanding is that of His endurance through which He exemplified the quality to be emulated by His followers. This quality figures prominently into the theme of Revelation (cf. 1:9; 2:2, 3).”<sup>54</sup>

“Again, words of commendation for the Philadelphians, flow from the mouth of Jesus. The word ‘patience’ from ‘hupomone’ means: steadfastness, constancy, endurance.’ In the case of the Philadelphians, they maintained ‘steadfast’ adherence to Jesus’ word.”<sup>55</sup>

The use of this phrase by E. G. White also strongly suggests the steadfastness of the believers during trial and persecution. The imagery clearly applies this to the remnant who will suffer during the Time of Trouble (both Little Time of Trouble and Jacob’s).

“‘Because thou hast kept the word of my patience.’ Does this apply to the men who persecute those who conscientiously keep the commandments of God, who refuse to bow down to an idol sabbath and worship an institution of the papacy? Who is keeping the word of God’s patience? This is a question of intense interest,—a question which none of us can afford to ignore; because God has said of those who do keep the word of his patience, ‘I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.’

“The hour of test and trial will surely come [a future allusion to the Little Time of Trouble on]; it is even now approaching. Christ declares, ‘Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.’ ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.’”<sup>56</sup>

“Could men see with heavenly vision, they would behold companies of angels that excel in strength stationed about those who have *kept the word of Christ’s patience*. With sympathizing tenderness, angels have witnessed their distress and have heard their prayers. They are waiting the word of their Commander to snatch them from their peril. But they must wait yet a little longer. The people of God must drink of the cup and be baptized with the baptism. [This is Little Time of Trouble language during the 5th seal.] The very delay, so painful to them, is the best answer to their petitions. As they endeavor to wait trustingly for the Lord to work they are led to exercise faith, hope, and patience, which have been too little exercised during their religious experience. Yet for the elect’s sake the time of trouble will be shortened. ‘Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him? ... I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.’ Luke 18:7, 8. The end will come more quickly than men expect. The wheat will be gathered and bound in sheaves for the garner of God; the tares will be bound as fagots for the fires of destruction.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>55</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 06/19/1900.

<sup>57</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 630.

“[Rev. 3:10 quoted] These words are important and solemn, and it would be profitable to us should we take them home with us, and search the Scriptures in reference to their true meaning. [Now a future time of trouble is anticipated.] The hour of temptation is to come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth; and although we do not wish to make a time of trouble for ourselves, nor do we wish to groan over trials in the future, still we should be so closely connected with God that we shall not fall under the temptation when it does come. ‘Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God’ (Isa. 50:10).”<sup>58</sup>

**Verse 10 – “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”**

The Greek word for “keep” is *tereo*. It implies to guard from loss or injury. This is in distinction from another “keep,” *phulasso*, which suggests isolation. Jesus is not isolating or removing them from this trial. He is guarding them against injury or harm! This argues against the dispensational futurists who view this as evidence for a pre-tribulation rapture.

This introduces eschatologic language. Though the possibility existed in the preterist and historical application of this church that the whole world at that time would come under a scourge, no such application exists. As was noted in verse 9, the imagery there takes us right to the time when God’s people will be delivered. Here we are introduced to ‘the hour of temptation’ (trial) which tries the world. This is a *Time of Trouble* expression, a time of tribulation related to the end of time.

“It is to be a time of distress on the world before the coming of Christ, one known as the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation, or the Great Tribulation (cf. Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:31; Mark 13:14; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 7:14; 14:7). This accounts for Christ’s words ‘I will come soon’ in Rev. 3:11, immediately following.

“The timing of ‘the hour of trial’s arrival is reflected by *tes mellouses erchesthai* (‘which is about to come’). The words describe ‘the hour’ and show that it should be closely related to ... (*ha dei genesthai en tachei*, ‘things that must happen soon’) and correspondingly also to ... (*erchomai tachy*, ‘I will come soon’).”<sup>59</sup>

The universality of this trial helps to make the application. Such expressions as “them that dwell upon the earth” are repeated elsewhere – Revelation 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14 (cf. Isaiah 24; Jeremiah 13:12-14).

“According to some interpreters (Ladd, Mounce, Walvoord), the ‘hour of trial’ (*horas tou peirasmou*, ‘time of temptation’) is better understood as the time known to the Jews as the ‘messianic woes,’ time of intense trouble to fall on the world before the coming of Christ and known as the eschatological ‘day of the Lord,’ or the ‘Great Tribulation’ (Dan 12:1; Joel 2:31; Mark 13:14; 2 Thess 2:1-12; Rev 14:7). This ‘hour of trial,’ then, will be the one described in such detail in the following chapters of the book.”<sup>60</sup>

The Greek word for “hour,” *hora*, can be literal or figurative. Either way it suggests a short time. It is so severe and universal that the promise comes as a divine gesture of good will – the faithful will be preserved from it.

“Gundry has shown the improbability of this understanding [physical rapture] by demonstrating parallels between Rev. 3:10 and John 17:15, which is the only other NT

<sup>58</sup> White, Ellen G.; *This Day with God*, p. 114.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 289-290.

<sup>60</sup> Gaebelein, *Op. cit.*, p. 454.

occurrence of [tereo] ... with [ek] ... there Christ prays, 'I ask not that you take them out of the world, but that you *keep them from* ... the evil one.' Thus Jesus denies a physical removal from tribulation and affirms a spiritual protection from the devil ... ['to keep'] with ... ['from'] in Prov. 7:5 and Jas. 1:27 has the same idea of protection from evil for those living in the midst of evil."<sup>61</sup>

"The trials mentioned throughout the letters and the visionary chapters that follow argue that both saints and unbelievers experience the same trials, but for the former trials refine faith, whereas for the latter trials only harden. Indeed, the affinity of the John 17 text with that of Rev. 3:10 is enhanced by the fact that the protection 'from the evil one' is also identified three times with the 'hour' ... of the testing of Jesus' followers (16:2, 4, 32), mention of which is directly followed by Christ's encouragement that they can 'have peace' in him in the midst of the world's tribulation because he has 'overcome the world' (16:33).

"That John has in mind a spiritual protection of Christians as they *go through tribulation* is evident also from the fact that Rev. 3:10 may well be alluding to Dan. 12:1, 10 (LXX), where 'that hour' ... is immediately described as 'that day of tribulation' ... when 'many are *tested* ... and sanctified and sinners sin' (v 10). This suggests that the 'testing' in Rev. 3:10 has the double effect of purifying and strengthening believers and of divine punishment of others.

"This assessment is confirmed from Rev. 7:14. There saints are depicted as 'coming out of the great tribulation' and wearing white robes in allusion respectively to Dan. 12:1 and 12:10 (see on 7:14). The fact that precisely the same two OT allusions are appealed to here further affirms that the subject of both passages is the church as latter-day Israel and its destiny to experience trial. In addition, the portrait in 7:14 is clearly that of believers enduring through tribulation and coming out of it successfully, which points further to the same picture in 3:10. They are not preserved from trial by removal from it, but their faith is preserved through trial because they have been sealed by God (see on 7:1ff, and 7:9ff.). Accordingly, the following interpretative rendering is best here: I will keep you *safe* from the spiritual harm of the coming tribulation period."<sup>62</sup>

"Psalm 91 specifically tells how Jesus will deliver the church of Philadelphia from the Great Tribulation.

"Ps 91:1-10: 'He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper, and from the deadly pestilence. *He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge*; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. *You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day; Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; {but} it shall not approach you. You will only look on with your eyes, and see the recompense of the wicked.* For you have made the LORD, my refuge, {even} the Most High, your dwelling place. *No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent.*"<sup>63</sup>

The Testimony provides two end-time applications for verse 10. One for the turn of the twentieth century related to crescendoing trial on God's people, and secondly, an allusion to the Time of Trouble.

<sup>61</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292.

<sup>63</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 54.

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.’ In this scripture is brought to view the hour of temptation that is to try them that dwell upon the earth. *We are now living in this trying hour.* There is no escape for any from this conflict. If in your life there are defective traits of character that you are not striving to overcome, you may be assured that the enemy will endeavor to take advantage of them; for he is watching vigilantly, seeking to spoil the faith of every one. In order to gain the victory over every besetment of the enemy, we must lay hold on a power that is out of and beyond ourselves. We must maintain a constant, living connection with Christ, who has power to give victory to every soul that will maintain an attitude of faith and humility.”<sup>64</sup>

“Just before us is the ‘hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.’ [1 Rev. 3:10.] All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome. But to those who earnestly seek a knowledge of the truth, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, the God of truth will be a sure defense. ‘Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee,’ is the Saviour’s promise. He would sooner send every angel out of Heaven to protect his people, than leave one soul that trusts in him to be overcome by Satan.”<sup>65</sup>

What will the trials include at that hour? Insight has been provided to give us some sensitivity.

“Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.”<sup>66</sup>

“As Satan accuses the people of God on account of their sins, the Lord permits him to try them to the uttermost. Their confidence in God, their faith and firmness, will be severely tested. As they review the past, their hopes sink; for in their whole lives they can see little good. They are fully conscious of their weakness and unworthiness. Satan endeavors to terrify them with the thought that their cases are hopeless, that the stain of their defilement will never be washed away. He hopes so to destroy their faith that they will yield to his temptations and turn from their allegiance to God.”<sup>67</sup>

**VERSE 11: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown.”**

### **Verse 11 – “Behold, I come quickly:”**

The word “Behold” is supplied. Some commentators feel the “coming” of Jesus noted here refers to His presence during trials and the coming tribulation. The exegetic links to Revelation 22:7, 12 and 20 clearly make this second-coming language.<sup>68</sup>

Looking at the sequential language, Wood suggests: “We should consider that Jesus meant He would come very soon after the time ‘the synagogue of Satan’ has knelt at the

<sup>64</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 07/09/1908.

<sup>65</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 377.

<sup>66</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 618-619.

<sup>68</sup> Gaebelien, *Op. cit.*, p. 455.

feet of the saints. He encourages the saints to remain steadfast in faith, during the time of trouble.”<sup>69</sup>

This is commensurate with E. G. White’s intimations in Broadside 1, 04/06/1846; *Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, p. 280 and *The Great Controversy*, pp. 635-652.

“The placement of this fifth promise at this point is clear implication that deliverance of the faithful will occur in conjunction with His coming. It holds open the possibility that His coming will happen before this generation passes, but does not guarantee it. This heightens the expectancy of Christ’s coming soon, a possibility that is stressed further by the presence of *tachy* (‘soon’). This kind of anticipation supplies motivation for the church to persevere (Swete).”<sup>70</sup>

Here Jesus is telling the Philadelphian believers, “keep your eyes on the reward – my personal presence.”

“Jesus says: ‘Behold, I come quickly.’ We should keep these words ever in mind, and act as though we do indeed believe that the coming of the Lord is nigh, and that we are pilgrims and strangers upon the earth.”<sup>71</sup>

“The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures. From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing steps from Eden, the children of faith have waited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer’s power and bring them again to the lost Paradise. Holy men of old looked forward to the advent of the Messiah in glory, as the consummation of their hope.”<sup>72</sup>

### **Verse 11 – “hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown.”**

“The promise of being kept from ‘the hour of trial’ in v. 10 carries with it the responsibility of continued effort (*kratei*, ‘hold fast’), and the motive for doing so derives from the short interval remaining until Christ returns (*erchomai tachy*, ‘I will come soon’).”<sup>73</sup>

The three complements of “holding fast” would be what this congregation needs to especially guard and preserve:

Kept his word  
Have not denied his name  
Keeps the word of his patience

To “hold fast” alludes to expectant trials which will require diligent safeguarding of their faith.

“Notice also that Jesus’ only counsel to the Philadelphians is to hold fast to what they have so that no one will take their crown. The crown here is not a king’s crown but a crown or wreath of victory. Jesus tells the church of Smyrna that if they are faithful unto death, He will give them a crown of life. Here the Philadelphians already either possess the crowns [figuratively] or already have one ‘reserved’ in heaven. At the end of his life, Paul told Timothy, ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; [in the future] *there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*’ 2 Tim 4:7-8. In either event, it is clear that they have

<sup>69</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 290.

<sup>71</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Maranatha*, p. 75.

<sup>72</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 291.



already overcome the beast and his image. However, they are cautioned to hold on to their faith and their relationship with Jesus, implying that they could still lose salvation. Jesus did tell them that He laid the door of salvation open before them, and no one could shut that door except Him. The Philadelphians are walking in the right direction, however, they need to stay the course until the end. Neither their individual probation nor corporate probation has passed at this point. They simply need to hold fast to what they already have. Notice that Jesus tells the Philadelphians also that He is coming quickly. The eschatological context of this message is abundantly clear.”<sup>74</sup>

The question arises, who or what could take the crown of life or righteousness from the believers who already are shown an open door to eternal life? No one can assume the right to enter heaven at the expense of another person. Jesus also just said that ‘no man’ could shut this door into heaven. But there is always the risk that one’s attention could turn from the portals of heaven to an earthly interest. The influence of an attention detractor brings the warning: “Hold fast, lest that influence takes away your reward.”

“The robber would not steal the crown for himself, but simply to deprive the faithful of the benefit. The benefit is called *ton stephanon sou* (‘your crown’). The Smyrnan church was promised the same reward, except there the crown was equated to ‘life’ (cf. Rev. 2:10). Perhaps here the more general meaning of victory attached to *stephanon* should remain undefined.”<sup>75</sup>

This is elaborated on uniquely in these thoughts: “The true Witness has given us the assurance that He has set before us an open door, which no man can shut. Those who are seeking to be faithful to God may be denied many of the privileges of the world; their way may be hedged up and their work hindered by the enemies of truth; but there is no power that can close the door of communication between God and their souls. The Christian himself may close this door by indulgence in sin, or by rejection of heaven’s light. He may turn away his ears from hearing the message of truth, and in this way sever the connection between God and his soul. Neither man nor Satan can close the door which Christ has opened for us (RH March 26, 1889).”<sup>76</sup>

The eschatologic implications are carried forward to God’s people right at the end. “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.’ Here again we are admonished to faithfulness, in view of the conflict. We must not yield any point that we have already gained. *From now on till Jesus comes, the battle will wax fiercer and still fiercer.* We shall have to meet and resist men who are regarded as very wise and learned, but who are not spiritually wise unto salvation. Our only hope of saving our own souls and of helping others to be saved, is to receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are seeking for a crown, a crown of glory that fadeth not away. As overcomers we are to reign with Christ in the heavenly courts; and we are to overcome through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.”<sup>77</sup>

“As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third message, but have not been sanctified through it, abandon their position, and take refuge under the banner of the powers of darkness. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbath-

<sup>74</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*

<sup>75</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>76</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 961.

<sup>77</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 07/09/1908.

keepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.”<sup>78</sup>

**VERSE 12:** “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*”

**Verse 12 – “Him that overcometh”**

The overcomers trilogy of rewards:

Will I make a pillar in the temple  
He shall go no more out  
I will write on him the name

“In order to gain the victory over every besetment of the enemy, we must lay hold on a power that is out of and beyond ourselves. We must maintain a constant, living connection with Christ, who has power to give victory to every soul that will maintain an attitude of faith and humility. As those who hope to receive the overcomer’s reward, we must press forward in the Christian warfare, though at every advance we meet with opposition. As overcomers, we are to reign with Christ in the heavenly courts, and we are to overcome through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. ‘Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.’”<sup>79</sup>

**Verse 12 – “will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out:”**

“The word ‘pillar,’ from ‘stulos’ means: ‘a prop or support.’ But, it need not be something literal for in Galatians 2:9, ‘James, Cephas, and John’ were called ‘pillars,’ or supporters of the Gospel. The same sense of the word pertains to the Philadelphian overcomers. But, they will be an extraordinary group of God’s supporters unlike any ever seen before in history. As the Commentary suggests, these overcomers ‘will hold a permanent, important place in the very presence of God’ (7BC 759) who resides in His heavenly ‘temple.’

“In consideration of that special place these saints will occupy in heaven, a ‘temple’ is depicted twice in Daniel and sixteen times in Revelation. Daniel refers to ‘the temple which was in Jerusalem’ (Dan. 5:2, 3). John, likewise, refers to an earthly ‘temple’ in Rev. 11:1 and 2 that stands in need of judgment just as these seven churches in Rev. 2 and 3. But, the remainder (see Rev. 7:15, 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 17 and 21:22) as in this verse, refers to the ‘temple’ in heaven.

“So, these Philadelphian overcomers will be God’s special human supporters in the great controversy between Christ and Satan and thus receive special honor in heaven.”<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 426.

<sup>79</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 370.

<sup>80</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

“A metaphorical ‘pillar’ would, of course, be part of a metaphorical ‘temple.’ In the NT the word translated ‘temple’ (*naos*) generally refers to the inner sanctuary containing the holy and most holy places, not to the whole complex of buildings that constituted the ancient Temple. Accordingly, this promise would mean that the overcomer will hold a permanent, important place in the very presence of God. For similar metaphorical usage of the word ‘pillar’ see Gal. 2:9; I Tim. 3:15.”<sup>81</sup>

The gift of this wonderful spiritual metaphor extends to us today. We are becoming *pillars* prepared for that temple. We will support and bring honor to the central administration of the universe.

“It may be that much work needs to be done in your character building, that you are a rough stone which must be squared and polished before it can fill a place in God’s temple. You need not be surprised if with hammer and chisel God cuts away the sharp corners of your character, until you are prepared to fill the place He has for you. No human being can accomplish this work. Only by God can it be done. And be assured that He will not strike one useless blow. His every blow is struck in love, for your eternal happiness. He knows your infirmities, and works to restore, not to destroy.”<sup>82</sup>

This imagery created for this church has promise after promise. Now is developed the theme of permanency.

“The promise tells of the reward for their perseverance: a stable relationship to God and an absolute assurance (trebly verified) of eternal life (Moffatt).”<sup>83</sup>

Some have argued that this symbolism is inconsistent with Revelation 21:22, which states there is no temple in Jerusalem. There is a danger that symbolic and literal interpretation become competitive. This will be addressed later. But a tantalizing thought: if the temple representation is “*functional*” – then it could absorb the meaning of both views.

A unique insight comes to us: “Due to the frequent destruction of the city [Philadelphia] by earthquake and war, the people often dispersed to live in the villages near their vineyards. To them the promise of ‘a pillar in the temple of my God’ where ‘he shall go no more out’ was very meaningful.

“So what remains? The site shows three large brick buttresses and columns of the *Church of John* built in the 6th century.

“To modern man these ‘pillars’ bring to our minds the faithfulness of the Christians of Philadelphia.”<sup>84</sup> This is symbolic for God’s final people – out of ruin comes immovable pillars for His work.

**Verse 12 – “and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”**

A striking part of Jesus’ ‘communique’ now comes to John. He is introduced to sealing language for those who “hold fast” and “overcome.” The pillar is permanent. The relationship is enduring. They shall no more go out. That is what happens to the 144,000 when they are sealed. God’s name is stamped on their foreheads. They forever belong to God. That forehead is part of the very character and being of the individual. It is then

<sup>81</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 759.

<sup>82</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 264.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 292

<sup>84</sup> Smart, *Op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

that God's covenant is finally achieved, through a people. His church here in Philadelphia become like Him. This church is a metaphor for the 144,000!

"For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Hebrews 8:8-12.

God certifies this eternal plan in another awesome trilogy:

And I will write upon him  
The name of my God  
My new name

A spiritual kingdom family has now become a literal kingdom family. The bride of the Lamb now can declare, I have His name, His father's name and the kingdom name (New Jerusalem).

The name of my God is written on the 144,000. "And I looked, and, lo; a Lamb stood on mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Revelation 14:1.

"Inasmuch as a 'name' implies personality and character, the promise here is that those who overcome will receive the permanent impress of God's character; the image of their Creator will be fully restored in them. This figure of speech may also be understood to imply that the victorious saints will be completely God's own, as attested by His name, or sign of ownership, thus affixed upon them."<sup>85</sup>

"Let your souls answer the question, Does my character correspond to the qualifications essential that I may receive a passport to the mansions Christ has prepared for those who are fitted for them? Holiness must be inwrought in our character."<sup>86</sup>

We are carried forward to the time of the new earth: "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads:" Revelation 22:3-4.

Throughout Revelation we see a progression of Christian development in the saints.

Earth	1	Hold fast – overcome – God's character promised (3:12)
Earth	2	God's character sealed in the saints (14:1)
Heaven	3	Saints with His character before throne serving Him (22:3-4)

This fulfills the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah 65:5 and 62:2 and is an allusion back to Pergamos (2:17). A fascinating thing occurs in step one above that Paul further describes. Speaking of the Ephesian believers: "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed

<sup>85</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 760.

<sup>86</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 446.

with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” Ephesians 1:12-14.

Until we are sealed for eternity in steps 2 and 3, we are His by the Holy Spirit, through promise; that is part of the New Covenant. Here the remnant are waiting to be sealed. During this time of preparation they are held fast by the power of His Spirit. When sealed, the covenant is completed – God now has His people (step 2). Then when they reside with Him (step 3), they become part of His immediate family. He now has a perfected church.

All this defines the ultimate response of God to man’s response to Him. The over-comer: “The only hope of any man lies through Jesus Christ. The pure and holy garments are not prepared to be put on by any one after he has entered the gate of the city. All who enter will have on the robe of Christ’s righteousness, and the name of God will be seen in their foreheads. This name is the symbol which the apostle saw in vision, and signifies the yielding of the mind to intelligent and loyal obedience to all of God’s commandments.”<sup>87</sup>

The sealed: “While Satan has been urging his accusations, holy angels, unseen, have been passing to and fro, placing upon the faithful ones the seal of the living God. These are they that stand upon Mount Zion with the Lamb, having the Father’s name written in their foreheads. They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. ‘These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.’ Revelation 14:4, 5.”<sup>88</sup>

The name, New Jerusalem, is also put on their foreheads. Just before Jesus returns to this earth and after the sins of the saints are put on Satan, comes the marriage of the Lamb. It occurs while Jesus is still in the Most Holy place in heaven. Who does Jesus marry? Who is He bonded to? The New Jerusalem. Notice the profound insight which opens like a blossom in the following thoughts: “Jesus sent His angels to direct the minds of the disappointed ones to the most holy place, where He had gone to cleanse the sanctuary and make a special atonement for Israel. Jesus told the angels that all who found Him would understand the work which He was to perform. I saw that while Jesus was in the most holy place He would be married to the New Jerusalem; and after His work should be accomplished in the holiest, He would descend to the earth in kingly power and take to Himself the precious ones who had patiently waited His return.”<sup>89</sup>

“The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which is the capital and representative of the kingdom, is called ‘the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ Said the angel to John: ‘Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ ‘He carried me away in the spirit,’ says the prophet, ‘and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.’ Revelation 21:9, 10. Clearly, then, the bride represents the Holy City, and the virgins that go out to meet the bridegroom are a symbol of the church. In the Revelation the people of God are said to be the guests at the marriage supper. Revelation 19:9. If guests, they cannot be represented also as the bride. Christ, as stated by the prophet Daniel, will receive from the Ancient of Days in heaven, ‘dominion, and glory, and a kingdom;’ He will receive the New Jerusalem, the capital of His kingdom, ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.’ Daniel 7:14; Revelation 21:2. Having received the

<sup>87</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 370.

<sup>88</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 591.

<sup>89</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, p. 251.

kingdom, He will come in His glory, as King of kings and Lord of lords, for the redemption of His people, who are to 'sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,' at His table in His kingdom (Matthew 8:11; Luke 22:30), to partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb."<sup>90</sup>

We have the name of God written in our foreheads, also the name of Jesus' bride – the New Jerusalem. That New Jerusalem which "cometh down" is a reference to the actual resume of what will happen in 21:2. Why is Jesus' bride a "city?" Though His guests at the marriage supper will be the church, the city symbolized the twelve tribes which is a metaphor for the 144,000.

The city also represents the twelve apostles who symbolize the committed faithful throughout all the ages. He marries the New Jerusalem, the seat of His kingdom, but He eternally bonded with each saint when they were sealed. The New Jerusalem becomes an eternal simile of His forever relationship with the saved.

The new name of Jesus is mysterious. Many commentators ignore this phrase. Some seek to identify the descriptive names of Jesus post-resurrection. The *context* is that of "King Jesus," who already has a bride. This steps beyond the High Priestly ministry. Revelation 19:12 says "He had a name written that no man knew, but He Himself." Presumably this name is on Jesus' forehead. Will that be the name written on us? We do not know. It is certain, however, that some new kingly name will become ours, which will represent our King Jesus.

**VERSE 13: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."**

"God desires us to give attention to the words of truth. We are to hear and practice them; for the truth is a message of Heaven to those who take heed. The oft repeated charge of the Lord is, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'"<sup>91</sup>

"The most powerful preaching of the Word will avail nothing unless the Spirit teaches and enlightens those who hear. Unless the Spirit works with and through the human agent, souls will not be saved, or characters transformed by the reading of the Scriptures."<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 426-427.

<sup>91</sup> White, Ellen G.; Bible Echo and *The Signs of the Times*, August 14, 1899.

<sup>92</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 2, p. 45.

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## SUMMARY – PHILADELPHIA

Though the name of the church means “brotherly love,” the focus of this message is on the Christian walk and growing up in Christ, which will lead to the sealing. It presents the imagery of the remnant who become the 144,000. Like, Smyrna, it is a church that Christ doesn’t criticize.

### End-time Metaphor for Philadelphia

The presenting picture of Jesus is one of a holy being. This sacred designation is the only place in the book of Revelation where He is called *ho hagios* – the holy one. Jesus declares himself also as true. These two designations present the first picture of the end of time. The final battle will be fought over truth, especially the Sabbath, which establishes His authority, divinity and creative power.

Jesus is shown having the key of David. David is a symbol of Jesus. The House of David is symbolic for the kingdom of Jesus. Jesus has the key, the symbol of authority to open doors to His kingdom. He tells the Philadelphian congregation the wonderful news that He has opened the door for them and no man will shut it.

The imagery goes deeper. It alludes also to the opening of the door to the Most Holy Place. This is where judgment begins. Thus, once again, we know that these messages are for God’s end-time people. The timing is judgment hour.

With sensitive words, Jesus reveals His understanding of their weariness and weakness because of persecution, “thou hast little strength.” Yet, He shows His deepest gratitude through recognizing their obedience and upholding His name. This “weak” congregation had a powerful influence over the city. Eventually, Christianity became the majority religion.

Jesus recognizes an apostate group within this church that clearly is an impediment to this congregation. They are a dishonest “religious” element He relegates to the Synagogue of Satan. One of the many promises that Jesus gives to this church is His prediction that this dishonest group would eventually acknowledge that the “weak ones” were right and worship God at their feet.

This language is, again, end-time! That is imagery of what will happen to the remnant at the time God’s people are delivered – after probation closes.

Jesus goes on to talk of their consistent lives, and He brings another promise: special help would be given to them “in the hour of temptation” that will come upon the church. But even more! – “which shall come upon the world.” This is an allusion that takes us to the Time of Trouble (or tribulation), which immediately precedes the great consummation.

In numerous end-time quotations, E. G. White uses many phrases from the Philadelphia church. They are more than pastoral illustrations to make a spiritual point. They are pointed messages to the remnant and to those preparing to be among the 144,000. Her quotations add valuable insight as to what the saints will experience during the final conflict between good and evil.

One profound thought that the Testimony gives is, “There is no escape for any from this conflict.”<sup>93</sup> That suggests every word of counsel that comes from Jesus is vital to understand and apply.

Time is running out. We sense final probationary appeals because Jesus tells us with precise words the response of those who waited till it was too late. God would be worshiped by them at our feet!

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<sup>93</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, July 9, 1908.

To emphasize the lateness of the hour Jesus told John, “Behold, I come quickly.” Revelation 3:11. This is repeated imagery Jesus instills into the pen of John on Patmos.

Throughout the messages to the seven churches, warnings or requests have been made in relationship to Jesus’ coming – some with the associated word “quickly” (*tachu*), suggesting without delay, suddenly, even by surprise.

To John:

Show things that must shortly come to pass (1:1)  
 For the time is at hand (1:3)  
 Behold he cometh with clouds (1:7)  
 In the Spirit on the Lord’s day (1:10)

To Church:

I will come unto thee quickly (2:5)  
 Ye shall have tribulation (2:10)  
 I will come unto thee quickly (2:16)  
 Hold fast till I come (2:25)  
 Keepeth my works unto the end (2:26)  
 I will come on thee as a thief (3:3)  
 I come quickly (3:11)

The hope of the apostles and every believer is the return of Jesus. It is this theme that begins early in Revelation, because the focus of the whole book is on the final conflict just before Jesus returns. This repeated picture threads its way right to the last part of the book.

