

Worthy Is The Lamb



**Revelation
Chapters 1, 2 & 3**

**VOLUME ONE
Carl E. Sadler, ThD, DD**

The Book of Revelation

The Seven Churches Of Asia
Volume I of Revelation

Carl E. Sadler, Th.D., D. D.

Copyright/ 1st Printing 1978
Revised / 2nd Printing 1994
3rd Printing 1996

Former Pastor
Trinity Missionary Baptist Church
Richmond, Kentucky

Former President
Kentucky Mountains Baptist Schools
Richmond, Kentucky

Preface

There lies within every man a desire for knowledge of the future and the unseen world. There is something intriguing to him about that which he can not see. Because of this, men who are not led by the Holy Spirit in their study, especially the Bible, are open to anything deceptive about the other world and the ages to come.

Satan has seized upon this desire in man and tries to either deceive or confuse him about things to come. He does not care what man thinks about the ages to come as long as it is not the truth. Satan does his work by leading his servants to prey upon man's gullibility; and they who have been deceived by Satan, in turn delude others. Many of these tools of Satan go in the name of Christian religion: The Spiritualists, who claim to speak to the dead or to be able to bring the dead back with some important message to those they are deceiving. Others, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witness (so-called), Mormons, and the followers of Armstrong use an elaborate system of the future as a basis for their other damnable heresies.

Then, there are those who unwittingly become the tools of Satan by propagating the wrong interpretation of the Scriptures, even though they themselves are saved and would like to tell the Truth about it. They have listened to men and their theories instead of making a thorough study of the Word of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They have been more engrossed about telling what they think God really meant than teaching what He really said.

God has given to us in the Bible all the knowledge we need to know concerning the other world and our future life. He did not give it to us for speculation, not to satisfy our curiosity, but to declare to the edification of the saints.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1-- The Book Itself: 1:1-3

I. Introduction	1
A. Our Present Age Nad The Book	1
B. The Book And The Age In Which It Was Written	2
C. It Is A Book Of Special Blessings	4
D. A Book To Strengthen Believers	5
E. A Description Of God's Last Drama	6
F. The Title Of THE Book - Its Name - Revelation	7
G. A False Opinion	8
H. Its Depth	9
I. The Nature Of The Book Of Revelation	10
J. Symbolism Used In The Book Of Revelation	12
K. Revelation And Theology	15
II. John, The Writer Of Revelation	15
III. Theories Of Interpretation	17
A. Introduction	17
B. A Non-literal or Allegorical	17
C. A Contemporary Historical View	18
D. The Church-Historical View	18
E. The Futuristic View	19

Chapter 2 The Seven Churches - 1:4-20

I. Introduction - To The Seven Churches Of Asia	23
II. The Message To The Seven Churches Of Asia	28
A. John's Overflowing Heart	28
B. Christ Is Coming Again	29
C. The Alpha And Omega	30
D. John Commanded To Write	31
III. The Visions Of Christ Among The Seven Churches	33

Table of Contents (Continued)

Chapter 3 The Church At Ephesus 2:1-7	41
I. Introduction	41
A. Some General Information About These Seven Churches	41
B. Some False Doctrines Appear In The Cities Of These Churches	42
II. The Church At Ephesus	43
A. Revelation 2:1-7	43
B. The Comments	45
Chapter 4 The Church At Smyrna 2:8-11	53
I. The City Of Smyrna	53
II. The Comments	54
Chapter 5 The Church At Pergamos 2:12-17	63
I. The City Of Pergamos	63
II. The Comments	64
Chapter 6 The Church At Thyatira 2:18-29	77
I. Introduction	77
II. The Comments	78
Chapter 7 The Church At Sardis 3:1-6	89
I. Introduction	89
II. The Comments	89
Chapter 8 The Church At Philadelphia 3:7-13	101
I. Introduction	101
II. The Comments	101

Table of Contents (Continued)

Chapter 9 The Church At Laodicea 3:14-22	113
I. The City Of Laodicea	113
II. The Comments	114
Chapter 10 A Summary Of The Seven Churches	125

Chapter 1

The Book Itself

L Introduction:

A. Our Present Age And This Book:

We are living in strange days. The world has passed through some terrible times before this day in which you and I live. I am glad I live in this age, not because of the goodness of it, but because of the many wonderful opportunities I have to serve my Saviour. The world has never been bound together as one world as it is now. This cohesion is not because of love and goodness, but through Satan's organizing forces of evil. Never before in its history has the world been so much against God and the things for which He stands. Never has the world been so saturated with immortality, greed, and open depravity as it is now, unless it was just before the flood. We are not isolated units anymore. There is no such thing as a nation being isolated from other nations now. The political crisis and the economical situation of any one nation, be it small or large, affects all nations. Northern Siberia affects the Mississippi farmer; the Arabs and their oil have a great influence upon the mountain folks of Appalachia. Where ever you turn, our world is tied together. Our modern • transportation and communications make the inhabitants of Manhattan and the pygmies of Australia, next-door neighbors.

The book of *Revelation* is a book for the present hour in which we live. Never has its meaning been so clear as it is to those living now. We are on the threshold of its fulfillment and the world stage is ready for the first act -- the return of Christ Jesus for His saints.

B. The Book And The Age In Which It Was Written:

We must know something of this to understand its message. The time was 95-96 AD. The only objectors to this date are modernists and those who oppose the pre-millennial return of our Lord. Much of the argument of these objectors comes largely from the theology of the Alexandrian School of Theology in the 3rd century

which opposed the doctrine of the millennial kingdom.

It was written during the last year of the reign of Domitian, the Roman Emperor. He was the first of the churches' persecutors to recognize there was a supernatural power behind the Christians, and for that reason he struck at destroying the name of Jesus their founder and in whose power they worked.

During the first part of his reign, he did many notable things for the Roman Empire and those days were peaceful ones. But the last three years of his reign was the reign of a madman. Not only were all Christians endangered, but every one whom he thought may be against him He was a real type of the Anti-Christ.

The progress of the gospel among mankind was being stopped at this time. The progress of the gospel that was mighty and triumphant in Paul's day, had been blocked. Edicts were issued with the purpose of stopping the spread of the gospel. Every copy of the New Testament writings that could be found were burned. Everywhere witnesses were being imprisoned, killed, exiled, and tortured to rid the world of this unwanted religion. Even women were dragged before the legal tribunals and commanded to renounce Christ and worship the heathen gods or be thrown to the lions for destruction. The fires of persecution and infidelity burned fiercely against all Christendom and great discouragement prevailed among the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

It was during these trying circumstances that God sent the book of Revelation to His people. It was given to those struggling and disheartened saints to reawaken their faith, hope, love, and courage in God and in His purpose for them. It was given to show them that the clouds of the enemy's storm will pass away. It was to show them that, no matter how heavy the hand or the heel of the tyrant was, truth will yet prevail, and that ultimately the whole world will be conquered by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did those early Christians fully understand the book? I doubt if they really understood the whole impact of it. The full meaning of prophecy, as given in the Scriptures, was not necessarily understood by the writer nor by the generation in which he lived. It is often the nature of prophecy that it can not be fully understood until the time of the generation which achieves its fulfillment. For example: Look how long it took the disciples to understand what Christ taught them about His death and the delay of the "kingdom of God" which they anticipated would be fulfilled in

their day. Also, prophecy many times has minor fulfillment's before the final and complete fulfillment.

The application of the Scriptures can be many and no harm is done if the correct principles are used and the full meaning is not denied. The Apostle John and the Christians of his day applied Revelation to their circumstances. To them, Domitian was an Anti-Christ, through he was not the final one. Another example of this was during the dark ages when the real Christians thought the pope of the Roman Church was the Anti-Christ. He was an Anti-Christ, but he was not the final one either.

The message of the book was the same to them and their day as it is to us and our day. One of hope and expectation.

C. It Is A Book Of Special Blessings:

Revelation 1:3 - "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" In fact, it is the only book in the Bible that has direct promises of blessings; He (singular 1:3) that reads it is blessed. Many Christians miss this blessing that could be theirs. When it was written all men did not have copies of it as we do today. What a blessing that men now have the opportunity to read it. Very few people in the civilized world are without it in their own language, and yet, so many have never read it - or have failed to continue to read it.

They (plural, 1:3) that hear it read and expounded are also blessed. Dear friend, I do not have a monopoly on this book or any other book in the Bible; but the Lord has given me an understanding of this book in such a way it is in complete agreement with the rest of the Bible. I am not infallible, nor am I boasting of my ability; but you who will read all of these lessons, (that is a kind of hearing) and, especially, what the Holy Spirit puts into your heart by my teaching will be blessed. That is the promise of this book! Do not take this promise lightly. Anytime, you have the opportunity to hear a man of God, who is true to God's Word proclaim the message of this book, hear him.

Then there is also a blessing promised to those who "keep it" (1:3) In reality, this is where the blessing occurs. If you read it or hear it and fail to "keep it," remember its message, and obey its precepts, it becomes a curse instead of a blessing.

James tells us in *Revelation 1: 25* - "***But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.***"

There is such a thing as a blessing becoming a curse. The Bible was given, not to enhance our knowledge, but to guide us in pleasing our God.

It is the inspiring book of the Bible. From its composition to this day it has been a quickening book in the experiences of the people of God - a book of resurrection power in all seasons of despair. Wherever the light of its doctrines and promises shines, darkness is dispelled, faith becomes heroic, hope revives, and the powers of the world hold no fear for those who walk in the light of it. Whoever, in humble and docile spirit enters into a prayerful study of its great themes, and lays to heart its great promises will set this soul afire with zeal, and become transformed in his experiences. Since this book was written no true Christian has ever doubted the ultimate outcome of the battle between God and Satan.

D. A Book To Strengthen Believers:

Revelation is a book to provide special strength to the believer - the child of God - in his hour of struggle with the evil forces of his age. It gives the believer knowledge so he can arm himself for his present conflict in which he is engaged. It shows all Christians that in spite of the terrible judgments that will come upon this world, the believer in Christ can be unafraid and un-astonished because God still rules supreme and He watches over His own.

We (the Christian) will be relieved of those terrible judgments that will come upon the earth as Israel was spared the terrible plagues that came upon Egypt when they were in bondage, awaiting their deliverance. The world is dead-ripe for the plucking of the grapes of wrath for the vintage, but God has promised us in I Thessalonians 5:4-5, 9 - "But ye brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all are children of light ...God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation...."

E. A Description Of God's Last Drama:

We are living near the end (if not at the very end) of this age. We are witnessing the things just preceding God's last drama upon this present earth. The world is rapidly rushing through these last historical scenes. At any moment the closing event could take place - then you and I will be caught up to meet our Saviour in the air, and ever be with Him.

The plot has been intense throughout the whole: but as we come near the closing scenes the action becomes much more intense. The final scene will be a glorious one, because Christ will come unto His own. The hero, the Lord Jesus, Himself, will be victorious, and the villain, the devil, will be dethroned.

The action will be electrifying, terrifying and full of emotions. The actors will be in great numbers and a great variety, but One will outshine them all - the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Satan, the power, behind the Anti-Christ and the false prophet, is determined to be ruler and to be worshiped by man. He has set up his government and his church for that purpose, but Christ brings it all to nothing. The book of Revelation describes the climax of the great struggle (warfare) between Christ and Satan. It also tells of the climax of man's final relationship with God.

In Genesis the heavens and earth were created; In Revelation there comes a new heaven and a new earth. In Genesis the sun and moon appear; in Revelation there is no need for them for Christ is the light. Genesis shows a garden for man; Revelation shows a new and holy city for him and his God. In Genesis the marriage of the first Adam took place; in Revelation the marriage of the second Adam is described. Genesis tells of the beginning of sin; Revelation gives the end of sin -sin done away completely. In Genesis we see Satan's first appearance to ruin God's creation: in Revelation we see Satan's last appearance - he has been ruined by Almighty God.

F. The Title Of The Book - Its Name - Revelation:

Revelation 1:1 - "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he

sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:"

Verse 1 should be compared to the title given in the Bible above the book. The names given to the various books of the Bible are given for identification of both the nature of the book and the author.

The real title is given in the first verses as a rule. For example: I Corinthians 1:1-2 identifies the writer as Paul and the letter to the church of Corinth. Another example: I Timothy 1:1-2 identifies Paul as the writer and the letter to Timothy. Here in 1:1 the writer is the apostle John and the title: "Revelation of Jesus Christ."

The word "Revelation" (Greek "apocalypse") means "to take off the covering" or an "unveiling." This Greek word occurs 18 times in the New Testament and means what it is translated here - revelation.

G. A False Opinion:

A false opinion has been circulated about this book which I hear all too often: "The book is too vague and too obscure to be valuable" or, "It is so complex it can not be understood by ordinary minds" and "Why, no one can really know for sure what it means."

The title itself should discourage any such thoughts because it means "a revealing." Rather than being a book without meaning, it is a book that uncovers spiritual matter. It is a book that reveals Jesus. He is the One seen in this book. The very title declares it to be the uncovering of the future - an unveiling of things that otherwise would be concealed.

The nature of any prophetic revelation requires a supernatural understanding of future events. Of course, the natural man (the man-who leans on his own resources) can not understand it. Only the Spirit can reveal prophecy or any of God's Word to men. There is a sharp distinction between revelation that is divinely inspired and so-called revelation that is not inspired. There is a vast difference between the revelation God gives in His book the Bible and the revelation Jean Dixon tries to impose upon others. The Bible says:

Revelation 22:18-19 - "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,"

At the same time the Lord commends the book of Revelation, He condemns any who try to alter it by taking or adding to it.

H. Its Depth:

The depth and breadth of the book of Revelation is amazingly great. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the central theme, but it deals with many other things too. Everything that Genesis recorded as beginning, Revelation records its consummation.

It gives us knowledge far beyond the investigating powers of man because it is God breathed. This revelation extends to visions of heaven as well as visions of the earth. It is prophetic revelation of the future, including the eternal state of all things.

If this book were only a human invention, then it is of little value; but, because it is divinely inspired it is an open door to eternal truth. Some of the greatest practical truths of the Bible are in this book. It is an unfolding, an unsealing of divine purposes by a divine hand concerning things important to us; therefore, let us cherish the rich gems of this book that God has given to us.

I. The Nature Of The Book Of Revelation:

In this section I want to show its characteristics. I want to deal with what this book is all about.

Primarily, it is a book of prophecy, as 1:3 and 22:18 show. As the last books of the Old Testament were prophetic so also is this last book in the New Testament. By this statement, we do not imply there is not other prophecy in the Bible other than these: but that the primary purpose of the prophetic books is to reveal important future events.

Paul told the Corinthians - (I Corinthians 13:8-10) that prophecy would cease when that which was perfect was come. It did cease when John penned the last "amen" in this book. That which is perfect "the written word of God is here."

The details of prophecy are left more to those books we call prophetic than are given in other inspired books. Generally, this book prophecies of God's purpose for the earth and mankind. It' shows the judgment upon all those who oppose Him and His vindication of those who are faithful and true to the faithful witness, "Jesus Christ." It is the capstone of all futuristic prophecy of the entire Bible. It gathers into its prophecy the major themes of prophecy which is found in the rest of the Bible. The scope and plan is found in 1:1 - "*shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass;...*"

Revelation is also a book of judgment and doom. Nothing is concealed about the fiery judgment of God upon those who have disregarded Him. Here is a description of the culmination of the punishment for sin. Here is shown a miserable picture of the defeat and ruin of those who had so long been impenitent and rebellious. The "slain Lamb" is here manifesting His wrath. At last the power of the Almighty God is shown against all ungodliness - the day of His mercy and long-suffering is over. The dreaded torments for the wicked await the great wrath of God. The thunder of His judgment must come before the brighter day of His graciousness is manifested.

This is also a book full of dominant notes of praise for Him who holds all things in the power of His might. It is like the book of Psalms in that it records the seraphs song: "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who has and who is and who is to come." There is also a new song addressed to the Lamb; the triumphant chorus of "hallelujahs" which comes as a result of God's glorious judgment.

It is a book that contains practical and permanent moral values as well as spiritual values. It was written to give those values to the saved of the first century too. At the time it was being written, there was a danger that those under persecution would abandon their faith. Many were being slain and every device was being used against the Christians. A fierce attack was also against the character of Christ, in whom they put their trust. The godless world under the Roman Emperor was a real enemy to their spiritual life.

