

# The Revelation

## Lesson 4

### VII. The Letters of the Book

#### A. Ephesus – The Perseverant Church (2:1a)

Rev 2:1a **"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:**

When the Goths destroyed the city of Ephesus in 263 AD, the Church ceased to exist. The warning from the LORD for this Church was fulfilled. According to historians, the Goths were an East Germanic people and two of their tribes, the Visigoths and Ostrogoths, were instrumental in defeating the Western Roman Empire, the western leg of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue with the head of gold. However, it would take another 213 years before the Western Empire fell in 476 AD. For clarity, the Roman Empire was not divided at the time of the fall of Ephesus. That division did not occur until 22 years after the destruction of Ephesus. The division of the empire occurred in 285 AD when Emperor Diocletian made Constantinople the capital of the Eastern Empire and Rome the capital of the Western Empire.

#### 1. The LORD's Identification (2:1b)

Rev 2:1b **The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:**

When John turned to see the LORD speaking to him, he first saw the lampstands (1:12) and then, in verse 1:16, he saw the seven stars in the LORD's hand. Then, in the last verse of chapter one, the LORD interpreted the meaning of the stars as the messengers to those Churches and the seven lampstands of Asia Minor as the Churches (1:20).

Specifically, in association with the LORD's letter to Ephesus, the perseverant Church, the LORD wanted the members of that Church to remember that He held them in the palm of His hand and He was walking among them constantly. That was the purpose of identifying Himself this way.

What grace and peace can be felt when we know that the LORD is holding us in His hand and He is always walking among us. In other words, He is near, never too far away, always ready to help us with everything in life.

#### 2. The LORD's Oracle to Ephesus

##### a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (2:2-3)

Rev 2:2 **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; <sup>3</sup> and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

The LORD began this oracle to Ephesus by acknowledging the good things He found in that Church. **"I know your deeds"** and they met His approval. The LORD sees all things.

Nothing done in this world occurs outside His view. We are all naked before Him in our works and the intent of our hearts in those works. The Church in Ephesus did what they did for all the right reasons in the sight of the LORD. Moreover, the LORD said, **“I know ... your toil.”** We do not use the word *toil* very often these days, but in John’s day, it meant your *labor*. The Church was a faithful Church in carrying out the daily efforts of living in the faith of Christ. Additionally, the LORD said, **“I know your ... perseverance.”** Today, it would be better if we translated this phrase as *I know how you are patiently enduring*. Ephesus was already in trouble when this letter was being dictated to John. Living in Ephesus was a group of men who were heretics. The LORD said, **“and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.”** Ever since the days following Pentecost, when the Church of Jesus Christ was officially revealed by the LORD, heretics sought to take it over and turn it into their brand of religion. In this case, these heretics took upon themselves the title of “apostles.” No one should ever take the name *apostle* as a title in the Church save those selected by Jesus Christ at the Sermon on the Mount with the addition of Paul when Jesus selected him on the road to Damascus. John was the last Apostle and the only living one worthy of that title. Not one of the evil men in Ephesus was worthy of that title. As false apostles, these men were trying to re-direct the theology of the Church. As best it could, the Church thwarted their attempts. Therefore, the LORD said about Ephesus, **“and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.”** It is quite evident that those evil apostles had side-tracked the work in Ephesus and as we will see, the members of the Church of Ephesus could not overcome them and their evil works.

**b) The LORD’s Complaint – Left First Love (2:4-5)**

Rev 2:4 **‘But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> ‘Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.**

Here is the LORD’s complaint. **“But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.”** Oh, so many Churches are guilty of this today! The evil men in Ephesus wanted to be *apostles*! They wanted to make the church into what they wanted it to be. They were not concerned with the first and primary purpose of the Church, to reach the lost and bring them to salvation in the LORD. In every Church, in every location across the world, each Sunday should be flooded with visitors seeking the LORD with every baptistry teeming with proclamations of Christ being their LORD and Savior and every altar filled with prayers for those who have not accepted Him as LORD. That is the first purpose of every church and should be the priority of every congregation. Churches should not be stagnant in number. Those who call themselves *Calvinists* are not concerned with salvation, rather, they say they are concerned with the depth of the spiritual walk. It is often heard from the lips of these adherents, “We should not be concerned with numbers, we should be concerned with spiritual growth.” That position should never be the first love of a Church, it leads to an ineffective Church that the LORD will have a complaint against! That was the problem in Ephesus. The Church was so focused on defending the faith that they were not able “to add to the Church daily” through new converts to our LORD and Savior. They were side-

tracked. They needed to repent and return to the first love that established the Church about 60 years before this letter was written. Try as they might, they failed.