Jesus then with pathos tells the people to “hold fast.” Don’t let your progress slip. Don’t let anyone influence you to do wrong, leading to the loss of your crown. This presupposes that they already have the crown but could still lose it. Clearly, Little Time of Trouble language.

What do they preserve? Jesus has outlined it beautifully:

1. Keeping His word – obedience
2. Not denying His name – witnessing
3. Keeping word of patience – not swerving when persecuted

What happens with persistence? They will become an immovable part of His kingdom – a pillar in the temple of my God.” Revelation 3:12.

The final theme to the Philadelphia church is the sealing message. The sealing is a transition experience for all the saints who will be translated. When sealed, they will be irrevocably destined to spend eternity with Jesus.

The seal is one of officially becoming part of the family of God. Special names are written on the foreheads of all the saints: God – New Jerusalem (Jesus’ bride) – Jesus’ new name.

“What is the condition of those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus? If in families there are those who are refusing obedience to the Lord in keeping His Sabbath, then the seal cannot be placed upon them. The sealing is a pledge from God of perfect security to His chosen ones (Ex. 31:13-17). Sealing indicates you are God’s chosen. He has appropriated you to Himself. As the sealed of God we are Christ’s purchased possession, and no one shall pluck us out of His hands. The



seal given in the forehead is God, New Jerusalem. ‘I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God’ (Rev. 3:12).<sup>94</sup>

Gabriel will revisit the sealing again as we move deeper into the book. That event is a major transition point in the end-time message, which the book was written to portray in detail.

Philadelphia is endowed with more promises than any other church. They are the “blessed” church because they are a metaphor for those who will see Jesus right at the very end of time.

“At this point, it is well to remind ourselves that ‘the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.’ (Rev. 1:20) Although we have one more church to discuss, the fact that the seven churches are called ‘candlesticks’ puts us in position to understand the significance of the two “candlesticks (which are clearly two churches)’ alluded to in Rev. 11:4. When our study reaches that point, we will find that those two ‘candlesticks’ represent the two pure churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia. Their experiences typify that which will befall the people of God during the final hours of this earth’s history.”<sup>95</sup>

**Promise to Philadelphia:** “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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” (Revelation 3:12).

**Fulfillment:** “And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:3-4; cf. Revelation 21:2-27).

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them’ (Revelation 21:2-3).

<sup>94</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 15, p. 225.

<sup>95</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

## LAODICEA

### INTRODUCTION

Laodicea church – the militant congregation (judgment has begun).

### Geography

From Philadelphia to Laodicea, the next city in the clockwise circuitous route, was 40 miles distant. It was situated in the Lycus valley. The town of Colossae was the nearest Christian congregation, 13 miles directly east. Paul apparently wrote a letter to the Laodicean church, but it was lost. Laodicea was noted for its banking, medicine (ear and eye ointments) and special wool from black sheep.<sup>1</sup>

### Religion

Evidence suggests that there was a major Jewish population of 20,000 in the city.

A temple was there for the Phrygian god *Men Karou* (sometimes called Aseis). The center of Laodicean culture and city government surrounded honor to this god. As Hellenism came in, worship of this god continued, but characteristics of *Zeus* (Jupiter) were instilled into *Men Karou*.<sup>2</sup>

### Christianity

While Paul was in Ephesus a man named Epaphras evangelized the Lycus Valley (Colossians 1:6-7; 4:12-13).

“By the time Paul wrote Colossians (A.D. 61), he had not personally visited Laodicea or Colosse (Col. 2:1). His intended visit to Colosse (Philem. 22) did not come until his release from Roman imprisonment (A.D. 62, 63). Paul’s ‘letter from Laodicea’ (Col. 4:16) ... and his letter to Colosse were unusual, since Paul had not personally been in the Lycus Valley to found the churches. The suggestion that Archippus (Col. 4:17), a son of Philemon (Philem. 1:2), was responsible for the church in Laodicea is plausible. Churches in the three cities—Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colosse—were closely related because of geographical proximity to each other, with the first two overshadowing the last because of their size and economic importance. Colosse had declined in importance through the decades of the first century A.D. (Hemer).”<sup>3</sup>

“The state of the church in Laodicea was one of self-satisfaction and complacency. Apparently the Christians, like the city itself, enjoyed a high degree of comfort and prosperity – a factor that led to a diminished zeal for the things of God. The letter to the Laodiceans shares with Sardis the unhappy distinction of lacking any commendation from the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet we find God lavished much on this church. Paul also had deep feeling for this congregation along with the Colossian believers.

“Surrounded by the practices and influences of heathenism, the Colossian believers were in danger of being drawn away from the simplicity of the gospel, and Paul, in warn-

<sup>1</sup> Smart, Lois, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>4</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), 1997, p. 78.

ing them against this, pointed them to Christ as the only safe guide. ‘I would that ye knew,’ he wrote, ‘what great conflict I have for you, *and for them at Laodicea*, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’”<sup>5</sup>

“This is the testimony borne concerning the church at Laodicea. *This church had been faithfully instructed*. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul wrote: ‘Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.’”<sup>6</sup>

**VERSE 14: “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the A'-men, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;”**

### **Verse 14 – “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write:”**

The name Laodicean is interpreted in different ways: from “judgment of the people” (Paulein) to “justice of the people” (Vincent), “I rule” – denoting democracy (Thomas), “judging the people” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*) and “preaches about judgment” (Berry). The message reveals judgment has come.

This was a congregation without Jesus. Though one of the early churches, He was “outside.” Jesus is about to give a final invitation to let Him in.

“How can Christ be outside of his own church? How long has he been there? When did he leave? Did the church notice that he was not there? ... What a tragedy! Notice the words of Christ at the door: Rev 3:20 ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any *man* hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.’”<sup>7</sup>

“The message to the Laodicean church reveals our condition as a people (RH Dec. 15, 1904).”<sup>8</sup>

“The Laodicean message applies to all who profess to keep the law of God, and yet are not doers of it. We are not to be selfish in anything. Every phase of the Christian life is to be a representation of the life of Christ. If it is not, we shall hear the terrible words, ‘I know you not’ (RH Oct. 17, 1899).”<sup>9</sup>

“To the church of the present day this message is sent. I call upon our church members to read the whole of the third chapter of Revelation, and to make an application of it. The message to the church of the Laodiceans applies especially to the people of God today. It is a message to professing Christians who have become so much like the world that no difference can be seen [vs. 14-18 quoted] (RH Aug. 20, 1903).”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 473.

<sup>6</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 964

<sup>7</sup> Sheffield, Harold, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002).

<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 961.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 962.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 958.

**Verse 14 – “These things saith the A’-men, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;”**

Another instructive trilogy is presented. “These things saith”:

The Amen  
The faithful and true  
The beginning of creation

The self-descriptive proper name “Amen” is the only place in the New Testament where it is used [as a designation of Him]. “Jesus is the ‘Amen’ in the sense that he is the perfect human, [with an] obedient response to the divine promises (cf. Isaiah 65:16)”<sup>11</sup>

“Usually functioning as an adverb, [this] ... word has an article preceding it. This makes it a substantive and uses it to represent a quality par excellence. It thus becomes a descriptive title for the Lord, and pictures Him as the one in whom verity is personified (Beckwith). The Greek word, a transliteration of the Hebrew ... (*amen*, ‘be firm’), means ‘verity’ and implies certainty. The Hebrew source word signifies what is ‘fixed,’ ‘true,’ or ‘unchangeable.’ A form of *amen* is translated ‘truth’ in the twofold occurrence of ‘God of truth’ in Isa. 65:16 [*elohe* ‘amen’ – the God of amen].

“In John’s Gospel accounts, on no less than twenty-five occasions, Jesus prefaced His remarks with the rabbinical ‘Amen, amen’—translated ‘most assuredly’ in the NKJV (the familiar ‘Verily, verily’ of the KJV). Paul wrote of Christ: ‘For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us’ (2 Cor. 1:20). Christ affirmed the truth of the promises by fulfilling them (cf. Rom. 15:8).”<sup>12</sup>

Shumate shares: “As the Amen, Jesus Christ’s promises are absolutely reliable. As Barclay points out ‘a witness must satisfy three essential conditions: (a) He must have seen with his own eyes that of which he tells. (b) He must be absolutely honest, so that he repeats with accuracy that which he has heard and seen. (c) He must have the ability to tell what he has to say, so that his witness may make its true impression on those who hear. Jesus Christ perfectly satisfied these conditions.”<sup>13</sup>

This becomes a beautiful segue into Jesus’ next declaration which He has previously revealed – He is the faithful and true witness.

“This is repeated in several places throughout Revelation. In Rev 1:5 Jesus is called the faithful witness. In our discussion on that verse, we noted that the word ‘witness’ and ‘martyr’ are equivalent. The greatest testimony of the love of God that has ever been proclaimed was Jesus’ death on the cross of Calvary. Jesus is also called faithful and true in Revelation 19:11 in the description of His return. Finally, Revelation 22:6 tells us that the words of this prophecy are faithful and true. Jesus has born witness to the love of God through His life, death, resurrection, His word, and the promise of His return.”<sup>14</sup>

“So, the name ‘Amen,’ that Jesus takes upon Himself, is exactly what the Laodicean church needs: absolute trust and confidence in Him who is absolutely ‘faithful and true.’ But, as this phrase reads, He also declares Himself to be ‘the faithful and true witness’

<sup>11</sup> Gaebelien, Frank E.; *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI), 1984, p. 457.

<sup>12</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Canter, Bryan; *Revelation, Part 2, Messages to the Seven Churches* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 55.

suggesting Himself to be occupied, at this time, in legal matters, witnessing in a court room setting.

“As a matter of fact, the name ‘Laodicea’ means “judging the people,” or “a people adjudged.” (7BC 760) So, the very name of the church itself confirms that the beginning of this era in 1844, marks the transition of Christ’s ministry from the holy to the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary at the end of the 2300 day ‘mar’eh’ of Daniel 8:14. With the name ‘amen,’ signifying absolute fairness, we could not wish for a more competent witness, or judge in the heavenly court room setting as depicted in Dan. 7:13 where ‘one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days.’”<sup>15</sup>

Jesus – the faithful and true martyr – is seen in the finale’ statement to the churches as the “Yes” to all God’s promises (II Corinthians 1:20). In Him are fulfilled all the divine pledges to man. Through Him God’s covenant is completed.

“The best way to take *martyr* in 3:14 is to make it comprehensive in covering Christ’s reliability as a witness to every divine revelation (Charles). This meaning agrees closely with that assigned in 1:5, and is especially well supported by the observation that a faithful witness can be trusted never to misrepresent His message by exaggeration or suppression, with His veracity extending not only to His character but also to the content of His message (Moffatt). This meaning is broad enough to provide for an allusion to the OT source of the total expression (Ps. 89:37 [38]; cf. Rev. 1:5) as well as agreeing with the focus of the book as a whole and the need expressed in the message to Laodicea. Christ is the epitome of veracity.”<sup>16</sup>

The verse ends with “the beginning of the creation of God,” another self-designation. The Greek word for “beginning” is *asche*, which suggests *the* designation or noun of active cause of the creation of God. This would be consistent with the previous two declarations. Here He is the power or magistrate of God’s creation. What does this “creation” refer to? Commentators are at variance. An allusion to the creation of this earth and/or the universe is plausible and keeps the integrity of the trilogy. Using it as a metaphor that *He* is one of the creation detracts from His authority and power that is being portrayed.

The theme of this letter is what can happen to the worst church in the list if they repent. It outlines the extreme from God utterly rejecting this congregation to giving them a place right on His throne! It is symbolic of a recreation or new creation. God’s covenant will be fulfilled when this creation is complete. As will be built upon later, this era is the final period of Christian history for conversion, recreation and sealing. Laodicea is a microcosm of the book of Revelation.

Thus, we have the dual imagery of divinity before *all* and Jesus finishing *all*. The tie back to 1:8 is made, and we are carried forward to 21:6 and 22:13. The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and ending, is revealed in “creation” and re-creation.

**VERSE 15-16: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”**

*Oida sou ta erga* – I know your works.

<sup>15</sup> Wood, Robert, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 302.

“As in the previous messages, the Lord follows His self-description with *oida* (‘I know’), a word depicting intimate knowledge that is complete and infallible (Swete; Lenski). When used of human knowledge, this word designates something known by observation; but referring to divine knowledge, it points to a comprehension that is absolute because it is based on omniscience. The objects of His knowledge are *sou ta erga* (‘your works’) as in four of the six earlier messages (Rev. 2:2, 19; 3:1, 8). In each case the works are more than the deeds done. They are a reflection of life and conduct in general, including outward and inward spiritual activities (Alford). They are evidence of the inward spiritual condition the Lord alone sees and knows directly (Beckwith; Lenski). It is by means of these that men prove what they actually are.”<sup>17</sup>

This familiarity is an antithetic message – I want you to know me. “I know you don’t know me because you are lukewarm. You don’t take a stand.” Here Jesus has no commendation for this church. He launches right into a rebuke which is the most scathing of the seven.

“You are neither cold nor hot. These people had avoided the extremes of outright spiritual destitution, but they had also avoided unrestrained spiritual fervor.” Jesus is telling them I would rather you boil with fervor or coldly reject what you know. This reaction of God – *ophelon psychros es e zestos* – expresses His frustrated longing that the readers be anything but lukewarm.”<sup>18</sup>

“Christ gives man no encouragement to think that He will accept a *patchwork character*, made up mostly of self, with a little of Christ. This is the condition of the Laodicean church. At first there seems to be some of self and some of Christ. But soon it is all of self and none of Christ. The root of selfishness is revealed. It continues to grow, striking its roots deeper and deeper, till its branches are covered with objectionable fruit. Christ looks with pitying tenderness on all who have **combination characters**. Those with such a character have a connection with Christ so frail that it is utterly worthless (Letter 105, 1893).”<sup>19</sup>

“Satan is willing that you should be Christians in name, for you can suit his purpose better. If you have a form and not true Godliness, he can use you to decoy others into the same self-deceived way. Some poor souls will look to you, instead of looking to the Bible standard, and will come up no higher. They are as good as you, and are satisfied.”<sup>20</sup>

“Those who zealously oppose Christ (cold), and those who zealously serve Him (hot), have one thing in common: they both take Him seriously. The one who neither opposes nor serves offers Christ the ultimate insult – affirming His existence, but not taking Him seriously.”<sup>21</sup>

Coldness is a condition where conversion is still possible.<sup>22</sup> Being hot is related to the urgency of the time we are living in. “Every discourse should be given under a sense of the awful judgments soon to fall on our world.”<sup>23</sup>

The lukewarm state is dangerous. It reflects blindness to self, blindness to spiritual time and blindness to Jesus. Jesus is making a cognitive and emotional appeal to the Laodicean congregation – You have a nauseating problem.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>19</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1101 (emphasis added).

<sup>20</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 162.

<sup>21</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, February 24, 1903.

“The tepid spiritual condition of the Laodicean church was more dangerous than if the church had been cold. Lukewarm Christianity preserves enough of the form, and even of the content of the gospel, to dull the perceptive powers of the spirit and renders men oblivious to the earnest effort necessary to the attainment of the high ideal of a victorious life in Christ. The typical Laodicean Christian is content with things as they are and proud of the little progress he has made. It is almost impossible to convince him of his great need and of how far he is from the goal of perfection.”<sup>24</sup>

“To those who are indifferent at this time Christ’s warning is: [Rev. 3:16 quoted]. The figure of spewing out of His mouth means that He cannot offer up your prayers or your expressions of love to God. He cannot endorse your teaching of His word or your spiritual work in anywise. He cannot present your religious exercises with the request that grace be given you.’ (6T 408) So, to be spued out means that we will eventually ‘be hurt of the second death’ instead of partaking ‘of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.’ (Rev. 2:11, 7).”<sup>25</sup>

Lukewarmness also suggests the people are in a state of sin because in verse 19 they are admonished to repent.

“Today a large part of those who compose our congregations are dead in trespasses and sins. They come and go like the door upon its hinges. For years they have complacently listened to the most solemn, soul-stirring truths, but they have not put them in practice. Therefore they are less and less sensible of the preciousness of truth. The stirring testimonies of reproof and warning do not arouse them to repentance.”<sup>26</sup>

These people are absorbed in mediocrity and Christ wants to throw them up.<sup>27</sup>

This suggests that they are in danger of being ejected from the body of Christ. This imagery is meant to incite revulsion, a divine being vomiting! This undignified allusion can only be meaningful when Christians see themselves as the projectile. Jesus is blunt and graphic with the Laodiceans.

But His mercy still lingers and He offers hope.

“*Mello* (‘I am about to’) is informative in at least two regards. First, its use instead of another verb such as ... (*thelo*, ‘I wish’) shows that there is yet opportunity for the Laodiceans to repent (cf. 3:18-20), thereby averting the coming wrath of God. The longsuffering of God is still at work and the judgment of God still pending (Trench; Alford; Moffatt; Beckwith; Lenski). Second, *mello* indicates the imminence of the wrath to come on this church. This spewing out is not an immediate and special judgment. *It is rather a warning of coming eschatological wrath (Charles). The language is intended to awaken the readers to the impending danger (Trench; Beckwith; Lenski).*”<sup>28</sup>

Looking at the words *mello se emesai ek tor stomatos mou*, it literally says “I am about to spit you out of the mouth of me.”<sup>29</sup> The lukewarmness *does not* induce vomiting. Jesus is in full control. His act of vomiting is a voluntary one. He is waiting in mercy to give another chance.

“There seems to be a close connection in Revelation between the concept of the Creator God and judgment. The word ‘Laodicea’ means a people under judgment. In the

<sup>24</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 761.

<sup>25</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 426.

<sup>27</sup> Paulien, Jon, Ph.D.; *Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism*, chapter IV, *Symposium on Revelation – Book I*; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6; Frank B. Holbrook, Editor, (Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Springs, MD), 1992, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas, J. D.; *The New Greek English Interlinear New Testament* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; Wheaton, IL; 1990), pp. 859-860.

first angel's message of Revelation 14:6, there is a call to worship the Creator God alongside a warning that the hour of judgment has come. Before, we noted that the description of Jesus' eyes of fire symbolized His spiritual discernment. Here the reference to Jesus as the Creator God deals more with His authority to judge the people.

"This is a message to people who consider themselves to be Christians. The last day messages from God go first to the church, then to the world. Judgment begins with the house of God, and so do the warnings of impending judgment. Also, we need to note that probation has not closed for the church of Laodicea. Even though Jesus gives them a very strong rebuke – He actually has nothing positive to say about this church – still He makes the offer for them to repent and promises a reward to those who do."<sup>30</sup>

Here we see justice and mercy emanating from Jesus. The appeal is a repetition of hundreds of years before: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." But this time an eschatological urgency is given.

**VERSE 17:** "Because thou sayest, 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:'"

**Verse 17 – "Because thou sayest, 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;'"**

A trilogy of claims is presented by the Laodicean congregation:

I am rich  
Increased with goods  
Have need of nothing

The *satisfaction* of material possessions is transferred to a spiritual metaphor. There is a perception that they do not need to change. They are satisfied with how they are. They feel good about themselves. We are blessed so we must be good. In this boastful self-appraisal they had failed to distinguish between material and spiritual prosperity.

"That this is an economic–spiritual boast is also hinted at by the parallel of Hos. 12:8 with Rev. 3:17, which has been observed by many commentators: 'and Ephraim said, "Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they will find in me no iniquity, which would be sin"' ... The unique wording and thought in common between these texts suggest that it is more than a mere coincidental parallel, as many think, and that John has intentionally alluded to Hosea. The immediate context of Hos. 12:8 points further to this. Hos. 12:7 refers to Israel as a 'merchant' who prospers through oppression. In the wider context of the book Israel attributes its material welfare to the benevolence of its idols (e.g., Hos. 2:5, 8; 12:8; cf. Hosea 11 and 13). They, like some Christians in Asia Minor, may have thought that idolatrous syncretism was not inconsistent with their belief in Yahweh. But Yahweh's indictment of them is that they are in reality 'worthless' (Hos. 12:11)."<sup>31</sup>

"The least we could say was that these people are living in a constant state of denial.

"Denial,' yes, but denial of their impoverished spiritual condition, not of their financial assets. After quoting verses 15 and 17 Mrs. White writes: 'Here is represented a people who pride themselves in their *possession of spiritual knowledge and advantages*. But

<sup>30</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 304.



they have not responded to the unmerited blessings that God has bestowed upon them. They have been full of rebellion, ingratitude, and forgetfulness of God; and still he has dealt with them as a loving, forgiving father deals with an ungrateful, wayward son.' (1888 Materials, 387).<sup>32</sup>

This spirit of self satisfaction is at the root of today's church. It is the problem over which God is sending final and internal appeals to His people. Excursus I describes what E. G. White declares is the by-product of a self-complacent attitude.

**Verse 17 – “and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:”**

- Wretched – They felt societal contentment but God saw them as rejects.
- Miserable – They felt good about themselves but were terrible Christians.
- Poor – They felt rich but were destitute spiritually.
- Blind – In a city with eye medicines, they didn't see how they really were.
- Naked – In a city known for its woolen garments, they were without clothes.

“What is it that constitutes the wretchedness, the nakedness of those who feel rich and increased with goods?—It is the *want of the righteousness of Christ*. In their own righteousness they are represented as clothed with filthy rags, and yet in this condition they flatter themselves that they are clothed upon with Christ's righteousness. Could deception be greater?”<sup>33</sup>

**VERSE 18: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”**

**Verse 18 – “I counsel thee”**

The words “I counsel thee” leads and draws rather than demands. It reflects the tender pastoral concern that Jesus extends to this most wayward of churches. Jesus urges a trilogy of advice to the Laodicean member. With this counsel comes a trilogy of reasons for the advise.

<u>Counsel</u>	<u>Why</u>	<u>Problem (vs 17)</u>
Buy of me gold	that thou mayest be rich	poor
Buy of me white raiment	that thou mayest be clothed	naked
Buy of me salve	that thou mayest see	blind

**Verse 18 – “buy of me”**

Jesus, the great healer, the great counselor is providing the remedy for the wretched and miserable state noted in the previous verse. But He asked them to buy and anoint. How can they buy gold, raiment and eyesalve if they are poor? Is goodness and rightness really for sale?

<sup>32</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, August 7, 1894.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Isaiah 55:1.

The Greek word *agorazo* is generally translated as “buy,” suggesting purchase. But there is another connotation – “redeem.” The implication is beautifully expressed as “redeem from me [it is from Jesus these things are obtained] gold and white raiment.” Through sacrifice of self and sin, His righteousness can once again be theirs.

The Redeemer has something He wants them to have. He wants them to be delivered from sin’s bondage by turning their wretched state into His likeness. They can have what Jesus has through the steps He gives. They can become what they deceptively think they now are.

How does this congregation “buy” or “redeem” these items?

“The great Redeemer represents Himself as a heavenly merchantman, laden with riches, calling from house to house, presenting His priceless goods [Rev. 3:18-20 quoted] [RH July 23, 1889].”<sup>34</sup>

“These precious treasures will not drop upon us without some exertion on our part. We must buy—‘be zealous and repent’ of our lukewarm state. We must be awake to see our wrongs, to search for our sins, and to zealously repent of them.”<sup>35</sup>

“Open your doors, says the great Merchantman, the possessor of spiritual riches, and transact your business with me. It is I, your Redeemer, who counsels you to buy of me.”<sup>36</sup>

What is the redemptive *tender*? Repentance and opening the heart’s door.

### **Verse 18 – “gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich”**

“The best identification is to interpret gold as a picture of high quality faith, a faith capable of withstanding trials and one that results in works. This symbolism was apparently common among early Christians (cf. Luke 12:21; 1 Tim. 6:18; James 1:3; 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; cf. Prov. 17:3; Zech. 13:9). It should be remembered, however, that associated with this purified faith that the Lord offers is a new heart. The new heart is also implied in the two symbols yet to come.

“Each recommended purchase in v. 18 has its own purpose, that of refined gold being expressed by *hina plouteses* (‘that you may become rich’). This purpose, as the other two also, corresponds to one of the three self-delusions of the Laodiceans expressed by the last three adjectives of v. 17. Such spiritual riches are the direct solution to abject spiritual poverty (cf. *ptochos*, v. 17).”<sup>37</sup>

“*Refined gold* is a biblical idiom for purifying one’s life by removing sin (cf. Job 23:10; Prov. 27:21; Mal. 3:2-3; Pss. Sol. 17:42-43, 51 [where the ‘uncleanness of unholy enemies’ to be removed from Israel probably refers to idolatry]). The metaphor is also used for the purifying effect of tribulation on God’s people (Zech. 13:9; 1 Pet. 1:6-9). The Laodiceans are under obligation to ‘refine’ themselves in order to gain spiritual ‘riches’ in the same manner as the church of Smyrna has done.”<sup>38</sup>

Faith that is so pure that it withstands trials is refined and reflects a character like His – “but he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

<sup>34</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 965.

<sup>35</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 142.

<sup>36</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, August 7, 1894.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 313-314.

<sup>38</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 305.

Job 23:10. The metaphor is carried even further: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” I Peter 1:6,7.

“Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James 1:3, 4.

“The faith of all will be tested. All will be tried as gold is tried in the fire.”<sup>39</sup>

“Gold is tried in the fire, that it may be purified from dross; but faith that is purified by trial, is more precious than refined gold. Then let us look upon trials in a reasonable way. Let us not come through them with murmuring and discontent. Let us not make mistakes in getting out of them. In times of trial we must cling to God and his promises. Some have said to me, ‘Do you not get discouraged at times when you are under trial?’ And I have answered, ‘Yes, if by discouragement you mean sad or cast down.’ ‘Didn’t you talk to any one of your feelings?’ ‘No; there is a time for silence, a time to keep the tongue as with a bridle, and I was determined to utter no word of doubt or darkness, to bring no shade of gloom upon those with whom I was associated. I have said to myself, I will bear the Refiner’s fire; I shall not be consumed. When I speak, it shall be of light; it shall be of faith and hope in God; it shall be of righteousness, of goodness, of the love of Christ my Saviour; it shall be to direct the minds of others toward heaven and heavenly things, to Christ’s work in heaven for us, and our work upon earth for him.’”<sup>40</sup>

Though we are obtaining faith and love, the “obtaining” is an experience of replacing. It is the process of moving belief to abiding trust by giving up of self. Then that faith is tested. If genuine, it will only strengthen.

“Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but the Refiner will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. God’s love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity; but it is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire; their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected.”<sup>41</sup>

Why is this “golden faith” so vital? Why does Jesus ask His church to own such a precious commodity? “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” I Peter 1:9. This request is salvation based. Faith will lead to that.

So we find the first corrective measure addresses the very core of loyalty to Jesus. This is what Revelation is all about – loyalty under trial.

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming.’ says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.” Malachi 3:1-3.

Notice the eschatological context of the above verse. He comes to refine suddenly. The warning suggests time is running out. It is also judgment of His people.

“The gold mentioned by Christ ... which all must have, has been shown me to be faith and love combined, and love takes the precedence of faith.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 02/11/1890.

<sup>41</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 621.

<sup>42</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 36.

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.” Galatians 5:6.

- Faith and love = trust
- Trust = abiding in Christ

That faith and love is a tool for end-time witnessing.

“The end is near! We have not a moment to lose! Light is to shine forth from God’s people in clear, distinct rays, bringing Jesus before the churches and before the world. The instrumentalities to be used are those souls who gladly receive the light of truth which God communicates to them. These are God’s agencies for communicating the knowledge of truth to the world. If through the grace of Christ His people will become new bottles, He will fill them with the new wine. God will give additional light, and old truths will be recovered, and replaced in the frame-work of truth; and wherever the laborers go, they will triumph. As Christ’s ambassadors, they are to search the Scriptures, to seek for the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other,—Christ our righteousness.

“I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.’ This is what needs to be brought into ... all our churches. God wants every soul to turn to the first love. He wants all to have the gold of faith and love, so that they can draw from the treasure to impart to others who need it.”<sup>43</sup>

**Verse 18 – “and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear;”**

“The second remedy is for the spiritual nakedness of the Laodiceans – the ‘white raiment of Christ’s righteousness’ (RH 7-9-08) which is one of the things they lacked (see RH 8-7-94) believing they were sufficiently clothed with their own righteousness. The spiritual nakedness of the Laodiceans was painfully apparent to anyone who cared to look. For them to walk around naked while being unconscious of their true condition suggests extreme naiveté. So, even though they are not hypocritical, their condition is nonetheless lethal if the remedy is not applied.”<sup>44</sup>

The faithful in Sardis were offered similar garments (Revelation 3:4, 5). These garments have eschatological significance.

“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and *keepeth his garments*, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.” Revelation 16:15.