The messages of the book were intended to encourage those being tempted to be strong, and those suffering to be patient in the Lord. They were warned of the unseen dangers of the powers of hell and at the same time encouraged in their struggle with sin. Its messages told them that sin in its entirety and when under the most horrible Satanic influence would come to an everlasting end. Genesis gives a picture of man being driven out of the garden; Revelation shows him being restored to a better place of peace and joy.

There is a difference in this book and the Biblical books that preceded it; especially those of the Apostle Paul. The Lord is not pictured in the book of Revelation as the head of the body, the church, as He is in the Pauline letters. That description primarily belonged to Paul, who unfolded in his letters the character, the work and the destiny of the church. Here are seven messages to seven churches but the Lord is walking among them either judging or praising them rather than leading them.

The harlot mentioned may represent the false churches though she is never called by that name. Some believed the bride of Chapter 19 to be the true church ready for the marriage, but neither is she called the church. The Lord's churches are earthly organizations built for the purpose of preaching the gospel, edifying the saints, and upholding the truth. His churches along with all the saints are taken out of the earth before the tribulation. Most of revelation deals with the time after this removal; therefore, the church is not spoken of in the last chapters. The churches are an earthly institution and are not mentioned as being in heaven.

J. Symbolism Used In The Book Of Revelation:

Revelation is a book of visions and symbols. Men under ordinary circumstances have written books full of imagery, but they are not in the same class as this book. These are visions sent from God for definite purposes to His children; not a book of imaginary writings for the amusement of men. They are dramatic representations of divine truths which were visible only to the mind of the seer and to those who are sincerely seeking to know the mind, of God.

Visions and symbols as given in Revelations are not something new to Bible readers for many of these symbols are drawn from the Old Testament books; therefore, there is a real necessity of knowing the Old Testament for a full understanding of the book of Revelation. Some of its plumage came from paradise and the serpent of Genesis,

the plagues from Exodus, the wilderness wanderings from Numbers. Then: the lion was of Judah, the Holy City of Jerusalem, the temple of Solomon, Jezebel of Israel, and Babylon on the Euphrates, the land of Israel's enemies.

Revelation is not an allegory, but prophecy given in symbolic visions. It is symbolic like that found in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. These writers understood those visions to be symbols of something God wanted them to know. John understood the same; therefore, care must be taken concerning our understanding them.

We must be careful we do not make everything imagery. Some of these incidents and descriptions are to be understood literally. When there is no literal meaning we have no real foundation for that which is imagery. The less the literal interpretation is given of this book the less truth we will receive from it. For example: the seraphim's of Isaiah and the cherubims of Ezekiel were not symbolic. They were real. Isaiah and Ezekiel were given supernatural eyes to see them. The safest way is to use symbols only when the literal can not be used. All things that can be used literally must be so used.

The deaf and dumb have a sign language. To them every gesture is full of meaning. This is true in Revelation. Symbolism occurs throughout the Scriptures as a vehicle of revelation. There are more symbols in Revelation than elsewhere.

Why is there so much symbolism in the book of Revelations? There may be many explanations, but the necessity of expressing revelations from God in symbolic language in this book was because of the perilous religious - political situation at that time. Such conditions have existed for Christians at other times and the symbolic was useful to them too. The conditions that existed when this book was written will be similar to the conditions that will exist when the day of fulfillment actually comes except that then they will be more dreadful. As Jesus used parables to hide from some and to reveal to others, so the symbolic language was used in Revelation. The veiled language was needed then because of the severe persecutions during the last years of the reign of Domitian Emperor of the Roman Empire.

This reign of this terrible emperor gave John a spiritual insight of what was in store for Christianity in the future. Such symbolism could be adaptable to all centuries; thereby, strengthening God's children under all circumstances.

Very prominent in Revelation is the use of numbers. These numbers should be understood literally, but they also have symbolic meaning as elsewhere in the Bible. The number seven occurs most often (54 times). In Chapters 1, 2, & 3 this number refers to 7 literal churches, yet we must understand that these 7 churches were representative churches which were in some sense complete in their description of the normal needs of all churches, because the number 7 means complete. Next in importance is the use of the number 12'. Notice the number. 12 and its multiples: 12 tribes, 12,000 sealed of each 12 tribes, 24 elders, the size of New Jerusalem: 12,000 furlongs and 144 cubits high.

The use of numbers and the symbolic is not accidental. Their use is often accompanied by either an explanation of them, by implication, or by a direct use of them. The seven candlesticks are the seven churches. The seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. The symbolic is so important I have outlined the book around the number seven. We must be careful we do not manipulate numbers for our enjoyment or our benefit of appearing cunning.

K. Revelation And Theology:

Few books in the Bible provide a more complete theology then the book of Revelation.

It deals with eschatology - doctrines of last things. This is the principle contribution of Revelation. No other book in the Bible gives a more detailed description of the great tribulation, the millennial and the eternal state.

It is also Christological - "*revelation of Jesus Christ.*" It reveals Christ as glorified, exalted in contrast to His humiliation and suffering in the gospels. It speaks of the Father, and the Holy Spirit, but the emphasis is upon the Son and the climax is the 2nd coming of Christ in glory.

A good description is given of man in Revelation; especially in trying circumstances. The book describes sin and divine judgment in a very vivid fashion. No book speaks of angels more than Revelation. There is more about Satan here than in any other book. The word "church," (Greek - "ecclesia"), is used more often here by Christ than in the gospel records.

Its contents are full of the rest of the Scriptures. It is saturated with Old Testament references, though there are no direct quotes from it. Of the 404 verses, 278 verses contain Old Testament references. Most of the Old Testament books are referred to and all 3 major divisions - law, prophets, writings - are included.

H. John, The Writer Of Revelation

Revelation 1:1-2 .- "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw."

The Apostle John, that beloved disciple, was chosen by God the Father and inspired by God the Spirit to write in three different fashions books about the Son of God that would be recognized as part of the Bible. In the fourth gospel book that bears his name he wrote of the Son of God on earth as the Saviour of the world. In the three epistles that bear his name he wrote of the Son of God in heaven as the Mediator• between God and man. In this book, Revelation, he wrote about the Son of God as the King of kings and the Lord of lords bringing all things under His power and to judgment.

The apostle John, at the time of the writing of Revelation, had grown old in life as well as in his experiences in the Lord. He was that beloved disciple, who was called a son of thunder in his early apostleship. He was known now as the apostle of love. At the time of the writing of Revelation, he was the only living apostle and a most reverend man among the saints. Yet in spite of the position given him by the saints he was a humble and meek servant of the Lord.

He gives no titles to himself in this book for he knows that all are one in Christ; whether we be high or low, rich or poor, free or bond, male or female.

He was alone on the "Isle of Patmos," a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea not far south of Ephesus. It was not much more than a huge rock. He may have been the only inhabitant and he was there because of banishment by the Roman authorities. They wanted to get rid of his influence among the hated sect of "Christians," but God's purpose was not thwarted in this action of men. God took him there to write a book

to show that ultimate victory over sin was certain. He may have been alone but nothing can sever the bonds of Christ from the Christian. The wrath of the wicked only brings saints nearer to the choice favors of Christ.

Those who object to his authorship of Revelation are the modern critics who object to the Divinity of Christ and the Conservatives who object to the pre-millennial return of our Saviour. They are the same ones who object to the date of its writing - 95-96 AD.

III. Theories Of Interpretation:

A. Introduction:

It has more contradictory interpretations than any other book of the Bible. They are so varied that they are either fascinating or forbidden; practical or mystical; enjoyable or meaningless. They are an inexhaustible source of study or no study at all. The variety of approaches to interpreting the phraseology and the symbolism of the book may be divided into four approaches:

B. A Non-literal or Allegorical:

By this is meant a symbolic presentation of moral truth. The advocates of this theory believe it is an allegorical or symbolic way of showing the total conflict between Christianity. and evil. Augustine, using this approach, called it: "The City of God vs. The City of Satan." They believe it was written to give spiritual encouragement and assurance of the ultimate triumph of Christianity. This approach to its interpretation takes away the prophetic nature of the book. This theory is one of the favorites among those who are opposed to the millennial teaching that is so clearly shown in *Chapter 20*.

C. A Contemporary Historical View.

This view limits the application of the book to the time of the writer, who may not be the Apostle John. To them it is a record of the conflicts between the early church with Judaism and paganism. Therefore, Chapters 20-22 is the 1st century victor of Christianity. This view also believes the material is symbolic rather than prophetic, and descriptive rather than predictive. These also believe it is a symbolic word of

encouragement to the early Christians who were suffering persecutions, and give a general assurance to them of the ultimate triumph of Christianity. It was intended for the use of the 1st Century Christians to whom a detailed prophecy of the future ages would have been meaningless. This theory, if believed, would destroy any future significance of the book. The advocates of this theory also disregard the Old Testament prophetic books that predict Christ's 1st coming. Their claim is that prophecy in the Old Testament would have been as useless to Israel as this book would have been to the early Christians if it were considered prophetic.

D. The Church-Historical View:

This theory believes it is a prophetic survey of Church history, revealing the chief events in chronological order. To them it is a symbolic presentation of the total history of the church culminating in the 2nd coming of Christ. Revelation is, therefore, a devotional and spiritual text for comfort to the suffering church. The advocates of this theory are strong in their belief that "Revelation" is a good book for a philosophy of religious history and as a guide to understand the principles of divine providence. This concept has been most prevalent when Christianity has progressed numerically. The post-millennialists use this method of interpretation. They are constant in their interpretation, but these have no place in their theology for the imminent return of Christ. Those who take this position, make little of the prophetic value except that it does climax in their generation. This view has many different interpretations because of the lack of or minimum use of literal interpretation. The interpretation also changes from generation to generation. The same is true with pre-millennialists who use this church-historical method.

One of its greatest fallacies is the conflicting theories that have resulted from this view. Such conflicts will continue to increase if Revelation is regarded as principally a history of the conflict between civil and ecclesiastical authority. If this is the correct method, it is for sure no one has found the key to unlock a consistent meaning up to this point in time. The variations are manifold and they will continue to be an endless stream of conflicting interpretations.

What does this theory do with Revelation 20? To the majority of them the binding of Satan (verses 1-3) for 1,000 years (not a literal 1,000 years) represents the defeat of Satan by the church in history. The defeat of the beast and his allies is a defeat for Satan and signals the limitation of his power for a long indeterminate period of

time (called 1,000 years). The reign of the martyrs and the saints begins in this struggle in history. Those who are faithful in this struggle go from this earth at death to reign with Christ for a long indeterminate period of time (called 1,000 years), and this is the first resurrection to them.

E. The Futuristic View:

This form of interpretation admits there is some historical facts presented, but the majority of the book is yet future and pertains primarily to the tribulation and the millennial reign of Christ. This position is held only by conservative pre-millennial scholars. They believe that most of Revelation from **Chapters 4 through 22** is subject to future fulfillment. Not all conservative pre-millennialists hold this view. There are some who are advocates of the church-historical position along with the a-millennialists.

This problem between historical pre-millennialists and dispensational pre-millennialists stems from their difference in the interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27. The historical view believes Daniel's 70th week is already past; whereas, the futuristic view believes Daniel's 70th week is yet future. The futurists believe that most of Chapters 4 - 19 relate to a period of years prior to the 2nd coming of Christ to reign on earth. This period is called the "Great Tribulation" and is the same as Daniel's 70th week. The position one takes on the 70th week of Daniel determines his interpretation of Revelation. The futuristic view is the only view that has a clear systematic teaching of the last 3 1/2 years of that 7 year period known as the "Great Tribulation." To these, Chapter 20 is the future millennial reign of Christ on earth. Then Chapters 21 and 22 are events after the millennial kingdom has come to an end.

This view takes a much more literal interpretation of the specific prophecies than any other view. Though there is much symbolism, the events shown by these symbols are fulfilled in a normal way although both the supernatural powers of God and Satan are involved. For example: Chapter 13 is a prophecy of the future world empire with its political and religious heads represented in the 2 beasts. In Chapter 17 the harlot, Babylon, represents the final form of religious apostasy; whereas, Babylon in Chapter 18 represents the seat of commercial enterprise.

The greatest objection to this view is primarily: "It robbed the early church of the practical comfort it needed." Not even the most extreme futuristic view denied a

present value of the 1st century churches. Portions of it could have been understood and appropriated then as well as now. Some of it will be better understood later, but the general tenor of the book is "God will triumph, the saints will be blessed and sin will be judged."

In fact the futuristic view gave even more hope to the early Christians. That triumph may happen today!! Upon the same basis of those who object to the futuristic view, why not object to all the Old Testament prophecies? Why not object to

II Peter 3:10-12, 14 - "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found in him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

- as being no comfort to those to whom Peter wrote?

Though all the difficulties that are raised about the interpretation of Revelation are not cleared, the futuristic view offers a much clearer understanding of Revelation than any other view. This view is held by the greatest number of conservative scholars today. It is also the view held by the early church. Some early church fathers (2nd and 3rd centuries) attempted to interpret Revelation as fulfillment of contemporary incidents in the trials and difficulties of the early church, but subsequent history has shown that the events that should have followed (according to their interpretation), did not come to pass; therefore, such interpretations must be discredited. For this reason (the consistency of interpretation over a long period of time) the futuristic view has gained much more respectability. Other methods have left much confusion among God's people.

Chapter 2

The Seven Churches: Chapter 1:4-20

I. Introduction: "To the Seven Churches of Asia."

Revelation 1:4-5a - *"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth"*

This section shows Christ, the Good Shepherd, judging His churches on earth. Was John writing to "The Seven Churches in Asia" only? At the first glance it might seem so. Does this statement mean there were only seven churches in Asia? Again, at the first glance it appears this way.

The "Asia" here is that Roman Province called by that name. We know it better in history by "Asia Minor" and by our present geographical territories as "Turkey." Yet the Province proper did not really contain all of these areas. It included four districts in Western Asia Minor (Caria, Lydia, Mysia, & Phrygia).

We will show in this section some reasons why the term "The Seven Churches which are in Asia" is used.

There are many more churches in this area than seven. In fact, by this time, Christianity had made such progress that every major city plus many smaller cities had Christian congregations carrying out the "Great Commission." It is impossible to think these were the only churches existing in this large Roman Province. There was never a time when these churches and no others existed there.

It is evident from the Scriptures they were not the first ones to be established. A look at the book of Acts, beginning at Chapter 13 shows the Apostle Paul establishing several churches in Asia before these were established. Paul's work at Ephesus resulted in many churches being established as is shown by

Acts 19:10 - "And this continued by the space of twoyears; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard of the Lord Jesus: both Jews and Greeks."

Acts 20:7 and II Corinthians 2:12 show there was a church in Troas by 57 AD. In 61 AD Paul had written to the church at Colossae and in that letter he mentioned the Christians at Laodicea and Hierapohs. From our knowledge of the growth of the churches of our Lord it is certain that there were many churches beside these seven in Asia.

It is evident that these "Seven Churches" were selected out of a great number of churches in Asia, and it is not conceivable that the Apostle John simply wrote to these seven taken at random and ignored the rest.

From the nature of the letters the Apostle Paul wrote, it is clear he wrote to some churches and not to others, because he wrote as a crisis occurred in each church. But the Apostle John was writing to encourage all of the Lord's churches to take hope in, a better day than they were experiencing at the writing of Revelation.

But why the selection of these "Seven Churches?" I believe there were at least three reasons for this selection by the inspired Apostle.

These churches' problems were representative of problems that occur in other churches, both then and in the future.

These "Seven Churches" were known as the "Seven Churches" through whom other churches in Asia received messages that were relayed from other parts of the Christian faith. This last will be dealt with here, because the other two reasons are discussed elsewhere. There seems to be no way of evading the implications made in Revelation 1:4, 11 that these churches were already known as "The Seven Churches of Asia."

The classification is not made according to the sizes nor the influences of the cities in which they were located. They are all located in the most influential part of the Province. Neither are they classified according to the dignity of each of the churches mentioned. Neither can it be said they were representative churches of all the churches of Asia according to geographical location, because all seven are located in cities that form a circle of cities in the west-central district of Asia, while the north, the east, and

the south areas are not included A glance at the New Testament reveals that the writers of the New Testament used a literary device (letters) very popular at that time The epistolary communication is found clearly in twenty-four of the twenty-seven New Testament books The early church used this method of communicating with one another in various affairs Many of these letters were intended for the use of many churches - not Just the one to whom they were addressed For example Paul in writing to the church at Colosse said,

Colossians 4:6 - "...and when this epistle is read among you, cause that it lie read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."

Paul did not concern himself with writing the whole scope of Christian doctrine to every church, nor did the messengers who took the letters concern themselves about the fullest distribution of those letters. That task of distributing the letters was left to the local churches themselves.

An examination of the New Testament also reveals that churches maintained a frequent correspondence between their scattered congregations for their own welfare as well as the distribution of the message given them to proclaim throughout the world. This prevented isolation, departure from the faith, and a means of Christians finding another congregation to work with when moving from city to city.

Since this exchange of letters was employed very extensively by the early churches, there would be needs of some safe and systematic method for their delivery. The Christians, for their own safety and the safe delivery of the letters, of necessity provided means for their own letter-carrying service. The routes of these letter-carriers were fixed according to the best way for their delivery to various churches.

These "Seven Churches" were located in seven cities that formed an inner circle around the Province of Asia. Like our inner belt lines in our American cities which allow for an easier access to various parts of the city (both inner and suburbs), so were these cities points from which the rest of the Province could easily be reached. The churches in these cities became central points of distribution for the letters written by the Christians.

In our modern postal system we have regional post offices from which mail is dispatched to district post offices which then dispatches to sectional post offices where it is then sent to the local post offices for distribution to the local patron. The Christians had their own system of delivery for their correspondence similar to this, though much less complicated.

Through this system Ephesus not only took care of the other churches in her immediate vicinity (the Caster and Lower Marauder Valleys and Coastal plains) but could have included as area extending eastward to reach churches quite a distance away. The other six churches could have been of a service in the same manner.

All of ***Revelation*** was written to the seven churches, but not for them alone. There was a special message for each of them, but those messages for them were applicable to others. John's salutation is quite different in many respects to Paul's salutation, Paul's common way was: Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ through God, etc. He almost always spoke of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in his opening remarks. Whereas, John in verses 4 & 5 uses an Old Testament description of God - Jehovah (Exodus 3:14). In the Old Testament Jehovah is the "self-existent one" the "Eternal I am" who reveals himself John, like the Old Testament expressions does not give a clear distinction between the Father and Son He is more concerned about God in His absolute existence. In this book, John is more vivid in showing God as "The Great I AM," who rules than the God-man Christ Jesus who saves. The same is true of the Holy Spirit. Here the Holy Spirit is shown in the plenitude of His power (7 spirits). John does not show the indwelling presence of the Spirit in the churches as is shown in Paul's writings.

II The Message to the Seven Churches of Asia

A. John's Overflowing Heart: verses 5b-6:

Revelation 1:5b - 6 - "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

At the very mention of the name of Jesus a doxology flows from John's pen. He places a special emphasis upon what Christ has already accomplished in our behalf: Christ, the Son of God "loves us." He loves (present tense, rather than English past

tense) His own, His people, His church, His chosen: those whom are given to Him by the Father. These He loves with an everlasting and unchangeable love, with a love of delight that passes knowledge and will never end. John had already realized personally what Jeremiah (31:3) had recorded about God's love to Israel: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee."

Not only did God the Son love (had loved, still loves, and will continue to love) us, but He "*washed us*" (past tense). His love for us was the cause of His washing us. From this it signifies that we are filthy and unclean because of sin and that we could not cleanse ourselves by anything we could do. Therefore, He opened a fountain filled with His blood to wash us and cleanse us from all sins.

But more: He has "*made us kings and priests.*" We are made a "royal priesthood" according to I Peter 2:9. Exodus 19:6 from which it was borrowed says that Israel should be a "*kingdom of priests.*" All of God's saints are kings now in some sense. We have been received into the kingdom of grace and we can rule over our sins rather than our sins ruling us. We are like kings for all the treasures of God are ours. He has clothed us in garments of His own righteousness and the angels attend to us more faithfully than servants of kings. But much more, we will rule and reign with Him in His kingdom 1,000 years when it comes in its fullness. We are already priests and offer up spiritual sacrifices even now.

Hebrews 13:15-16 - "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Romans 12:1 - "I BESEECH you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

B. Christ Is Coming Again:

Revelation 1:7 - " Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindred's of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so,

Amen."

John asserts here what is declared in many other Scriptures:

Acts 1:9-11 - "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Matthew 24:30 - "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Matthew 25:31 - "When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory."

Zechariah 12:10 - And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one niourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for Jews and the whole earth shall see him."

This is not the rapture here. It is His return in glory. This is when His revelation as king takes place. It is the climax of earth's affairs and the beginning of the millennial reign. This is not to be understood in a spiritual sense. It is a personal return. At this time He does not come as a thief, but visibly.

C. The Alpha And Omega:

Revelation 1:8 - "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

These are the words of Christ Himself, appearing and confirming what John has had already written concerning Him, "Alpha" is the first letter and "Omega" is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. They mean the first and the last as verses 11 and 17

show. Isaiah 41:4; 44:6 and 48:12 calls the Divine being, "the first and the last." "Alpha" also means the "chief one," which Christ is. He is the Great Prophet, the Most Excellent Priest and the King of kings. He is now 'the Almighty, sustaining all things by His power and who is now the Saviour of men. He was the Almighty, creating all things by the word of His mouth and who was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He will come to rule over all things and appear the second time unto salvation to them that look for Him.

D. John Commanded To Write:

Revelation 1:9-11 - "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."

John, the apostle, was on the isle of Patmos, exiled for - preaching the Word of God. He was banished from society because they feared his influence among men. Had Satan stopped John's courageous voice in this move against him? No! Satan had blindly accomplished God's will for John's life.

"Write this book!" is the design of God in this move. John was "In the Spirit." He like Ezekiel was beyond a normal state. He was in a state of mind and attitude in which God could reveal supernatural things. The primary meaning is not "filled with the Spirit," though this was true too, but rather an all absorbing power of God over his being.

It was the "Lord's Day." It was the first day of the week; although it is not called the Lord's Day elsewhere in the Bible. The first day was set aside by the early church as the fulfilling of the Sabbath day. Paul makes this clear in:

Hebrews 4:9 - "There remaineth therefore a rest (Sabbath keeping) to the people of God"

"Sabbath" means rest - a complete cessation from normal activities. This was a perpetual enjoyment upon man. But the "Seventh day" was not perpetual. That day (the seventh), was that which honored God's creative acts. Neither is the "First day" perpetual. That day honors Christ's redemptive acts and is to be the day Christians use as a day of rest and worship.

The millennium is a Sabbath of 1,000 years and is not perpetual. That long rest (Sabbath) shows Christ's complete victory over the "*God of this world*" in regard to nations. The eternal rest is a complete rest from sin. When it comes it will never cease. All other rests pointed to this one great rest. Men who have no Sabbath keeping and who consecrate no Lord's days are not likely to hear the voice behind them as John did that day.

John heard a voice like a trumpet. Again we are taken back into an Old Testament setting. At Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:19) the trumpet sounded, Moses spake and God answered. The trumpet sounded as a signal of worship each morning. The year of Jubilee was ushered in by the sound of the trumpet. These were special events announced by a trumpet.

The trumpet plays an important place in the ending of this age also. It signals the rapture. Paul shows us this in

1 Corinthians 15:52 - "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:" The trumpet also is an important instrument to announce many incidents. Here, the trumpet-voice gives John the command to write in a book what he sees and send it to the "seven churches which are in Asia."

III. The Vision Of Christ Among The Seven Churches:

Revelation 1:12-20 - "And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlestick one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the

foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were .white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as aflame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shin eth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and he things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

The first things the Apostle saw were seven golden candlesticks. They are according to verse 20 the seven churches. We would understand this better if we called them seven golden lamp stands: They held oil lamps rather than candles. We need to compare this to the Lamp stand with 7 branches in the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple. There the one lamp stand was for one nation, united as God's people, But here the seven lamp stands represent the churches who have their own autonomy.

The church is always local. It is an individual congregation. Each has its own ministers, elders, deacons, and is separate from all other churches as to ruler ship, etc. Each is organized into distinct congregations, in different towns, cities or communities. The Word of God is clear that the church is an individual church and not to be confused with the family of God nor to be thought of as a particular denomination, etc. Churches may individually join together to accomplish a work, and they should, but any system that ignores, disregards, or supersedes the authority of the local church is wrong and sinful.

Paul's description of the churches of our Lord is quite different to John's vision. Paul shows her as a house, a body, or a foundation of truth. The indwelling (Ephesians 2:22) of the Spirit ("habitation of God through the Spirit") is central in his idea of her. Paul describes God's love for her, how He guides her and washes her by the water of the word to present her unto Himself as a glorious church.

Whereas, John sees her as a light bearer. To him they are God's responsible witnesses on earth. Therefore, in this character the churches are subject to judgment and rejection by the Lord Jesus. His description of the churches clearly shows they will not usher in a millennial before Jesus comes. They will not bring a Utopia on earth. The seven letters in Revelation to the churches have no reference to individual salvation. All the messages to them are concerned about them as light bearers and Satan's attempt to extinguish that light - their witness among men.

Before Christianity, Judaism was God's candlestick, Israel was God's witness on earth. She was not true to that task assigned her and she was removed and replaced by the churches of our Lord. This is shown by several passages in the New Testament. Paul in *Romans 11* shows the tame olive branch (Israel) is a "*House left desolate*." Jesus told Israel that He would take the kingdom from them and give to another that will obey Him. In *John 19*, the Jews cry, "*We have no king but Caesar*"; thereby, showing their infidelity to the Lord and proving that Jesus was just in His prophecy. Acts 8 shows the Jews rejecting the witness of the church. This is seen when they stoned Stephen to death because of his fidelity to Christ. In 70 AD Jerusalem was destroyed. This was the judicial end of the Jewish candlestick until God begins to deal with them (later) during the "Great Tribulation". Up until 70 AD, Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism by the world. Even the Christians had some visions of redeeming Israel after this fateful destruction.

John shows in Chapters 2 and 3 God's judgment upon the churches. Some did not live up to their potentials and were removed. Although we can not make these churches represent different periods of church history, there is a general progression through the ages. At Ephesus the deeds of the Nicolaitans clergy ruling laity were among them. At Pergamos the doctrine of the Nicolaitan's was established. Laodicea means mob rule which we have in many churches today.

Though the Nicolaitans are not an indisputable subject, it appears to me that they were those who advocated the clergy should have the same authority over the laity the apostles exercised. This was one of the first departures from the truth. God has made an arrangement that should exist between the -pastor and his people. If this is violated, all suffer - the pastor, the people, and God's work. This arrangement is one of the brotherhood. It can only work among born again people. The pastor is their overseer, yet the authority lies in the people or the congregation. He is to rule them for their good and God's glory. Any time the authority is taken away from the

congregation this arrangement is violated. Also, any time the leadership is removed from the pastor the arrangement is violated.

In these churches we have both violations. At Ephesus, the lovers of ruling the laity existed. At Pergamos, it had become a reality. But at Laodicea the opposite prevailed - the pastor was not their leader. If we follow church history these facts are seen: Bishops gradually took the authority away from the congregation until it reached its height of evil in the form of the pope in the Roman Catholic Church. But today, the reverse is seen in both the apostate churches and the true churches. The pastor is the leader in very few churches. Of course, there are some in which he is the dictator - the people only do as they are told. But in the majority of churches, there is either a Diotrephes, a "deacon board" or a mob that will not let the pastor rule.

Another thing is shown in the church at Ephesus. She had left her first love. It may be that she never repented of this sin. It seems that the Lord's churches do not love as they once did. Have they lost their savor? They all will be removed at the rapture.

But their responsibility, remains as long as there is a professing church. If the Lord came now, many churches would not be disturbed. They would go right on into the tribulation. It may be that their final overthrow is described in Revelation 17. Some Baptist Churches may be among them.

Why are only seven churches mentioned? In my introduction in Chapter 2, I mentioned three reasons why only seven churches were selected by John. The first two reasons I left to discuss at this time.

Seven is the number of completeness. There were 7 different sets of conditions that represented all churches of all ages and they appeared in these seven churches. John wrote to the 7 representative churches nearest to him. We see everywhere churches who have departed from the faith or have compromised truth. We also see those who are Bible lovers, faithful and interested in missions. There are others who delight in suppers and socials and are at war among themselves. There are some known for their power in prayer, their famous choirs or their wonderful buildings, etc.

These churches do not represent church history. When we examine the various works of such a period drawn up by different men who hold this view, we find them so utterly divergent as to prove fatal to the principle upon which they were constructed.

No one man has been able to prepare a chronological scheme which comes close to a general acceptance. The history of the church can not be portioned off into seven successive periods marked by characteristics to which those noted in the seven epistles correspond. Besides this, the whole idea rests upon the historical interpretation of the Apocalypse which is simply destructive both of the meaning and influence of the book.

There are some who make the churches here representative of church history and the rest the tribulation and others who make these literal churches and the rest of Revelation church history. How strange to have such bed-partners. The prophetic message in these should not be pressed too far.

They are not church ages. But we cannot completely ignore the historical aspect of these church problems. They are not denominations. The Lord's use of the word "church" (translated from the Greek word "*ecclesia*") knows nothing of a universal church - visible or invisible.

The next thing mentioned by John that he saw was "one like the Son of man." This is another borrowed Old Testament phrase. It can be compared to the fiery furnace episode in Daniel: "like the Son of God." It is nearer that of:

Daniel 7:13 - "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him."

There is quite a contrast in the description of Christ here and His description in the Gospels and in Paul's writing. In the Gospels He is pictured as the lowly Jesus of Nazareth. There He is the Son of God in humiliation. In Paul's letters He is in a glorified body; the High Priest for believers; and present in His churches guiding them in all truth. John may be giving us a view of Him as the High Priest trimming lamps as He walks among His churches, but the language pictures Him more as a judge of them.

Is this symbolic? If so, how much? What about the garments and His appearance? It is perfectly natural to take this in the language of men. Surely it is a literal description of Christ and His characteristics as He stands in the midst of His churches. The garment is a priestly robe perhaps, but it may also mean He is clothed in honor and

majesty and light as *Psalms 104:1,2* describes Him. The golden girdle may also be a part of that priestly attire, but it could be the "*righteousness girdle of his loins; faithfulness the girdle of his reins.*" as Isaiah 11:5 says. The white hair is a sign of both purity and Ancient of days - showing the "I am" feature of Jehovah. Their eyes aflame give evidence of a searching righteousness which belong to Him. The brazen feet and the furnace show trial and judgment.

John sees seven stars in Christ's right hand. We are told what these stars represent in verse 20. They are "angels of the churches." The word "angels" is the word used for "messenger." The messengers here are the pastors of these churches. The pastors were light-bearers to the churches; whereas, the churches were light-bearers to the world.

Pastors have a subordinate authority. They are God's representatives to the churches rather than the churches' representatives to God. They are responsible to God for the condition of the church. Just as the moon gets its light from the Sun, which is a star, so does the church get its light from the pastors. The condition of the church is largely determined by the character of the pastor, for he gives light to the church as he teaches and rules (pastors). Teaching and ruling are formative powers in others. We will notice later that the angel of Thyatira was blamed for Jezebel and her teaching and the angel at Sardis was blamed for Sardis' condition and he was called upon to repent.

John overwhelmed at the vision he saw fell as one dead. Christ assured him all was well by telling him again who He was - "the first and the last." Then Jesus told him clearly He was the one who had died but now was alive forevermore, and that He was the one who had the keys of hell and death.

At this time John was told specifically what to write: "the things he had seen, the things that are, and the things that shall be" Therefore this book must be about the past, present, and future.

I am a futurist as to the interpretation of this book. I take this position for several reasons. Although there have been some among this futuristic school who have followed fanciful ideas, the futurists have been more consistent in their interpretation of Revelation than any other group of scholars. The historical school continues to update their interpretations because it is evident, even to them, that their past interpretations have been only minor fulfillments of the prophecy of this book. Being

a futurist in the interpretation of Revelation also allows a more literal rendering of prophecy and thereby, minimizes the symbols of the book. This position allows a closer connection with all other prophecy of the Bible as well as the doctrinal teachings of the Scriptures.