The metaphor for having the correct “covering” or garment is emphasized in Matthew 22:11-14. The man without the wedding garment was cast out. Later in Revelation we read of a bride dressed in “fine linen, clean and bright,” which represents “the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:8).

There are two issues Jesus is emphasizing: one, to be clothed; the other, to avoid the shame of nakedness. One, what we must do now; the other, is what will happen later if we don’t. This becomes another eschatological message.

“The putting on of the garments Christ supplies comes at the moment of personal faith in Him, but the avoidance of shame will come at the time of His second advent.

<sup>43</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 259.

<sup>44</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

This is the shame of one who has professed Christ, but has not truly put on Christ (Trench). Shame and nakedness are frequently equated in Scripture (2 Sam. 10:4; Isa. 20:4; Ezek. 16:37; Hos. 2:3, 9; Nah. 3:5). Also, nakedness is a standing symbol (Heb. 4:13) (Beasley-Murray; Sweet). Not until the return of Christ for judgment will hidden issues of the heart become public. If the Laodiceans fail to repent, they will be utterly disgraced when Christ returns (Moffatt). *Phanerothe* ('be exposed') is regularly used in the NT for divine manifestations or revelations of things hidden from men now or at the last day, especially the latter (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:11; Eph. 5:13; 1 John 3:2). Reference to the revelation of man's inner condition at Christ's return is confirmed by usage of the same 'clothing–nakedness' terminology in the parenthetical blessing pronounced in Rev. 16:15. This promise, given in connection with the next-to-the-last bowl judgment, comes in conjunction with Christ's prediction that He would come as a thief (cf. 3:3). The imminence of His coming is a consideration placed before this church in 3:20.<sup>45</sup>

"Notice in Revelation 7 that those in white robes who surrounded God's throne are 'the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' – Rev 7:14. That is consistent with Jesus' counsel to the Laodiceans to obtain white robes from Him."<sup>46</sup> These saints are not only clothed in white but with the purest protection – Jesus' righteousness.

What kind of robe is this heaven-born coverage?

"This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us."<sup>47</sup>

There is more than white robes that God wants to cover us. The metaphor is expanded in Paul's writings: "I am charged with the message, Clothe yourself with the whole armor of Christ's righteousness. And, having done all you can do on your part, you have the assurance of victory. To every soul is granted the gracious opportunity of standing on the Rock of Ages."<sup>48</sup>

Though the white robes represent Christ's righteousness which we are clothed in, they and the gold are symbolic of the character that we must have to be saved.<sup>49</sup>

The dross is to be removed from the gold by testing our faith. The white robes are the purity and perfection which is to be in the heart cleansed by His blood. An end-time allusion can be made for the time those clothed and those naked will be separated. As just noted by Thomas, the "shame" of the nakedness won't come till the time Jesus is to return. But the separation begins to occur earlier.

"The time is not far distant when the test will come to every soul. The observance of the false sabbath will be urged upon us. The contest will be between the commandments of God and the commandments of men. Those who have yielded step by step to worldly demands and conformed to worldly customs will then yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death. At that time the gold will be separated from the dross. True godliness will be clearly distinguished from the appearance and tinsel of it. Many a star that we have admired for its brilliance will then go out in darkness. Those who have assumed the ornaments of the

<sup>45</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>46</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 311-312.

<sup>48</sup> White, Ellen G.; *My Life Today*, p. 311.

<sup>49</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 2, p. 175; White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, September 9, 1883.

sanctuary, but are not clothed with Christ's righteousness, will then appear in the shame of their own nakedness."<sup>50</sup>

"Who can truthfully say: 'Our gold is tried in the fire; our garments are unspotted by the world'? I saw our Instructor pointing to the garments of so-called righteousness. Stripping them off, He laid bare the defilement beneath. Then He said to me: 'Can you not see how they have pretentiously covered up their defilement and rottenness of character? 'How is the faithful city become an harlot!'"<sup>51</sup>

**Verse 18 – “and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”**

[I counsel you to buy] salve to rub on the eyes of you that you may see. Literal translation.<sup>52</sup>

This third remedy is for their blindness (verse 17).

"By common agreement, the anointing of the eyes is a spiritual anointing (as with ... [*chrisma*, 'anointing'], 1 John 2:20, 27; cf. John 9:6). [John 9:39-41].

"The eyesalve pictures the illuminating grace (Swete) or anointing of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 John 16:8-11) (Swete). The reproof of the Spirit that removes self-deception and bestows spiritual vision (Swete) should not be excluded, but the anointing or teaching ministry of the Spirit that provides illumination following conversion (Alford) is the more prominent. As the cure for spiritual blindness, this is the best parallel to the eye medicine for which this city was famous."<sup>53</sup>

"The eye is the sensitive conscience, the inner light, of the mind. Upon its correct view of things the spiritual healthfulness of the whole soul and being depends."<sup>54</sup>

That spiritual eyesight is to be opened to see who we really are!

"God has given to every man his work, and no one else can do that work for him. Oh, that you individually would apply the eyesalve, that you might see your defects of character and realize how God regards your love of the world, which is crowding out the love of God. Nothing can give you such power, such true self-reliance and nobility of soul, as a sense of the dignity of your work, an assurance that you are co-laborers with God in doing good and saving souls."

The spiritual eyes are to have discernment truth.

"We need to urge all to put on their spiritual eyeglasses, to have their eyes anointed that they may see clearly and discern the true pillars of the faith. Then they will know that 'the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his' (2 Tim. 2:19). We need to revive the old evidences of the faith once delivered to the saints."<sup>55</sup>

"Therefore we need to be exceedingly careful, and walk humbly before God, that we may have spiritual eyesalve that we may distinguish the working of the Holy Spirit of God from the working of that spirit that would bring in wild license and fanaticism. 'By their fruits ye shall know them' (Matt. 7:20). Those who are really beholding Christ will be changed into His image, even by the Spirit of the Lord, and will grow up to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God will inspire men with love and purity; and refinement will be manifest in their characters."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 188.

<sup>51</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 250.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas, *Op. cit.*, p. 860.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 315-316.

<sup>54</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 965.

<sup>55</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 2, pp. 25-26.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, bk 1, p. 142.

The Testimony adds deeper insight to the treatment motif that Jesus has outlined.

“It is very difficult, if not impossible for the same person to ‘see’ his OWN nakedness without the ‘eyesalve.’ That is such a common human characteristic and we must be willing to forgive it in others, ‘The “eyesalve,” *the Word of God*, makes the conscience smart under its application, for it convicts of sin. But the smarting is necessary that the healing may follow, and the eye be single to the glory of God.’ (OHC 350).”<sup>57</sup> See Excursus II for an outline of this process.

The character of gold, faith and love, was to be heated and refined and then tested. As that relationship matures, God wants to clothe our characters with His righteousness. Then, as the eyesalve opens our spiritual sensitivities, the Spirit leads us to become more and more like Him. These steps, coupled with the two following verses, outline the steps to Christ.

**VERSE 19: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”**

Between Philadelphia and Laodicea we have three levels of Christians described: (1) Those He might spit out, (2) those He disciplines, and (3) those He is pleased with (hold fast). Philadelphia is the most faithful and Laodicea is the least.<sup>58</sup>

The “as many as” (*hosous ean*) suggests He selectively loves. But “so loved [*agapao*] the world is all encompassing and draws within it the affection and friendship [*phileo*] of verse 19. “All you many members in Laodicea, whom I have affection for” reveals, again, the pastoral interest He has in each one. In fact, emotional interest.

“The surprising choice of this emotional word comes as a touching and unexpected manifestation of love toward those who deserve it least among the seven churches (Charles). Here is a case where Christ extends special treatment to a church in spite of its lukewarm condition.”<sup>59</sup> This is fascinating. He is about to spew them out of His mouth, yet He says He has an emotional love for them. This brings up the pathos of “How can I let thee go?”

God’s judicial wrath is not the theme to this congregation though the potential is expressed early on as a warning. The discourse directs towards a change, restoration and hope.

“Even though the state of a church, such as that in Laodicea verges on disaster, all is not lost if there are those in it who will receive Christ’s loving rebuke and come back to him. ‘I love’ is the Greek *phileo* (‘to have affection for’). This verb does not necessarily connote a lower level of love than *agapao*. Sometimes it has the force of *agapao* (e.g., John 5:20; 16:27; 20:22; cf. BAG, s.v.). Christ’s statement ‘I rebuke and discipline’ speaks of his love (Prov 3:12; 1 Cor 11:32; Heb 12:6).<sup>60</sup>

For those He cares for He says:

<sup>57</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Paulein, *Op. cit.*, Revelation 1-5, Seven Churches and a Heavenly Vision, The Bible Explorer Series recording tapes, tape 7 (The Ambassador Group, Harrisburg, PA; 1996).

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>60</sup> Gaebelien, *Op. cit.*, p. 459.

I love	<i>phileo</i> (fil-eh'-o) – have affection or personal attachment
I rebuke	<i>elescho</i> (el-ens'-kho) – admonish, rebuke, convict, at tempts to correct
I chasten	<i>paideno</i> (pahee-dyoo'-o) – discipline by punishment, teach through consequences

Fascinating is this discourse by Jesus. He is describing how the divine character of God deals with wrong. His rebuke is designed to bring conviction and then change.

Love → admonish/discipline → conviction → repentance

How does He discipline? Through trials of deprivation. This has the greatest potential of creating a dependency on Him. But has He put the Laodicean people through trials *in this message*? No. He will shortly though – He has counseled, He made pointedly clear the need. Now He invites zealous repentance. Quickly stop being a lukewarm pretender or chastening will come.

“The censure already given in vv. 15-18 does not mean hostility. It is rather an evidence of affection (Moffatt). The use of reproof and discipline to express love resides in the source text of this allusion (cf. Prov. 3:11-12). The ... (*mello*, ‘I am about to’) of v. 16 has already served notice that the opportunity for repentance is open. The ... (*oun*, ‘therefore’) that follows in v. 19 shows that this relationship of love is not yet reciprocal and should be sought through zeal and repentance. Most convincing is the fact that Rev. 16:15 pronounces blessing upon those who respond out of a state similar to that described in 3:18.”<sup>61</sup>

“He then uses one word to describe what we should be ‘zealous’ of: ‘REPENT!’ The Ephesians were counseled to do this twice (Rev. 2:5); the Pergamians once (Rev. 2:16); the Thyatirans four; and the Sardinians once (Rev. 3:3) as well as [the] ... Laodiceans. Therefore, all five churches were required to ‘repent’ except two: the Smyrnans (Rev. 2:8-11) and the Philadelphians. (Rev. 3:7-13).<sup>62</sup>

Jesus had told them that He wished they were either cold or hot. Now He says, be, therefore, *zestos* or hot. This is the divine wish: Become boiling hot for me.

Repent – “Gr. *metanoeo* (see on Matt. 3:2). The verb is in the singular, stressing the personal, individual nature of this admonition. Repentance, like salvation, can never be accomplished *en masse*. The spiritual experience of a relative or a friend can be of saving value to himself alone. This new attitude of sorrow for the past and zeal for the future is Christ’s purpose for the Laodicean church.”<sup>63</sup>

“He does not once call them Babylon, nor ask them to come out. But He says, ‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten’ ... Rev. 3:19.”<sup>64</sup>

The rebuke that comes to Laodicea has a deeper meaning for us today. God has given special messages for this church to help understand its condition. The collection of these is in the nine volumes of the *Testimonies*. One message is noted in Excursus III.<sup>65</sup> Often the words “I saw” or “I was shown” are referenced. That is heaven’s specifics for God’s people, for Laodicea. These are pointed truths for God’s people today and supplement our understanding of the Laodicean church.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>62</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 763.

<sup>64</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 2, p. 67.

<sup>65</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 252-272.



Speaking about some of the church's leaders in 1893: "Could they not discern there the revealings of the Spirit of God? Could they not see that God was opening the windows of heaven and pouring out a blessing? Why was this? Testimonies had been given correcting and counseling the church and many had made a practical application of the message to the Laodicean Church, and were confessing their sins and repenting in contrition of soul. They were hearing the voice of Jesus, the heavenly Merchantman, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man 'hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me' (Revelation 3:20)."<sup>66</sup>

"Sins exist in the church that God hates, but they are scarcely touched for fear of making enemies. Opposition has risen in the church to the plain testimony. Some will not bear it. They wish smooth things spoken unto them. And if the wrongs of individuals are touched, they complain of severity, and sympathize with those in the wrong. As Ahab inquired of Elijah, 'Art thou he that troubleth Israel?' they are ready to look with suspicion and doubt upon those who bear the plain testimony, and like Ahab overlook the wrong which made it necessary for reproof and rebuke. When the church depart[s] from God they despise the plain testimony, and complain of severity and harshness. It is a sad evidence of the lukewarm state of the church."<sup>67</sup>

"The people of God must see their wrongs and arouse to zealous repentance and a putting away of those sins which have brought them into such a deplorable condition of poverty, blindness, wretchedness, and fearful deception. I was shown that the pointed testimony must live in the church. This alone will answer to the message to the Laodiceans. Wrongs must be reproofed, sin must be called sin, and iniquity must be met promptly and decidedly, and put away from us as a people."<sup>68</sup>

What does this all mean? The Laodicean church – the end of time church – is in dire need of reproof. This is the church that stands rebuked. BUT – God makes it clear how to remedy the wrongs pointed out. Remarkably, it is the worst church since Christianity began. But, gratefully, not without hope.

**VERSE 20:** "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

### **Verse 20 – "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock:"**

*Idou* ("Behold") focuses on an anticipated blessing that Jesus is about to utter. "Listen," "Attention," "What you are about to hear is so important, I don't want you to miss one point," "Here I am" (NIV).

The imagery is very pastoral. He rebukes their false perceptions, offers them spiritual solutions, and now He prepares them, not as a disciplinarian, but as a caring friend to be their resident guardian.

He stands at the door. "Stands" (*hesteka*) gives the impression that He is abiding there. His position is established at the door of our hearts.

"This verse, in context, actually expresses Christ's feeling of being an outsider from His own church, desiring to be invited back in."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, pp. 349-350.

<sup>67</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, pp. 283-284.

<sup>68</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 260.

<sup>69</sup> Gregg, *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

In conjunction with the previous verse, to be zealous and repent, He is here waiting to enter when they are able to open the door. Jesus is building on a special restorative plan. Before He can come in, each individual has to comply with very specific steps. But He is staying right outside of the portal – waiting. The divine Merchantman has the gold and clothes and eyesalve ready.

“The picture comes from Song of Sol. 5:2 ... where the bridegroom knocks and seeks to be admitted by the bride (Swete). Christ presents Himself as right on the verge of entering and so furnishes incentive for the church to heed the commands of v. 19 (Beckwith).”<sup>70</sup>

The implication remains – the heart has another occupant. All the words and claims of being Christ’s will not open the door. The dynamics in these verses are salvic and form the basis for eternal life.

“Consider that Jesus could easily kick the door open and barge right in. Puny man would have no power to restrain Him. But, such is not how God works. It is His purpose to preserve the freedom of His creatures throughout the endless ages of eternity, so He must protect it now. It might seem, at first, that keeping the ‘door’ of choice closed would be an expression of noble self determination and independence. But, nothing could be farther from the truth. If we exclude the Lord (which we have power to do) we automatically open the door to the worst tyrant that ever lived. Therefore, ‘unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not [even] necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. If we do not cooperate with the heavenly agencies, Satan will take possession of the heart, and will make it his abiding place.’ (DA 324).”<sup>71</sup>

“Not the door of proffered opportunity in v. 8, nor the door of salvation (cf. Matt. 25:10; Luke 13:25). These doors God shuts and opens. The door here referred to is under the control of man, and each person may open or shut it at will. Christ awaits each man’s decision. This is the door to a man’s soul.”<sup>72</sup>

Jesus speaks this message through an “intercom” right into the heart. But He stands knocking. This presentation shows the Master begging for intimacy. “It indicates the intensity of His desire and the love flowing from Him.”<sup>73</sup>

“Boastful self-sufficiency and complacent self-righteousness have masked and concealed the beggary and nakedness of the soul; but with God all things are naked and manifest. Yet Jesus is going from door to door, standing in front of every soul-temple, proclaiming, ‘I stand at the door, and knock.’ As a heavenly merchantman, he opens his treasures, and cries, ‘Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.’ The gold he offers is without alloy, more precious than that of Ophir; for it is faith and love. The white raiment he invites the soul to wear is his own robes of righteousness, and the oil for anointing is the oil of his grace, which will give spiritual eyesight to the soul in blindness and darkness, that he may distinguish between the workings of the Spirit of God and the spirit of the enemy.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 321.

<sup>71</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 763.

<sup>73</sup> Diop, Ganoune; “Jesus Christ in the midst of His people: A study of Revelation 1:9-3:22,” *J Adventist Theological Society*, 8/1-2 (1997) , p. 55.

<sup>74</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 08/07/94.

Laodicea knows the message, hears the knock but essentially replies back through inaction, I don't need you to come in.

Canter gives us beautiful insight which contemplates heaven's regard for us. "Jesus shows the Laodiceans that He is *taking the initiative* in re-establishing His relationship with them." But he goes on, "The sinner must only respond."<sup>75</sup>

We love because He first loved us. I John 4:19. What is that response? Repentance.

"How willing is Christ to take possession of the soul temple if we will let Him! He is represented as waiting and knocking at the door of the heart. Then why does He not enter? It is because the love of sin has closed the door of the heart. As soon as we consent to give sin up, to acknowledge our guilt, the barrier is removed between the soul and the Saviour."<sup>76</sup>

"[Rev. 3:20 quoted] He is not repulsed by scorn or turned aside by threatening, but continually seeks the lost ones, saying, 'How shall I give thee up?' Hosea 11:8. Although His love is driven back by the stubborn heart, He returns to plead with greater force, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.' The winning power of His love compels souls to come in. And to Christ they say, 'Thy gentleness hath made me great.' Ps. 18:35."<sup>77</sup>

How hard is this knock? That is an important spiritual issue. He knocks (*krouo*) "with the knuckles." He is rapping "with a heavy blow."<sup>78</sup> That's just like Jesus. He makes sure that there is enough evidence to respond and make decisions on. Jesus has an unmistakable knock. It is part of His "caller ID."

"So great is the unwillingness of the Lord to leave you, and such is His love toward you, that notwithstanding your life has not been in accordance with His will, and your works and ways have been offensive to Him, the Majesty of heaven condescends to beg the privilege of making you a visit and leaving you His blessing."<sup>79</sup>

Is there any greater passionate and loving interest than these remarkable scenes – divinity pleading to come into the dysrhythmic heart of man?

### **Verse 20 – "if any man hear my voice, and open the door,"**

Man's response is twofold: hear (*akono*) Jesus' voice (to understand what He is saying) and to open (*anoigo*) the door (remove any barrier that would impede His entrance).

The knock is undoubtedly heard, but there is a question whether His voice is understood.

"The custom of the time was to speak and identify oneself when knocking at someone's door (cf. Acts 12:13-14), so the opening of the door was in response to both the knock and the voice. The above discussion identifies this response with the repentance commanded in v. 19. This is the climactic decision of a lost person in turning to Christ for salvation."<sup>80</sup>

What does it mean to open the door? What barriers impede Jesus from entering? Why doesn't He just come right in?

<sup>75</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>76</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 325.

<sup>77</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 235.

<sup>78</sup> Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent's Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 473.

<sup>79</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 224.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 323.

“Some opened the door slightly and permitted a little light from His presence to enter, but did not welcome the heavenly Visitor. There was not room for Jesus. The place which should have been reserved for Him was occupied with other things.”<sup>81</sup>

“I saw that many have so much rubbish piled up at the door of their heart that they cannot get the door open. Some have difficulties between themselves and their brethren to remove. Others have evil tempers, selfish covetousness, to remove before they can open the door. Others have rolled the world before the door of their heart, which bars the door. All this rubbish must be taken away, and then they can open the door and welcome the Saviour in.”<sup>82</sup>

“There is something that you must do. You must clear the way and open the doors of your hearts. Perhaps you have a sin of self-indulgence to remove; perhaps some member should be removed, and it is better to enter into life maimed than to perish with all your members.”<sup>83</sup>

“Jesus will not force open the door. You must open it yourselves and show that you desire His presence by giving Him a sincere welcome.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Verse 20 – “I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”**

“I will come” has been seized by many commentators as an allusion to the *parousia*. Others have linked this to the personal appeal that threads its way through the Laodicean message. The dual allusion does not detract from the beauty of the “coming” of Jesus. It actually enhances the personal appeal and reinforces the eschatological theme presented to all the seven churches.

#### **Personal Imagery**

“It is a beautiful picture and reveals the intimate fellowship the believer may have with his risen Lord. The act of dining together creates a bond of fellowship between two persons. This is particularly true in the Orient. Sharing a meal is a symbol of friendship, the host furnishing not only the meal, but, greater still, the freedom of his home. As we open our heart’s door to Christ we thereby invite Him to share our innermost lives.”<sup>85</sup>

The reference to Jesus standing at the heart’s door wanting to “come in” is used often in sermons and appeals. It ties to the spiritual relationship Jesus revealed in His prayer: “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one.” John 17:23. This is the tenor of the preceding verses. His passion is one of our “becoming like He is.” This would symbolize the ultimate oneness that the gospel appeals to.

Additionally, if the door can’t be opened because of the rubbish of sin, then it is the soul temple that Jesus is calling out to when He knocks – “Let me in!”

“Oh, how precious was this promise, as it was shown to me in vision! ‘I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.’ Oh, the love, the wondrous love of God! After all our lukewarmness and sins He says: ‘Return unto Me, and I will return unto thee, and will heal all thy backslidings.’ This was repeated by the angel a number of times. ‘Return unto Me, and I will return unto thee, and will heal all thy backslidings.’”<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 216.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 143.

<sup>83</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 2, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 217.

<sup>85</sup> Anderson, Roy Allen; *Unfolding the Revelation*, p. 46.

<sup>86</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 143.

“It is through the Holy Spirit that Christ and the Father come to have fellowship with us (John 14:23).<sup>87</sup>

“If they would choose to open the door He will come in and share an intimate candle-light dinner with them, thus restoring them to favor.”<sup>88</sup>

This is an important concept that Shumate points out. The “coming in” and the “sup” signals restoration. A completeness of fellowship is pictured. This is foundational to the promise that is now to be given.

### End-Time Imagery

“The more probable identification is the eschatological door through which Christ will enter at His second advent. This picture stresses the urgency for people to seek a right relationship with Christ. A convincing proof of this view is that this figure was widely used among early Christians as a way of portraying the Lord’s return (cf. Matt. 24:33; Mark 13:29; Luke 12:36; James 5:9). It also parallels the command–incentive sequence in other messages, i.e., a reference to Christ’s coming following the command for repentance (cf. 2:5, 16; 3:3) (Swete). The source of the language of v. 20, Song of Sol. 5:1 ff., is also alluded to in Luke 12:35-38 where it is given a comparable eschatological sense (Moffatt). Jewish interpreters handled this OT passage in a similar way, using an allegorical sense to look forward to the coming of their Messiah (Sweet).

“Lord’s coming (Walvoord; Johnson). The evidence is quite convincing that the time of the promise’s fulfillment is Christ’s return, but this does not exclude a secondary reference to conversion, which is a prerequisite to participation in the blessings of that return. The eschatological tone of the promise is overwhelming: the ‘eschatological *idou*’ (‘behold’) (cf. 5:8,9) which introduces v. 20, the reference to the eschatological supper later in v. 20, the broader context of the message (cf. 3:16, 18, 21), the analogy of five of the other six messages (excluding the one to Smyrna), the broader context of Revelation (cf. 16:15), and the connotation that first-century Christians put on the picture of Christ knocking at the door (cf. Matt. 24:33; Mark 13:29; Luke 12:36; James 5:9) (Moffatt; Beckwith; Mounce).

“Though the Supper is a preview of the Lord’s return (cf. Matt. 26:29), the language of this verse points to a coming of the Lord that is much more personal and intimate than experienced in the corporate worship of the church (Swete; Beckwith; Caird). Other attempts at identifying this supper experience have usually referred it to present fellowship with Christ enjoyed by believers (Beasley-Murray; Mounce). These, however, fail to appreciate that Christ’s present supping with believers is only a foretaste of the future. As part of the bride of Christ, believers will participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (cf. Rev. 19:9) and in this manner celebrate in His future kingdom (cf. Luke 22:16, 29, 30) (Smith). The language of this promise makes it impossible to rule out primary reference to the future messianic kingdom (Beasley-Murray; Mounce).

“The ‘supper’ picture of fellowship in the messianic kingdom was widespread in the early church (cf. Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:30)(Beckwith). So interpreted, this promise follows the pattern of Luke 12:25-38 (particularly v. 37) where a meal of fellowship follows the entrance of the master. Future bliss was regularly conceived of as a feast (cf. Enoch 62:14) (Moffatt). Eating with the Messiah and ruling with Him (cf. Rev. 3:21) are regularly brought together (Swete; Beckwith). The contextual tie of this figure

<sup>87</sup> Gaebelain, *Op. cit.*, p. 459.

<sup>88</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

is the Apocalypse with 19:9 and the invitation to the wedding feast there (Bullinger). That is the prophetic fruition of the promise made in Rev. 3:20.<sup>89</sup>

Canter makes an interesting tie: “Eating together is a close form of communion. But there is also another eschatological connotation in this imagery. We see Jesus at the door with the offer of a supper together. Referring to the ‘signs of the times’ that He had described to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus said ‘Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, {right} at the door.’ Matt 24:32-33. As soon as we enter into heaven we will dine together with Jesus at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

“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.’ 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. And he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God.’ Revelation 19:7-9.”<sup>90</sup>

**VERSE 21: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”**

**Verse 21 – “To him that overcometh ... even as I also overcame,”**

Literally, *ho nikon*, the *one* who overcomes.<sup>91</sup> Though addressed to a church, the message is to each individual. What does “overcometh” mean? Jesus just outlined the steps to overcoming in verses 18-20. The apostle John had previously given insight into this overcoming and indwelling. He that overcomes the world believes Jesus is the Son of God (I John 5:5); whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him (I John 4:15); he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him and he in him (I John 3:24).

“As usual, each verse is full of profound words to contemplate, and this is no exception. Note that the Lord Himself says that He had to ‘overcome’ just like we do. The words ‘overcometh’ and ‘overcame’ are from ‘nikao’ meaning ‘to conquer, come off victorious.’ It is found 29 times in the New Testament, 17 of which are in the book of Revelation. Therefore, ‘overcoming,’ being victorious in the matter of Christian living is a subject of major importance in John’s vision.”<sup>92</sup>

The question must be pressed further – What is man to overcome?

“The question is, Shall we keep on sinning as though it were an impossibility for us to overcome? How are we to overcome? *As Christ overcame, and that is the only way.* He prayed to His heavenly Father. We can do the same. When tempted to speak wrong and do wrong resist Satan and say, I will not surrender my will to your control. I will cooperate with divine power and through grace be conqueror.—Manuscript 83, 1891.”<sup>93</sup>

There we find the key. It is not a blind challenge. We have the example of Jesus. Look to Him, follow Him, overcome as He did.

“*Man must pass over the ground over which Christ has passed.* As Christ overcame every temptation which Satan brought against Him, so man is to overcome. And those

<sup>89</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 321-324.

<sup>90</sup> Canter, *Op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>91</sup> Douglas, *Op. cit.*, p. 860.

<sup>92</sup> Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>93</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 3, p. 195.

who strive earnestly to overcome are brought into a oneness with Christ that the angels in heaven can never know.”<sup>94</sup>

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.’ [Rev. 21] Verse 7. Here, also, conditions are specified. In order to inherit all things, we must resist and overcome sin.”<sup>95</sup>

“Those who would overcome must put to the tax every power of their being. They must agonize on their knees before God for divine power. *Christ came to be our example*, and to make known to us that we may be partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>96</sup>

“Many desire the final reward and victory which are to be given to overcomers, but are not willing to endure toil, privation, and denial of self, *as did their Redeemer*. It is only through obedience and continual effort that we shall overcome as Christ overcame.”<sup>97</sup>

**Verse 21 – “will I grant to sit with me in my throne, ... and am set down with my Father in his throne.”**

From threatening to vomit these believers out of His mouth to sitting with Him on His throne next to the Father in a few short verses shows the amazing power of redemption. Jesus is threatening, then directive, then pastoral, then consoling – “I did it, so can you.”