Generally the things seen (past) is Chapter 1; the things present are Chapters 2 and 3; and the things here after are Chapters 4 through 22. There are a few exceptions to this arrangement for clarification in some areas.

Chapter 3

The Church At Ephesus: Chapter 2:1-7 1. Introduction

A. Some General Information About These Seven Churches:

These churches were light-bearers being judged and encouraged. God lays much stress upon the practical side. Orthodoxy must be there, but it alone will not do. It is evident that Satan was working against them; both from within and from without. He desired to lead them astray in their beliefs and practices. Satan tries to get three competing religions in these cities (heathen, Jewish, Christian) mixed together therefore, destroying the true witness for Christ - His churches. There must be a clear evidence of a true faith and at the same time a living, working, bearing, self-denying faith. There is such as dead works. James says:

James 1:27 - "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, (compassion) and to keep himself unspotted (purity) from the world."

There are several similarities in the seven letters: each is addressed to a particular church. Each had some citation of attributes of the speaker who is Christ. There is an assertion of His complete knowledge of them. A description of the state of each church is given. There is an allusion to His promised coming again. A universal command to hear is given in each letter to each church. In each letter a special promise is made to the ones who overcome.

These letters are like the parables of Christ. They are His own words. They are messages from an absent Lord, but show also: they are sentences from a present Judge.

There are some general conditions that exist among these churches. Not all of them were alike; really, none were alike. Five of the seven had some serious faults. Two only passed His solemn inspection, but they had elements He condemned. One had nothing commendable. Some were priest-ridden (the clergy lording it over God's heritage); while at least one was mob-ridden. Those with either deficiency were condemned as unsatisfactory. At least one was zealous for the doctrines and worked diligently, but failed in love. Some showed faith and love, but had yielded to lewd

effeminacy; Some were suffering and faultless, but very feeble; others were strong, but dead.

There was true faith, little faith, false faith, and no faith among them. There were some with schisms, heresies and sects as well as devout works, noble sacrifices and fidelity unto death. Mixed among them was truth and error, wheat and tares, sins and sanctities, and the children of the kingdom with the children of the wicked one.

Here in these churches we see what Christ predicted about the "mysteries of the kingdom" in the gospels; the leaven of evil was already in the woman's meal and the birds of impurity were already in the branches of the mustard tree.

B. Some False Doctrines Appear In the Cities Of These Churches.

The doctrine of Balaam was at Pergamos. The deeds of the Nicolaitans was at Ephesus, and their doctrine was at Pergamos. Satan's synagogue was at Smyrna and Philadelphia, his seat was at Pergamos, and his depths was at Thyatira. The doctrine fostered by Jezebel was at Thyatira. We will notice that each of these more thoroughly as we come to them.

II. The Church at Ephesus

A. Revelation 2:1-7

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things. saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know they 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: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted Nevertheless 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 the candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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."

Ephesus, though under the control of Rome at this time and previously under the control of the Greeks, was in reality an Asian city. Embedded in them was the Anatolian (Asia Minor) heritage, especially of their religion which was the worship of the goddess of the Ephesians - Diana the Roman name and Artemis the Grecian name. To the Asians of Ephesus, she was the Mother and Queenbee.. The Diana of the Ephesians was not the same as the Roman goddess Diana nor the Greek goddess Artemis. To them she was very different. The temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the world.

She was their Great Goddess, the mother, protector, teacher, and mistress of an obedient people. Their life was built around her and her priests, etc. Because of dominion by the Romans they must accept Rome's rule as they did the Greek rule. This heritage is shown in Acts 19 when Demetrius, the silversmith aroused the people against the Christian religion as being opposed to their great goddess.

In the following centuries the apostate Christian religion tried to associate this goddess with the virgin Mary - the mother of God. The place that the Ephesian goddess had her first home, Ortygia (just south of Ephesus) is declared to be the home and grave of Mary, and this Ephesian myth has a place of veneration in the Catholic church today.

This city was the great city of the Roman Province called Asia, and one of the great cities of the world at the time of John's writing. She was the greatest trading city of the Asian Province and also of the northern part of what we know as Asia Minor. Ephesus was the chief harbor of Asia on the west and the gate to Asia from Rome. The Roman governors entered Asia here until the 3rd century AD. Ephesus was also on the central highway leading from Syria and eventually to Rome.

The church's beginning is recorded in Acts 19:1-41. Prior to this beginning, Apollos had spent some time there - Acts 18:24-26. Apollos was a Jew who had been known in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Alexandria was one of the chief cities of the world in its learning, commerce, etc. Apollos was a powerful preacher of the Old Testament. He knew only the baptism of John the Baptist. Evidently he heard John when he taught that the Messiah would come. John taught men to repent before baptism. This is what Apollos taught too. He did not know that Jesus had come until Aquilla and Priscilla taught him more thoroughly.

When Paul arrived at Ephesus he found some men who were no doubt convinced by Apollos about some facts of the gospel before Aquilla and Priscilla had shown him the real truth about Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the church. There were twelve in number. These men became converted and it seems the church started about that time. Paul was there three years and he had a very effective ministry. Paul also made many enemies while there (19:23-24). He had much influence in this church until his death in 68 AD.

This church became a soul-winning church as Acts 19:10 plainly tells us:

"And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."

Timothy was there and appears to have been their pastor and may have been followed by the Apostle John.

B. The Comments:

Revelation 2:1 - "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;"

Ephesus means desire. This church in its beginning was expressive of the fervent love of the apostolic churches. They eagerly desired more knowledge of Christ, sought for a closer fellowship with him, and a burden to spread the gospel everywhere. This is the church that had left her first love.

An angel is one of God's created heavenly beings. They are the ones who carry a message from God; therefore, an angel could be anyone who bears a message from God. Here the pastor is meant. The Greek word "aggelos" for angel is translated "messenger" elsewhere in the New Testament. Matthew 11:10 uses this for John the Baptist - "For this is he, whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger (aggelos) before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." Luke 7:24 uses it in the same manner - "And when the messengers (*aggelos*) of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John..." Luke 9:52 - "And he sent messengers (aggelos) before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of Samaritans,..." No superhuman could sin and repent, be persecuted and die, nor fall into heresies and

suffer as is said of these angels. Therefore, they must be men. Since the letter is addressed to them as well as the church they must be the pastor.

The attributes of the speaker (Christ) is shown by the stars in His right hand and His walking among the lamp stands. These show a place of sovereign protection as well as a divine authority over them. My what a place to be - in His right hand. We who are pastors should serve with gladness He who gives us such security and power. Compare this to:

John 10:28-29 - "And I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them: out of my hand My father, which gave them: me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

But especially in regard to pastors are the seven stars in His right hand. God has called us and placed us' in the ministry not because of our greatness but because of His doings. He has placed us so He can use us as lights to His churches. Therefore, it is necessary we be sovereignly protected for our usefulness. His holding us in His right, hand shows us as His possession to be used at His disposal, but it also shows that He upholds and sustains us. He does this so we will not be carried away with every kind of doctrine nor fall into the errors of the wicked.

Christ's walking among the churches corresponds to Aaron's trimming of the lamps in the lamp stand in the tabernacle. He is among His churches as He promised in:

Matthew 28:20 - "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world, Amen."

Matthew 16:18 - ...the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (His church)."

But he also walks among them to observe their works. In this sense He is among His churches to judge them so they will not be judged with the world. In the present age He removes those lamp stands that violate the design He has for them. Just as there is a "sin unto death" for disobedient Christians, so is there a removal of unfaithful churches from among those whom He pleases to protect. They may still function as assemblies but no longer as His.

Revelation 2:2-3 - "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: And hast borne, and hast patience and for my name's sake has labored and has not fainted."

A wonderful estimate is made of this church. They were not idle, not asleep, and not dormant. They had toiled early and late; no evil work in them; were orthodox; and hated false teachers. They had not fainted and they exercised church discipline over those who were evil. All of the commendation was based upon His knowledge of them.

These things are badly needed in our churches today. What great changes have come over the people who profess to be the Lords. The tendency today is to compromise with both moral and theological evils. Even among the most faithful the tendency of becoming like the world prevails too much. Very few churches could qualify for such commendation as given to the church at Ephesus by the Lord. Most pastors would like to have a church like this one in these respects mentioned for this church far excelled in their works the majority of churches today.

Revelation 2:4-5 - "Nevertheless 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 you quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

But something vital was lacking. As Jesus walked among His churches, He saw in this one a servant instead of a bride. Ephesus was indicted for her lack of devotion to Christ. She was not void of it, but it was not fervent. It lacked depth. Rather than love for Him, their love was in things - yes, good things, but not the best things. The Greek word is "agape." It is the deepest and most meaningful love. This is the same word used in 1:5; 3:9; and 12:11. This is the word used most often of God's love for His own.

Was it hospitality to strangers they had left? Was it their care and affection for the poor that was not shown? Was it lack of concern for the flock? NO! They had left-off loving Jesus their first love. It was not lost, but left neglected.

There are many areas of spiritual poverty in our lives as well as in the churches. The lack of faith in God is one area. This is when we fall short of salvation or a lack of an abiding dependence on God. This is spiritual poverty in our intelligence. Another place is the lack of yielding to God. This is spiritual poverty in our will. The Spirit does not fill us because of this unyieldedness. But here at Ephesus it was lack of love. This was heart trouble, heart poverty.

Comparing these to those at Ephesus in the time of Paul we see quite a difference. They had continued to work faithfully, but didn't have a love for Jesus they had at the beginning. This is the way of decline: First cooling of our love to Him; then we love things of the world, which leads us to compromise, and finally into spiritual corruption which degenerates to a departure from the faith. Those who depart from truth do not always do it in a short space of time. Sometimes it is years before the leaving of our first love becomes manifest in error or heresy.

Nothing has the right to take the place of our love for Christ. Anything that takes the place of love for Him is in reality an idol, be the thing or a person ever so good. Sometimes the love for father or mother (whom we should love) takes the place of our love to Jesus. It is possible that love for our wife or husband may supplant our love for Jesus.

A correction for this deficiency at Ephesus is given to them: The first thing was to "Remember." They were to go back to the place of departure - bring to memory their relationship to their Saviour. They must review their lives so as to see where they had gone wrong. They were to "repent"; that is, get a different attitude about their relationship with Jesus. They were to recognize that they were at fault in this. Then they were to "do the first works." This first work is our love to God. From this proceeds all other worthwhile endeavors. Paul tells us this in I Corinthians 13. The word used for charity is the same word - "agape." This love for Christ will be manifested in our brotherly love and our compassion for sinners.

There was a warning to them if they did not repent. He said, "I will remove you from your place." When will He come to judge? At the 2nd coming? NO! I will do it quickly; NOW!

The record in I Corinthians 5:13 and 11:30-32 shows that this happens to individuals in this life. So, does it happen to churches. The church at Ephesus became the, seat

of Eastern bishops who had departed the faith. In 431 AD the 3rd council met at the church of St. Mary. The name shows their candlestick had been removed. The whole city was gone in the 14th century.

Revelation 2:6 - "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

They did hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Already this heresy was at work in the city.

Revelation 2:7 - "He that hat/i 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."

"Hear the Spirit" is an instruction given to all the churches. This is a vital thing in the life of every individual and every church. Only through Him can we know and do the truth.

Then the promise is given to those who overcome. What is meant by this promise to the overcomers? To individuals in all seven churches this promise is made. All are connected with the word "overcometh" (Greek "nikao" - to gain the victory). None of the promises are exactly alike. There are about 13 things promised to the overcomers; "eat of the tree of life," "not be hurt by the second death," "eat of the hidden manna," "white stone with a new name," "power (rule) over the nations," "give him the morning star," "clothed in white raiment," "not blot out his name in the book of life." "I will confess his name," "become a pillar in the temple of God," "not go out," "write on him.. .my new name," and "sit with me (Christ) in my throne."

They are promised an eating of the tree of life. It is true that those who overcome false doctrines and do not become entangled with the errors of this world will have the joy of communion with Christ Jesus. This promise was particularly given to those who would overcome the lack of love that was at Ephesus.

Spiritually, the tree of life in the garden of Eden, alludes to Christ, who is our life and those who feast upon Him partake of the blessings of life and grace. He is now at the right hand of God (paradise God's garden) and also walking among His churches. Communion is a privilege to us now.

But this refers (as is evident in the other promises to over-comers) to the tree that is in Paradise - the New Jerusalem - in Chapter 22:2. We must not disregard that fuller and more perfect hereafter where we will enjoy in fullness the joy that belongs to the overcoming saints.

This promise is climaxed in 21:7 - "*inherit all things.*" It is clear that this is not just one transaction but a continuous struggle that ends in victory. Therefore, it must be thought of as starting at the "new birth" or "justification" and ending at the death of the body. It has to do with overcoming the world and the god of this world the devil. But this must also include a victory over the "old man" through which the world and Satan tempt. The means by which we overcome is "the blood of the Lamb" and this we do through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These promises are full of much imagery. They go beyond our ability to apprehend the magnitude of their glory; therefore, we must wait not only for an understanding of them but also for the receiving of them. By faith we may see the glory that awaits the overcomers. But even now, they awaken in us a desire to obtain them, an awareness to develop strength to overcome and an inspired zeal to labor in the Lord.

Chapter 4

The Church at Smyrna Chapter 2:8-11

I. The City of Smyrna

The city of Smyrna was located 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was also a seaport. It is still a city today with a population of over 1/4 million people. There is also a church there. This is the only time it is mentioned in the Scriptures. The city at the time of John's writing was greatly opposed to Christianity. It was a wicked city as Revelation tells us. History also tells us this fact.

The present city of Smyrna has a history of over 2,000 years. The old Ionian city of Smyrna was destroyed by the Lydians (Asians) because it had too much Greek influence in its heritage. The new city of Smyrna was started by Alexander the Great and it continued to be built under King Lysimachus. Their design in this city was to make it a maritime and trading center. This design disappeared after the early 15th century because of the harbor being filled with silt.

Smyrna also had a friendly relationship with her conqueror Rome because of a common enemy to both - the Seleucids. As early as 195 BC Smyrna built a temple and instituted a worship of the Roman, Tiberius and his mother, Julia.

She was a city of beauty - called the "ornament of Asia". She claimed to be the number one city of the Province of Asia and was, in some respects. The idea of a crowned city belonged to them. The phrase "the crown of Smyrna" arose from the appearance of the hill, Pagoda. Also the worshipers of the god Bacchus and the goddess Cybele (Sipylos - better known as Nemesis - twin goddesses) wore garlands of flowers on their heads to form a crown that represented the one they worshipped. Polycarp was bishop here 74 years and suffered martyrdom here by being burned to death in 168 AD. This would have made him pastor in 94 AD - at least two years before John wrote Revelation. He was converted in 82 AD by the preaching of John and according to Tertullian, Irenaeus and Eusebius he became pastor at Smyrna under the apostle John.

II. The Comments:

Revelation 2:8 - "And unto the angel of the church of Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive."

The name Smyrna comes from the perfume, myrrh. It carries with it the idea of being grateful to God. It is the principle product of this city. It is a sweet perfume used to embalm dead bodies. This is the same kind as the anointing oil of the Temple and Tabernacle. From the Song of Solomon 3:6 we understand it was used by the bridegroom; "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchants?" It is also used by the heavenly bridegroom in Psalms 45:8 - "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad" Christ is represented as the Eternal One by the phrase "the first and the last." The message to the church is from the Lord who is introduced as the Eternal One.

He is the One which died and is also the resurrected One. It was the eternal One who became incarnate, died, and arose. They could expect victory because Christ was the victorious One. The grave could not hold Him. The word "lives" symbolizes His triumph over persecution, death and the grave. These words were especially for this church and others which were undergoing severe trials.

The Risen Lord speaks to these churches in forms of verdicts, warning, and promises. He lays bare their failures and He calls to effect repentance and to excite to zeal.

Revelation 2:9 - "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."

Christ is also the All-Knowing One. He knew their works, but also their tribulation and poverty. These folks were not just "penia" (poor), but they were "potcheian" (abject). They had been robbed of their possessions.