“The promise to the overcomers concerns the sharing in Christ’s future reign in the eschatological kingdom: ‘I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.’ Such a joint reign with Christ has already been referred to earlier in the book (1:6, 9; 2:26-27) and appears later on (5:10; [1:15] 20:4-6). The kingdom reign is also a theme in other NT writings (Luke 22:28-30; Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12). As Christ overcame through his suffering and death (John 16:33) and entered into the highest honor God could bestow, that of being seated at his ‘right hand’ of sovereignty (Mark 16:19; Acts 2:22ff.; Rev 22:1), so believers who suffer with Christ even to the point of death will share in the honor of Christ’s exalted position. The distinction between the Father’s throne and Christ’s throne is no mere rhetoric. On the contrary, it differentiates aspects of God’s program in history (1 Cor 15:24-28). Christ is reigning now, for there is a sense in which the eschatological or messianic kingdom of God was inaugurated in Christ’s earthly ministry, death, and resurrection. But the promise here, as elsewhere in the NT, foresees a final earthly consummation of the kingdom that awaits the return of Christ.”<sup>98</sup>

This is a segue into the next chapter where a vision of the throne room is given. This throne is the ruling center of the universe. Where does this become a reality? Luke 22:29-30 reveals the context of the *parousia*: “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (cf. Matthew 19:28, Mark 8:38–9:1).

Jesus’ close throne relationship with the Father is expressed in Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3, 8:1 and 12:2. “Jesus ... set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Are there two thrones or one? Revelation 22:1 would suggest one, but the imagery of this whole verse is two. Though we will sit down with Him on His throne, Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:29-30 suggest twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The picture is expanded in 20:4 by “And I saw thrones (plural)” (*kai eldon thronous*). Yet we

<sup>94</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol 7, p. 926.

<sup>95</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 540.

<sup>96</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 409.

<sup>97</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 59.

<sup>98</sup> Gaebelien, *Op. cit.*, pp. 459-460.

find the 24 elders on thrones in 4:4, 5:10 and 11:16. This will be discussed in greater detail as the study continues.

“The distinction between Christ’s throne and the Father’s is not merely rhetorical. It provides for different aspects of God’s future program (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28) by recognizing the final ... consummation of Christ’s kingdom at His return (Johnson). His throne is the one to which He is heir as David’s son (cf. Ps. 122:5; Ezek. 43:7; Luke 1:32) (Bullinger). He will occupy it when He comes in His glory (Luke 1:32; cf. Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 25:31; Acts 2:30; Heb. 2:5-8; Rev. 20:4). Christ’s occupancy of the throne of David is a major emphasis of Revelation from its very beginning to the very end (cf. 1:5, 7; 22:16). It is this throne ... on which the overcomer is promised a place.

“The pattern followed in sharing His throne with overcomers is that of the Father in sharing His throne with Christ: *hos kago enikesa kai ekathisa meta tou patros mou en to throno autou* (‘as I also overcame and sat down with My Father in His throne’). A comparison of Christ’s relations with believers with the Father’s relations with Him is characteristically Johannine (cf. John 15:9, 10; 17:21, 22; 20:21)(Moffatt).”<sup>99</sup>

We are referred back to the preface of the book when the exalted position of God’s people becomes their reward as kings and priests, suggesting rulership and judgeship (1:6).

“Will I grant to sit with me in my throne.—Those who have a seat at the Saviour’s side on His throne are only that class who have overcome as He overcame.”<sup>100</sup>

“In this life we must meet fiery trials and make costly sacrifices, but the peace of Christ is the reward. There has been so little self-denial, so little suffering for Christ’s sake, that the cross is almost entirely forgotten. *We must be partakers with Christ of His sufferings if we would sit down in triumph with Him on His throne.* So long as we choose the easy path of self-indulgence and are frightened at self-denial, our faith will never become firm, and we cannot know the peace of Jesus nor the joy that comes through conscious victory. The most exalted of the redeemed host that stand before the throne of God and the Lamb, clad in white, know the conflict of overcoming, for they have come up through great tribulation. Those who have yielded to circumstances rather than engage in this conflict will not know how to stand in that day when anguish will be upon every soul, when, though Noah, Job, and Daniel were in the land, they could save neither son nor daughter, for everyone must deliver his soul by his own righteousness.”<sup>101</sup>

**VERSE 22:** “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

“The opinions we have received through listening to the traditions of men must not be permitted to bar the way so that we shall not receive the light that requires reformation and transformation. Enter your closets with the Bible in your hand, and there commune with God, having an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto you. Let your heart be humbled and teachable, softened and subdued by the Holy Spirit. If you find that your former views are not sustained by the Bible, it is for your eternal interest to learn this as soon as possible; for when God speaks in His Word, our preconceived opinions must be yielded up and our ideas brought into harmony with a ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ Christ said, ‘Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.’ With submissive spirit you

<sup>99</sup> Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 325-326.

<sup>100</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 234.

<sup>101</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 215



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are to obey the truth at any cost, knowing that the precepts of the Bible are the word of the eternal God.”<sup>102</sup>

“The Lord leaves in darkness no man who has an ear to hear and a heart to understand.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Southern Work*, p. 47.

<sup>103</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Upward Look*, p. 143.

## SUMMARY – LAODICEA

Pointedly, the Testimony states that the description of the Laodicean church is the condition of the church today. It, therefore, becomes Christ's mission statement for all those claiming to be Christians at the end of time. Jesus warns against world likeness. He challenges all Christians to be doers of the Word – to be like Him.

Jesus established His authority base, once again, through self-declarations. He is the Amen, the absolute verity, the faithful uncompromising martyr, the creator and re-creator. In Him is embodied all truth, the alpha and the omega of all time, the ultimate sacrifice of love and the unexcelled power of divine presence. He is about to show how Laodicea needs this verity.

With that authority base He established the right to judge. The Creator can pronounce life or death on the created. The state of Laodicea was lukewarm, uncommitted to Jesus. He wished they would either reject Him outright (where there might still be hope) or be on fire for the kingdom (then they would be His forever). But the tepid spirit brings a threat (*mello*) – I am about to vomit you out.

This threat means He is in full control of the discarding process. But He said – “I am about to” execute judgment. This is an allusion to eschatological wrath. The judging has begun, the execution of the outcome of that executive decision is imminent.

Jesus then addressed the denial of Laodicea. Their spirit suggests they were in God's favor. Before He addresses this arrogant claim, He jolts them into reality that they are about to become a rejected people, discarded with the projectile force of vomit. This imagery contrasts their satisfied perception against God's. “I think I am spiritually good” was their boastful self-appraisal. Then with judgmental swiftness, they are told that they are everything He despises.

This was Jesus' segue into giving pastoral advice to lead them to make a change. Jesus then creates the imagery of being a divine merchant, peddling gold, raiment and salve. They were purchased with the *tender* of blood sacrifice. They can redeem the qualities they lost through giving up self and sin.

What will they redeem back? Gold – a high quality of faith. Jesus judges that that will make them rich. This won't come easy. It will be through fire, tribulation and even persecution. Golden faith withstands *the test* and removes all earthliness. Peter talks of this vital experience and says that the end of faith is the salvation of our soul (1 Peter 1:9).

Malachi 3:1-3 talks of this refining process. The context is one of suddenness and urgency. He is coming *suddenly* to refine. Since Laodicea is during judgment time, it represents the last window of opportunity being presented to the church. The gold is also a tool to reach out to others to bring His saving righteousness.

An allusion to the final scenes just before the second coming of Jesus is found in the garments. *Christ's righteousness* comes the moment personal faith is exercised in Him. The shame of nakedness will come when faith that is tried fails. This instruction is expanded in Revelation 7:4 where we see the saints in white robes before God's throne. They were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. They remained faithful when tried. This begins just before the Sunday laws come.

Finally, Jesus said that they were to be anointed by the Holy Spirit. How? Through “buying” it – by laying aside every sin, everything that would impede the working of the Spirit. Another application of the eyesalve is God's Word. Then spiritual insight is given to see our deformity, and spiritual power to overcome ensues.

With pastoral interest Jesus tells them not to think this rebuke and firmness is unloving. Those He loves, He stresses. We now have the loving imagery of how Jesus

draws the heart to Himself. Through love he admonishes and even disciplines all to bring conviction. Then He emphatically says: “Repent.”

The oft cited picture of Jesus knocking at the door of our hearts is introduced by Jesus in the Laodicean message. There has been an ill-directed sensate response by Christians to this. “Jesus – at our heart’s door? I’ll let Him right in.” The previous verses make clear what has to be done to let Him in. Sin has to be taken away just to get the door open. Repentance for the past is required. All self is to be set aside. That door opens with willing preparation.

This presents a vital New Testament truth. Before Jesus comes in, man must negotiate a trade with the heavenly Merchantman. He takes our repentance, sins and selfishness. In turn, we receive the garment of His righteousness, power of His Spirit and an abiding faith. He can come in only when we relinquish self. In fact, as we repent, He gives us power to help in the heart cleansing.

The “coming in” to us has a personal appeal. Many scholars see this also as eschatological imagery. The whole message is the final appeal at judgment time to repent and be ready. For those who persevere and prepare, Jesus will come, and they all will enjoy the banquet at the wedding feast. Jesus then gives the remarkable promise that all the overcomers will sit with Him on His throne. Again, this is a second-coming reward.

**Promise to Laodicea:** “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” (Revelation 3:21).

**Fulfillment:** “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

## Summary of Revelation 2 and 3

The book of Revelation unfolds the final saga in the conflict between Christ and Satan. The play and counter-play that is staged on earth and in heaven is graphically detailed. The messages to the seven churches addresses a similar conflict but tragically within God's own body of believers.

Though directed to local Middle Eastern congregations, and in spite of weak symbolic ties to historical periods of Christian history, those sermonettes outline pointed issues in an end-time cleansing of sin out of God's body of believers. The seven churches' "story" reveals God's activity in the final development of His covenant people.

There has been a difficult struggle within various camps of thinking over the meaning of these passages. Much of this conflict lies at the feet of deciding before the pages are opened which generation these words apply to. This prison of understanding has hampered prophetic insight. This is a fascinating dilemma. Gregg shows how the interpretive tools bias the prophetic view: "In the view of the *historicists*, the letters contain a cryptic reference to the conditions in which the whole church would be found at varying times in her history. The church of Ephesus represents the church in John's own day, while the church in Laodicea stands for the church in the end times.

"The *preterists* consider the letters to apply to little else than the contemporary situation of the seven churches as they existed in John's time. As with all biblical epistles, however, application to similar churches of any time is acknowledged.

"*Futurists* may side with the *historicists* or, alternatively, with the *preterists* and the *spiritual* interpreters as to the application of the letters, though they see the reference to the 'things which shall take place after this' (1:19) as referring to the end of the present age.

"*Spiritual* interpreters see the purpose of the book as communicating to the whole church the facts of God's sovereignty in history and His vindication of the righteous. The seven churches symbolize the church of all times, and the letters apply to any churches in which the relevant circumstances prevail."<sup>1</sup>

As has been shown, numerous lessons drawn from each church by the Spirit of Prophecy are directed as God's end-time people. To compartmentalize by time periods the seven messages only minimizes their significance. Though it is stated that the Laodicean testimony is especially applicable to this time<sup>2</sup> all messages have remnant instruction.

Feeling concern for this restricted view, Sheffield made this observation: "We may with surety un-date the messages and the counsel to each. They are written for us as surely as they were written for them.

"The warnings and counsels to the seven churches are given for this hour. This direct word to John from Jesus himself has come down to us in our day. It is our common belief that we are those upon whom the ends of the world have come. Heed to both warning and gracious counsel is not an option. We must listen to him and become people possessed by the Spirit or we shall perish."<sup>3</sup>

Addressing the historicist views, Clover made several deep observations.

<sup>1</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), 1997, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 411.

<sup>3</sup> Sheffield, Harold, M.D.; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), pp. i, iii.

“The most difficult questions regarding the Historicist view of the seven churches are those regarding the basic assumption that these messages are chronologically sequential. Throughout the prophetic portion of Revelation – which I hold to begin with Revelation 4 – the major elements are clearly consecutive (e.g., the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Seal and so forth). Such is not the case with the Churches. In fact, the seven churches to which these letters are addressed *all existed at the same time*. There was no chronological sequence to the churches. The messages that were given each applied to *different members* of the Christian church that existed *at the same time*. Such is still the case. Dr. Bursey urges:

“Remember the call Jesus makes seven times: ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.’ Note the plural address. Like the original listeners we are invited to consider the values of the message for ourselves. Hopefully, the original listeners did more than ‘look over the shoulders’ to see what were the sins of their contemporaries elsewhere in Asia Minor. The calls to hear suggest that you and I and all good ‘hearers’ of the Spirit need to be acquainted with all of the messages. Our circumstances change. We require different advice from God at different times.”<sup>4</sup>

A collective view of these individual characteristics helps one to see the spectrum of problems confronting the Christian church of today and a beautiful overview of qualities those with a deep spiritual commitment have. The corrective measures that Jesus conveys collectively form a basis for ministers, the church leaders He is specifically addressing, in dealing with wrong within a congregation. The dynamics of each of these are profound and extensive. They form an administrative guide to God’s church of any age.

“These seven letters, written by John, were sent to real people in real church congregations. They outline specific methods of attack by Satan on local congregations in various settings. Along side of Satan’s evil designs to destroy the church Christ presents Himself as adequate to meet these threats with remedies that bring healing and restoration. The messages to the seven churches are as valid today for similar church congregations as when written two centuries ago. Earl Palmer writes, ‘I believe we must avoid all luxurious interpretations of the seven letters. The seven letters of the Book of Revelation make better sense and are more spiritually and theologically helpful when they are seen in the same light as the letters of the New testament. They teach the Gospel and its implications for life.’<sup>5</sup>

### Structure of the Seven Churches

In general, each letter or “epistle” can be divided into seven divisions – Jesus always opens with a command to write, and He identifies where the message is to go. Then comes the specific thoughts for that church. Command to Write:

1. Self-description of Christ
2. Commendation and encouragement
3. Censure for sin(s)
4. Exhortation with warning

<sup>4</sup> Bursey, Dr. Ernest J.; Theological Department, Walla Walla College, research document on the *Historicist View of the Seven Churches*.

<sup>5</sup> Shumate, Gordon; *Revelation Two and Three* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 10.

5. Special sin issues to address
6. Warnings and promises to overcome
7. Hear Spirit<sup>6,7</sup>

These seven divisions have church specific issues that are presented for each individual and/or congregation. They also outline a message that is applicable to God's last people and church. Out of the church a remnant will come. God wants that remnant to be as large as possible.

*The command to write* was given previously (1:1, 19). Now it is repeated prior to the message in conjunction with the name of the specific church. This gives a unique personal quality for that congregation. It is like saying, "Dear Sardis, I am glad to write this letter to you. I have an interest in your people."

*The self-description of Christ* is an authoritative visual message apropos to a specific church: "Christ presents himself with certain attributes particularly suitable to the situation of each church, faith in which provides the basis for overcoming the specific problem that the church faces; the situation and the particular problem are reviewed (introduced by 'I know')."<sup>8</sup>

This imagery has parallels to the picture of Christ in chapter 1. "No church gets all of Jesus. But, each church gets a unique Jesus."<sup>9</sup> The all-encompassing Jesus appears in a specific expression to minister to each congregation. This remarkable way each message opens continues also the pastoral leadership concern we get a glimpse of in chapter 1 as He walked among the churches. His presence is need specific. Putting all the images together, we see the picture of how Jesus presents to the church of the last days:

1. **Ephesus** [2:1 (1:13)]: Jesus holds the seven stars. He is among the lampstands. His presence is among His people, and its leaders are secure in His hand and have the assurance of His guidance.
2. **Smyrna** [2:8 (1:17,18)]: Jesus is the first and the last. He died and is alive. To those under trials, persecution and threat of martyrdom, in the time of trouble, He is not only the eternal God but is a fellow sufferer and has the keys to the grave.
3. **Pergamos** [2:12 (1:16)]: Jesus has a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. He will meet out justice to all wrong and to those hurting His people. He makes sure truth is clear, penetrating and not adulterated by falsehood.
4. **Thyatira** [2:18 (1:14, 15)]: Jesus' eyes are fire and His feet are glowing brass. He is the judge and executor against wrong in the last part of probation. His movements are pure and precise among His people, and He is always present to help.
5. **Sardis** [3:1 (1:4, 16, 20)]: Jesus holds seven Spirits and stars in His hand. He has available the full measure of His Spirit for His leaders, His people and, finally, the 144,000.

<sup>6</sup> Paulien, Jon, Ph.D.; *Seven Churches and a Heavenly Vision, The Bible Explorer Series* recording tapes, tape 3 (The Ambassador Group, Harrisburg, PA; 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>8</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 225.

<sup>9</sup> Paulien, *Op. cit.*

6. **Philadelphia** [3:7 (1:18)]: Jesus is holy and true. God’s people will be sanctified and sealed and share the throne in heaven.
7. **Laodicea** [3:4 (1:5)]: Jesus is the faithful and true witness, ruler of creation, firstborn of dead. He has been the faithful martyr and firstborn of the resurrection. We will be part of His new creation and kingdom where there is victory over death.

His *commendation and encouragement* is a beautiful way to introduce His pastoral visit. He wants them to sense His sensitivity to what they are doing right. This approach maintains the relationship and prepares the congregation and its leaders to receive counsel. Collectively, it shows what ideals He wants in His end-time church. He commands:

1. Good works of service, patience (not giving up), intolerance of the dishonest and false leaders (Ephesus)
2. Bearing up under trials, persecution, poverty and hypocrisy of other members (Smyrna)
3. Holding high the name of Jesus and the gospel even if threatened with martyrdom (Pergamos)
4. Works of charity, help to those in need, confidence in Jesus (Thyatira)
5. Maintains the Christian name in face of non-Christian elements (Sardis)
6. Though weak, obeyed My word and not denied Jesus in word or deed (Philadelphia)
7. Nothing commendable (Laodicea)

Jesus pointedly *censures for sin* and makes it clear that He will make corrective moves to have it cease. At the end of time there is a concerted appeal to the world, but especially to His people, to go all the way with Jesus. Sin is to be given up – permanently. That will be one of the characteristics of the 144,000 before the Latter Rain and Loud Cry. It is also part of the last warning that the conflict between truth and error, right and wrong is about to cease. His church will become pure through appeals, persecution and the shaking.

Paulien makes a beautiful point. Since repeatedly Jesus says, “I know” relative to understanding the depth of our hearts, “there is nothing to hide any more. Thus, there is no reason why we shouldn’t confess our sins.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus’ concerns:

1. Left your first love, fallen (Ephesus – 2:4-5)
2. No complaints (Smyrna – 2:8-11)
3. Hold false doctrines (Pergamos – 2:14-15)
4. Interest in and loyalty to other gods, unable to take counsel well (Thyatira – 2:20-21)
5. Imperfect service (Sardis – 3:2)

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

6. No complaints (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Feels no deep need for Jesus (Laodicea – 3:17)

Then Jesus *exhorts and warns the churches* as to what steps need to be taken. This parallels the appeal that began with the Christian Church as the apostles went out to “repent.” There is a required duality of action that has been part of developing a people He can call His own throughout history. Set aside sin, repent and cling to God–Jesus’ saving grace. This dual message does not cease till the work is done. The Three Angels’ Messages embody this appeal. Here, in the message to five of the seven churches, we find a focus on Jesus and the urgent command to cease what is displeasing Him.

1. Repent, remember the spiritual heights of the past (Ephesus – 2:5)
2. No corrective advice (Smyrna – 2:8-11)
3. Repent (Pergamos – 2:16)
4. Repent (she didn’t) (Thyatira – 2:23)
5. Repent (Sardis – 3:3)
6. No corrective advice (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Repent, be zealous (Laodicea – 3:19)

Then Jesus gives specific things He wants the congregations to do. He has *special issues to address* to the remnant. Putting each of these together, it gives the imagery of what the hope for the remnant will be like. All error must be addressed. A complete turning away from wrong must occur to receive the sealing.

1. Do your first works, have the same excitement you had when you first gave your heart to me (Ephesus – 2:5)
2. Fear not poverty, trials, prison or persecution (Smyrna – 2:10)
3. No special message (Pergamos – 2:12-17)
4. Hold fast till I come, keepeth my works (Thyatira – 2:25-26)
5. Be watchful, strengthen the things which remain that are about to die, remember what you have had in the past and hold onto it (Sardis – 3:2-3)
6. No special message (Philadelphia – 3:7-13)
7. Buy gold, white raiment and eyesalve (Laodicea – 3:18)

In God’s final appeal there are great contrasts drawn between problems and promises. It is God finally saying, “Look what is eternally before you. See what will befall you if you turn away from me.”



<u>Problem or Counsel</u>	<u>Promise</u>	
1. Left thy first love	Eat of Tree of Life	Ephesus – 2:4, 7
2. Be faithful unto death	Give thee crown of life Not hurt by second death	Smyrna – 2:10-11
3. Tolerate false doctrine	Eat hidden manna White stone New name	Pergamos – 3:14-15, 17
4. Tolerate false doctrine and worship	Give power over nations Rule with rod of iron Give morning star Power to rule like Christ	Thyatira – 2:24, 26, 27
5. Live like Christians but dead	Walk with me in white Clothed in white raiment His name not to be blot out of the book of life Confess his name before Father and angels	Sardis – 3:1, 4-5
6. Hold fast; don't let anyone take thy crown	Keep thee from hour of temptation Pillar in temple of my God Write name of my God on him Write my new name Make those of Satan worship before your feet	Philadelphia – 3:10-12
7. Lukewarm, loyalty, wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked	Sit with me on my throne	Laodicea – 3:15, 17, 21

The final shared thread between the churches is to hear the *Spirit speaking to the churches*. This is the same message to all the churches. To God's last people this will be the final convicting appeal that will come to the heart.

### Chiastic Structure

There is a chiastic structure to the messages given to the congregation and there is a chiastic structure to the churches themselves. The latter alone presents an enormous amount of data to help us understand the messages.

#### Messages Themselves:

- Imagery of Jesus – divinity
- Commendation and encouragement
- Censure for sin
- Warnings and exhortation
- Special sin issue to address
- Promise to overcomer
- Hear the Spirit – divinity

**Churches:**

- Ephesus – lost excitement about God
- Smyrna – no complaint, be faithful
- Pergamos – evil false gods and doctrine, remnant repents
- Thyatira – evil, did not repent
- Sardis – evil, false gods and doctrine, remnant repented
- Philadelphia – no complaints, faithful
- Laodicea – lost God

**Historical Application to Churches**

Ellen G. White does give a historical application to the churches (as well as making a last generation association). Could there be an association between the churches and their Biblical “personality” and the historical eras? When dates are added, it fragments this general application.

- |               |                                                                                               |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ephesus:      | Lost excitement about God, early church Apostolic Period                                      |
| Smyrna:       | Faithful church, time of persecution under Pagan Rome                                         |
| Pergamos:     | Constantine began era of church and state union, time of compromise                           |
| Thyatira:     | Church idolatrous, tyrannical, evil Dark Ages                                                 |
| Sardis:       | Protestant Reformation, new dawn in Christianity but counter Reformation resistance developed |
| Philadelphia: | Many Churches emerge rebelling against the idolatrous practice of Rome                        |
| Laodicea:     | God’s people become self-sufficient and defiant – church apostasy and militantancy            |

**Sequence of the Churches**

It is fascinating that the churches listed follow a postal and travel route, making a circuitous round. This was the path of John’s letters. A question we have apparently no information on is how much more of the prophetic writing went to the churches besides chapter 1–3. It would be easy for the churches to look at each epistle and concentrate on their own as the writing passed from church to church. But, did they have chapters 4–22? Were they invited to immerse themselves into deep prophetic studies that were apropos to the very end? If not, does that mean they missed the glorious descriptions of the new earth and final warnings of His soon return? If they didn’t have chapters 4–22, are those distinctly applicable for the end of time understanding? Is the last generation the only one to unseal Daniel and marry its understanding to Revelation?

**The Crescendoing Rewards of the Churches**

As if God wants to make a progressive point, to “him that overcometh” the rewards are progressively described. This fascinating observation by Paulien adds passion to God’s message. “Look what you have ahead of you – if you repent and are faithful. Look what you will miss if you don’t overcome.”

Like a person not being heard, the reward gets ever louder and more emphatic. Jesus does not want His people to miss what He has planned for them!

- A. Revelation 2:7 Overcomer – promised Tree of Life
- B. Revelation 2:11 Overcomer – (1) crown of life, (2) second death
- C. Revelation 2:17 Overcomer – (1) hidden manna, (2) white stone, (3) new name
- D. Revelation 2:18 Overcomer – (1) authority over nations, (2) ride over these with iron scepter, (3) morning star
- E. Revelation 3:1 Overcomer – (1) walk with Jesus, (2) dressed in white, (3) not blot names out of book of life, (4) acknowledge name before Father, (5) acknowledge name before angels
- F. Revelation 3:7 Overcomer – (1) kept hour of trial, (2) pillar in temple, (3) will never leave it, (4) name God writes on them, (5) name of city of God, (6) God's new name
- G. Revelation 3:14 Overcomer – promises include all 21 previous promises, "sit with Jesus on throne"<sup>11</sup>

## THE SHAKING – THE FINAL PURIFICATION OF HIS COVENANT CHURCH

"There is ... general agreement that the final church is in a deplorable condition. The True Witness to the Laodicean church has warned us that the straight testimony of what God's ideals are for His church will be empathatically heralded. This will cause a rebellion *within* our ranks that will lead to a major shaking of apostasy and apostates out of the remnant fold."<sup>12</sup>

The shaking is among God's people.

"The testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. This testimony must work deep repentance, and all that truly receive it will obey it and be purified."<sup>13</sup>

The Laodicean church is a summation metaphor for all the corrective *issues* of each church. It is a summary call for all those who claim to be His to come unequivocally to the foot of the cross and crucify self. It is a metaphor of what will happen to every type of congregation if changes do not occur – the ultimate rejection – God spits them out of His presence.

The straight testimony will have those concerns:

1. Thou hast left thy first love, Jesus is no longer exciting
2. False doctrine in understanding faith and sin
3. Cherishing priorities that fail to put God first
4. Making pleasure of all kinds more important than God
5. Weak in seeing and serving the needs of others

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Sheffield, *Op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 181.

## 6. Failing to see the second coming as urgent.

This is a powerful tool to use to bring the purity of truth back into His cherished church.

### Eschatological Application

There are allusions to the coming of Jesus in the churches.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the messages to the seven churches, warnings or requests have been made in relationship to Jesus' coming. Some with the associated word, quickly (*tachu*), suggesting without delay, suddenly, even by surprise.

To John: Show things – must shortly come to pass (1:1)  
 For the time is at hand (1:3)  
 Behold he cometh with clouds (1:7)  
 Spirit on the Lord's day (1:10)

To Church: I will come unto thee quickly (2:5)  
 I will give thee a crown of life (2:10)  
 I will come unto thee quickly (2:16)  
 Hold fast till I come (2:25)  
 Keepeth my works unto the end (2:26)  
 I will come on thee as a thief (2:3)  
 I come quickly (3:11)

With each church a specific summary is made that includes the profound meaning of each testimony for today's Christian. This is neither futurist nor simply spiritual in an interpretative view. Repeatedly, Jesus tells John of the urgency of His counsel because of His imminent return. This transcends ancient apostolic concern for His quick return and puts it in a context which will be built upon throughout the whole book – He is about to return, be ready. This will be substantiated by revealed signs and timed prophecies. Analysis reveals that the messages to these churches have their greater application apocalyptically.

"This analysis of the churches serves as a preparation for God's people, so that they may be ready when the Son of man returns in glory and majesty. The reader of the Scriptures is informed that 'God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets' (Amos 3:7). Thus, before the coming of 'the day of the Lord' (Amos 5:18) for them, that is, before the tragic events of the end of the northern and southern kingdoms, in 722 and 586 BC, respectively, God sent prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel. These prophets were sent as God's representatives in a covenant lawsuit against His people.

"Likewise, before the coming of the eschatological 'day of the Lord' (2 Pet 3:10), Jesus Himself (described in the book of Revelation as being in the midst of His people) assumes this prophetic office of warning and preparing them for His return."<sup>15</sup>

"Through the Prophet Isaiah God revealed to His people His holiness, power and wisdom. He pronounced judgment upon Israel because of their sins (Isaiah 1–39). In chapters 40–66 salvation becomes an ever-present theme. 'Out of the tone of love, God

<sup>14</sup> Diop, Ganoune; "Jesus Christ in the midst of His people: A study of Revelation 1:9-3:22," *J Adventist Theological Society*, 8/1-2 (1997), 40-58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

has good news for His people. Grace takes over judgment as He announces that their “warfare is ended” ... their iniquity is pardoned’ [Barclay].

“Isaiah’s idealistic vision of God’s New Age does not stand alone. Every quality of life prophesied by the prophet is repeated and reaffirmed in the Book of Revelation. To discount Isaiah’s vision is to deny the Revelation and to deny the Revelation is to limit the redemptive purpose of God” [Palmer].<sup>16</sup>

This unique insight beautifully outlined by Shumate is really the summation of these messages. Though Jesus threatens judgment, He comes to have grace take over. The outcome is based on man’s will. He appeals to church leaders to appeal to the church members – repent. Grace is full of promises waiting that very decision.