These tired and tried heroes were brought before the King of kings as distinguished members of the kingdom. They were persecuted unto death, yet holy. They were destitute, powerless, and crushed, but rich in divine grace. Being a poor church there were not many achievements. He, knowing this, made riches out of poverty. He made

no complaints against them. The kisses of God come out of trouble and suffering. They pleased the Lord and He comforted them with joyous hopes of the world to come.

So much depends upon our point of view: "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich." Men hear about our evil report but God records the good report. We are unknown to the world, but well-known to God. What a contrast between Smyrna and Laodicea: Poor church called rich.; rich church called poor.

The world has often looked upon persecuted Christians as some sort of "rabble" or "beggars," but we go on with gold in our hands. Listen to another apostle in:

II Corinthians 6:4-10 - "But in all things approving ourselves ... By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

What matters the frown of the world, if we have the smile of God? There is nothing in the world that compares to the glory of God. All of this is like our current history. As we view the situation before us how many congregations do we see that possess great beautifully furnished buildings. It appears they have everything they need in the world. Yet they are so poor in spiritual affairs. Our compassion is for them because of their spiritual poverty. Yet, we see others struggling to make ends meet; full of love, to God and full of efforts to help fallen man. How we wish things would be better for these in carnal matters.

Friends: bond issues may be floated, loans may be secured, and gifts may be received to obtain all these things, but without the touch of God, those who have all these things are dead, poor and wretched. Dear ones, we must take our stand for one or the other. Which will it be: the poor-rich church or the rich-poor church. We must stand with the world or with God. Our appraisal of poverty or riches will depend on whether our eyes see material things or discern spiritual realities.

But lo, in the midst of these blessed saints are blasphemers more terrible than the persecutions from without. There appeared to be some poisoned doctrines of some within the church also. Satan had got in and some of his kingdom had become a part

of the congregation.

Who were these who were in opposition to the truth? In Ephesus it was the leaders lording it over others, but here: men brought in damnable heresies.

This should have been settled after the conference at Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15. But Satan keeps coming back; he never knows when to stop. Judaism - a system of salvation by works - kept creeping into the churches everywhere. It has invaded the whole system of so-called Christianity. This is what Christ meant by the tares growing in the wheat. Paul had written to the churches throughout all Asia, but Judaism still prevailed in many.

Galatians 2:16-18 - "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law: but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

Galatians 1:8 - "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Legalism is not less evil because it is more respectable. Christians must never forget that "Salvation is by grace." Perhaps true believers will never be deceived by Satan into believing salvation is given on the basis of their works, but Satan has caused many others to believe it. He has caused the majority of Christendom to preach one can be lost after Jesus has planted divine life in the soul.

There are many like Peter, whom Paul had to withstand. They are not standing fast in their liberty in Christ. Others go further combining grace and works to be saved.

Romans 11:6 - "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

Some of these folks at Smyrna were entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Perhaps

the true believer will never be guilty of changing the day of worship back to Saturday and go into full scale legalism, but we must be wary that Satan does not get them to keep the first day of the week as a precept by law instead of by grace.

The true believer is not to be considered here as the "blasphemous and synagogue of Satan. " This belonged to the false professor of Christianity. Here, John also meant the Jewish synagogue was of Satan; not only pagan, but Jewish errors are of Satan too.

All false religions were involved in the early persecutions. Satan is the author of false religions, no matter what name they go under - even the name of Christianity. Note the warning of Paul in;

Ephesians 4:14 - "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; "

So often I hear; "But, he never says an unkind word about anybody, he must be a wonderful Christian." They never consider what he teaches. Satan has his ministers and many times they are the "nicest fellows." But ever since Cain, false religions, no matter what the name, have been the most zealous in opposing truth. Not all are like Cain in their outward, actions, but their purpose is the same - destroy the truth. Revelation 2:10 - "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.

"Fear not," says the Eternal One. God promises us grace in any circumstance:

I Corinthians 10:13 - "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way, to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Hebrews 4:16 - "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need."

Romans 8:28 - "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

.1 John 4:18 - "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hat/i torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

God is wise. When we learn this, there will be no fear, even of the burning stake.

Note that Paul said about suffering to another church;

Colossians 1:24 - "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:"

Christ suffered three ways:

1. He suffered as a man, He has suffered personally as a man and He shares with us now all kinds of suffering we have.
2. He suffered for man. As our substitute He did it alone. There was no sharing in this cross. He took it all. No more suffering will He do in behalf of men. It is finished.
3. He also suffers from man. This suffering is not complete / yet. This we do share with Him. This is what Paul meant in Colossians 1:24. Christ still suffers through us. He suffers when we suffer.

This message is to all the suffering saints of all ages. Jesus said in:

John 16:33 - "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Paul tells us the same:

II Timothy 3:12 - "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

The present persecution of the saints at Smyrna that John wrote about was small compared to what was to come upon them. History records Polycarp being burned at this place in 168 AD. The Jews were his bitter persecutors and played a large part in his death. After the first century it was the Waldensians, Albigensians, Anabaptist,

etc., that were persecuted by the devil. He did it through false religions. Even Rome worshiped the Emperor as god. In the dark ages under the inquisitions of the Roman church millions were killed. Even in our modern days God's people are persecuted. Since 1924 in Russia true believers have been imprisoned, killed or sent in exile to Siberia.

It is the Sufferer who speaks to His church that is suffering here. He was innocent more so than His church. Polycarp said before his persecutors: "Four score and six years I have served my Lord. He never wronged me. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour."

Why churches and Christians suffer: One reason is because of Satan. He delights in causing misery. He also thinks he may make some to falter, harming the testimony of Christ. Another reason is to have a better testimony: God said in Acts 9:16 about Paul: "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" Another reason is to learn patience and obedience: Romans 5:3-5 - "Tribulation worketh patience" Hebrews 5:8 - (Christ) "...he learned obedience by the things which he suffered Y' It is also to keep us humble. II Corinthians 12:7 - Paul said "...there was given to me a thorn in flesh ... lest I should be exalted above measure" It is also for discipline (training, chastisement) I Corinthians 11:30-32 - "judge ourselves not be judged ...chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with world" and Hebrews 12:3-13 - "...whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth ... yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness..."

You will not suffer always was promised. There is a limit. Their limit was ten days. Whether this has anything to do with it or not may be questioned, but in the second and third centuries there are records of ten different persecutors of this church.

A reward will be given to the faithful. Their reward was a "Crown of Life." This is not the promise of life, but a "crown Of life." Life is not a reward for faithfulness. Life is a gift of grace. Rewards are only for those who earn them. Those get a crown. James 1:12 speaks about the same crown. It is given to those who love Christ more than they love their own lives.

Revelation 2:11 - "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."

Hearing the Spirit is enjoined upon his church as is upon all the churches. The overcomers in this church were promised they would "not be hurt of the second death." In Revelation 20:6 we are told: "...***Second death no power...reign with him a 1,000 year.***" What matters is how we leave this life if we are to triumph in the first resurrection.

This promise to those in this church was for those who were not intimidated by poverty, loss of all their possessions, tribulations, persecutions and death itself.

Chapter 5

The Church at Pergamos : Chapter 2:12-17

I. The City of Pergamos:

Pergamos (or Pergamum) was one of the most prominent cities of Asia; in fact, it was a city of Mysia and the capital of the Province of Asia (not to be confused with the continent of Asia, nor with Asia Minor. It applied to the part of Asia Minor in possession of the Romans.). It lies north of Smyrna and about 20 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. The kingdom of Pergamos merged into Roman dominion when Attalus III at his death (133 BC) gave it to Rome. Here the deification of the Roman emperors began to take on the form held by the Pergamanim kings and Julius Caesar asserted those same powers of divine dignity.

There is a modern city of Bergans near here of 30,000. Pergamos was a wealthy city. A large library was there that rivaled the one at Alexandria in Egypt. Cleopatra received permission from Anthony to remove it to Alexandria. Its chief product was parchment. It was called *pergamena* as the name of the city. This was where it was first made from the skins of sheep and goats.

Pergamos was full of temples and idols of many different deities. They included: Zeus, Athena (Minerva), Apollo, Dionysus, and Aphrodite. Its chief god (the god-serpent) Askiepios was its largest idol in the form of a serpent.

The name of the Asian god, Aesulapius came from: "aish", man; "shkul", to instruct; "aphi" a serpent. The Greek name, "Askelepios" simply means, the "instructing snake."

Tertullian said that many of the pagans who in later years were brought into the Roman church, practiced snake worship and even used a replica of it in their Eucharist This may seem strange, but Moses had to destroy the brazen serpent because the Israelites worshiped it Very similar to this are the snake handlers in our day. In reality, this is nothing short of Satan worship.

One of the forms of Rome's "Teitan" (sun-deity) was this Epidaurian snake. It came from this worship at Perganium. And the Pergamanim worship came from the

Babylonian system. This sun-deity was encircled with rays, as also was the head of the Epidaurian serpent. The Catholic pictures of Christ show His head also encircled with the same kind of rays. These beams were supposed to point out or show that the sun-deity, the Epidaurian snake, was the child of the Sun.

These same rays around the head of Christ was to show the pagans they could also safely worship Christ.

This was a city completely adverse to the Christian testimony when this letter was written. Because of the deep rooted religion of Satan and faithfulness to Rome, Christians were persecuted very harshly as shown by the death of Antipas.

II. The Comments:

Revelations 2:12 - "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write: These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges:"

Christ is described as "*He that hath the sharp sword with two edges.*" In 1:16 and 19:15 the sword proceeds out of His mouth. It is long and spear like - a two edged sword which refers to the two edged character of the Word of God.

God's Word is the instrument of salvation. It is the means whereby God separates vessels of grace from the condemnation with the world. It is the power of God unto salvation and it cuts loose the chains of sin and condemnation which binds helpless sinners.

It is also an instrument of judgment (death). It is the means through which God brings about condemnation and judgment upon those who refuse its message of grace.

Paul in Hebrews 4:12 shows it as that which judges the heart and life of believers. It is seen in Revelation 10:11-12 as an instrument of war to smite the nations. Here in Revelation 2:16 Christ is come to war against some who are His enemies at Pergamos Christ is meant by "He". He and the word of God were the only things used by this church to defend themselves from the persecutions of their enemies. "He is eventually the One who will destroy all enemies.

Revelation 2:13 - He 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."

He who had said we are to consider ourselves "unprofitable servants" when we have done all we can Luke 17:10 has praises for some here who are faithful. Here at Pergamos there were some that held fast His name and had not denied the faith. They did in spite of their environment; in the city of Satan's throne.

In Pergamos Satan's powers ruled at will. Here he was strong. The worship bestowed upon him at Babal had now come to this place and was deeply seated in the life of the city. When divine judgment comes, it takes into consideration the evil with which God's people have had to contend. Commendation, therefore, is more generous under conditions where the power of Satan has been overcome.

This church challenges us who live in a more enlightened age because it stood true when engulfed by an evil world. It stood true when apostasy prevailed and when temptations to compromise were very powerful and aimed at them with all the forces of Satan.

Who is Antipas? He is unknown to the world but well known to God. He had given his life for the cause of Christ. Already he had received praise for his faithfulness but in the day of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ the Lord will say: "Well done thou good and faithful servant, Enter into the joys of thy Lord."

Revelation 2.14-15 - "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the Children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrines of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

While there is praise for some at Pergamos there is rebuke for others. The doctrinal faithfulness of this church had been infiltrated by error. Not all were faithful to the truth. The woman of Matthew 13:33 had hidden leaven in the meal. Truth had been infected with that which was false. Error had been permitted to grow and they had not purged themselves of it.

Degeneration is the law of all life apart from God. The atomic theory says that materials decay, decompose, corrode, etc.

This same law works in our spiritual lives too when we forget God. One does not "stand still"; either, he goes forward spiritually or, backward. John 15:5 says, "...without me, you can do nothing." It is evident that all was not well with the church at Pergamos They had at least two blemishes upon them There were two serious errors among them Doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. The "Doctrine of Balaam" is the first serious thing mentioned against them. Balaam means "the destroyer of the people."

To understand this doctrine one must be familiar with Numbers 22-25 and also Numbers 31:15-16. Balak, the king of Moab, was afraid of the Israelites as they journeyed to the land of promise and called for Balaam to come and curse them for him. He could not curse Israel for Balak, but he did show him how God's displeasure could be made to come upon Israel. He encouraged Balak to corrupt Israel by tempting the men with the prettiest Midianite and Moabite women. He knew they would marry them and then worship their idols. The men of Israel did wrong in taking heathen women as brides. The fornication was not in taking the women but in taking up their devil worship. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 shows that those heathen nations did not worship God and they were to have nothing to do with them.

This is contrasted to "way of Balaam" in

II Peter 2:15 - "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;" Selling the prophetic gift for money is called the "way of Balaam."

It is also contrasted to "error of Balaam" in Jude 11 - "woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain. and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of core." His assumption that God would curse Israel was Balaam's error.

As Israel was stopping too long and too close to Moab in their journey, so were these at Pergamos too close to Satan's seat. We must be the more careful if providence puts us near those who are wicked indeed. Lot is an example of a believer who has his

roots too firmly planted in the ground that is polluted. He had forgotten he was a pilgrim and became a part and parcel of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

No believer is responsible for being in the world, but we are responsible for our attitude toward it. God intends for us to be in the world for its good, but He does not want us to be a part of it. He does not want the world in us. One man may own much property and be heavenly-minded; whereas, another may not even have a grain of sand and yet mind earthly things. It is not the riches that condemns; it is the love of them that "is the root of all evil.

Intermarriage of Christians with idol worshipers was a real problem here at Pergamos. The name Pergamos is very close kin to "Polygamy." Such a union would invariably lead to joint participation in each others religion. Intermarriage of Christian and non Christians usually result in spiritual corn-promise.

I Corinthians 10:20-21 - "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils."

The civic and religious life of some were interwoven with the devil worshippers and it put them in the same position as Israel when near the Moab border. We face this compromising spirit in the United States in other things beside marriage.

Wherever Christians go in our land, they are confronted with compromising principles Our public school system presents and ever increasing danger. Many restaurants serve intoxicating drinks. Even the grocery stores have become liquor dispensaries. Satan is busy laying traps for Gods children.

Evidently there were some in the Pergamos church that believed Christians had the right to intermarry with heathen

II Corinthians 6:14-18 - "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And

what agreement hath the temple of God with idols, for ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my Sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Christ's testimony to this church was, "*I have a few things against thee.*" It should be clear from the Scriptures that Christians must at all cost remain pure and separate from the world. There are some historical implications in this charge against Pergamos. There is a larger application that can be made toward Christendom. It deals with the church marrying the world.

How could this happen? For Christ, said,

John 15:18-19 - "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world; therefore the world hateth you."

It is clear that before the world can love the church, she must be a part of the world. This is what happened to Christendom; even in the early centuries. Sin crept in some of the churches and they began to compromise godly principles. They got farther from truth and began to bring in things of the world to worship.

This compromise with the world happened on a large scale during the reign of Constantine, the Emperor of Rome. Early in the 4th century the Roman Emperor died. Two men vied for the position of Emperor of Rome. At a place in Northern Italy called Mivian Bridge the two armies bivouacked waiting to battle each other the next day. The western commander Constantine, had come in contact with some of the people of Christianity, and knew something of their beliefs. He, like many others depended upon the gods to help them in crucial times. Tradition tells us he saw a cross in the sky and took that as an omen that Christianity would help him. So, being superstitious, like most men of his day, he vowed if he won he would become a Christian.

The "cross in the sky" is only tradition added by a jealous apostate Roman church. It

is evident to me, from the evidence recorded and things resulting from that vow, that he made a bargain that night with some supernatural power other than Jehovah God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. History has revealed it was the prince of this world, the god of this age, the spirit which blinds and then binds to himself - Satan. It could be no other.

There is no evidence of Constantine's ever being saved. From what he said about baptism, it is evident that the Christianity he knew about was apostate Christianity. Here is what he said about baptism, *"If baptism washes away sin, I will wait until I am ready to die,"* History records that he was baptized just before he died.