“Each church has to learn to function in the body of Christ using the principles of God’s kingdom. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, a local body of believers and said, ‘You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it’ (I Cor. 12:27). ‘God’s people from every local body of Christ are part of God’s kingdom. Christians are kingdom people and Christ Himself is the eternal King over His kingdom. [Blackaby]. This is a good model for churches today.”<sup>17</sup>

The contemporary, eschatological application is remarkably summarized by Thomas.

“Collectively, the seven messages form an indispensable part of the Apocalypse. In them are the practical lessons to be applied in light of coming events in God’s prophetic program.

“They also serve to unify the other parts of the book. Christ’s self-descriptions, for the most part, draw from the introductory words and vision of Revelation 1; 2:1 draws from 1:13, 16; 2:8 draws from 1:17-18; 2:12 draws from 1:16; 2:18 draws from 1:14; 3:1 draws from 1:4, 16; 3:7 draws from 1:5a; 3:14 draws from 1:5a. They build upon Christ’s initial appearance to John on Patmos and utilize characteristics of His Person depicted there to address areas of need in each church.

“The warnings of the seven messages also reflect their unifying effect. They consistently point forward to the dreaded happenings to be foretold in chapters 4-19:

“The promises of the seven messages also serve notice of the book’s unity. They provide for escape from the miseries of Revelation 4-19 and for enjoyment of the privileges of the saints after Christ’s triumphant return in Rev. 19:11-21.

“These seven messages cannot be read apart from the rest of the Apocalypse, nor does the rest of the book mean anything without these seven. Chapters 2–3 explain why the rest of the book was written. The overall purpose is distinctly practical (cf. 1:3).”<sup>18</sup>

Canter has outlined a remarkable eschatological argument for the seven churches through the symbols of chapters 1–3, drawing from the sanctuary scene in chapter 1 (see Excursus IV).

The following page is a summation table worked out by Wade. The subsequent pages outline several ways the message can be organized.

“We have been given a message exceeding in importance any other message ever entrusted to mortals. This message Christ came in person to the Isle of Patmos to present to John. He told him to write down what he saw and heard during his vision, that the churches might know what was to come upon the earth.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Shumate, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 327.

<sup>19</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Medical Ministry*, p. 37.

<b>Ted Wade – Revelation Two and Three, Prophecy Research Initiative Document</b>							
	<b>Ephesus 2:1-7</b>	<b>Smyrna 2:8-11</b>	<b>Pergamum 2:12-17</b>	<b>Thyatira 2:18-29</b>	<b>Sardis 3:1-6</b>	<b>Philadelphia 3:7-13</b>	<b>Laodicea 3:14-22</b>
<b>Period Described</b>	The early church, to AD 100	The church Under pagan persecution, To 303	Paganism enters the church, to 500's	Papal supremacy of Dark Ages, to mid 1500's	Protestant Reformation and fossilization, to late 1700's	Awakening Bible spread and studied, to mid 1800's	The end-time church content but sinful, to End
<b>Opening To the angel of the church ... write</b>							
<b>Description of Christ</b>	Holds 7 stars Walks among 7 lampstands	First and last Died and came to life	The One with two-edged sword	Eyes of fire, feet like brass Searches minds	Holds 7 spirits and 7 stars	Holy, true Holds keys, opens and shuts	Amen, true witness Beginning of creation
<b>What Christ knows</b>	Works, labor, patience	Works, trials, poverty; Blasphemy of false Jews	Works, living where Satan's throne is	More works, love, service, faith, patience	Works (and see "What you have")	Works	Works Neither cold nor hot
<b>Commendations</b>	Tested false prophets Perseverance	Rich in spite of poverty	Held to My name and faith, even in time of martyrdom	(above)	Have a few names Undefiled	Kept commandments	—
<b>Rebuke</b>	Left first love	—	Ones with doctrine of Balaam	Jezebel with immorality permitted	Works Imperfect	—	Lukewarm, wretched, blind, naked
<b>Counsel</b>	Remember, repent, do first works	Do not fear Suffering	Repent	Hold fast till I come	Watch, strengthen remainder	Hold fast, preserve crown	Buy gold, clothes, eye ointment
<b>Warning</b>	Lampstand will be removed	—	Will fight with sword of mouth	Jezebel into sick-bed, children killed	I will come as thief if you do not watch	—	I will spit you out Rebuke and punishment
<b>What you Have</b>	My hatred for Nicolaitans	Tribulation coming	Also have ones with Nicolaitan doctrines	Rest do not have false doctrine, not satanic depths	A name as alive, but dead (also see above)	A little strength My word and name	Not what you think you have
<b>Reward for Overcomers</b>	Eat from tree of life	Not hurt by second death	Hidden manna, white stone	Power over nations Morning star	Clothed in white, name in book, confessed	Made pillar, inscribed with new name	Sit on my throne
<b>Other promises</b>	—	Eternal life to ones faithful to death	—	Rest are given no other burden	Undefiled ones will walk in white	Submission of false Jews Kept from hour of trial	Eat with those who open door
<b>Closing Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches</b>							

## Seven Churches – Described and Identified

	<u>Ephesus</u>	<u>Smyrna</u>	<u>Pergamum</u>	<u>Thyatira</u>	<u>Sardis</u>	<u>Philadelphia</u>	<u>Laodicea</u>
I know thy works	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Good works initially observed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Never	Yes	Never
Things against you, complaints	Yes	Never	Yes	Yes	Yes	Never	Yes
Summary judgment	Repent		Repent	Repent	Repent		Repent
Hear what Spirit says	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Promise to overcomers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

### Evil Church

### Evil City

Ephesus	Left first love (whole church)	Cult of Artemis (Diana)
Smyrna	Blasphemy (segment church)	Temple to Roma – spirit of Rome
Pergamos	Idolatry	Temple to Caesar Augustus
	Sexual immorality	Temple to Zeus
	Nicolaitans (segment church)	Temple to Serpent-god Asclepius
Thyatira	“Allows” idolatry (whole church)	Oppressive trade guilds
Sardis	You are dead (segment of church)	Immorality – easily defeated
Philadelphia	Local Jews (segment of church)	Earthquake – only natural disaster
Laodicea	Lukewarm, poor, blind, wretched, miserable	Banking center, wealth, medical school, self sufficient

### Jesus' Position and Authority

Ephesus	Holds seven stars in His right hand who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (nurtures ministers, nurtures churches by power of His sovereign will); encouragement to believers
Smyrna	Says the first and the last, who was dead, and came to life (has control of time and the grave); encouragement to persecuted
Pergamos	He who has the sharp two-edged sword (he will execute justice – will convict hearts of truth); stern executor of judgment
Thyatira	Son of God, eyes like a flame of fire, feet like fine brass (He sees all – will judge all – will refine); will cleanse His church
Sardis	Has seven Spirits of God and the seven stars (He represents fullness of Spirit – controls church leaders); Spirit will guide His leaders
Philadelphia	Holy, true, has keys of David (is truth and holiness, therefore, governs who enters heaven – though open to all); inviting everyone – He's final gatekeeper
Laodicea	Amen, Faithful and True Witness; beginning of the creation of God; the "so be it," faithful and true martyr; I'm from very beginning of creation; will be your companion forever



## End of Time – Second Coming Allusion

Ephesus	I will come quickly and remove your Lampstand  Sounds like punishment but it is more like what results will happen if not <i>repentant</i>	Eat from tree of life in Paradise of God
Smyrna	Prison, tested, tribulation faithful to death Crown of life clearly an allusion to the  Little Time of Trouble	Crown of life Not hurt by second death  Post-millennium Sealed – no harm
Pergamos	I will come quickly and fight against them with sword  Allusion as to what will occur at His coming and harvest, judgment	Eat hidden manna (Jesus) New name on white stone;  Acquittal stone
Thyatira	Hold fast what you have till I come  Keeps my works until the end till I come or death	Power over nations; shall rule; Morning star
Sardis	I will come upon you as a thief Will not know what hour I will come  Second coming allusion? Yes! (GC370)	Clothed in white garment Not blotted out of Book of Life Confesses before Father and angels
Philadelphia	Keep you from hour of trial which shall come upon the world	Make a temple pillar Have name of God and His city, New Jerusalem (sealing) No harm
Laodicea	I stand at door and knock – last opportunity	Sit with Me on throne

**Reward**

Ephesus	Eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God (2:7)
Smyrna	Crown of life; not be hurt by second death (promise of heavenly reward beyond sin)
Pergamos	Hidden manna to eat; white stone; new name (promise of Christ's companionship; named citizen of heaven)
Thyatira	Give him the morning star (promise of Jesus Himself)
Sardis	Clothed in white garments; not blot name out of Book of Life (promise of Christ's righteousness; registered citizen of heaven)
Philadelphia	Pillar in temple; write name of God, city and New Jerusalem; My name (promised part of heaven; ownership of God's home)
Laodicea	Dine with Him; sit on My throne (promised part of Jerusalem; sitting as king with Him)



# **Excursuses**

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# THE LAODICEAN CHURCH

*Testimonies, vol. 1, p. 185*

Dear Brethren and Sisters: The Lord has again visited me in much mercy. I have been greatly afflicted for a few months past. Disease has pressed heavily upon me. For years I have been afflicted with dropsy and disease of the heart, which has had a tendency to depress my spirits and destroy my faith and courage. The message to the Laodiceans has not accomplished that zealous repentance among God's people which I expected to see, and my perplexity of mind has been great. Disease seemed to make continual progress upon me, and I thought that I must lie down in the grave. I had no desire to live, therefore I could not take hold of faith and pray for my recovery. Often when I retired to rest at night I realized that I was in danger of losing my breath before morning. In this state I fainted at midnight. Brethren Andrews and Loughborough were sent for, and earnest petitions were offered to God in my behalf. The depression, the heavy weight, was lifted from my aching heart, and I was taken off in vision, and shown the things which I now present before you.

I saw that Satan had been trying to drive me to discouragement and despair, to make me desire death rather than life. I was shown that it was not God's will that I should now cease from the work and lie down in the grave; for then the enemies of our faith would triumph, and the hearts of God's children would be made sad. I saw that I should often feel anguish of spirit, and should suffer much; yet I had the promise that those around me would encourage and help me, that my courage and strength might not fail while I was so fiercely buffeted by the devil.

I was shown that the testimony to the Laodiceans applies to God's people at the present time, and the reason it has not accomplished a greater work is because of the hardness of their hearts. But God has given the message time to do its work. The heart must be purified from sins which have so long shut out Jesus. This fearful message will do its work. When it was first presented, it led to close examination of heart. Sins were confessed, and the people of God were stirred everywhere. Nearly all believed that this message would end in the loud cry of the third angel. But as they failed to see the powerful work accomplished in a short time, many lost the effect of the message. I saw that this message would not accomplish its work in a few short months. It is designed to arouse the people of God, to discover to them their backslidings, and to lead to zealous repentance, that they may be favored with the presence of Jesus, and be fitted for the loud cry of the third angel. As this message affected the heart, it led to deep humility before God. Angels were sent in every direction to prepare unbelieving hearts for the truth. The cause of God began to rise, and His people were acquainted with their position. If the counsel of the True Witness had been fully heeded, God would have wrought for His people in greater power. Yet the efforts made since the message has been given, have been blessed of God, and many souls have been brought from error and darkness to rejoice in the truth.

God will prove His people. Jesus bears patiently with them, and does not spew them out of His mouth in a moment. Said the angel: "God is weighing His people." If the message had been of as short duration as many of us supposed, there would have been no time for them to develop character. Many moved from feeling, not from principle and faith, and this solemn, fearful message stirred them. It wrought upon their feelings, and excited their fears, but did not accomplish the work which God designed that it should. God reads the heart. Lest His people should be deceived in re-

gard to themselves, He gives them time for the excitement to wear off, and then proves them to see if they will obey the counsel of the True Witness.

God leads His people on, step by step. He brings them up to different points calculated to manifest what is in the heart. Some endure at one point, but fall off at the next. At every advanced point the heart is tested and tried a little closer. If the professed people of God find their hearts opposed to this straight work, it should convince them that they have a work to do to overcome, if they would not be spewed out of the mouth of the Lord. Said the angel: "God will bring His work closer and closer to test and prove every one of His people." Some are willing to receive one point; but when God brings them to another testing point, they shrink from it and stand back, because they find that it strikes directly at some cherished idol. Here they have opportunity to see what is in their hearts that shuts out Jesus. They prize something higher than the truth, and their hearts are not prepared to receive Jesus. Individuals are tested and proved a length of time to see if they will sacrifice their idols and heed the counsel of the True Witness. If any will not be purified through obeying the truth, and overcome their selfishness, their pride, and evil passions, the angels of God have the charge: "They are joined to their idols, let them alone," and they pass on to their work, leaving these with their sinful traits unsubdued, to the control of evil angels. Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation.

God proves His people in this world. This is the fitting-up place to appear in His presence. Here, in this world, in these last days, persons will show what power affects their hearts and controls their actions. If it is the power of divine truth, it will lead to good works. It will elevate the receiver, and make him noblehearted and generous, like his divine Lord. But if evil angels control the heart, it will be seen in various ways. The fruit will be selfishness, covetousness, pride, and evil passions.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Professors of religion are not willing to closely examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith; and it is a fearful fact that many are leaning on a false hope. Some lean upon an old experience which they had years ago; but when brought down to this heart-searching time, when all should have a daily experience, they have nothing to relate. They seem to think that a profession of the truth will save them. When they subdue those sins which God hates, Jesus will come in and sup with them and they with Him. They will then draw divine strength from Jesus, and will grow up in Him, and be able with holy triumph to say: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." It would be more pleasing to the Lord if lukewarm professors of religion had never named His name. They are a continual weight to those who would be faithful followers of Jesus. They are a stumbling block to unbelievers, and evil angels exult over them, and taunt the angels of God with their crooked course. Such are a curse to the cause at home or abroad. They draw nigh to God with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him.

I was shown that the people of God should not imitate the fashions of the world. Some have done this, and are fast losing the peculiar, holy character which should distinguish them as God's people. I was pointed back to God's ancient people, and was led to compare their apparel with the mode of dress in these last days. What a difference! what a change! Then the women were not so bold as now. When they went in public, they covered their faces with a veil. In these last days, fashions are shameful and immodest. They are noticed in prophecy. They were first brought in by a class over whom Satan has entire control, who, "being past feeling [without any

conviction of the Spirit of God] have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” If God’s professed people had not greatly departed from Him, there would now be a marked difference between their dress and that of the world. The small bonnets, exposing the face and head, show a lack of modesty. The hoops are a shame. The inhabitants of earth are growing more and more corrupt, and the line of distinction between them and the Israel of God must be more plain, or the curse which falls upon worldlings will fall on God’s professed people.

I was directed to the following scriptures. Said the angel: “They are to instruct God’s people.” 1 Timothy 2:9, 10: “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing Godliness) with good works.” 1 Peter 3:3-5: “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves.”

Young and old, God is now testing you. You are deciding your own eternal destiny. Your pride, your love to follow the fashions of the world, your vain and empty conversation, your selfishness, are all put in the scale, and the weight of evil is fearfully against you. You are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. While evil is increasing and taking deep root, it is choking the good seed which has been sown in the heart; and soon the word that was given concerning Eli’s house will be spoken to the angels of God concerning you: Your sins “shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever.” Many, I saw, were flattering themselves that they were good Christians, who have not a single ray of light from Jesus. They know not what it is to be renewed by the grace of God. They have no living experience for themselves in the things of God. And I saw that the Lord was whetting His sword in heaven to cut them down. Oh, that every lukewarm professor could realize the clean work that God is about to make among His professed people! Dear friends, do not deceive yourselves concerning your condition. You cannot deceive God. Says the True Witness: “I know thy works.” The third angel is leading up a people, step by step, higher and higher. At every step they will be tested.

The plan of systematic benevolence is pleasing to God. I was pointed back to the days of the apostles, and saw that God laid the plan by the descent of His Holy Spirit, and that by the gift of prophecy He counseled His people in regard to a system of benevolence. All were to share in this work of imparting of their carnal things to those who ministered unto them in spiritual things. They were also taught that the widows and fatherless had a claim upon their charity. Pure and undefiled religion is defined, To visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and to keep unspotted from the world. I saw that this was not merely to sympathize with them by comforting words in their affliction, but to aid them, if needy, with our substance. Young men and women to whom God has given health can obtain a great blessing by aiding the widow and the fatherless in their affliction. I saw that God requires young men to sacrifice more for the good of others. He claims more of them than they are willing to perform. If they keep themselves unspotted from the world, cease to follow its fashions, and lay by that which the lovers of pleasure spend in useless articles to gratify pride, and give it to the worthy afflicted ones, and to sustain the cause, they will have the approval of Him who says, “I know thy works.”

There is order in heaven, and God is well pleased with the efforts of His people in trying to move with system and order in His work on earth. I saw that there should be order in the church of God, and that system is needed in carrying forward successfully the last great message of mercy to the world. God is leading His people in the plan of systematic benevolence, and this is one of the very points to which God is bringing up His people which will cut the closest with some. With them this cuts off the right arm, and plucks out the right eye, while to others it is a great relief. To noble, generous souls the demands upon them seem very small, and they cannot be content to do so little. Some have large possessions, and if they lay by them in store for charitable purposes as God has prospered them, the offering seems to them like a large sum. The selfish heart clings as closely to a small offering as to a large one, and makes a small sum look very large.

I was pointed back to the commencement of this last work. Then some who loved the truth could consistently talk of sacrificing. They devoted much to the cause of God, to send the truth to others. They have sent their treasure beforehand to heaven. Brethren, you who have received the truth at a later period, and who have large possessions, God has called you into the field, not merely that you may enjoy the truth, but that you may aid with your substance in carrying forward this great work. And if you have an interest in this work, you will venture out and invest something in it, that others may be saved by your efforts, and you reap with them the final reward. Great sacrifices have been made and privations endured to place the truth in a clear light before you. Now God calls upon you, in your turn, to make great efforts and to sacrifice in order to place the truth before those who are in darkness. God requires this. You profess to believe the truth; let your works testify to the fact. Unless your faith works, it is dead. Nothing but a living faith will save you in the fearful scenes which are just before you.

I saw that it is time for those who have large possessions to begin to work fast. It is time that they were not only laying by them in store as God is now prospering them, but as He has prospered them. In the days of the apostles, plans were especially laid that some should not be eased and others burdened. Arrangements were made that all should share equally in the burdens of the church of God according to their several abilities. Said the angel: "The ax must be laid at the root of the tree." Those who, like Judas, have set their hearts upon earthly treasure will complain as he did. His heart coveted the costly ointment poured upon Jesus, and he sought to hide his selfishness under a pious, conscientious regard for the poor: "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" He wished that he had the ointment in his possession; it would not thus be lavished upon the Saviour. He would apply it to his own use; sell it for money. He prized his Lord just enough to sell Him to wicked men for a few pieces of silver. As Judas brought up the poor as an excuse for his selfishness, so professed Christians, whose hearts are covetous, will seek to hide their selfishness under a put-on conscientiousness. Oh, they fear that in adopting systematic benevolence we are becoming like the nominal churches! "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." They seem to have a conscientious desire to follow exactly the Bible as they understand it in this matter; but they entirely neglect the plain admonition of Christ: "Sell that ye have, and give alms."

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them." Some think this text teaches that they must be secret in their works of charity. And they do but very little, excusing themselves because they do not know just how to give. But Jesus explained it to His disciples as follows: "Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the



streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." They gave to be regarded noble and generous by men. They received praise of men, and Jesus taught His disciples that this was all the reward they would have. With many, the left hand does not know what the right hand does, for the right hand does nothing worthy of the notice of the left hand. This lesson of Jesus to His disciples was to rebuke those who wished to receive glory of men. They performed their almsgiving at some very public gathering; and before doing this, a public proclamation was made heralding their generosity before the people; and many gave large sums merely to have their name exalted by men. And the means given in this manner was often extorted from others, by oppressing the hireling in his wages, and grinding the face of the poor.

I was shown that this scripture does not apply to those who have the cause of God at heart, and use their means humbly to advance it. I was directed to these texts: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." "By their fruits ye shall know them." I was shown that Scripture testimony will harmonize when it is rightly understood. The good works of the children of God are the most effectual preaching that the unbeliever has. He thinks that there must be strong motives that actuate the Christian to deny self, and use his possessions in trying to save his fellow men. It is unlike the spirit of the world. Such fruits testify that the possessors are genuine Christians. They seem to be constantly reaching upward to a treasure that is imperishable.

With every gift and offering there should be a suitable object before the giver, not to uphold any in idleness, not to be seen of men or to get a great name, but to glorify God by advancing His cause. Some make large donations to the cause of God while their brother who is poor, may be suffering close by them, and they do nothing to relieve him. Little acts of kindness performed for their brother in a secret manner would bind their hearts together, and would be noticed in heaven. I saw that in their prices and wages the rich should make a difference in favor of the afflicted and widows and the worthy poor among them. But it is too often the case that the rich take advantage of the poor, reaping every benefit that is to be gained, and exacting the last penny for every favor. It is all written in heaven. "I know thy works."

The greatest sin which now exists in the church is covetousness. God frowns upon His professed people for their selfishness. His servants have sacrificed their time and strength to carry them the word of life, and many have shown by their works that they prize it but lightly. If they can help the servant of God just as well as not, they sometimes do it; but they often let him pass on, and do but little for him. If they employ a day laborer, he must be paid full wages. But not so with the self-sacrificing servant of God. He labors for them in word and doctrine; he carries the heavy burden of the work on his soul; he patiently shows from the word of God the dangerous errors which are hurtful to the soul; he enforces the necessity of immediately tearing up the weeds which choke the good seed sown; he brings out of the storehouse of God's word things new and old to feed the flock of God. All acknowledge that they have been benefited; but the poisonous weed, covetousness, is so deeply rooted that they let the servant of God leave them without ministering to him of their temporal things. They have prized his wearing labor just as highly as their acts show. Says the True Witness: "I know thy works."

I saw that God's servants are not placed beyond the temptations of Satan. They are often fearfully beset by the enemy, and have a hard battle to fight. If they could be released from their commission, they would gladly labor with their hands. Their labor is called for by their brethren; but when they see it so lightly prized, they are

depressed. True, they look to the final settlement for their reward, and this bears them up; but their families must have food and clothing. Their time belongs to the church of God; it is not at their own disposal. They sacrifice the society of their families to benefit others; and yet some who are benefited by their labors are indifferent to their wants. I saw that it is doing injustice to such to let them pass on and deceive themselves. They think they are approved of God, when He despises their selfishness. Not only will these selfish ones be called to render an account to God for the use they have made of their Lord's money, but all the depression and heartache which they have brought upon God's chosen servants, and which have crippled their efforts, will be set to the account of the unfaithful stewards.

The True Witness declares: "I know thy works." The selfish, covetous heart will be tested. Some are not willing to devote to God a very small portion of the increase of their earthly treasure. They would start back with horror if you should speak of the principal. What have they sacrificed for God? Nothing. They profess to believe that Jesus is coming; but their works deny their faith. Every person will live out all the faith he has. Falsehearted professor, Jesus knows thy works. He hates your stinted offerings, your lame sacrifices.

## FAITH NEEDS A CATALYST

“Work” has become a “four-letter word” (usually with an “s” added) in many Protestant churches. Since we are saved 100% by His merits and from what He has done, *anything* we might engage in has been relegated to quicksand in the vast marshes of legalism.

In fact, to talk about work(s) in a Sabbath School or Sunday School class can stimulate the condemning eye of “how dare you” when Jesus paid it all! The silent minority seems to fear an encounter, so never share that God said “*we need to pick up the benefit check.*”

Claiming an unmarred relationship with Jesus without compliance duplicates the presumption of Eve. One of the greatest areas of confusion is believing that obedience is works! If obedience is works, then faith is also! Both are things *we* have a part in.

There is a difference between.

### Pleasing God By:

Repentance  
Faith  
Trust  
Obedience

or

### Trying to Please God By:

Attending church  
Fasting  
Offerings  
Penance  
Service  
Prayers  
Communion...

Somehow the misleading perception that “obedience” is man’s works that tarnishes faith has created a new tree of knowledge. Salvation’s fruit just falls right into one’s hands – without picking!

Evidence mounts that faith has been misunderstood. It is vital that this issue be simplified and clarified. Salvation rests on how we relate to faith, obedience, works, sin and repentance. Since the Bible repeatedly uses those terms, they must fit somewhere in salvation’s remarkable puzzle.

Paul said to the church that lost its first love, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8. The word “through” is the Greek preposition *dia*. It means the *channel through which* or *because of* faith, grace can save us. That’s incredible. Faith is a protective conduit that grace flows through into the heart. What kind of faith protects God’s grace? That’s the issue.

Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 7:21.

So, I can believe in Jesus, I can be actively involved in serving Him and not be saved? What are we missing? Jesus said the problem was in not *doing* the will of His Father (Matthew 7:21). This group was involved with sin (7:23). Does that mean when I have faith, I have to address the sin issue?

A little later Paul, in the same Ephesian letter, said, “put off the old man” (4:22); “be renewed in the Spirit of your mind” (4:23); “put on the new man” (4:24); and “Neither give place to the devil” (4:27). The contemporary thinking says that once we have faith, we are given power to do *these* things. That is true, but there is a “do” issue tied in with faith.

There are two gifts that heaven bestows on us, no matter how deep in sin we may be: one is a measure of faith, the other the ability to repent. If we claim faith and give praise and honor to Jesus and fail to handle the past, the conduit (the *dia*) of faith will never be mature enough for saving grace to flow through it. It will collapse, and saving grace will never reach the heart.

*“In order for man to be justified by faith, faith must reach a point where it will control the affections and impulses of the heart [faith is here equated with superintending the will]; and it is by obedience that faith itself is made perfect.”*<sup>1</sup>

That is very different from the concepts of faith and salvation generally taught that suggest faith never worries at first about sin or a perverse will. “Once faith is exercised, we will have the power to do right.”

If faith is a channel for grace or God’s Spirit, and faith must control the choices we make before God’s Spirit enters, that faith is naked unless it is dressed with true repentance.

“The principles that should govern our actions are plainly marked out in the divine word. Repentance [actively dealing with the past] toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ [present commitment], are the conditions of salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

Oh, how easy it is to confuse faith unto salvation with works of self-righteousness.

“Many concede that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, but at the same time they hold themselves away from Him and fail to repent of their sins, fail to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour. Their faith is simply the assent of the mind and judgment to the truth; but the truth is not brought into the heart that it might sanctify the soul and transform the character. *‘For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified’* (Romans 8:29, 30). Calling and justification are not one and the same thing. Calling is the drawing of the sinner to Christ, and it is a work wrought by the Holy Spirit upon the heart, convicting of sin, and inviting to repentance.”<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps it would be helpful to divide the “saving” process into five steps:

Step 1 – The calling of Jesus – the wooing of the Spirit

Step 2 – Man’s response – faith and true repentance

Step 3 – Saving grace – justification – endowed with the Spirit’s power

Step 4 – Obedience of faith – *our* thermometer that our faith is genuine (James 2:19-20)

Step 5 – Saving transformation – sanctification

“As the *penitent* sinner, *contrite before God*, discerns Christ’s atonement in his behalf, and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul is to conform his will entirely to God’s will, and *keep in a state of repentance and contrition, exercising* faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer and advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Faith and Works*, p. 100 (emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, January 7, 1897.

<sup>3</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 389 (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, p. 1070 (emphasis added).

What happens when grace comes in? The robe of Jesus covers the “bad” part (but past sins are already repented of). God now only sees good. We are justified. To recapitulate:

“But while God can be just, and yet justify the sinner through the merits of Christ, no man can cover his soul with the garments of Christ’s righteousness while practicing known sins or neglecting known duties. *God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place*; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.”<sup>5</sup>

Can we lose that justifying garment, the merits of Jesus?

“It is by *continual* surrender of the will, by *continual* obedience that the blessing of justification is retained.”<sup>6</sup>

Does repentance mean that I’m going to be sinless? Never. It only indicates to God that we really mean business. It takes care of the *past*. It is the catalyst that firms up faith, assuring God that that channel won’t collapse when we are exercising it.

Will deeper conviction come over our nature when grace enters the heart? Certainly. That means every step of the Christian walk we surrender ourselves to Jesus. That is remarkable. If faithful to this trust (His plan), we become more and more like Him. He wants that – because He would like us to live in His home forever. What a wonderful Savior is Jesus. He craves our love so much. He wants this to be so genuine that all allegiance to wrong is set aside.

Franklin S. Fowler Jr., M.D.

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<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Faith and works*, p. 100 (emphasis added).

<sup>6</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 397 (emphasis added).



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# THE LAODICEAN CHURCH

*Testimonies, vol. 3, pp. 252-272*

The message to the church of the Laodiceans is a startling denunciation, and is applicable to the people of God at the present time.

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

The Lord here shows us that the message to be borne to His people by ministers whom He has called to warn the people is not a peace-and-safety message. It is not merely theoretical, but practical in every particular. The people of God are represented in the message to the Laodiceans as in a position of carnal security. They are at ease, believing themselves to be in an exalted condition of spiritual attainments. “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

What greater deception can come upon human minds than a confidence that they are right when they are all wrong! The message of the True Witness finds the people of God in a sad deception, yet honest in that deception. They know not that their condition is deplorable in the sight of God. While those addressed are flattering themselves that they are in an exalted spiritual condition, the message of the True Witness breaks their security by the startling denunciation of their true condition of spiritual blindness, poverty, and wretchedness. The testimony, so cutting and severe, cannot be a mistake, for it is the True Witness who speaks, and His testimony must be correct.

It is difficult for those who feel secure in their attainments, and who believe themselves to be rich in spiritual knowledge, to receive the message which declares that they are deceived and in need of every spiritual grace. The unsanctified heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” I was shown that many are flattering themselves that they are good Christians, who have not a ray of light from Jesus. They have not a living experience for themselves in the divine life. They need a deep and thorough work of self-abasement before God before they will feel their true need of earnest, persevering effort to secure the precious graces of the Spirit.

God leads His people on step by step. The Christian life is a constant battle and a march. There is no rest from the warfare. It is by constant, unceasing effort that we maintain the victory over the temptations of Satan. As a people we are triumphing in the clearness and strength of the truth. We are fully sustained in our positions by an overwhelming amount of plain Scriptural testimony. But we are very much wanting in Bible humility, patience, faith, love, self-denial, watchfulness, and the spirit of sacrifice. We need to cultivate Bible holiness. Sin prevails among the people of God. The plain message of rebuke to the Laodiceans is not received. Many cling to their doubts and their darling sins while they are in so great a deception as to talk and feel that they are in need of nothing. They think the testimony of the Spirit of God in reproof is uncalled for or that it does not mean them. Such are in the greatest need of the grace of God and spiritual discernment that they may discover their deficiency in spiritual knowledge. They lack almost every qualification necessary to perfect Christian character. They have not a

practical knowledge of Bible truth, which leads to lowliness of life and a conformity of their will to the will of Christ. They are not living in obedience to all God's requirements.

It is not enough to merely profess to believe the truth. All the soldiers of the cross of Christ virtually obligate themselves to enter the crusade against the adversary of souls, to condemn wrong and sustain righteousness. But the message of the True Witness reveals the fact that a terrible deception is upon our people, which makes it necessary to come to them with warnings, to break their spiritual slumber, and arouse them to decided action.

In my last vision I was shown that even this decided message of the True Witness had not accomplished the design of God. The people slumber on in their sins. They continue to declare themselves rich and having need of nothing. Many inquire: Why are all these reproofs given? Why do the Testimonies continually charge us with backsliding and with grievous sins? We love the truth; we are prospering; we are in no need of these testimonies of warning and reproof. But let these murmurers see their hearts and compare their lives with the practical teachings of the Bible, let them humble their souls before God, let the grace of God illuminate the darkness, and the scales will fall from their eyes, and they will realize their true spiritual poverty and wretchedness. They will feel the necessity of buying gold, which is pure faith and love; white raiment, which is a spotless character made pure in the blood of their dear Redeemer; and eyesalve, which is the grace of God and which will give clear discernment of spiritual things and detect sin. These attainments are more precious than the gold of Ophir.

I have been shown that the greatest reason why the people of God are now found in this state of spiritual blindness is that they will not receive correction. Many have despised the reproofs and warnings given them. The True Witness condemns the lukewarm condition of the people of God, which gives Satan great power over them in this waiting, watching time. The selfish, the proud, and the lovers of sin are ever assailed with doubts. Satan has ability to suggest doubts and to devise objections to the pointed testimony that God sends, and many think it a virtue, a mark of intelligence in them, to be unbelieving and to question and quibble. Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence.

Eternal life is of infinite value and will cost us all that we have. I was shown that we do not place a proper estimate upon eternal things. Everything worth possessing, even in this world, must be secured by effort, and sometimes by most painful sacrifice. And this is merely to obtain a perishable treasure. Shall we be less willing to endure conflict and toil, and to make earnest efforts and great sacrifices, to obtain a treasure which is of infinite value, and a life which will measure with that of the Infinite? Can heaven cost us too much?

Faith and love are golden treasures, elements that are greatly wanting among God's people. I have been shown that unbelief in the testimonies of warning, encouragement, and reproof is shutting away the light from God's people. Unbelief is closing their eyes so that they are ignorant of their true condition. The True Witness thus describes their blindness: "And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Faith in the soon coming of Christ is waning. "My Lord delayeth His coming" is not only said in the heart, but expressed in words and most decidedly in works. Stupidity in this watching time is sealing the senses of God's people as to the signs of the times. The terrible iniquity which abounds calls for the greatest diligence and for the living tes-



timony, to keep sin out of the church. Faith has been decreasing to a fearful degree, and it is only by exercise that it can increase.

In the rise of the third angel's message those who engaged in the work of God had something to venture; they had sacrifices to make. They started this work in poverty and suffered the greatest deprivations and reproach. They met determined opposition, which drove them to God in their necessity and kept their faith alive. Our present plan of systematic benevolence amply sustains our ministers, and there is no want and no call for the exercise of faith as to a support. Those who start out now to preach the truth have nothing to venture. They have no risks to run, no special sacrifices to make. The system of truth is made ready to their hand, and publications are provided for them, vindicating the truths they advance.

Some young men start out with no real sense of the exalted character of the work. They have no privations, hardships, or severe conflicts to meet, which would call for the exercise of faith. They do not cultivate practical self-denial and cherish a spirit of sacrifice. Some are becoming proud and lifted up, and have no real burden of the work upon them. The True Witness speaks to these ministers: "Be zealous therefore, and repent." Some of them are so lifted up in pride that they are really a hindrance and a curse to the precious cause of God. They do not exert a saving influence upon others. These men need to be thoroughly converted to God themselves and sanctified by the truths they present to others.

### POINTED TESTIMONIES IN THE CHURCH

Very many feel impatient and jealous because they are frequently disturbed with warnings and reproofs which keep their sins before them. Says the True Witness: "I know thy works." The motives, the purposes, the unbelief, the suspicions and jealousies may be hid from men, but not from Christ. The True Witness comes as a counselor: "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

Those who are reproved by the Spirit of God should not rise up against the humble instrument. It is God, and not an erring mortal, who has spoken to save them from ruin. Those who despise the warning will be left in blindness to become self-deceived. But those who heed it, and zealously go about the work of separating their sins from them in order to have the needed graces, will be opening the door of their hearts that the dear Saviour may come in and dwell with them. This class you will ever find in perfect harmony with the testimony of the Spirit of God.

Ministers who are preaching present truth should not neglect the solemn message to the Laodiceans. The testimony of the True Witness is not a smooth message. The Lord does not say to them, You are about right; you have borne chastisement and reproof that you never deserved; you have been unnecessarily discouraged by severity; you are not guilty of the wrongs and sins for which you have been reproved.

The True Witness declares that when you suppose you are really in a good condition of prosperity you are in need of everything. It is not enough for ministers to present theoretical subjects; they should also present those subjects which are practical. They need to study the practical lessons that Christ gave His disciples and make a close appli-

cation of the same to their own souls and to the people. Because Christ bears this rebuking testimony, shall we suppose that He is destitute of tender love to His people? Oh, no! He who died to redeem man from death, loves with a divine love, and those whom He loves He rebukes. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." But many will not receive the message that Heaven in mercy sends them. They cannot endure to be told of their neglect of duty and of their wrongs, their selfishness, their pride and love of the world.

I was shown that God has laid upon my husband and me a special work, to bear a plain testimony to His people, and to cry aloud and spare not, to show the people their transgressions and the house of Israel their sins. But there is a class who will not receive the message of reproof, and they raise their hands to shield those whom God would reprove and correct. These are ever found sympathizing with those whom God would make to feel their true poverty.

The word of the Lord, spoken through His servants, is received by many with questionings and fears. And many will defer their obedience to the warning and reproofs given, waiting till every shadow of uncertainty is removed from their minds. The unbelief that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to the evidence that God is pleased to give. He requires of His people faith that rests upon the weight of evidence, not upon perfect knowledge. Those followers of Christ who accept the light that God sends them must obey the voice of God speaking to them when there are many other voices crying out against it. It requires discernment to distinguish the voice of God.

Those who will not act when the Lord calls upon them, but who wait for more certain evidence and more favorable opportunities, will walk in darkness, for the light will be withdrawn. The evidence given one day, if rejected, may never be repeated.

Many are tempted in regard to our work and are calling it in question. Some, in their tempted condition, charge the difficulties and perplexities of the people of God to the testimonies of reproof that we have given them. They think the trouble is with the ones who bear the message of warning, who point out the sins of the people and correct their errors. Many are deceived by the adversary of souls. They think that the labors of Brother and Sister White would be acceptable if they were not continually condemning wrong and reproofing sin. I was shown that God has laid this work upon us, and when we are hindered from meeting with His people and from bearing our testimony and counteracting the surmisings and jealousies of the unconsecrated, then Satan presses in his temptations very strongly. Those who have been ever on the questioning, doubting side feel at liberty to suggest their doubts and to insinuate their unbelief. Some have sanctimonious and apparently conscientious and very pious doubts, which they cautiously drop, but which have tenfold more power to strengthen those who are wrong, and to lessen our influence and weaken the confidence of God's people in our work, than if they came out more frankly. These poor souls, I saw, were deceived by Satan. They flatter themselves that they are all right, that they are in favor with God and are rich in spiritual discernment, when they are poor, blind, and wretched. They are doing the work of Satan, but think they have a zeal for God.

Some will not receive the testimony that God has given us to bear, flattering themselves that we may be deceived and that they may be right. They think that the people of God are not in need of plain dealing and of reproof, but that God is with them. These tempted ones, whose souls have ever been at war with the faithful reproofing of sin, would cry: Speak unto us smooth things. What disposition will these make of the message of the True Witness to the Laodiceans? There can be no deception here. This message must be borne to a lukewarm church by God's servants. It must arouse His people from their security and dangerous deception in regard to their real standing

before God. This testimony, if received, will arouse to action and lead to self-abasement and confession of sins. The True Witness says: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot." And again, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." Then comes the promise: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

The people of God must see their wrongs and arouse to zealous repentance and a putting away of those sins which have brought them into such a deplorable condition of poverty, blindness, wretchedness, and fearful deception. I was shown that the pointed testimony must live in the church. This alone will answer to the message to the Laodiceans. Wrongs must be reprovved, sin must be called sin, and iniquity must be met promptly and decidedly, and put away from us as a people.

### FIGHTING THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Those who have a spirit of opposition to the work that for twenty-six years we have been pressed by the Spirit of God to do, and who would break down our testimony, I saw are not fighting against us, but against God, who has laid upon us the burden of a work that He has not given to others. Those who question and quibble, and think it a virtue to doubt, and who would discourage; those who have been the means of making our work hard and of weakening our faith, hope, and courage have been the ones to surmise evil, to insinuate suspicious charges, and to watch with jealousy for occasion against us. They take it for granted that because we have human weaknesses it is a positive evidence that we are wrong and that they are right. If they can find a semblance of anything that they can use to injure us they do it with a spirit of triumph and are ready to denounce our work of reprovving wrong and condemning sin as a harsh, dictatorial spirit.

But while we do not accept their version of our case as the reason for our afflictions, while we maintain that God has appointed us to a more trying work than He has others, we acknowledge with humility of soul and with repentance that our faith and courage have been severely tried and that we have sometimes failed to trust wholly in Him who has appointed us our work. When we gather courage again, after sore disappointment and trials, we deeply regret that we ever distrusted God, gave way to human weaknesses, and permitted discouragement to cloud our faith and lessen our confidence in God. I have been shown that God's ancient servants suffered disappointments and discouragements as well as we poor mortals. We were in good company; nevertheless this did not excuse us.

As my husband has stood by my side to sustain me in my work and has borne a plain testimony in unison with the work of the Spirit of God, many have felt that it was he personally who was injuring them, when it was the Lord who laid upon him the burden and who was, through His servant, reprovving them and seeking to bring them where they would repent of their wrongs and have the favor of God.

Those whom God has chosen for an important work have ever been received with distrust and suspicion. Anciently, when Elijah was sent with a message from God to the people, they did not heed the warning. They thought him unnecessarily severe. They even thought that he must have lost his senses because he denounced them, the favored people of God, as sinners and their crimes as so aggravated that the judgments of God would awaken against them. Satan and his host have ever been arrayed against those who bear the message of warning and who reprove sins. The unconsecrated will

also be united with the adversary of souls to make the work of God's faithful servants as hard as possible.

If my husband has been pressed beyond measure and has become discouraged and desponding, if we have at times seen nothing desirable in life that we should choose it, this is nothing strange or new. Elijah, one of God's great and mighty prophets, as he fled for his life from the rage of the infuriated Jezebel, a fugitive, weary and travel-worn, desired to die rather than to live. His bitter disappointment in regard to Israel's faithfulness had crushed his spirits, and he felt that he could no longer put confidence in man. In the day of Job's affliction and darkness, he utters these words: "Let the day perish wherein I was born."

Those who are not accustomed to feel to the very depths, who have not stood under burdens as a cart beneath sheaves, and who have never had their interest identified so closely with the cause and work of God that it seems to be a part of their very being and dearer to them than life, cannot appreciate the feelings of my husband any more than Israel could appreciate the feelings of Elijah. We deeply regret being disheartened, whatever the circumstances may have been.

### **AHAB'S CASE A WARNING**

Under the perverted rule of Ahab, Israel departed from God and corrupted their ways before Him. "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."

Ahab was weak in moral power. He did not have a high sense of sacred things; he was selfish and unprincipled. His union by marriage with a woman of decided character and positive temperament, who was devoted to idolatry, made them both special agents of Satan to lead the people of God into idolatry and terrible apostasy. The determined spirit of Jezebel molded the character of Ahab. His selfish nature was incapable of appreciating the mercies of God to His people and his obligation to God as the guardian and leader of Israel. The fear of God was daily growing less in Israel. The blasphemous tokens of their blind idolatry were to be seen among the Israel of God. There were none who dared to expose their lives by openly standing forth in opposition to the prevailing blasphemous idolatry. The altars of Baal, and the priests of Baal who sacrificed to the sun, moon, and stars, were conspicuous everywhere. They had consecrated temples and groves wherein the work of men's hands was placed to be worshiped. The benefits which God gave to this people called forth from them no gratitude to the Giver. All the bounties of heaven,—the running brooks, the streams of living waters, the gentle dew, the showers of rain which refreshed the earth and caused their fields to bring forth abundantly,—these they ascribed to the favor of their gods.

Elijah's faithful soul was grieved. His indignation was aroused, and he was jealous for the glory of God. He saw that Israel was plunged into fearful apostasy. And when he called to mind the great things that God had wrought for them, he was overwhelmed with grief and amazement. But all this was forgotten by the majority of the people. He went before the Lord, and, with his soul wrung with anguish, pleaded for Him to save His people if it must be by judgments. He pleaded with God to withhold from His ungrateful people dew and rain, the treasures of heaven, that apostate Israel might look in vain to

their gods, their idols of gold, wood, and stone, the sun, moon, and stars, to water and enrich the earth, and cause it to bring forth plentifully. The Lord told Elijah that He had heard his prayer and would withhold dew and rain from His people until they should turn unto Him with repentance.

### ACHAN'S SIN AND PUNISHMENT

God had specially guarded His people against mingling with the idolatrous nations around them, lest their hearts should be deceived by the attractive groves and shrines, temples and altars, which were arranged in the most expensive, alluring manner to pervert the senses so that God would be supplanted in the minds of the people.

The city of Jericho was devoted to the most extravagant idolatry. The inhabitants were very wealthy, but all the riches that God had given them they counted as the gift of their gods. They had gold and silver in abundance; but, like the people before the Flood, they were corrupt and blasphemous, and insulted and provoked the God of heaven by their wicked works. God's judgments were awakened against Jericho. It was a stronghold. But the Captain of the Lord's host Himself came from heaven to lead the armies of heaven in an attack upon the city. Angels of God laid hold of the massive walls and brought them to the ground. God had said that the city of Jericho should be accursed and that all should perish except Rahab and her household. These should be saved because of the favor that Rahab showed the messengers of the Lord. The word of the Lord to the people was: "And ye, in anywise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it." "And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."

God was very particular in regard to Jericho, lest the people should be charmed with the things that the inhabitants had worshiped and their hearts be diverted from God. He guarded His people by most positive commands; yet notwithstanding the solemn injunction from God by the mouth of Joshua, Achan ventured to transgress. His covetousness led him to take of the treasures that God had forbidden him to touch because the curse of God was upon them. And because of this man's sin the Israel of God were as weak as water before their enemies.

Joshua and the elders of Israel were in great affliction. They lay before the ark of God in most abject humility because the Lord was wroth with His people. They prayed and wept before God. The Lord spoke to Joshua: "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

I have been shown that God here illustrates how He regards sin among those who profess to be His commandment-keeping people. Those whom He has specially honored with witnessing the remarkable exhibitions of His power, as did ancient Israel, and who will even then venture to disregard His express directions, will be subjects of His wrath. He would teach His people that disobedience and sin are exceedingly offensive to Him and are not to be lightly regarded. He shows us that when His people are found in sin they should at once take decided measures to put that sin from them, that His

frown may not rest upon them all. But if the sins of the people are passed over by those in responsible positions, His frown will be upon them, and the people of God, as a body, will be held responsible for those sins. In His dealings with His people in the past the Lord shows the necessity of purifying the church from wrongs. One sinner may diffuse darkness that will exclude the light of God from the entire congregation. When the people realize that darkness is settling upon them, and they do not know the cause, they should seek God earnestly, in great humility and self-abasement, until the wrongs which grieve His Spirit are searched out and put away.

The prejudice which has arisen against us because we have reproved the wrongs that God has shown me existed, and the cry that has been raised of harshness and severity, are unjust. God bids us speak, and we will not be silent. If wrongs are apparent among His people, and if the servants of God pass on indifferent to them, they virtually sustain and justify the sinner, and are alike guilty and will just as surely receive the displeasure of God; for they will be made responsible for the sins of the guilty. In vision I have been pointed to many instances where the displeasure of God has been incurred by a neglect on the part of His servants to deal with the wrongs and sins existing among them. Those who have excused these wrongs have been thought by the people to be very amiable and lovely in disposition, simply because they shunned to discharge a plain Scriptural duty. The task was not agreeable to their feelings; therefore they avoided it.

The spirit of hatred which has existed with some because the wrongs among God's people have been reproved has brought blindness and a fearful deception upon their own souls, making it impossible for them to discriminate between right and wrong. They have put out their own spiritual eyesight. They may witness wrongs, but they do not feel as did Joshua and humble themselves because the danger of souls is felt by them.

The true people of God, who have the spirit of the work of the Lord and the salvation of souls at heart, will ever view sin in its real, sinful character. They will always be on the side of faithful and plain dealing with sins which easily beset the people of God. Especially in the closing work for the church, in the sealing time of the one hundred and forty-four thousand who are to stand without fault before the throne of God, will they feel most deeply the wrongs of God's professed people. This is forcibly set forth by the prophet's illustration of the last work under the figure of the men each having a slaughter weapon in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side. "And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof."

Who are standing in the counsel of God at this time? Is it those who virtually excuse wrongs among the professed people of God and who murmur in their hearts, if not openly, against those who would reprove sin? Is it those who take their stand against them and sympathize with those who commit wrong? No, indeed! Unless they repent, and leave the work of Satan in oppressing those who have the burden of the work and in holding up the hands of sinners in Zion, they will never receive the mark of God's sealing approval. They will fall in the general destruction of the wicked, represented by the work of the five men bearing slaughter weapons. Mark this point with care: Those who receive the pure mark of truth, wrought in them by the power of the Holy Ghost, represented by a mark by the man in linen, are those "that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done" in the church. Their love for purity and the honor and glory of God is such, and they have so clear a view of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, that they are represented as being in agony, even sighing and crying. Read the ninth chapter of Ezekiel.

But the general slaughter of all those who do not thus see the wide contrast between sin and righteousness, and do not feel as those do who stand in the counsel of God and receive the mark, is described in the order to the five men with slaughter weapons: "Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary."

In the case of Achan's sin God said to Joshua: "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you." How does this instance compare with the course pursued by those who will not raise their voice against sin and wrong, but whose sympathies are ever found with those who trouble the camp of Israel with their sins? Said God to Joshua: "Thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." He pronounced the punishment which would follow the transgression of His covenant.

Joshua then began a diligent search to find out the guilty one. He took Israel by their tribes, then by their families, and next individually; and Achan was designated as the guilty one. But that the matter might be plain to all Israel, that there should be no occasion given them to murmur and to say that the guiltless was made to suffer, Joshua used policy. He knew Achan was the transgressor and that he had concealed his sin and provoked God against His people. Joshua discreetly induced Achan to make confession of his sin, that God's honor and justice might be vindicated before Israel. "And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.

"And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones."

The Lord told Joshua that Achan had not only taken the things which He had positively charged them not to take, lest they be accursed, but he had stolen and had also dissembled. The Lord said that Jericho and all its spoils should be consumed, except the gold and silver, which were to be reserved for the treasury of the Lord. The victory of taking Jericho was not obtained through warfare or the exposure of the people. The Captain of the Lord's host had led the armies of heaven. The battle was the Lord's; it was He who fought the battle. The children of Israel did not strike a blow. The victory and glory were the Lord's, and the spoils were His. He directed all to be consumed except the gold and silver, which He reserved for His treasury. Achan understood well the reserve made and that the treasures of gold and silver which he coveted were the Lord's. He stole from God's treasury for his own benefit.

## COVETOUSNESS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

I saw that many who profess to be keeping the commandments of God are appropriating to their own use the means which the Lord has entrusted to them and which should come into His treasury. They rob God in tithes and in offerings. They dissemble and withhold from Him to their own hurt. They bring leanness and poverty upon themselves and darkness upon the church because of their covetousness, their dissembling, and their robbing God in tithes and in offerings.

I saw that many souls will sink in darkness because of their covetousness. The plain, straight testimony must live in the church, or the curse of God will rest upon His people as surely as it did upon ancient Israel because of their sins. God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them. If the leaders of the church neglect to diligently search out the sins which bring the displeasure of God upon the body, they become responsible for these sins. But to deal with minds is the nicest work in which men ever engaged. All are not fitted to correct the erring. They have not wisdom to deal justly, while loving mercy. They are not inclined to see the necessity of mingling love and tender compassion with faithful reproofs. Some are ever needlessly severe, and do not feel the necessity of the injunction of the apostle: "And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire."

There are many who do not have the discretion of Joshua and who have no special duty to search out wrongs and to deal promptly with the sins existing among them. Let not such hinder those who have the burden of this work upon them; let them not stand in the way of those who have this duty to do. Some make it a point to question and doubt and find fault because others do the work that God has not laid upon them. These stand directly in the way to hinder those upon whom God has laid the burden of reproving and correcting prevailing sins in order that His frown may be turned away from His people. Should a case like Achan's be among us, there are many who would accuse those who might act the part of Joshua in searching out the wrong, of having a wicked, fault-finding spirit. God is not to be trifled with and His warnings disregarded with impunity by a perverse people.

I was shown that the manner of Achan's confession was similar to the confessions that some among us have made and will make. They hide their wrongs and refuse to make a voluntary confession until God searches them out, and then they acknowledge their sins. A few persons pass on in a course of wrong until they become hardened. They may even know that the church is burdened, as Achan knew that Israel were made weak before their enemies because of his guilt. Yet their consciences do not condemn them. They will not relieve the church by humbling their proud, rebellious hearts before God and putting away their wrongs. God's displeasure is upon His people, and He will not manifest His power in the midst of them while sins exist among them and are fostered by those in responsible positions.

Those who work in the fear of God to rid the church of hindrances and to correct grievous wrongs, that the people of God may see the necessity of abhorring sin and may prosper in purity, and that the name of God may be glorified, will ever meet with resisting influences from the unconsecrated. Zephaniah thus describes the true state of this class and the terrible judgments that will come upon them:

"And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and de-



solation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy: for He shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land."

### CONFESSIONS MADE TOO LATE

When a crisis finally comes, as it surely will, and God speaks in behalf of His people, those who have sinned, those who have been a cloud of darkness and who have stood directly in the way of God's working for His people, may become alarmed at the length they have gone in murmuring and in bringing discouragement upon the cause; and, like Achan, becoming terrified, they may acknowledge that they have sinned. But their confessions are too late and are not of the right kind to benefit themselves, although they may relieve the cause of God. Such do not make their confessions because of a conviction of their true state and a sense of how displeasing their course has been to God. God may give this class another test, another proving, and let them show that they are no better prepared to stand free from all rebellion and sin than before their confessions were made. They are inclined to be ever on the side of wrong. And when the call is made for those who will be on the Lord's side to make a decided move to vindicate the right, they will manifest their true position. Those who have been nearly all their lives controlled by a spirit as foreign to the Spirit of God as was Achan's will be very passive when the time comes for decided action on the part of all. They will not claim to be on either side. The power of Satan has so long held them that they seem blinded and have no inclination to stand in defense of right. If they do not take a determined course on the wrong side, it is not because they have a clear sense of the right, but because they dare not.

God will not be trifled with. It is in the time of conflict that the true colors should be flung to the breeze. It is then that the standard-bearers need to be firm and let their true position be known. It is then that the skill of every true soldier for the right is tested. Shirkers can never wear the laurels of victory. Those who are true and loyal will not conceal the fact, but will put heart and might into the work, and venture their all in the struggle, let the battle turn as it will. God is a sin-hating God. And those who encourage the sinner, saying, It is well with thee, God will curse.

Confessions of sin made at the right time to relieve the people of God will be accepted of Him. But there are those among us who will make confessions, as did Achan, too late to save themselves. God may prove them and give them another trial, for the sake of evidencing to His people that they will not endure one test, one proving of God. They are not in harmony with right. They despise the straight testimony that reaches the heart, and would rejoice to see everyone silenced who gives reproof.



# MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

## A Study of the Eschatological Application of Prophecy

By Bryan Canter

### An Eschatological Application

Here is some internal textual evidence that the primary application of the Messages to the Seven Churches should be an eschatological one. Notice that Jesus tells almost every one of the churches that He will come to them to deliver either a reward or punishment based on their response to His message to them. The phrasing of the reference to His coming to that church is almost always in terms used throughout the New Testament for His literal Second Coming.

To the church of Ephesus Jesus says: Rev 2:5 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.

To Pergamum Jesus says: Rev 2:16 Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

To Thyatira Jesus says: Rev 2:20-26 (20) But I have {this} against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit {acts of} immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. (21) And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. (22) 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. (23) 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. (24) 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. (25) Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. (26) And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations;

To Sardis: Rev 3:3 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.

I would like to make a special note about this phrase that Jesus will come “like a thief.” The idea of Jesus coming like a thief in the night is discussed in five other locations in the New Testament (Matt 24:42-44; Luke 12:39-40; 1 Thes 5:2-4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 16:15). *In every single one of these instances it refers specifically to His literal Second Coming.* There is no reason to believe that this instance is any different.

To Philadelphia Jesus says: Rev 3:10-11 (10) Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that {hour} which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. (11) I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.

The “hour of testing, which is about to come upon the whole world” is undoubtedly the great tribulation.

To Laodicea, Jesus says: Rev 3:20 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.

The language to the church of Laodicea is less forceful in terms of Jesus coming literally to them, but we have always understood the church of Laodicea – or people “under judgment” – to be a church that Jesus would come to literally.

The only church of the seven that Jesus does not tell that He will come to them is the church of Smyrna. Jesus actually has no reproof for the church of Smyrna, but rather simply indicates that they should be “faithful unto death.” Perhaps the reason that Jesus does not tell this church that He will return to them is because they represent the martyrs of the time of trouble. If so, they would still represent a church of the last days, but would not be alive to see Jesus return. Look at what Jesus says to this church:

Rev 2:10-11 (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. (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.