He won the battle and became the Roman Emperor. He made a proposal with the apostate church: The church would be the religion of Rome and the leaders in the church would be supported by the government. The apostate church consented. Those that were true to Christ would have nothing to do with this arrangement. After this pact Roman authorities and the bishop of Rome selected the preachers. The Priest of pagan temples were baptized into so-called Christianity and they became the priests of the church.

During the reformation the same kind of arrangement existed. Luther and his church had a union (marriage) with the German princes. Calvin had the same arrangement with the French and the Swiss, etc. England's church (Episcopalians) began because the king wanted his own way in opposition to the pope at Rome. He became the head of the church in England himself.

Only God's providence kept our United States from having a union of Church and State. Early in the Congress of the United States, the question arose concerning the established churches, religious tolerance, or religious liberty for all. Several bills were offered. One recommended the Church of England, another the Congregationalist, and another the Presbyterians. The Baptists were contending for religious liberty for all with James Madison as their main supporter.

Patrick Henry offered a substitute bill for the others stating that four churches (denominations) instead of one be established: Church of England, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and the Baptist. The Baptists still argued against it through James Madison in spite of Patrick Henry's plea that they could not live without the union of church and state. Finally, the vote was taken and it carried overwhelmingly. But, in

those days, the measure had to be voted on and passed three times before it became law. James Madison continued to fight against it, but he was no match for the eloquent Henry. It passed overwhelmingly the second time. The third vote must be taken, but before it was taken Patrick Henry was made governor of Virginia and left Congress. Without his eloquence the vote was lost. God's providence had kept the United States from having state churches.

No wonder Christ appears as the one with the sharp sword. The doctrine of Nicolaitans is the other serious criticism, of the church at Pergamos. This doctrine advocates the exercise of authority of the clergy over the laity.

That which was "deeds" at Ephesus became "doctrine" at Pergamos. That which was hated at Ephesus was acceptable here. There is needed a strong leadership in every church but when that leadership begins to "*lord it over God's heritage*" they will soon be destroyed. The Lord is not pleased with this arrangement because it disregards His arrangement between the pastor and the flock.

Notice what Peter has to say to the pastor about this:

1 Peter 5:2-3 - "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples of the flock."

Paul has some words to say to the congregation about this too:

Hebrews 13:7,17 - "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

"Which thing I hate" is the Lord's attitude toward any false doctrine. The tendency to destroy the distinctions of moral and theological truths is not modern. Really, it is about as old as man. It is seen just outside the garden in Cain's way of worship. If the Lord said this about the church at Pergamos, what do you think His attitude is toward

those organizations within Christianity that have their whole system built around this doctrine?

The greater part of Christianity is preacher controlled. There are varied forms of it, but basically all are the same. Roman Catholicism through its hierarchical system is finally controlled by one man. The Episcopalian have almost the same setup. Methodists has a modified system; others too numerous to mention are similar in their church government. Even some Baptist preachers have control over local, churches not sanctioned by the Scriptures.

There is quite a difference between the language here, *I...will fight against them...*" and Matthew 28:20, "*and lo, I am with you alway,*"

There is also quite a contrast between the doctrines of the two kinds of churches (the one established by Christ and those established by men). Why should people have the Lord's blessings and claim to be His church when they have substituted their own doctrines (which are wicked and evil) for the doctrines plainly given to them by Christ through His inspired Word?

Is this threat carried out in the vision of Revelation 19:11-21. Will those Christian organizations that have departed from the Lord's teaching be here at the end of the tribulation? If so, it is evident they will not have the saved within them, because the saved are raptured at the beginning of the tribulation.

Revelation 2:16 - "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly. and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

The only cure for such a condition in this church was "repentance." The same remedy was given to the Church at Ephesus. It appears that neither church repented. Ephesus was soon removed as a "light bearer" and Pergamos soon lost its fight against the Lord.

Revelation 2:17- "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 manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it"

But there are some promises given to the overcomers those who overcome the influence of the doctrines of the Nicolaitans and Balaam.

A promise of eating "hidden manna" seems to be a present reward in contrast to those who participated in eating things sacrificed to idols. 'Manna, "the food that sustained Israel in the wilderness when they were exposed to the idolatrous practices of the heathen nations through whom they journeyed, is a fitting expression for those at Pergamos who were also exposed to the heathen practices within that city which had infiltrated the church.

“Manna” is a type of the gospel and the Christ of the gospel who is the food of the righteous and that which sustains God's people as pilgrims in this weary land. It is called "hidden" because the Gospel comes guised in weakness though it is the 'power of God "It is hidden to the world and those who desire the things of the world. Christ is "hidden" and unknown to the world because "the god of this world has blinded the eyes of them who do not believe."

The promise of a "white stone, " which is a sign of approval - especially to those who overcome those persecutions and difficulties against them, seems to indicate a future reward. John could have been referring to the use of the white stone to mark good or lucky days or those white stones given to the conquerors in the Olympic games. He could have been referring to the Roman's use of the white or black stones used in judgment of individuals: the black stone meant condemnation and the white stone meant absolution.

The "new name" written does not relate to the adoption and new nature given in regeneration, but as a reward for faithful service.

Chapter 6

The Church at Thyatira Chapter 2:18-29

I. Introduction

Thyatira was a small thriving town 40 miles southeast of Pergamos on the road to Sardis. It was in Lydia on the river Lycus near the border of Mysia. It was given this name in 280 BC by Seleucus Nicator who colonized it with Greeks. The chief product was a dye and its inhabitants were famed for their skill in dyeing. Lydia, a convert of Paul and the first Christian in Europe, was from there:

Acts 16:14-15 - "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul. And then she was baptized, and her household, she besought us saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us."

It is strange that this church was selected as one to which to write. It was small for such an important message. The city's location was not a prominent one. The only record of this church elsewhere in the New Testament is in Acts 19 where it is said all of Asia heard the gospel. Even there, the church is not mentioned. But this message reached the city where this church labored. It also was heard in much of Asia and it was effective then reaching far beyond the time of this church even into the twentieth century. This is one of the severest messages written to these seven churches of Asia.

Many of the inhabitants of this city were worshippers of idols, various deities, and the Roman Emperors. Games were celebrated in honor of the gods and goddesses and the Emperors. Among those goddesses worshipped was Diana. There are remains of a church building (St. John) which at one time was used as a pagan temple and is now a Moslem mosque.

The name of the city if it is equivalent to "thyatira" means "daughter." It comes from the words "Thygates" and "Teiro" it means feminine oppression. This last is the meaning we get from its use in Revelation. It is said that the false prophets who

enticed the Christians to apostasy were women and that later in their history many of their bishops and leaders were women. This church is a fit symbol of the effeminate church of Rome.

II. The Comments

Revelation 2:18 - "And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira 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,"

In each letter an attribute of Christ is given. Here it is "Son of God" This designation of Christ is not used before in this book. To Ephesus and Pergamos the designation is "he." To those at Smyrna Christ is called, "the first and the last." In Revelation 1:13-15 the title "Son of Man" is used which was Christ's favorite expression of Himself while on earth. But here the phrase is "Son of God" in keeping with the character of judgment on this church. Their departure from true worship was so severe and serious, it called for the title: "Son of God" He who is the Righteous Judge is able to ferret out every evil This is to show that Sovereign judgment deals with all who fail to meet the requirements Christ has given to His churches on earth.

The symbols of judgment are fire, and brass and are shown here. Christ had "Eyes like unto a flame of fire" showing His burning indignation and purifying judgment against these here. Paul understood this about Christ and wrote:

Hebrews 4:13 - "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

He whose "feet are like unto, fine brass" shows another symbol of judgment, and in 1:15 is added "as if they burned in a furnace." Verse 23 of this Chapter adds, "he which searcheth the reins and hearts (mind)."

Revelation 2:19 - "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith. I and thy patience and thy works; and the last to be more than the first."

This verse tells of His commendation of Thyatira. In spite of the terrible sin in this church, Christ recognized the good they did do.

This church had one important thing not credited to any of the other churches. They had charity (love - "agapo"). This is the kind of love God has for His people. They may have been charitable to their brethren, which no doubt they were since their love is commendable. In other areas there was also commendation. They were workers, were patient, exercised faith, and appeared to be increasing in their endeavors. But in the commendation it seemed there was an indication they lacked the proper zeal - possessing a zeal without knowledge:

Revelation 2:20-23 . "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 sacrificed into idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 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."

These verses show a very severe indictment against this church and perhaps the pastor also. They had tolerated a woman named "Jezebel" and her teachings that led astray some of the saints. The language indicates that an actual woman is intended. Some have believed the woman was the pastor's wife. Whoever she was she had a dominant position in the church and had not been rebuked nor disciplined for her actions. The language indicates she had urged Christians to continue their worship of idols, mixing it with their worship of Christ. It may be she had only engaged them to eat meat offered to idols, but it appears she also taught them to take part in the immoralities of pagan worship.

We can best understand this when we know the Old Testament Jezebel. This woman was fulfilling the same role of the Old Testament Jezebel. If her name was not Jezebel, and only a symbolic name used, it was rightly chosen as a symbol of the woman at Thyatira. Both of these women put themselves in a place of religious leadership. Both called themselves prophetesses. This their own assumption because they both were disowned of God. They pretended infallibility when they were not true messengers. Jezebel was an idolatrous queen and also an adulterous one. By Ahab's choice she occupied the throne. This woman was an idolatrous and adulterous leader, the pastor permitted her to seduce others.

This woman represents the woman in the "*parable of the leaven*" in Matthew 13. In that parable a woman hid leaven (false doctrine) in the bread. In this church a woman leads in the apostasy. Both may be representative of the manner false doctrines have infiltrated Christianity.

The time of Jezebel was the work period of Old Testament history. Ahab's Pergamos was his marriage to Jezebel.

I Kings 16:31 - "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 Ethbaai kings of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him."

Ahab's Thyatira was his pagan worship,

I Kings 16:33 - "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."

The worship in Israel was actual depraved sex orgies used in the worship of Baal, etc. Those used in worship were actual prostitutes. Both male prophets and female prophetesses were a part of their religious worship under Jezebel's leadership.

To understand this idolatrous worship in Israel the word "grove" needs to be understood,

I Kings 18:19 - "Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table."

II Kings 23:6-7 - "And he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove."

Deuteronomy 16:21 - "Thou shall not plant thee grove of any trees near unto the altar of the Lord thy God, which thou shalt make thee. "

The word is in the Hebrew "*asherah*," "*asheroth*." It is equivalent to the Greek "*astarte*," and the Roman "*venus*." These are the name of their respective sex goddesses. Our English word "Easter" comes from these Hebrew and Greek words. The use of the grove was more than a tree or a group of trees constituting a shaded place. It was a tree carved into an idol. There is plenty of evidence in history of this, and the findings of archeologists have verified history.

Pagan religion in the 1st century was full of sex worship. This misuse of sex has also been brought into some areas of Christianity, notably in the Roman Church. Every place where idols are worshiped immorality is involved because Satan is its author and subject of worship. He is everything Christ is not and he leads his followers into those things despised of God.

Another sin of the Old Testament Jezebel was she made Naboth suffer for his faithfulness to his inheritance. She persecuted those who were faithful to Jehovah God. She tried to kill Elijah and would have if she could.

This Jezebel of Thyatira was to the church there what the Old Testament Jezebel was to Israel. This same kind of sin was especially true of the true Christians during the Middle Ages (Dark Ages). The Christians would not surrender their inheritance which was their faith in God. The apostate religion (The Roman Church) did to those faithful followers of Christ what Jezebel did to Naboth.

Many stories are told of those who had faith in God. Here is one that greatly impressed me. In southern France there stands a famous tower where Marie Durand and other women believers were imprisoned in the Middle Ages because of their faith in Christ. (Those who would not deny their Christ and become Catholic). Because she was a noblewoman, orders were given that she was not to be molested personally. Her tormentors would have already released her if she would have denounced her faith. Instead, during those years, she comforted the women who were ravished by their captors. She brought the children into the world of those who had lost their virginity. During all the time she was imprisoned she rubbed on the wall with her bare hands the French imperative "Resisted" until it was engraven in the rock. Jesus had already on her heart salvation and freedom. The vigor of youth could account for her early

years and her first refusal, but only divine strength could account for her perseverance. She would not sell her inheritance. Many other such incidents were done through the Inquisitions that took place all over Europe under Rome's authority.

Jezebel also appropriated Ahab's authority. She did as she pleased and Ahab did nothing to prevent her:

I Kings 21:7-9 - "...Doest thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?...I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth...She wrote letters..."

It appears this woman at Thyatira was permitted by the pastor to do as she pleased. She was like Jezebel, wicked and strong. The pastor must have been like Ahab, wicked, and weak.

Some believe that the church's condition at Thyatira represented the Roman Church just prior to the Reformation. This may be a good application, but that form of Christianity represented by Jezebel will pass into the great tribulation. Verse 22 shows this: "***Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into except they repent of their deeds.***" Revelation 17:1-7; 15-16 gives us a picture of apostate religion and its destruction during the "great tribulation."

Jezebel was signaled out for a special prophecy that was against her to destroy her. II Kings 9:33-35 gives a record of its fulfillment. Jezebel had a most unenviable record of evil: she was responsible for Naboth's death; she killed many prophets of the Lord; even tried to kill Elijah. This Jezebel at Thyatira broke down all barriers separating the church and the wicked world just as Jezebel did to Israel.

The Middle Ages brought an exaltation of Mary to a place of worship, an introduction of idols in the apostate churches, a continual sacrifice (changing the Lord's supper into a sacrifice each time it was observed), and gross immorality. All you need to do to see that these things are true is to check your history books.

We are not much better off today in Christianity. Immorality has almost destroyed the testimony of Christians. Not too long ago a church in Dallas advertised a stripper would perform in their evening worship. She was supposed to be expressing her worship to Christ. Some people actually believed she was. How stupid can one get?

Revelation 2:21 - "And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented-not."

Space for repentance was given. She did not repent. This is God's way of dealing with the wicked. Seldom does He cut them off without mercy. His dealings are shown in:

Romans 9:22 - "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

Jezebel was given a space to: repent between Elijah's warning and her destruction. She repented not. The same was true with the woman at Thyatira and will be true of the woman in Revelation 17.

Revelation 2:22-23 - "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. "

Jezebel's suffering is typical of the riot (apostate religion) who finally suffers and is destroyed by the Anti-christ in the tribulation. "Will cast" is an emphatic future. This form of Christianity will pass into the tribulation period, for it is evident this form knows nothing of salvation.

But this kind of judgment is applicable to any who dare corrupt the purity of the church. Notice what Paul says in:

I Corinthians 3:17- "If any man defile (Greek 'phtheiro') the temple (church) of God, kin, shall God destroy (Greek 'phtheiro'); for the temple (church) of God is holy, which temple ye are."

Revelation 2:24-29 - "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, 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. But that which ye have already hold fast until I come. And he that overcome 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

But there was a godly remnant in the Church at Thyatira. This group within the church was singled out as being true. There was a promise to them of being relieved of any other burden than already upon them. What really took place at Thyatira that Jezebel, her followers and the faithful remnant history has not revealed to us. But one thing is certain, God will give to everyone "according to their works" verse 23.

The faithful at Thyatira had not indulged in the "*deep things of Satan*." They had been buffeted by the world because they were separate from the worldly kind of religion.

John 15:18-21 - "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, Thy servant is not greater than his lord. If they had persecuted me, they will also persecute you..."

Anytime that Christians become so popular with the world that their rule is acceptable, they have abandoned their sacred calling. Only Jezebel and her kind of religion can be popular with the world that crucified Christ.

The language of verse 25 indicates that Christ has in mind either His coming (Greek "keko") to get them at the rapture or to come to judge the church and remove her as a candlestick. These two things are quite different and for different purposes. At the rapture Christ removes His churches by taking all the saints to meet Him in the air and keep them from going through the tribulation (this is promised to Philadelphia in 3:10). At that time He leaves all unbelievers, even though they may be church members. Therefore, some churches may go into the tribulation without much or any loss of membership. But Christ's coming to judge His churches and remove them as light bearers may occur at any time, but it always takes place after He has given them time to repent.