### **The Main Point of the Messages to the Seven Churches**

The Messages to the Seven Churches are a description of what God aims to have in His “collective church” on earth be like just before Jesus “takes the reigns into His own hands” (TM 300) and brings the history of earth to a close. These messages depict a divided church. THE CHURCH is represented as several independent churches with separate characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. Among the seven churches we find some who are faithful and others who are not. We find some that have lost their first love, some that hold to or permit false doctrines, some that are dead asleep, and some that are lukewarm. This stands in stark contrast to the church that we find at the moment that Jesus returns. This church is depicted as a unified church. This church is depicted as a faithful church. Some of the descriptions of the church at the very moment of Jesus’ return are found in: Rev 7:13-14; Rev 12:11; Rev 12:17; Rev 14:4-5; Rev 14:12; Rev 17:14; Rev 19:7-8; and Eph 5:25-27.

I believe that the Seven Churches describe the state of the universal church (i.e all those who call themselves Christians) just before the beginning of the “Time of the End.” Much of the rest of the book of Revelation describes how Jesus takes the reigns into His own hands to bring earth’s history to a close. The 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, and 7 Last Plagues describe the process by which the whole world is sifted and shaken into two very distinct groups – the process by which the hearts of the wicked are progressively hardened and the faith of the righteous is purified. Compare the two following verses. The first one is at the end of the introductory sanctuary scene for the Messages to the Seven Churches. The second is part of the introductory sanctuary scene for the Seven Seals.

Rev 1:19: Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.

Rev 4:1: After these things I looked, and behold, a door {standing} open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like {the sound} of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”

The Greek for the phrase, “what must take place after these things” (*ha deí gen-ésthai metá taúta*) is exactly the same in both of these verses. This strong verbal link indicates that Rev 4:1 points directly back to Rev 1:19. The Seven Churches describes “the things which are.” Beginning with the Seven Seals, Revelation begins to describe “the things which shall take place after these things.” Notice that the text does not say that these things “might” take place. The word “must” is a proper translation of the Greek word *deí* which is a forceful definitive. The events “that *must* take place after these

things” are certain to happen. Why? Because God in His foreknowledge knew that the church would not have fulfilled the Gospel commission by the time that the nations of the world had filled their cup of iniquity to the brim. As we discussed in the previous study, the decisive factor which forces God to act to bring about the consummation of the plan of salvation and the end of earth’s history is when evil and the effects of sin have completely run their course. Through His foreknowledge and His control of the epic events of History, God determined that Satan’s period of probation would last 6000 years. He modeled the plan of salvation after the Sabbath cycle (weekly, yearly, and the 50-year Jubilee cycle) with six 1000-year “days” of work and the seventh-day millennial Sabbath. Since God knew that the church would not have completely fulfilled the Gospel commission by the time that evil had reached a critical mass, He planned in advance for the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit, the Little Time of Trouble, and the Great Tribulation in order to bring end-time events to a rapid close. Through this plan, it could be demonstrated without a doubt that final deliverance into heaven was God’s work, and not the work of man. God will take the reigns into His own hands during the final events of earth’s history. No one must ever claim that it was human effort – the work of the church – that caused the end to come. It is not the work of the church, but rather God’s work through the church and through circumstances that brings earth’s history to a close.

The Messages to the Seven Churches are God’s admonitions to individuals and groups that exhibit the character traits described for each of the Seven Churches. There are a number of ways that these “Churches” can be applied. They can be applied to individual Christians. They can apply to local churches. They can apply to denominations as a whole. They can apply to the Christian church in different geographical areas of the world. But the bottom line is still the same. There are certain individuals and groups that exhibit the character traits described in the Seven Churches. Each of these individuals and groups must heed Jesus’ admonitions and take His advice, because He is coming to each one of them very soon.

These messages are for our world today! The Latter Rain is about to fall. The first Trumpet is about to sound. Jesus is about to intervene to finish the work that the church has been either unwilling or unable to do for the last 1900+ years. And yet we see that there is hope in this process. We can be absolutely certain that there are some individuals from each of the Seven Churches that heed Jesus’ warning and take His advice, because all of the rewards that are promised to those of the Seven Churches who repent are realized in the description of Jesus’ bride in Revelation chapters 19–22.

General Fulfillment of all Promises:

Rev 21:7: He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

*Promise to Ephesus:* Rev 2:7: 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.

*Fulfillment:* Rev 22:2: 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.

*Promise to Smyrna:* Rev 2:11: 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.

*Fulfillment:* Rev 20:6: Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

*Promise to Pergamum:* Rev 2:17: 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.

*Fulfillment:* Rev 22:4: and they shall see His face, and His name {shall be} on their foreheads.

*Promise to Thyatira:* Rev 2:26-28: (26) And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; (27) 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; (28) and I will give him the morning star.

*Fulfillment:* Rev 22:5: And there shall no longer be {any} night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever. Rev 22:16: I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star. Rev 20:6: Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

*Promise to Sardis:* Rev 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.

*Fulfillment:* Rev 19:8-9: (8) 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. (9) And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

Rev 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.

*Promise to Philadelphia:* Rev 3:12: He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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.

*Fulfillment:* (see also Rev 21:9-27) Rev 22:3-4: (3) And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; (4) and they shall see His face, and His name {shall be} on their foreheads.

Rev 21:2-3: (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is

among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them,

*Promise to Laodicea:* Rev 3:21 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.

*Fulfillment:* Rev 20:4: And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I {saw} the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

One additional indication that the Messages to the Seven Churches are actually one message to the one collective but divided church of God is in the promises and their fulfillment's. The separate promises are made to the separate "churches." But the fulfillment's of those promises are realized by all who are part of the one body and bride of Christ at the moment of His return. So I believe that we are to view the Seven Churches as characteristics within the church that might manifest themselves in individuals, congregations, denominations, or geographical regions of the world. Eventually, through the trials of the end times, all the bad characteristics will be removed and the good qualities will be enhanced and the "seven" churches will become one unified body with Christ as the head.

### **Introductory Sanctuary Scene**

Following that general introduction, we will now look at the introductory sanctuary scene. I want to reiterate here what has been said before about the significance of the introductory sanctuary scenes of each of the septeraries. The introductory scenes set the context for interpreting the whole section that follows. They draw their imagery from the Old Testament sanctuary services and provide the *scope* of the section within the plan of salvation. Therefore, a correct interpretation of each septerary is highly dependent upon a correct interpretation of its introductory sanctuary scene. *The introductory scenes do not occur chronologically before the events described in the following section.* Rather these scenes provide the complete chronological backdrop for that given septerary. For example, at the end of the introductory sanctuary scene for the Seven Seals, we see "every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea" praising Jesus and giving honor and glory to Him. Right after this, the first Seal is broken. Well, that scene of praise is obviously at a point in the future, at or after the Second Coming, when "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord." We are not to conclude that the first Seal chronologically follows that event. Instead, the introductory sanctuary scenes provide the whole historical scope of the septerary that follows. So with the Seven Seals, the events take place chronologically between the time that the Lamb takes the scroll and the time described above when every living creature will give praise to Jesus.

This concept is interesting when it applies to the introductory sanctuary scene for the Messages to the Seven Churches. This scene is different from most of the rest of the sanctuary scenes because it does not describe a particular event or series of events. Instead, it just describes a scene with no particular action taking place. It describes more of a state of being than an event. Therefore, we are led to the conclusion that the

Seven Churches are *not* primarily to be understood as a series of events. Instead they describe the characteristics of the church either in general, or at a given point in time. I believe that the latter is the case. This point is strengthened by the fact that none of the Seven Churches are ever referred to by a number or with reference to a specific place in a sequence. Ephesus, for example, is never referred to as the *first* church. Actually, John is instructed to write all of the messages and put them in a single book. “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches...” – Rev 1:11. The section on the Messages to the Seven Churches is devoid of sequentially based language like “next” or “and then” etc. This stands in stark contrast to the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets and the Seven Last Plagues, which are all described with specific sequential language. We will discuss this in more detail a little later. But first, let’s take a look at the introductory sanctuary scene for the Messages to the Seven Churches.

Rev 1:9-20 [quoted]

*I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance {which are} in Jesus...*

It is interesting to note that John describes himself as our brother and fellow partaker, or companion, in *the* tribulation. In the Greek, the definite article, *teé*, is present here. Is John perhaps alluding to more than just the typical tribulation that Jesus promised to all believers? All believers of all ages have experienced tribulation, as was promised by the Apostles. “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” – 2 Tim 3:12. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” – Acts 14:22. But since John uses the definite article here, he may be indicating more than just typical persecution. In the context of the setting, he may be drawing a comparison between the first days of the Christian era and the last days of the Christian era. There are a large number of parallels between the two. The Early Rain of the Holy Spirit inaugurated the Christian era and the Latter Rain will consummate it. The tribulation that accompanied the Early Rain is just a foreshadow of the great tribulation that will accompany the Latter Rain. The “Kingdom of God,” which John alludes to next, began at the time of Christ. Jesus Himself preached that “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15. But the Kingdom of God will not be fully realized until the seventh Trumpet blows and the voices in heaven proclaim, “The kingdom of the world has become {the kingdom} of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever...We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign.” Rev 11:15-17. When John declares himself to be our brother in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Christ, he is claiming kinship in one sense with all believers, but in a particular way he is claiming kinship with those who will live at the time when the visions of Revelation will reach their ultimate fulfillment. Notice particularly in this verse that the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance are all “in Christ.” When we face the great tribulation and enter into the kingdom it can only be through Christ. Jesus is our perseverance. With Him we can do all things. Without Him we can do nothing. Jesus Christ is our Alpha and Omega. He is our all in all.

***I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day...***

The “Lord’s day” here has a very interesting connotation, with very significant ramifications for the interpretation of both the Messages to the Seven Churches and to the rest of Revelation. How do we interpret the term, “Lord’s day?” If we use the Bible as its own expositor, there can be only two meanings. First it means simply that John received



the Revelation vision on the Sabbath day. Scripture repeatedly identifies the Sabbath as God's special holy day.

Exod 20:10: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God; {in it} you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

Isa 58:13: If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your {own} pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy {day} of the LORD honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your {own} ways, from seeking your {own} pleasure, and speaking {your own} word,

Matt 12:8: For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

But as we mentioned before, the Bible gives us another distinct possibility of how to interpret the “Lord’s day.” It could also mean the eschatological “day of the Lord” – the time at the end of earth’s history when God takes the reigns into His own hands and begins the final judgment of the world.

Isa 2:12: For the LORD of hosts will have a day {of reckoning} against everyone who is proud and lofty, and against everyone who is lifted up, that he may be abased.

Joel 1:15: Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Joel 2:1: Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; surely it is near,

Joel 2:28-31; Acts 2:17-21: (17) And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (18) Even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy. (19) And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. (20) The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. (21) And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Joel 3:13-16: (13) Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. (15) The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness. (16) And the LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth tremble. But the LORD is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel.

Mal 4:5: Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

1 Cor 5:5: {I have decided} to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

1Thes 5:1-6: (1) Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the day of the

Lord will come just like a thief in the night. (3) While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. (4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; (5) for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; (6) so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

II Thes 2:1-4: (1) Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, (2) that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (3) Let no one in any way deceive you, for {it will not come} unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (4) who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

2 Pet 3:9-10: (9) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

So when Revelation says that John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, it could mean that the Spirit took him forward in time to the eschatological "day of the Lord" and showed him the events that would make up and surround the time of the end. This would certainly be consistent with the context of the many references cited above. Did you notice that many of those passages describe events that are almost identical with what we find in the book of Revelation? For example, we see "the sun turned into darkness, and the moon into blood" in the fourth and fifth Trumpets and the fifth Plague. We see the Elijah message being proclaimed in Revelation chapters 11, 14 & 18. We see the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit in the first Seal and in Revelation 18. We see the references to the grain and grape harvests in Revelation 14. We see the "valley of decision" fulfilled in the close of probation depicted in Revelation 22:11 and inferred throughout the book. We see the "man of Sin" being revealed in Revelation chapters 12, 13 & 17. The textual evidence is extremely strong, showing that what John saw in his Revelation vision were the very events described throughout the rest of the Bible in the "day of the Lord" passages.

So which of these two possible interpretations for the "Lord's day" is correct in this instance? Is John referring to the Sabbath day, or to the eschatological "day of the Lord?" I would suggest that both are correct. I believe that John received the vision on the Sabbath day. I also believe that he was shown the events of the eschatological "day of the Lord" in vision. Furthermore, I think that there is a significant link between the two. The Sabbath is a type of the eschatological day of the Lord. There are a number of parallel allusions throughout scripture that support a 7000-year theory. Just as God created the world in six days and rested the Seventh, the earth will suffer the effects of sin for 6000 years and will experience a Sabbath rest during the 1000 years of our millennial reign in heaven with Christ.

2 Pet 3:8: But do not let this one {fact} escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Ps 90:4: For a thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or {as} a watch in the night.

The “day of the Lord” includes a tribulation that precedes the Sabbath rest. In Jesus’ ministry, he suffered a Little Time of Trouble in Gethsemane and a Great Tribulation on the cross just prior to His Sabbath rest in the grave. Likewise, we will experience the Little Time of Trouble and the Great Tribulation prior to the millennial Sabbath reign in heaven. The Sabbath of years in the sanctuary system is also a type of the Millennium. The Israelites were to farm the land for six years and allow it to lie fallow on the seventh year. Also, if they took a brother Israelite as a slave, they were to set him free on the seventh year. Likewise, the “Israel of God” has been in bondage to sin for 6000 years and will be set free from the presence of sin at the beginning of the 7000 year.

Exod 21:2: If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment.

Exod 23:10-12: (10) And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, (11) but {on} the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard {and} your olive grove. (12) Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease {from labor} in order that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.

See also Leviticus 25:3-4 and Deuteronomy 15:12.

The failure of the Israelites to observe both the weekly and seven-year Sabbath cycles was part of the reason that they were sent into captivity in Babylon. It is interesting to note once again that God predicted this event even before He delivered Israel into the Promised Land.

Lev 26:27-35: (27) Yet if in spite of this, you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, (28) then I will act with wrathful hostility against you; and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins. (29) Further, you shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you shall eat. (30) I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols; for My soul shall abhor you. (31) I will lay waste your cities as well, and will make your sanctuaries desolate; and I will not smell your soothing aromas. (32) And I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled over it. (33) You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. (34) Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. (35) All the days of {its} desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it.

Jer 34:14-21: (14) At the end of seven years each of you shall set free his Hebrew brother, who has been sold to you and has served you six years, you shall send him out free from you; but your forefathers did not obey Me, or incline their ear to Me. (15) Although recently you {had} turned and done what is right in My sight, each man proclaiming release to his neighbor, and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name. (16) Yet you turned and profaned My name, and each man took back his male servant and each man his female servant, whom you

had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your male servants and female servants.” (17) Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother, and each man to his neighbor. Behold, I am proclaiming a release to you,’ declares the LORD, ‘to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (18) And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, {when} they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts (19) the officials of Judah, and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers, and the priests, and all the people of the land, who passed between the parts of the calf (20) and I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. (21) And Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has gone away from you.

2 Chr 36:20-21: (20) And those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, (21) to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

Neh 13:17-18: (17) Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day? (18) Did not your fathers do the same so that our God brought on us, and on this city, all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath.

Likewise God will bind Satan and slay the wicked during the eschatological Day of the Lord and the world will enjoy its Sabbath rest during the Millennium. The final and ultimate Sabbath typology is embodied in the Jubilee.

Lev 25:8-12: (8) You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, {namely,} forty-nine years. (9) You shall then sound a ram’s horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. (10) You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. (11) You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in {from} its untrimmed vines. (12) ‘For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field.

Notice that the Jubilee came after the seven Sabbaths of years (or 49 years). At this time all the slaves were set free and everyone’s inherited property was returned to them, and all debts erased. The original fulfillment of the Jubilee came at the cross, when Jesus came to “proclaim release to the captives and...to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” – Luke 4:18-19. However, the ultimate fulfillment of the Jubilee is embodied in the eschatological Day of the Lord, which culminates after the millennium when sin is completely and finally done away with and the “Israel of God” receives back their inheritance of the earth made new. Just a side note, I would not be surprised if God once again takes six days to recreate the world and we all celebrate the Sabbath day together with Him.

Can you begin to see the immense significance of the simple fact that John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Yes it was a Sabbath day. But it was so much more than that. John was carried forward in time to the eschatological Day of the Lord and was shown the ultimate fulfillment of all that the Sabbath day has come to symbolize.

*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.*

The introductory sanctuary scene for the Messages to the Seven Churches is descriptive of general characteristics at a point in time. It does not describe a specific event or a series of events. This is also contrasted with the introductory sanctuary scenes for the other sections of Revelation. We are to conclude, therefore, that the most complete application of the Messages to the Seven Churches is an eschatological description of the characteristics of the church as a whole just before God intervenes with the epochal end-time events described throughout the rest of the book of Revelation. The Messages to the Seven Churches do not serve primarily to describe the ages of the church throughout history.

There is also an indication here, as we have noted before, that the Messages to the Seven Churches are actually one message to the one collective but divided church of God. Further evidence of this fact is manifest in the promises made to the churches and the fulfillments of those promises in the latter part of the book. The separate promises are made to the separate "churches." But the fulfillments of those promises are realized by all who compose the one body and bride of Christ at the moment of His return. This suggests that we are to view the Seven Churches as characteristics within the church that might manifest themselves in individuals, congregations, denominations, or geographical regions of the world. Eventually, through the trials of the end times, all the bad characteristics will be removed and the good qualities will be enhanced and the "seven" churches will become one unified body with Christ as the head.

### **A Vision of Jesus**

The vision of Jesus within the introductory sanctuary scene is so significant that I wanted to place it under its own sub-heading. Look again at the vision that John sees of Jesus.

Rev 1:12-18 [quoted]

It is very significant to note that this description is almost identical to the one we see in Daniel chapter 10.

Dan 10:4-10 [quoted]

Notice in Daniel's vision, that Gabriel (an angel sent from Jesus) was bringing a message to Daniel about the last days. "Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet {future.}" – Dan 10:14. The term "latter days" is translated from the Hebrew, *báachariyt*, which is translated numerous times elsewhere in scripture as "last days." So John and Daniel under similar circumstances are given parallel visions of Jesus and then shown or told by the angel Gabriel what would happen in the last days of earth's history. This again is strong evidence for an eschatological application of Revelation.

Something else is very significant about this description of Jesus that we should note up-front. Jesus is depicted in the garb of an ordinary priest. He is not seen in His High Priestly garb. There is no doubt that Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 8:1-2). The only

time during the sanctuary services on earth that the high priest wore the garb of an ordinary priest was on the Day of Atonement. This vision of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary in the garb of an ordinary priest places the whole Revelation vision in the context of the Day of Atonement services. Notice throughout Revelation's sanctuary scenes that we never see Jesus specifically performing any of the elements of the "daily" or "continual" services. At times we see Him ministering before the golden altar of incense. We see Him approaching God's throne (the Ark of the Covenant). We do see Him walking among the lampstands and we see Him near the laver (sea of glass). But notice in those instances that He is not actually performing the daily services in relation to those items. He is merely standing among the lampstands; He is not tending to the lamps and trimming the wicks. Likewise, we do not see any references to the altar of burnt offerings or to the daily sacrifices. Neither do we ever see Him tending to the bread on the table of shewbread. The only services that we see Jesus performing throughout Revelation's sanctuary scenes are all associated with the Day of Atonement. This has very significant ramifications for how we interpret the prophecies. It clearly places the most complete application of those prophecies in an end-time context.

How do we know that Jesus is wearing the garments of an ordinary priest and not those of the high priest? We have already noted that John's vision here is parallel to Daniel's vision in Daniel 10:4-10. On page 6 of his paper entitled, "The Timed Prophecies of Daniel 12," Dr. Franklin Fowler provides a very insightful quote from an article by Dr. Robert Hauser entitled, "The logic of Fidelity Towards Meaning," *Truth and Consequences*, page 22. "There are two words in the Old Testament translated as *linen* in English. The first of these, *shesh* (shaysh), is used to describe the linen garments for the high priest for his daily, holy place ministry. The second word, *bad* (bad), is used in Lev. 16 describing the garments the high priest wore on the Day of Atonement. The Hebrew word in Daniel 10 and 12 for the linen of the man on the water is *bad*, indicating that Jesus is seen here during the antitypical day of atonement..." Dr. Fowler goes on to note the other uses of the word *bad* throughout the Old Testament. This word appears only 23 times in the Old Testament and in only 11 separate passages. In five of those passages, it is used to refer to the garments worn by ordinary priests. In one passage, it is used to describe the garments of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. It is used twice in Daniel 10 and 12 in visions describing Jesus. Twice it is used to describe the linen ephod that David wore when he brought the Ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. The final use of the word is in Ezekiel chapters 9 and 10 in a vision describing the sealing of God's people and the destruction of those who are not sealed. This vision in Ezekiel is an apocalyptic vision and is the major background source for the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and for the introductory sanctuary scene for the Seven Trumpets in Revelation 8. All of these instances strongly support the Day of Atonement imagery that is suggested by the use of this particular word, *bad*, for linen. Also, the rest of the description of Jesus in Revelation 1:12-18 lets us know that Jesus is clothed in the garments of an ordinary priest that the High priest wore only on the Day of Atonement. The only two garments that are mentioned in this passage are the white robe and the golden girdle, or sash. The other special garments of the high priest are not mentioned at all, in this rather detailed description of Jesus. One item that is significantly absent from the description is the breastplate or ephod upon which were the twelve gemstones and the two decision stones – the Urim and the Thumim. This item was central to the clothing and to the role of the high priest and would certainly not have been omitted in this passage if Jesus were presented in high priestly garments. One item worn by the ordinary priests is missing – the white turban. But we see Jesus described as having hair that is white like wool and like snow. The priests wore a white turban that symbol-

ized a covering of righteousness. Jesus possesses His own righteousness and that is symbolized with white hair in the place of a white turban.

***And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands...***

Notice here that John sees lampstands, not lamps. In verse 20 Jesus identifies the lampstands as representing the seven churches. But in Rev 4:5 we read this: “And {there were} seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” This reference indicates that the lamps themselves represent the Holy Spirit. This is an important distinction. The church is never the source of light. The church can only lift up a source of light that is not internal to itself. Here it is indicated that the source of light is the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in scripture, the Bible and Jesus are also identified as the source of light. These references are not contradictory, because all represent a revelation of truth from God. By being represented as lampstands, it highlights the mission of the church to lift up Jesus and the Bible and the Holy Spirit before the people of the world. This imagery is also further confirmation that we are not seeing a scene from the “daily” or “continual” ministry in the sanctuary. In the daily service, the priests tended to the lamps and trimmed the wicks. They did not tend to the lampstands themselves.

***I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen...***

As we noted above, the linen robe shows that this is a Day of Atonement vision, since Jesus is dressed in the garments of an ordinary priest. The high priest only wore these garments during the Day of Atonement services. The linen robe represents righteousness. Jesus is later depicted as having white hair, indicating that He has his own internal righteousness. Robes or garments indicate an external covering of righteousness. Later in Revelation, Jesus offers the white robes of His righteousness to those who accept and believe in Him.

Isa 64:6: For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Zech 3:2-8: (2) And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” (3) Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. (4) And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” Again he said to him, “See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.” (5) Then I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by. (6) And the angel of the LORD admonished Joshua saying, (7) “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘If you will walk in My ways, and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among these who are standing {here.} (8) ‘Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you – indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch.

Rev 3:4-5 (4) '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. (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.

Rev 3:18 (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.

Rev 4:4 And around the throne {were} twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones {I saw} twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

Rev 6:10-11 (10) 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?" (11) 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.

Rev 7:9, 13-14 (9) After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and {all} tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches {were} in their hands; (13) And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

***...whose waist was girded with {a belt of} pure gold of Uphaz***

Gold represents faith. Jesus is seen here with a symbol of perfect faith girding His waist (or across His chest). He offers this faith to those in the church of Laodicea who will repent. Faith is a characteristic of our relationship with God. Faith is a combination of belief and trust in God. "And without faith it is impossible to please {Him} for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and {that} He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." – Heb 11:6. Jesus exhibited perfect faith on the cross. At that moment, He could not see past the second death to the Resurrection. Yet He had complete trust in the will of God the Father.

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done."

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Luke 23:46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." And having said this, He breathed His last.

God helps our faith to grow through our trials and tribulations. As we learn to trust God through our trials, our faith is strengthened and purified. The gold is refined in the fire. Just like Daniel's three young Hebrew friends who were cast into the fiery furnace



(see Daniel 3), we will soon go through the fiery times described in the book of Revelation. And just as Jesus walked with Meshak, Shadrach, and Abed-nego through the fire, so will He walk with us through the trials of the last days. Notice that Meshak, Shadrach, and Abed-nego were not harmed by the fire. The only things that were burned in the furnace were the ropes that bound them. As we walk with Jesus through the Great Tribulation, the only thing that will be destroyed is the sin that binds us. Our faith will be tried in the fire and come out refined as pure gold.

Rom 5:3-5 (3) And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (5) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

James 1:2-3 (2) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which {the Lord} has promised to those who love Him.

1 Pet 1:6-7 (6) In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, (7) that the proof of your faith, {being} more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Rev 3:18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourselves...

One final point which is worthy of mention here. Notice that Jesus is not just wearing a sash of gold, but the gold is of Uphaz. There are two more references to the gold of Uphaz in the Bible. One is in Daniel chapter 10, and gives us further evidence that John's vision is parallel to Daniel's. The other reference is in Jeremiah 10:9. In this passage, God is making a distinction between Himself and the idols that Israel had adopted from their heathen neighbors. These idols were crafted with the gold of Uphaz. But God notes that He is the true God. He is the Creator. He is the one who controls the lightning and the rain and the wind. In this passage in Jeremiah, God shows the distinction between Himself, the true God, and the false gods that surround Israel. This is also a very common theme of the book of Revelation. That Jesus is clothed with the Gold of Uphaz highlights His victory over the false gods of Israel's past. It stands as a warning against the false Gods that play a part in the closing scenes of earth's history as portrayed in the book of Revelation. Here is a portion of the passage in Jeremiah. Notice the common imagery that you also see in the book of Revelation.

Jer 10:1-13 (1) Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. (2) Thus says the LORD, "Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens although the nations are terrified by them; (3) For the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. (4) "They decorate {it} with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter. (5) "Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, for they can do no harm, nor can they do any good." (6) There is none like Thee, O LORD; Thou art great, and great is

Thy name in might. (7) Who would not fear Thee, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Thy due! For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like Thee. (8) But they are altogether stupid and foolish {in their} discipline of delusion— their idol is wood! (9) Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of a craftsman and of the hands of a goldsmith; Violet and purple are their clothing; they are all the work of skilled men. (10) But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation. (11) Thus you shall say to them, “The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.” (12) {It is} He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens. (13) When He utters His voice, {there is} a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings out the wind from His storehouses.

***His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow;***

As we have noted before, the white hair of Jesus is in place of the white turbans worn by the priests. It indicates that Jesus has an intrinsic righteousness – unlike the priests, whose righteousness is a covering obtained from an external source. That external source is, of course, Jesus. The comparison to wool reminds us again that Jesus is the true Lamb of God, without blemish of any kind. The whiteness of snow is also an image derived from the Old Testament concept of sinlessness, righteousness and purity.

Isa 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.

Also, in Daniel, we find a vision of God the Father having white clothing and white hair that is compared to wool and snow. This is just a further confirmation of the oneness of the Godhead. It also emphasizes the close connection between Daniel and Revelation.

Dan 7:9 “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.

***His eyes were like a flame of fire***

Eyes are used throughout the Bible as a symbol of spiritual discernment. In Revelation 3:18, Jesus counsels the church of Laodicea to buy eye salve from Him to anoint their eyes that they might see.

This is an obvious allusion to spiritual discernment. When eyes are used as a symbol of God’s discernment, it is usually in a setting of judgment or warning of impending judgment. Through this imagery, we are reminded that “God {sees} not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” – 1 Sam 16:7. We have seen in this vision that Jesus is among the lampstands, indicating His presence with the church. However this reference to the spiritual discernment of God also lets us know that Jesus is judging the church. At this point, the judgment is an investigative judgment for the purposes of admonition and of warning – warning that the final judgment is approaching. In the section that follows Jesus discerns the spiritual state of each of the Seven Churches and admonishes them to repent because the final, irrevocable judgment is coming soon.

There are a number of Biblical parallels that we need to consider with regard to the eyes of God representing spiritual discernment. The first parallel to this description here is in Revelation 19:12. Note that this passage is part of the chiasmic parallel to the Messages to the Seven Churches.

Rev 19:11-16 (11) And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it {is} called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. (12) And His eyes {are} a flame of fire, and upon His head {are} many diadems; and He has a name written {upon Him} which no one knows except Himself. (13) And {He is} clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. (14) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white {and} clean, were following Him on white horses. (15) And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. (16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

The parallels in this passage are very significant. In this passage, we see the beginning of the executive phase of Christ's judgment. Jesus is coming from heaven to "wage war" on the wicked and rescue His people. The Bible uses the image of His eyes being a flame of fire to emphasize the certainty of His judgment. The books have already been opened to the angels in heaven at this point. They have already heard the verdict of God's judgments and have participated in the punishments imposed under the Seven Last Plagues. Between the second and third Plagues, the angels declare, "Righteous art Thou, who art and who wast, O Holy One, because Thou didst judge these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it." – Rev 16:5-6. However, the wicked do not become aware of the judgments against them until the moment of Jesus' return. Up until that point they are under the delusion that they are righteous and that the plagues they are suffering are the result of the "disobedience" of God's true people in that they refuse to worship the beast. Later, in heaven, when the books are opened before the redeemed, they proclaim the righteousness of God's judgments. "After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her." Rev 19:1-2. Eventually, even the wicked will acknowledge the righteousness of God's judgments.

Rom 14:10-12 (10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. (11) For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." (12) So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Phil 2:9-11 (9) Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

(10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, (11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The next major reference to the eyes of Jesus is in Revelation 5:6. This is part of the introductory sanctuary scene for the Seven Seals.

Rev 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.

Here the “eyes” of the Lamb are identified as “the seven Spirits of God, sent into all the earth.” We noted in Rev 1:4 that the “seven Spirits” is a term used to denote the Holy Spirit. This description in Revelation 5:6 has a couple of very significant Biblical parallels. In each instance, the reference to the “eyes” or “vision” of God refers to a time when He is about to proclaim judgments against either His people or the enemies of His people. We will also see that most of these instances are in passages that are types of the final eschatological judgment.

2 Chr 16:9 “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

This passage in 2 Chronicles 16 refers to a time when Israel was besieging Judah. Asa, the king of Judah, made an alliance with Ben-hádad, king of Syria, instead of relying on the power of the Lord to protect him. God’s response is recorded in the verse we just read above. As a result of his lack of faith, Asa suffered under war and bloodshed the rest of his days. Although this is not an apocalyptic passage, it does state the principle involved. The “eyes of God moving to and fro throughout the earth” indicates His spiritual discernment and His judgment. Now let’s look at two apocalyptic prophecies in the book of Zechariah that are significant background references for the book of Revelation. We read the first passage a few moments ago when we talked about the white robes of righteousness. Now look at the passage again and notice the close association between this concept and the “eyes” or judgment of God.

Zech 3:1-10 (1) Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. (2) And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” (3) Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. (4) And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” Again he said to him, “See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.” (5) Then I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by. (6) And the angel of the LORD admonished Joshua saying, (7) “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘If you will walk in My ways, and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among these who are standing {here.} (8) ‘Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you – indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. (9) ‘For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; *on one stone are seven eyes*. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. (10) ‘In that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘every one of you will invite his neighbor to {sit} under {his} vine and under {his} fig tree.’”

The “one day” mentioned here is none other than the eschatological day of the Lord. Actually this prophecy foretells both the cross and the eschatological day of the Lord. At the cross, the Lord brought forth “His servant the Branch” placed the iniquity of us all on

Him. On that day Jesus gained the victory over sin and Satan for all time. In the eschatological day of the Lord, Jesus shall return to remove the presence of sin in His universe. At His Second Coming, He declares the final verdict of the wicked. The final execution of that verdict, and the consummation of the plan of salvation from sin, is delayed until the end of the millennium and after the righteous have reviewed God's judgments in the books of heaven. God wants to ensure that there are no unanswered questions in anyone's mind before He executes the irrevocable sentence of the second death. Notice in the passage above the close association of the garments of righteousness and the eyes of God that we also see in the description of Jesus in Revelation.

Let's look now at the next chapter of Zechariah where we find another important parallel with the Book of Revelation. In this passage we notice a reference to lampstands, the eyes of God, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the "two witnesses" of Revelation 11.

Zech 4:2-14 (2) And he said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; (3) also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side." (4) Then I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" (5) So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." (6) Then he answered and said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. (7) 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel {you will become} a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" (8) Also the word of the LORD came to me saying, (9) "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish {it.} Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. (10) "For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel— {these are} the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth." (11) Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" (12) And I answered the second time and said to him, "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden {oil} from themselves?" (13) So he answered me saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." (14) Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth."

Notice the close connection between the lampstand and the "eyes" of God, just as we see in the vision of Jesus in Revelation. Later in Zechariah, we read background material for the four horses of the Seven Seals and direct references to the Latter Rain. The prophecy deals with God's deliverance of His people from captivity in Babylon. It is typical of God's final deliverance of His people from spiritual Babylon in the last days. These allusions in the Introductory Sanctuary Scene of the Messages to the Seven Churches to Old Testament passages that provide background material for the rest of Revelation, and that are strong eschatological types, gives us more confidence in an eschatological application of the Messages to the Seven Churches. They focus our attention on the themes of righteousness, judgment, warning to repent, assurance of salvation and deliverance from the captivity of "Babylon" that provide the setting for the Messages to the Seven Churches, which themselves provide the setting and context for the rest of the book of Revelation. The Messages to the Seven Churches describe the

spiritual condition of God's people just before He intervenes and initiates the events that will bring earth's history to a close.

***His feet {were} like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace...***

Given the sanctuary setting of this vision, it is interesting to note that the only use of bronze in the sanctuary furniture was in the altar of burnt offering and the laver. These items were outside the tabernacle in the courtyard. All the items inside the tabernacle were of gold. The courtyard represents the earth. It also represents justification in the plan of salvation. It is the place where the lambs, goats and bulls were sacrificed. It was there that the burnt offerings were made. Inside the tabernacle represents heaven. The Holy place represents Christian growth. The Most Holy Place represents glorification, and it is here that the Shikinah Glory – the very presence of the glory of God – dwelt among His people. It was on the earth – in the courtyard – that Jesus was sacrificed. But Jesus now ministers in heaven – in the presence of God – on our behalf. Jesus trod the earth as a man and went through the fiery trial of crucifixion and the second death, and so He appears in this vision with feet of bronze that glows as if it just came from the furnace. The sash over His heart is of gold, representing the purity of the faith that fills His heart and the ministry He now performs on our behalf in heaven itself.

***...His voice {was} like the sound of many waters***

Within the book of Revelation, this phrase appears two more times. Here it says that Jesus' voice was like the sound of many waters. In Revelation 14:2-3, it says that the collective voice of the 144,000 is like the sound of many waters. And in Revelation 19:6-7, the collective voices of all the redeemed, praising God and giving glory to Him, are described as being like the sound of many waters. In Revelation 17:15 we read that the harlot Babylon is sitting on "many waters" which represent "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." Finally, in Ezekiel 1:24 and 43:2 the voice of God the Father is described as the sound of many waters.

Rev 14:2-3 (2) And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard {was} like {the sound} of harpists playing on their harps. (3) And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.

Rev 19:6-7 (6) And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. (7) 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."

Ezek 43:2 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.

What are we to make of these references? First of all, I believe that we can say that Jesus and God the Father speak with the same authority – the authority of the Creator God. In ancient times, when a king or ruler spoke, they spoke on behalf of all the people that they ruled or governed. A monarch would often refer to himself as "we" rather than

“I,” indicating that he spoke on behalf of all his people. And so it is with God. When He speaks, He speaks on behalf of all the redeemed. But there is one more significant Old Testament passage that I would like for us to consider.

Jer 10:12-13 (12) {It is} He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens. (13) When He utters His voice, {there is} a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings out the wind from His storehouses.

Jer 51:15-16 (15) {It is} He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens. (16) When He utters His voice, {there is} a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings forth the wind from His storehouses.

First of all, notice that these two passages are identical. They come from two different instances when the authority of God as the Creator and true God is being vindicated. But also notice that in these passages, the forces of nature are described as being at God’s disposal. They are tools that God can use to accomplish His ends. In the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets, and the Seven Last Plagues, we see many instances of God using the forces of nature as a significant part of end-time events. People are forced to react when they face a crisis. Some crises are brought about by our own actions, and we usually either blame ourselves or others for the outcome of these situations. Great economic crises are of this variety. But most people still understand the forces of nature and natural disasters to be “acts of God.”

The Book of Revelation indicates that there will soon be a time when the whole world will be divided over the issue of worship. Every single person in the world will be a “religious fanatic.” That is certainly not the case at this point in time. In fact, the predominant position in the world today is one of secular humanism. So what will cause such a revolutionary change in the thought patterns the entire global population? The only thing that can cause that kind of revolution in thought is a global crisis. But a global economic crisis would not drive people to get religious. To refocus the attention of the entire world on worship, the global crisis would have to be recognized by people as an “act of God.” I believe that the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets describe the global crisis that will bring about this revolution in global thought.

With the cross references we have noted above, we see Jesus depicted in this Introductory Sanctuary Scene as the one who has control of the forces of nature. God used a 3-1/2 year drought in the time of Elijah to get the attention of the people of Israel. Once He had gotten their attention with the drought, He sent Elijah to deliver a message to the people on Mount Carmel. The heart of that message was “How long will you falter between two opinions If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” I King 18:21. Following that message, God provided a very dramatic display of His power to demonstrate who the true God was. Well, in the last days, God will once again use the forces of nature to get the attention of the world. Then He will send the “Elijah message” to the world through the 144,000, under the power of the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit. But the critical setup for that message is a global crisis that will be recognized by all the people as an act of God.

Jesus here is depicted as the One who has the forces of nature at His disposal. This is how He will intervene in the affairs of men to bring earth’s history to a close. This is how He will “take the reigns into His own hands.” Revelation says that in the end there

will be only two camps. Right now there appear to be three camps. Some are clearly in God's camp. Some are very clearly in Satan's camp. But the vast majority are riding the fence. Soon, God will reach down and shake the fence and cause people to have to jump off the fence into one camp or the other. God doesn't make the choice for these people, but He will force them to make a choice. He will cause circumstances that will force people to decide – one way or the other. When the very last person on earth has made the irrevocable decision to follow the true God or to deny Him and follow a false god, then probation will close. Then God will pour out the Seven Last Plagues on the finally impenitent. The reference describing Jesus' voice as the sound of many waters is a strong literary allusion to Jeremiah 10:12-13 and 51:15-16. These cross references give us additional confirmation of a valid eschatological application of the book of Revelation. It highlights Jesus warning to the Seven Churches that He is about to take final events into His own hands.

***...in His right hand He held seven stars... the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches...***

It is significant that Jesus holds the stars in His right hand. Throughout scripture, the right hand symbolizes power or strength, blessing, salvation, honor, judgment, and ownership. In the sanctuary services, as part of the consecration rite for the priests, they would apply the blood of the consecration offering to their right earlobe, index finger, and big toe. In the book of Revelation, several things are associated with the right hand. The seven stars are in Jesus' right hand. In Revelation 1:20, when John faints from the vision, Jesus touches him with His right hand. In Revelation 5:1,7, Jesus takes the scroll from the Father's right hand. In Revelation 10:5, the Angel raises His right hand to heaven when He makes His proclamation that there will be no more delay, but that the mystery of God will be complete when the seventh angel blows his trumpet. Finally, we note that the mark of the beast is given in the right hand or the forehead.

In this particular instance here, the seven stars are in Jesus' right hand. This has a number of connotations. It symbolizes that they are covered by Jesus' protection. It indicates that they receive of Jesus' strength. It indicates that they are in a position of honor at Jesus' right side. It indicates that they have received the salvation offered by Jesus, and that He has proclaimed judgment in their favor. Finally, it indicates that they have received the blessing of the firstborn.

This raises an interesting point. What do the stars symbolize? Well, verse 20 tells us that they represent the angels of the seven churches. Does this refer to actual angels? The answer is not certain. The book of Revelation uses the symbol of stars to refer to literal angels in a number of places. However, the book of Revelation also uses the term "angel" to refer to literal angels and to other messengers – usually people whom God has commissioned to carry a certain message to the world or to His people. The three angels of Revelation 14 and the angel of Revelation 18 are good examples of where angels represent people with a special message. I believe that in this instance, the stars represent "angels" as messengers, mostly because of the "right hand" symbolism noted above.

So if these stars represent human messengers, who are they specifically? Notice that it is not the churches themselves, but the angels to the churches that Jesus holds in His right hand. Remember that the right hand is a strong Biblical symbol for the blessing to the firstborn. In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is identified as the Firstborn of the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul says that "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep." When Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended to the right hand of God the Father (Colossians 3:1). Later in Revelation 14:4, the 144,000 are



described as the “first fruits” to God and the Lamb from among men. If the right hand represents the blessing to the firstborn, perhaps these angels represent the 144,000 as they are being commissioned by God to take the last word of warning to the church. In this case, they would be analogous to the Angel of Revelation 18. It is also possible that they could represent the three angels of Revelation 14 as well. These angels carry a message of preparation for end-time events that precedes the blowing of the first Trumpet and the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit, which seems to be in keeping with the context of the Messages to the Seven Churches.

***...out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword...***

This two edged sword is a reference to the Word of God. It is also a reference to judgment, which once again leads us to the conclusion that we are witnessing a judgment scene in the Messages to the Seven Churches. Judgment, however, comes in several phases – investigation of the facts, preliminary warning to repent, determination of the verdict, declaration of the verdict, and execution of the verdict. In the judgment of God, the execution of the verdict comes in two phases. First there is a temporal punishment (Seven Last Plagues) and the first death. The final stage of the execution comes in the form of the second death after the millennium. In the instance we are considering here, in the Messages to the Seven Churches, it appears as if we are in the investigation and warning phase of the judgment. See the cross references below to the two edged sword representing the Word of God and judgment.

Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Heb 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.

Rev 2:16 ‘Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

Rev 19:15 And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

Rev 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

***...His face was like the sun shining in its strength.***

In general, Jesus is described as the Light of the world. Light also represents truth and righteousness. In Revelation 12:1, the pure woman, i.e. the true church, is represented as being clothed with the light of the sun – or with the truth and righteousness that come from Jesus. Thus scripture describes both Jesus and the church as the light of the world. Jesus is the source of truth and righteousness, and the church is a reflection of Christ to the world.

John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Matt 5:14-16 (14) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) “Nor do {men} light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the

lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. (16) "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

This reference to Jesus' face shining as the sun also alludes to a moment of overwhelming conviction and commissioning. Paul (as Saul of Tarsus) had a vision of Jesus that was brighter than the sun. The vision came with a warning to repent and with a commission to carry the Gospel message to the Gentiles.

Acts 26:12-15 (12) "While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, (13) at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. (14) "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' (15) "And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

In the Messages to the Seven Churches, Jesus comes with a similar message of repentance and commissioning. He tells the churches to repent and to carry God's final Gospel call to the world. We see again the eschatological overtones in this symbolism. The following cross-references make the eschatological overtones even more pronounced.

Matt 17:2-3 (2) And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (3) And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

This is on the Mount of Transfiguration, which is a miniature representation of Heaven. You have Jesus in all His glory. You have Moses who represents those who died and were resurrected. And you have Elijah who represents those who are translated and never see death. Moses also represents the law and the Word of God. Elijah also represents the prophets. Note the very strong parallels between Revelation 1:16, Matthew 17:2-3, and the following passage from Malachi 4. This draws a very strong connection between the book of Revelation and the eschatological "Day of the Lord."

Mal 4:1-6 (1) "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." (2) "But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. (3) "And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts. (4) "Remember the law of Moses My servant, {even the} statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. (5) "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (6) "And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to {their} children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

John the Baptist was the first fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. He came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" to deliver a message of repentance to God's people and to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. Look at the words that John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, prophesied under the Spirit of God.

Luke 1:76-79 (76) "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; (77) To give to His people {the}

knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, (78) Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the sunrise from on high shall visit us, (79) To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

This is a type of the commissioning of the 144,000 who will be the final fulfillment of Malachi's Elijah prophecy. These will come in the spirit and power of Elijah to carry the final message of repentance to the world to prepare the way for Jesus' Second Coming. The literary parallels here solidify this linking of ideas.

Note these additional cross-references as well. The eschatological context is emphasized once again.

Isa 60:19-20 (19) “No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory. (20) “Your sun will set no more, neither will your moon wane; for you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be finished.

Rev 21:23-24 (23) And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp {is} the Lamb. (24) And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.

***...He laid His right hand upon me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.***

In Revelation 1:4,8 the parallel references were to God the Father. In Jesus' proclamation here, He demonstrates His equality with the Father. This proclamation is the keystone of all that is to come in the book of Revelation. All the promises to the redeemed have their certainty in Jesus' proclamation in this verse. Jesus lifts John up from his death-like state and tells him, “Do not be afraid.” Why is John not to be afraid? Because the promises of Jesus are absolutely certain. He has the power to deliver from both death and sin. Why? Because of the three things that Jesus proclaims in this statement. 1) “I am God,” 2) “I died in your place,” and 3) “I rose from the dead and live forevermore.” These three facts form the firm foundation of the entire Christian faith. Salvation is available to us because of the Deity/Humanity, death, and resurrection of Christ. Based on these facts Jesus now holds the “key” or the power over death and the grave. He has this power, because He holds the power over sin. In Revelation 20:14, we find that death and hades are the final things thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. This is because death is a byproduct of sin. Sin and all sinners will be forever destroyed in the lake of fire. As a result, death and the grave are destroyed as well. No more sin no more death. The real power that Jesus holds, the real key in His hand, is the power over sin. And as we see in the book of Hebrews, Jesus' indestructible life is the basis of His High Priestly ministry. Consider the following cross-references.

Rom 6:8-10 (8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (9) knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. (10) For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

Gal 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Heb 7:15-17, 25 (15) And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, (16) who has become {such} not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. (17) For it is witnessed {of Him} “Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (25) Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

### **The Historical Context of the Messages to the Seven Churches**

Verse 19 in Revelation chapter 1 is a pivotal verse. As we indicated before, it is a key verse in establishing the historical timing of the entire book of Revelation. We have already noted a number of factors that help us to conclude that the Messages to the Seven Churches primarily have an eschatological application. Some of these factors are the “day of the Lord” reference, Jesus’ Day of Atonement garb, and the numerous cross-references in the description of Jesus that have special end-time significance (feet of bronze, eyes of fire, two-edged sword, face shining as the sun, etc.). From this, along with the content of the messages themselves, we have concluded that the messages to the seven churches are descriptions of the collective church just before Jesus takes the reigns into His own hands to bring earth’s history to a close. They also reflect Jesus’ counsel to the church on the eve of the time of the end. Now let’s compare Revelation 1:19 with Revelation 4:1.

Rev 1:19 Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.

Rev 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door {standing} open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like {the sound} of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”

The Greek for the phrases underlined above is identical. The strong literary link has led a number of scholars to conclude that Revelation 4:1 is a direct reference to Revelation 1:19. Revelation 4:1 begins the Introductory Sanctuary Scene for the Seven Seals. The verse suggests that the Messages to the Seven Churches constitute the “things which are” of verse 1:19, and the rest of the book of Revelation describes the “things which must take place after these things.” So, the Seven Churches represent the collective church on earth just before end-time events begin. The Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, and Seven Last Plagues, along with several other portions of Revelation, describe the events that lead up to Jesus’ Second Coming. The whole of Revelation, in its eschatological application, describes the culmination of the plan of Salvation and the final disposition of the sin problem.

I also want to note that the verse says the things *must* happen. These events are absolutely certain. They are not conditional. They represent actions of God, by way of commission or of permission. But they are sovereign acts of God, the timing of which He determined – or fixed – from the beginning of time, based upon His sovereignty and His foreknowledge, mixed with mercy and grace.

“Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. There will be those among us who will always want to control the work of God, to dictate

even what movements shall be made when the work goes forward under the direction of the angel who joins the third angel in the message to be given to the world. God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness.” TM 300.

“Do you believe that the Lord is coming, and that the last great crisis is about to break upon the world? There will soon come a sudden change in God’s dealings. The world in its perversity is being visited by casualties,—by floods, storms, fires, earthquakes, famines, wars and bloodshed. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power;...but His forbearance will not always continue. Who is prepared for the *sudden change* that will take place in God’s dealings with sinful men?” – Fundamentals of Christian Education, p.356, 357.

***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.***

For a discussion of the seven lampstands and seven stars see the previous discussions on 1:12 and 1:16.

### **The Messages to the Seven Churches**

Based on our discussion of the Introductory sanctuary scene, we are now prepared to take a look at the Messages to the Seven Churches themselves. We took time to look in detail at each verse in the Introductory Sanctuary scene. This is because the Introductory Sanctuary Scene sets the context in which the Messages to the Seven Churches are to be understood. We will not go into the same amount of detail in the messages themselves, taking them verse by verse. Instead, we will consider each message as a whole. If by some chance you have skipped ahead to this point in the paper without reading the section on the Introductory Sanctuary Scene, please go back and read through that material. It forms the foundation of all that we are now to consider. To understand any of the sections of Revelation, it is imperative to have a good understanding of the Introductory Sanctuary Scenes.

### **General Approach**

As we have already established that we are considering the eschatological application of the book of Revelation, I will not reiterate the preterist, historicist, or idealist applications here. We will focus only on the eschatological application. It will be seen that the characteristics of the Seven Churches could possibly apply in a number of different ways. They could be characteristics of individual Christians, or of local churches, or of denominations or movements as a whole, or of the collective church in different geographical regions of the world. For each church, I will suggest how these applications might be made.

I do not believe that these messages apply only to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I see the role of the Adventist Church more as that of the prophet of Israel, rather than as the whole of God’s church. Israel originally consisted of twelve tribes (plus the Levites). After the reign of Solomon, the larger part of Israel, ten of the tribes, apostatized and turned their backs on God. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin along with most of the Levites stayed true to God. In many ways they experienced a spiritual revival after the split. But finally Judah also fell away from God to even a greater extent than Israel did. Therefore, God sent them into captivity in Babylon. But closely associated

with the Babylonian captivity and the subsequent deliverance, God provided the prophetic voice to call His people back to repentance. This voice came through men such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others.

The Church has followed this same pattern in the Christian era. The church was originally united as one body. During the Dark Ages, the larger portion of the church apostatized and turned from sound doctrine. A smaller portion remained faithful and experienced spiritual revival after the Protestant Reformation. But eventually, we have seen our Protestant brothers and sisters fall away from the truth and most are now in captivity in Babylon. I see the Adventist church in the role of the prophet, calling God's people back to repentance, to doctrinal purity, and out of Babylon.

This is consistent with the parable of the Ten Virgins. The virgins represent God's collective church. As the Bridegroom tarried, all ten virgins fell asleep. But at midnight, the cry came, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh!" to awaken the sleeping churches. If all the churches were asleep, who sounded the midnight cry? Someone apparently wasn't sleeping. I believe that the Adventist church represents the voice of the prophet that sounds the midnight cry.

The number seven is significant in this regard. Obviously, there were more than seven churches in Asia Minor at the time Revelation was written. As we look at an eschatological application, we note that there are certainly more than seven churches extant today. The number seven is commonly understood to designate completeness or totality. In this case, all of the collective church is addressed in these messages.

Remember that John was instructed to write all of the messages in one book (or scroll). He was then either to circulate the one book among the Seven Churches or, more likely, to send a copy of the book to each of the Seven Churches. The point being that everyone in all the churches would read each other's strengths and weaknesses. The message is to be taken as a whole. The Ephesians were not only to heed the instructions directed to them, but also the ones directed to the other churches as well, lest while they repent of their own faults, they adopt the faults of another church. The admonishment is to us. As we look at the eschatological application of the messages, we are to identify which characteristics we exhibit in our lives and in our churches and then accept Jesus' admonitions and instructions for us. At the same time, we are to heed the admonitions to the other churches as well, so that in the process of repenting of our faults, we do not adopt the faults of another church.

It is significant to note that in this passage of Scripture, Jesus is specifically addressing the church. God has end-time messages for the whole world, but those do not come until later. Here, He is addressing the church. God operates through the church. He has commissioned the church to spread the Gospel message. He "has committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation" – 2 Corinthians 5:18. Therefore, as He prepares to initiate the events that will bring earth's history to a close, He sends messages to the church to prepare us for our role in the end-time events. In Revelation, we see that God will use cataclysmic events to get the world's attention and to cause every single person on earth to make a decision to follow God or reject Him. Once God has gotten the attention of the world, He sends the message to the world through His people, the church. Therefore, God needs to send these messages to the churches to prepare them for their role in end-time events.

In this way, God is beginning the final judgment with the church. This is consistent with the principles in scripture.

Ezek 9:6 Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.” So they started with the elders who {were} before the temple.

1 Pet 4:17 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?

It is very important to notice, though, that the Messages to the Seven Churches do not represent God’s final proclamation of judgment against the churches. Rather, they announce the results of an investigative judgment and provide for the opportunity to repent. Judgment is not sealed on the churches at this point. *Jesus has investigated each church.* He tells them all that He “knows their deeds.” He knows more than that – He knows the inclinations of their hearts. But along with each admonition is specific guidance and an opportunity to repent. Probation will close for professed Christians before it closes for the world in general. This is true mostly because professed Christians have the Gospel message available to them, and so their decisions will come more rapidly once the circumstances that God creates forces them to take a stand one way or the other. Those who have not heard the Gospel message will take longer to decide. They must have an opportunity to hear and respond before God will close probation for them. Once the very last person on earth has made a decision, the decision to follow Christ or to reject Him, then general probation will close, and God will punish the finally impenitent with the Seven Last Plagues. At that time, he will also refine the character of those who have chosen to follow Him by walking with them through the Great Tribulation.

### **Common Points of All the Churches**

One thing that we notice about each church is that the message begins with a description of Jesus that is derived from the description in chapter one. Each description is somehow pertinent to the characteristics of the church that is receiving the message. We looked at the significance of the symbolism behind the descriptions in an earlier section, so in considering the messages themselves, we will just look at how the description is pertinent to that church.

The messages all follow a similar format. They begin with a description of Jesus, followed by a word of praise from Him. Then there is an admonition from Jesus and a call to repentance. Finally, there is a promise given to those who heed the admonition and “overcome.” As is consistent with the chiasmic structure that we discussed at the beginning of our study, we note that the second and sixth churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive no admonition. Likewise, the third and fifth churches, Pergamum and Sardis receive no praise.

Another thing that is common to the messages to all the churches is the following phrase, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This call to listen to the Spirit is significant in a way. In the parable of the Ten Virgins that we mentioned briefly a moment ago, we notice a parallel issue. As we noted before, the virgins represent the church – God’s people. It is not referring to false churches or to the lost of the world; the description is of ten virgins, not of some virgins and some harlots. Also, as we noted before, all ten virgins fell asleep while waiting on the Bridegroom. After the midnight cry, “Behold the Bridegroom cometh!,” the virgins awake and five of them discover that they do not have any oil for their lamps. The lamps are symbolic of the Bible. “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.” – Ps 119:105. “And {so} we have the prophetic word {made} more sure, to which you do well to pay attention

as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” 2 Pet 1:19. The oil represents the Holy Spirit. “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.” – 1 Sam 16:13. (See also Zechariah 4.) So in the parable of the Ten Virgins, we see that all ten virgins – all of the churches – had their Bibles; all were studying the Word of God. But half of them were not listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual things are Spiritually discerned. We must heed the leading of God’s Spirit in discerning truth in the Bible. Therefore, there is a strong admonition from Jesus to all of the Seven Churches of Revelation to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” In this parallel again we see an eschatological application of the Messages to the Seven Churches. The parable of the Ten Virgins is most certainly an eschatological lesson.

### **Conclusion**

The Seven Churches depict the collective condition of the Christian church just before God takes the reigns of history into His own hands and initiates the events that will bring this world to a close. In the Seven Churches, we see a church divided. At the end of Revelation, we see a church united together as the unified body of Christ. In the Seven Churches, we see many strengths and many faults. When Jesus returns, we see a church of spotless purity. The Messages to the Seven Churches are God’s warning to the church on the eve of the time of the end. Each message is couched in an eschatological context. God warns the church first, before He warns the rest of the world. The events depicted in the later sections of Revelation – the Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, Seven Last Plagues, etc. – describe the events of the time of the end. They describe the process by which God divides the world and the church into two very distinct groups. They describe the process by which God purifies the church and reveals the wickedness of sin. The Messages to the Seven Churches are given while probation is still open. They are intended to prepare the church to play its proper role in the time of the end. The characteristics of the different churches are evident throughout the Christian world as we look at the church from a number of perspectives. These messages can apply to individuals, local churches, the church in different geographical areas, and denominations as a whole. Wherever they apply, the offer is given to repent and promises are made to those who heed the warnings and overcome. We know that at least some people from each of the churches do heed the warnings, because all of the promises are realized in the church of the new earth. The Messages to the Seven Churches have set the stage for the end times. Beginning in the next section, the Seven Seals, end-time events are described in detail.