But verses 26 and 27 indicate the Lord has in mind the Rapture (His coming) and then the Revelation (His coming to reign). A promise is made to overcomers of obtaining a rulership with Christ. After we have been with the Lord during the tribulation period. He will bring us back to reign with Him on earth 1,000 years. There is a problem in verses 26 and 27 for those who declare the second coming of Christ as one single event. This promise to the overcomers is two fold: a freedom from the tribulation and ruling with Christ. These can not be fulfilled unless there will be both a literal kingdom on earth and a great tribulation. Both must be realities for the promise to be real.

The "Morning Star" will be a reward too. This refers to Christ Jesus himself as Revelation 22:16 explains. This shows the close relationship and fellowship of the faithful ones and the Lord.

Chapter 7

L The Church At Sardis: Chapter 3:1-6

A. Introduction:

Sardis was located 50 miles east of Smyrna and 30 miles southeast of Thyatira. It was an important and wealthy city. It had once been the capital of Lydia. It was full of n hi with many cults and secret societies. The chief deity was the goddess, Cybele - the mother goddess. Those who worshiped her indulged to the grossest form of idolatry and immorality. The foulest of impurities were committed by the inhabitants of this city. But some in this city had been rescued through the salvation they had received in Christ and a church started.

The general conditions of the Sardis church when John wrote was not good. There is no word of commendation. It is a message of rebuke and censor. The other four letters began with commendation by this with a severe censor. It was not as scandalously wicked as Thyatira, but its character was known by the Lord, as nothing escapes His vision. It was seen by Him to be void of any spiritual good; therefore, was dead. A form of Christianity was there, but the heart was gone from their worship. They recognized Christ in words but ignored Him in deeds. Their reputation was that their creeds were correct and their conduct respectable, but life had departed. They had started well but had developed into a dead lifeless thing.

B. The Comments:

Revelation 3:1 - "And unto the angel of the church of Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou has a name that thou livest, and art dead "

They had a name that they lived but they were dead. The fact a church is called Christian gives it a name that lives, but go into some and you will see how far you must go before you find evidence of salvation among them.

The thing that governs our physical body is our spirit. That which runs Christ's body (the local church) is the Holy Spirit. It seem ***Christianity*** one often finds the gospel in the coffin instead of a spirit that corresponds to the new life received in Christ

Jesus. The church on earth is a habitation of God through the Holy Spirit, but Sardis showed no signs of His activity.

You may pass through many churches and ask the questions, "Are you born again?" "Are you a new creature?" and many would not know of what you were speaking. Many in our churches are like the Jews of Nehemiah's day.

Nehemiah 13:23-24 - "In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jew language, but according to the language of each people."

Many church members in our day are yoked with the world by age vows or lodge fellowships. Others are yoked with the world by narrow sectarian bigotry and are ignorant of the Word of God - even ignorant of the gospel of salvation. No wonder the phrase Thou are dead! was pronounced over the Sardis church and many churches in our age.

In 3:1 we are again introduced to the seven spirits. In 1:4 they were before the throne, but here they are the possessions of Christ. I believe these are the manifestation of the fullness of the Holy Spirit and may refer to those qualities in Isaiah 11:2-5 - the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear and righteousness. This description shows Christ's righteous character and His right, to judge. They had a reputation but Christ knew differently. Many modern churches are very much like this one. They are full of activity but little that speaks of Christ, their own spiritual life, or the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is danger of death to churches which worship without the Holy Spirit's leadership and presence. We then tend to worship our own past, be more concerned with forms than life, or spend more time and energy about physical things than enjoying spiritual things. Then it becomes evident we love the systems more than we love Christ.

Revelation 3:2-3 - "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 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."

An indictment and warning is issued to the church. It appears some still had true life and that there were some things not quite dead. There are five exhortations given in these two verses: The first is to be ***watchful***. Christ wants them to become vigilant and awake. They had been in a sleep of death. The second is to ***strengthen things*** (or affairs that remain. If this is addressed to the pastor then he must use his stewardship as pastor wisely by feeding the flock (I Peter 5:2), making straight paths for his own feet (Hebrews 12:13), and lift up the hands that hang down (Hebrews 12:12). If members are to yield to pastors then they must be faithful guides.

It seems their works were more honored than they were faithful. None of their works were perfect (complete) before the Lord. Sometimes works are carried on with increased zeal even after the Spirit is gone. Even after the power of God has ceased to operate men carry them on by their own power. Many churches have forgotten the real essence of works and continue in them only for religious and philanthropic ends.

The third exhortation was to they had ***heard and deceived the word and the Spirit***. They had forgotten the beginning of their service to God and because of this they must go back to the beginning again and see how they received at first. Paul told the Colossians

Colossians 2:6 "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him."

40,000 delegates heard a leader of their convention say, "One of our purposes for gathering is to devise business methods by which the Holy Spirit of God may be regulated and made efficient." This is the general concept of the Christian world. The Holy Spirit is not a machine to be regulated but a Being to take control.

The consequences to those not watching was a sudden coming of the Lord upon them. Judgment to come as a thief (when least expected) if they did not hold what they had and repent of their watchlessness. Watchlessness on their part was to be followed by judgment coming quickly as He had warned Ephesus (2:5) and Pergamos (2:16).

Revelation 3:4-6 - "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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Two distinct promises were made to the overcomers. There were some (a few) at Sardis that had not defiled their garment and to these were given the promises. They were not given to all that were there, only those who had not defiled their garments. These were the overcomers and it is said they were "few." A good description may be seen of the blessing to those who have not defiled themselves in Chapter 14 verses 1-5. These promises were not to those at Sardis only, but to all who have not defiled themselves. The first promise was being "*clothed in white*" and "*walking with Christ*." White in the Scriptures denotes purity and righteousness. It not only speaks of the imputed righteousness of Christ that all saints possess but it refers also to their righteous walk in life before the Lord. This regards not only faithfulness to the doctrines of Christ but also the moral life. This promise is something in addition to the white robes of immortality and glory.

In Revelation 19:8 the bride of the Lamb is "arrayed in white" which is called the "righteousness" (plural, righteous deeds) of the saints. This is her wedding garment. This passage does not refer to all the saints because in the following verse (9) the guests at the wedding are mentioned. The few of Sardis (or elsewhere) who "are worthy" shall receive this bestowal. No man within himself is worthy but some men so conduct themselves before God, that God declares them worthy. Paul said of himself:

I Timothy 1:12 - "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;"

Three other places in Revelation: 4:4; 6:11; and 7:13 show these garments of white bestowed upon some special ones - the twenty-four elders and the martyrs of the tribulation.

"*Walking with Christ*" is also another blessing for those "who are worthy." Referring to 14:1-5 (again to those who had not "defiled themselves") we see 144,000 were permitted to be in his presence continually (walk with Him). It is said of Enoch:

Genesis 5:24: "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

Walking is the normal gait for the servant of God. Those walking well-pleasing to the Lord are blessed in that walk, but this passage refers to a walk with Christ in the age to come.

The second promise is ***"I will not blot out his name; but will confess his name before the Father."*** There has been a long controversy about this subject; both over the "blotting out" and the "book of life." The following Scriptures have something to say about this: Exodus 32:32-33; Psalms 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27; and 22:19.

Of these passages of Scripture only 4 deal with the "blotting out." The other 6 are positive statements: Those spoken about are either "written in the book of life" or "not written in the book of life." These 4 (Exodus 32:32-33; Psalms 69:28; Revelation 3:5; and 22:19) are the only ones needed to be treated.

For example, Revelation 13:8 positively says that those whom the Anti-christ overcame in the tribulation were not written in the book of life of the Lamb. Revelation 17:8 speaks of the same people. Revelation 20:15 has reference to the lost of all time and there is the positive statement they were not written in the book of life. Whereas, Daniel 12:1 refers to the saved of the tribulation as being written in the book, and Philippians 4:3 refers to some particular servants of the Lord, as written in the book of life. Revelation 21:27 refers to all the saved.

Several explanations have been given concerning these 4. One of which is: *The Lamb's book of life* has in it all of the redeemed; whereas, the *book of life* records every person that ever lived and if they are not saved they are blotted out. Another explanation says that a person may be truly saved (those that make this..explanation do-not. believe in the. security of the believer) and then have his salvation taken from him.

Do these passages of Scripture really teach that is possible for one who has really been saved: (born again) to lose his salvation? Those who teach this doctrine teach that the continuance of ones salvation depends upon his works and continued faithfulness. To these, salvation by grace and grace only is not true. These do not believe one is justified by faith apart from works. Therefore, the names of the saved

may be "blotted out." Most of so-called Christianity takes this position.

But, do the Scriptures teach that the saved are secured or is it possible for them to lose it after they have once received it? First of all, one should take the whole teaching concerning this rather than one or a few isolated passages dealing with the salvation of one's soul.

The first question to be answered is: "Who does the saving?" The answer is found in the following Scriptures:

Matthew 1:21 - "...thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins."

Acts 4:12 - "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"

II Timothy 1:12 - "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Philippians 1:6 - "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;"

Romans 8:33 - "It is God that justifieth."

Jude 24 - "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.."

I John 1:7 - "...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

It is evident from these passages and many, many more that we are saved by God. Other places tell us salvation is the gift of God - Ephesians 2:8; Romans 6:23 and Romans 11:29 says, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (God does not change His mind about them), and Hebrews 6:17 says, "... God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath" It is evident that God saves and every one He saves He will not change His mind about.

The next question to be answered is: "Upon what basis does God save sinners?" The

following Scriptures answer this question:

Ephesians 2:8 - "for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"

Ephesians 1:7 - "In whom (Christ) we have redemption through His blood."

Romans 5:9 - "...justified by his (Christ's) blood..."

Colossians 1:14 - "...redemption through his (Christ's) blood.."

Revelation 5:9 - "...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by the blood..."

The above passages make it clear that the basis of our salvation by God is because of His grace through our faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus. In addition there is an assertion Ephesians 2:8 we are not saved by our works. Titus 3:5 clears up any doubt by:

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost;"

Another question to be faced is: "How are we kept saved?" The following Scriptures answer:

I Peter 1:5 - "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

John 10:28-29 - "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

These verses tell us we are kept securely in God's hand by His power. Not only is salvation a gift to us but we who are saved are gifts to Christ; therefore, He will not loose anything the Father gives Him.

If our salvation is not secure, then words mean nothing. If Christ cannot keep that which belongs to Him how can he save? If God can not keep us saved it reflects upon His knowledge. Why would He save at all if He knew we eventually would be lost. It would also show He is not as powerful as Satan. After having snatched us from the bondage of Satan and then Satan recapturing us would show His weakness.

Exodus 32:32-33 will be better understood in the light of Psalms 69:28 and its own context. Moses is pleading life for life. It was the present life that God threatened to take away. It was this that Moses offered to God in exchange for the life of those who had sinned. At this time the Lamb's book of life was unknown to them.

Revelation 22:19 does not refer to any "*blotting out*" of a name written in a book. It refers to taking away any part of these Bible rejecters could have had in the book of life (some manuscripts read: "tree of life'). They were never written in it, because they had never received God's word as truth; therefore, they could not have been saved.

The "*I will not blot out*" is joined to the blessing that they will receive. They will be confessed before the Father as having been faithful under trying circumstances. There is a special blessing awaiting those who are faithful under duress. They will be brought before the Father and confessed by the Son as faithful ones. This is similar to the soldier who is commended for his bravery before the Commander-in-Chief.

Chapter 8

The Church at Philadelphia. Chapter 3:7-13

I. Introduction:

From what scanty history has revealed about this city we know it was named after Attalus II 159-138 BC, whose love and loyalty to his brother, Eumenes, won him the name Philadelphus (brotherly love). It was a blending of Greek and Asian thoughts, customs and religions. It was founded to honor Attalus II plus the spreading the Greek language in Pergamos and the surrounding provinces. The Asian people's characteristics were at the heart of religion in this city; the Greek aspect was restricted to the superficial show in the festivals.

We also know very little about the Philadelphian Church apart from what John has given us here. It was one of the two for whom the Lord had a little strength but much boldness in keeping the faith. It was not a great church as far as its reputation was concerned but it was good. It was not a powerful church by world's standards but it was faithful to the Lord. It was a persecuted church, but it was still true to God. It was not missionary like Ephesus, not gifted as Corinth.

II. The Comments:

Revelation 3:7-8 - "And to the angel of the church of 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; 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."

The title that describes Christ and given to the Philadelphian church follows the pattern established in **Chapter One** and the address to each of the other churches. The titles used in these addresses show in some measure His judgment upon churches. To the church at Philadelphia there is a note of praise in the judgment.

These very personal titles are thoughts from the Old Testament concerning Jehovah God. In *Leviticus 11:44* He says: *"I am Holy"* and in *Jeremiah 10:10*, *Jeremiah*

declares "the Lord is the true God"

The phrase "*the key of David*" comes from Isaiah 22:22 and is a prophetic utterance concerning Christ, although the context (verses 8-25) "Eliokim the son of Hilkiah" is meant. Eliokim means, "*the one God has sent us*" and is a very worthy description of our Lord Jesus Christ who is set above all principalities.

The word "*key*" is also a significant word in the Bible as well as in life. The one who holds the "*key*" to a door has authority over the door and perhaps the house as well. Here is seen the Lordship of the "*Great Son of David over his house.*" It should be noted that this principle applies to individuals also.

There are several things that the opening and closing of doors by the Lord means. One is that God's providence is not to be overlooked. He opens doors of usefulness to us and He closes doors which we have no business going through. God has a plan for my life of which I am not to be unmindful. He has the key to the usefulness of my life and because of this I must follow that plan He had designed as best for me.

There is also involved in this Lordship a protection for His own. Nothing formed against the church at Philadelphia could prosper. The same is true for all of God's people. We need to rely upon the power of Christ, trusting it to accomplish for us those things we are able to do.

As to the church at Philadelphia, Christ had opened a door of service to them. This was a door no man could shut. Such encouragement was needed by this church of "*little strength.*" Victory lay before them. They could not lose. God intended to use them. My, what prospects such an open door presents to God's people!

Paul wrote to the Corinthians (**I Corinthians 16:9**) of such a door being opened to him "**For a great door and, effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.**" He writes of another open door in *II Corinthians .2:12* - "**Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,**"

Success in Christian service is not to be measured as the world looks at success. Their success was: they had kept His word and had not denied His name. Many pastors and

Christian workers think success is their rise to some ecclesiastical position or to have the esteem of men. Such standards as lovely new buildings, large congregations, or popularity within the society are all standards of success as men see success. This is not how God measures success.

The Philadelphian Church's success and strength was in the presence of Christ among them, the keeping of His word, and not denying His name. The world has a poor opinion of those who consistently adhere to God's Word. When we show our preference to the Genesis account of creation over the theory of science (so-called); believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures by God; hold to the virgin birth of Jesus; and teach the church of the Bible is never anything other than a local congregation; we are in the world's estimation poor scholars who are led by prejudices and ignorance into such outdated concepts.

But this may refer (as the context seems to favor) to an open door through which the church will be delivered from the hour of testing to come upon the world. So, it may be an open door of deliverance meant here. Christ has the power and will exercise that power to open doors through which His own will pass; therefore, they will not pass through the "*great tribulation.*" More of this at verses 10 and 11.

Revelation 3:9 - "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."

Though the world has a poor opinion of those who keep God's word, He does not. Here is a promise that those who keep His word and do not deny His name will have their enemies brought to nought. The ridicule or persecution they were exposed to in the world will be turned into a blessing for them and a curse to those who are against God's servants. Those churches of the Lord which remain faithful to Him and His Truth in spite of all the opposition they face will be exonerated by the Lord and before all those who ridiculed their faithfulness.

There is an orthodoxy in which the Lord is not delighted. The Bible that the letter without the Spirit is dead. So is that orthodoxy without the right kind of spirit, dead. Woe unto those who depend upon their righteousness. They will receive the ridicule of man and most surely God's disdain.

Matthew 7:21-23 - "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 thee, I never knew you: depart from me, that work iniquity."

There is also a spirit that denies Christ's Words and their rightful place in their lives to be obeyed. A spirit that is not in harmony with God's truth, the ***Bible***, is not the spirit of truth but a spirit of evil. Such a spirit comes from the devil who continues to get men to deny, disbelieve or doubt God's Word.

It is a shame, but there are so-called, churches which deny the very Christ they profess to follow. They talk about salvation, but their 'salvation is not by grace through faith in the atoning work of Christ. Instead it resides in their own efforts and is obtained by their own works. It is an earning of God's acceptance rather than a receiving of His acceptance because they are in Christ Jesus. They talk about Christ, but He is not the God-Man of the Scriptures. The virgin birth is a myth to them, yet they want the name, Christian. They worship Him outwardly, sometimes very faithfully and sincerely, but they have never been born again. Many of these are among those who outwardly are enemies of those who hold forth the truth of God's Word. All are the enemies of the Cross of Christ even though they are unaware of their position.

The false pretenders as well as the enemies will also be compelled to worship the true and living God at the very feet of those whom they reviled. They will be made to understand in that day, that those they thought were foolish who believed and held to the Word of God as real truth were really the wise ones.

The reference to false Jews here no doubt were to those with the Philadelphia church, but here is a word about such in our day: There exists now a false Israel-Political Zionism - masquerading as the State of Israel. It opposes even the Jewish religion as seen by the recent coalition of government in Israel. Even the symbol called the Star of David, is connected with the Zionist "Police State" - These false Jews are the synagogue of Satan and may be the ones who will make a league with the Antichrist (***Daniel 9***).

Revelation 3:10-11 - "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. Behold, I come quickly: hold th(a)st which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Those who are truly saved and keep God's Word know that a great judgment will soon come upon this world. They know the stage is being readied, even now, for the return of Christ for His own. They see that clouds of God's great wrath beginning to gather in these days we live in and that it will not be long before God's indignation will begin to be poured out upon this earth.

Will God's people go through that time of God's wrath upon the earth? Will the people who are saved go through "*this great tribulation*"? These and many other questions arise concerning this teachings. There are many divergent thoughts of this subject; all claiming to base their beliefs upon the Word of God.

There are some who openly declare: "There is no such thing as the great tribulation"; others are so vague, about it they can not tell if there is one or not. Some tell us all living saints will go through it all; others think that they will go only through one half of it. There is another persuasion that declares that the faithful will not have to endure it. The Lord said to those with a little strength through the apostle John, "***Because thou hast kept the word of my patience. I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, (trial) which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.***"

Here is a promise from the Lord "to keep thee from ("ek" Greek - "out of") the hour ("hora" Greek - "time") of temptation ("peorasmos," Greek "trial"), which shall come upon all the world..." This "time" (hora) upon the whole world does not include all of the ages nor this particular age in which we live that Satan tempts men. That it designates that period of time between the Rapture of the saints of this present age and the setting of Christ's millennial kingdom is clear in other Scriptures. It is known by the language of the Scripture as the "great tribulation," (***Matthew 24:21; Revelation 2:22; 7:14***) and the "*tribulation of those days*" (***Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; 13:19*** - affliction). There are other tribulations that are great, but this particular time is so designated by the Scriptures.

That there are saved people in that period of time known as the "*great tribulation*" is evident from Revelation 7 where 144,000 Jews are protected from the wrath of this

time; whereas, countless multitudes of all nations came out of this time. Also Matthew 24:21-22 shows these days shortened for the elect's sake. Then Matthew 24:7-13 shows those enduring "unto the end" Then Revelation 20:1-6 must be considered: those who were martyred by the Anti-christ during that time.

Though this passage does not in exact words say the saved of this present age is which we live will not go through the "great tribulation," there is support for this meaning from other Scriptures related to the coming of the Lord. For example, the sudden and imminent return of our Lord for His own without announcement. Jesus refers to this in His answer to the disciples' questions in:

Matthew 24:3; "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world ("aion," Greek "age")?"

He clearly shows some will be taken and others left. He shows the ones taken are the blessed ones. Those taken must already be ready for there will be no time for preparation Paul shows the same truth in ***I Thessalonians 4:13-18*** where he explains the resurrection of those "asleep in Jesus" and the translation of the living saints will take place at the same time. Paul makes it clear that this is a meeting of the saved, with the Lord in the air and not the establishment of the kingdom in which He will rule with His saints.

There is a distinct difference between the Lord coming "as a thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:2) and the Lord coming "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels" (II Thessalonians 1:7) When He comes "with His saints" (I Thessalonians 3:13) and "to be glorified in His saints" (II Thessalonians 1:10) He will set up His earthly kingdom (Matthew 25:31-34) and reign with His saints "a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4-6).

But let not the believer think they will escape all judgment, because they will not be subjected to this time of wrath upon the earth. They are objects of the Saviour's judgment now:

I Corinthians 11:31-32 - "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world"

There is also a "judgment seat of Christ" for all believers -

II Corinthians 5:10 - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

Romans 14:10 - "But why doest thou judge thy brother? or why doest thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

The *judgment seat of Christ* ("bema" Greek) should not be confused with the "great white throne" ("leukos thronos" Greek) judgment of Revelation 20:11. The judgment of the saved takes place before the millennial reign of Christ and is at the (bema) "judgment seat of Christ" It is for the purpose of rewarding the saints for faithful service to their Lord The "great white throne judgment" is for the wicked and is after the millennial reign of Christ and is to determine the degree of punishment for them There is no such thing as a general judgment as taught by the majority of Christendom where all mankind will be brought before God at one time and in which He separates the sheep (saved) from the goats (lost) The Scripture used by the advocates of such a general judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. But this takes place when Christ comes to set up His millennial kingdom one thousand (1,000) years before judgment of the damned. (Revelation 20:1-5). The judgment in Matthew 25 separates the sheep (the living who enter the millennial kingdom) from the goats (the lost who are barred from that earthly kingdom). The judgments are not to determine who the lost and who the saved are, but to evaluate their works for reward or for punishment.

Revelation 3:12 - "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 him my new name."

There is a word for the overcomers here also. A reward is promised to them as was promised to the overcomers in the other churches. There are three things promised these over-comers.

First, they will become 'a pillar in the temple of my God" This reward is wither a

present reward or a millennial reward because there is no temple in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:22). I Kings 7:15-22 will help us understand the pillar. In Solomon's temple there were two pillars (verse 15). One was called Jachin (He establishes) and the other called Boaz (In Him is strength). These overcomers were established in the strength of God." If this were a "little strength" (Revelation 3:8) and were given strength from the Lord for their faithfulness. It is was for the millennium it was an established position in the kingdom. If it was for the new heavens and new earth it is a figure of speech that pertains to rewards.

Second, they will no more go from the presence of the Lord. A permanent residence with the Lord is assured these faithful ones. This is similar to Revelation 14:1-5 and the 144,000 who never go from the presence of the Lamb.

Third, three names are written upon them to identify them with God. The first name "My God" seems to identify these with the 144,000 of Revelation 14 because they have "*his Father's name written on their foreheads.*" This contrasts them to those who take the mark of the beast in their foreheads (Revelation 13:16-17). The next name was the "*city of my God*". This is in contrast to "that great city Babylon" (Revelation 18:10). The name of that city is "New Jerusalem" pictured in Revelation 21 and 22. The third name given was "my new name." This must be the name written on the Lord's vesture (Revelation 19:16) "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Chapter 9

The Church at Laodicea: Chapter 3:14-22

I. Introduction

The city of Laodicea was founded by Antichus II of Syria in the 3rd century before Christ and named for his wife. He populated it with Syrians and Jews from Not much is known of its early history and it did not have a place of prominence until Rome formed the Asian province in 190 BC It suddenly became a wycenter of industry and banking operations. It was almost completely destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD, and the population quickly rebuilt it without the help of Rome.

It was not as successful as Philadelphia in diffusing the Greek tongue in the districts immediately surrounding it. This may also indicate something about the nature of its people with the surrounding world This is the character of the church as described by John.

The church at Laodicea was quite different from the church at Philadelphia. There was nothing the Lord commended in it though there may have been a few suffering ones in it whom Christ loved and chastened. It did have a very high opinion of itself It thought itself rich (and was materially), but it was very poor spiritually. It was a self-righteous and self-sufficient church and boasted of greatness.

Its name shows it to have been ruled by the popular opinion of the people. Laodicea literally means "*people rule*." This word has the same root word that Nicolaitans has. That word (Nicolaitans) literally means, "*rule over the people*." This "rule over the people" began early in the apostate churches. This kind of rule still exists in many churches In many others it is a "*mob rule by the people*" designated by the name (Laodicean). Both conditions are true in Christendom. The majority of churches (whether true or false). are ruled by popular consent rather than by the Spirit of God. The average church is either a church of a ruling clergy or one ruled by a domineering people. In the average church the preacher may only safely preach what pleases the people or his ecclesiastical bosses. He no longer is their leader; he is their administrator.

The "church of the Laodiceans" is the worst of the seven churches. It is lukewarm: a little of Christ and a little of the world; claiming to be heavenly but clinging to the world; on the Lord's side by profession but a faith worked up from the world; and pretending to feed on heavenly manna while feasting with the world.

Is not the church of the Laodiceans a picture of the churches in our age? Never have churches had so much money, beautiful buildings, wonderful choirs, intelligent preachers, influential congregations, and so many missionaries. We want for nothing in our self-satisfied churches; yet for all that, we are poor, blind and naked. We are boasting of our work for the Lord while He is saying, "*I will spew you out of my mouth.*"

II. The Comments:

Revelation 3:14 - "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;"

This verse deals with that characteristic of Christ as the "eternal and faithful witness. "He is called the "Amen" which really means "it is true." This same Greek word "amen" when translated in the King James Version is translated "verily. " As a title here for Christ it shows the certainty of His promises which this church had forgotten. Paul uses the same word when writing to the Corinthians about His promises:

II Corinthians 1:20 - "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."

He is the "*Faithful and true Witness*" which is a distinct contrast with Laodicea which was neither faithful nor true In Revelation 1:5 He is called "*the faithful witness*" and in 3:7 He is called "*He that is true.*" This fact about Christ and His truthfulness gives a special emphasis to the church of the Laodiceans to that truth which follows.

He is also called "*The beginning of the creation of God.*" By this is not meant that Christ is a created being as some declare, but there He is the originating source of Creation as John 1:3 makes clear. "*All things were made by him, and without him not anything made that was made.*" First born also carries the idea of preeminence as Paul so states in:

Colossians 1:15,18 - "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: and he is the head of the body, the church who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things be 'might have the preeminence."

It is evident the Laodiceans were familiar with Paul's writings:

Colossians 4:16 - "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."

"First fruit" (I Corinthians 15:20) also indicated the idea of preeminence. Christ is not a created being because he created all things. There are two areas Jesus is said to have been "begotten" of God: the incarnation and the resurrection.

John 1:14 - "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,). full of grace and truth."

This passage has reference to His virgin birth when using the word "begotten." John 1:1-14 shows clearly that this Begotten One was the Word that was God in the beginning. John 1:18; 3:16, 18; and I John 4:9 all have reference to this incarnation of the Word - "the Word was made flesh." The Greek word "*monogenes*" from which this "*only begotten*" comes carries the idea of "only one who is of the same origin or ic/nd" Hebrews 1:6 has reference to the virgin birth also but here the word is *prototokos* and translated *first-begotten* the idea being the preeminent One. The same Greek word is used in Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18 and Hebrews 12:23 and is translated 'first born," but also with the idea of preeminence. The Greek root word *protos* means "*chief*" etc.

But this word "*prototokos*" is used in Revelation 1:5 and refers to Christ's resurrection and exaltation. He is said in that place to be "begotten" from the dead. It was the same person "begotten" from the dead that was "begotten" in the virgin birth. In both instances one already in existence was "begotten." Christ is the only one that was virgin-born and this came from the work of the Father and the Spirit. He became flesh rather than became a person. Therefore, it was the 2nd person of the

Triune God that was made flesh and this same person became the foremost of many in the resurrection from the dead.

Another Greek word is used also to designate the resurrection - "*gennao*." This is found in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 and means to "*bring forth from*." Paul uses this word in Philemon 1:10 in reference to the salvation of Onesimus while he (Paul) was in prison. This has no reference to a beginning of Onesimus but of a change in his relationship to his sins. Because Paul was the means of his salvation he said he begat him.

Revelation 3:15-16 - "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."

These verses carry a very severe indictment as is indicated in the "I will spew thee out" phrase. Now, the modern man would say, "This is good. This church is like baby bear's pottage. It is not too hot and it is not too cold. It is just right" The modern man would see a tendency in this church of toleration and allowance, but this is not the meaning here.

This is the most scathing rebuke of all that had been given to these seven churches. This rebuke was to the pastor as well as the church. The state of a church is usually a result of the ministry of the leadership. If the church is faulty it is because of a faulty ministry. Remember what Paul wrote to Archippus in:

Colossians 4:17- "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it."

There are three possible spiritual states in which churches may be found: They may be hot; that is, full of flavor with much evidence of the Grace of God being fruitful in them. Some may be cold; that is, without fervor and no evidence of God's grace among them. But others may be as this one; is difficult to really know their spiritual state. There is some interest shown by their testimony falls far short of what it should be, but it is not clear if they really have been converted by it and really belong to Christ.

This church gives a very good picture of the majority of the churches of our time. They try to show a good thing but have a very weak foundation on which they build. A lot of show of the flesh but very little of any spiritual value. We are like the merchant who puts his best garments in the show window, little realizing they are greatly damaged by the moths. Perhaps this church was living on her reputation among men rather than her character before God. Christ's opinion and men's opinions often differ. This is not a transitional period from cold to hot. If such were true, the "Amen" would have encouraged and strengthened rather than rebuked. He would have commended rather than condemned. This was the state of the church. It was not hot; neither cold. It was careless and indifferent to the real facts of Christ and His work. They did not appear to be infidels, but they did not appear to be earnest Christians. They were not really in opposition to the gospel, neither were they willing to defend it. They were not working a lot of mischief by their deeds, but they were not doing any good, either. Their reputation was not disreputable, neither was their character distinguished by holiness.

This church did not want to be designated "*bigots*;" therefore, they did not separate themselves from the world. They had some good things to maintain, but there was no need making such a fuss about it. A good evening at home may have meant as much to them as an evening at prayer meeting. They were content to do some good things; but if they had too much vigor and zeal they would be considered vulgar by the world which they could not endure.

Oh, yes, they were careful to maintain their Bible classes and the preaching services, but even then they did not want a display of undue energy. The deacons were excellent pillars if the chief quality in a deacon was to be still and exhibit no motion or emotion. The ministers were the angels of the church but their wings had been clipped so close they could not fly. Everything was done halfheartedly and listlessly. If it was done, it was okay; if it was not done, it was still okay.

It is apparent there was something in this church that was very obnoxious to "the True Witness." It is very apparent to the readers of this letter what was obnoxious to the Lord in this church. They had a very high opinion of themselves. There is danger ahead for those who "*think too highly of themselves*." There is more hope for the publicans and the harlots than for the Pharisees according to our Lord. Really, there is more hope for those who make no pretense at Christianity than those who pretend to have it, yet are lacking its essentials.

Revelation 3:17 - "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"

When churches or individuals are "lukewarm," there also exists much self-glorification: "*I am rich.*" They were rich in their own esteem, but bankrupt in God's sight. When such exists, men tend to think all things are alright. Everything seems to go well with them; therefore they see no need to do anything about it. Men are less likely to repent in this state than when they are in deep sin. Their condition becomes hopeless because when they are reprov'd it falls as water on a duck's back. They think they do not deserve it, so it was not meant for them, but for others. Lukewarmness is so much of our nature it is difficult to get us out of it. The cold makes us shiver; the heat makes us miserable, but lukewarm is just right - it pleases. There is also much self-satisfaction where men are "lukewarm" spiritually: they "need nothing." When they should be mourning their state, they are rejoicing. Instead of sending up signals of distress, they are holding up banners of triumph. Their joy was misplaced. Instead of their joy being in Christ, it was in themselves. They were spiritually poor but did not know it, and therefore, were content - proud.

Contentment when there is a lack of worldly goods is good, but to be content with our spiritual condition is an index to our poverty in spiritual matters no matter who we are. The reverse is usually the case with us. We are content to be spiritually poor while at the same time discontent with our worldly goods no matter how much we have of them.

Revelation 3:18 - "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in 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."

A church that God will bless rather than censor is one that recognizes its backslidden condition and mourns of its spiritual deficiency. He will bless those people who desire more of Christ no matter how much of Him they already possess.

T H E E N D