c) [The LORD's Salute \(2:6\)](#)

Rev 2:6 **'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

But the LORD was not so harsh that He did not salute Ephesus for its hatred of the **“deeds of the Nicolaitans.”** The LORD hated them too. According to the writings of some of our early pastors, the Nicolaitans taught that wives could be shared among the men of the church communally and that adultery and fornication needed not be thought of as sin. Furthermore, they taught that it was quite lawful to eat food offered to idols and that pagan rituals were acceptable practices in the Church. The second century pastors who identified these traits of the Nicolaitans were Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Augustine.

d) [The LORD's Charge \(2:a\)](#)

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

This same charge is offered to all the seven Churches. **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** This sentence indicates that all the LORD's acknowledgments, warnings, complaints as well as charges and gifts apply to all the seven Churches and can be extrapolated to apply to all local Churches that have ever been formed anywhere. **“He who has an ear, let him hear,”** is not an unfamiliar statement from the LORD. He used it in Matthew 11:15 when He explained that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah's return. Therefore, all Christians must understand that this warning to Ephesus, as well as all the other seven Churches, applies to all Churches of every generation in every century until the Second Coming of the LORD.

e) [The LORD's Gift – Tree of Life \(2:7b\)](#)

Rev 2:7b **To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'**

Regardless of the evil found in the Church of Ephesus, it still had members who were faithful to the end. For them a gift awaits, promised from the LORD. When they arrive in the **“Paradise of God”** they will be allowed **“to eat of the tree of life.”** The *seed* of this theology was planted as a full-grown tree in Genesis 2:9. As long as Adam and Eve ate from its fruit, they were promised eternal life. But when they sinned because of the encouragement of the old serpent, Satan, the LORD had them removed from the garden, so they would not have eternal mortal life on earth as sinners (Gen 3). That tree has been protected by the LORD in the location in which it was planted, guarded all these years by cherubim with flaming swords. Not to get too far ahead of the story at this point, let it just be said here, when the New Jerusalem comes to earth at the end of the REVELATION, the tree of life will be exposed again to all the saints for eternal enjoyment (22:22).

## B. Smyrna – The Poverty Church (2:8a)

Rev 2:8a **"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:**

Smyrna was a poor Church. But, as in the case of many Churches even today, the poorest of the local Churches in the world are the richest in the purity of their faith in Christ. Although Smyrna was destroyed by an earthquake in 178 AD, it was quickly rebuilt under Emperor Marcus Aurelius. This poor Church was able to continue uninterrupted from about 30 AD (after the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem) until 1921 according to Catholic record. World War I (WWI) had been over for about three years by that time. In the war (WWI), the Muslim Turks joined the side of the Germans and, once defeated by the Allied Forces, lost much of their land and influence in Europe. According to Islamic records, Muslims were well on their way to a 50% control of Europe before the war. The Church was officially removed from Smyrna in 1921 AD, although some of its members may have remained in the town until the full-blown insurgence of Muslim citizens on September 9, 1922 as they attempted to reclaim lost territory. Nevertheless, it was the next to the last Church to cease to exist and that might have been because the LORD offered no complaint against it in this letter.

### 1. The LORD's Identification (2:8b)

Rev 2:8b **The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:**

In the letter to Smyrna, the poor Church, the LORD identified Himself as the first and last Who had died at Calvary and rose from the grave. To the Church in Smyrna, this language was undeniable and indicative of His love for it. This same language was included in John's description of Jesus when he turned to see Who was speaking to him in chapter one. When the LORD said, "**The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life**" those words were in direct opposition to the practicing theology of the Jewish members in the synagogue located in Smyrna. They did not believe that Jesus was "**The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life.**" They had rejected Him completely! They did not believe He was eternal. They did not believe that He had risen from the dead. They did not believe that He was alive. They did not believe that He was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Savior of all the people of the world who would believe in Him. He did not belong to them and they did not belong to Him.

### 2. The LORD's Oracle to Smyrna

#### a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (2:9)

Rev 2:9 **'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

The Church in Smyrna was plagued by the synagogue in the community that contained Jews who were not really Jews. For explanation, we must look back in history. These so-called Jews had not only rejected the Messiah, they were worshipping in a Judaism that was different from the Judaism of Jesus' day and before. Twenty-five years before the Lord revealed this REVELATION to John, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the son of the Roman Emperor. This happened on Sunday, August 5th, 70 AD. Because the sacrifices

and Jewish routines were interrupted and forbidden under Roman law, the Jewish leadership created what is now called “Rabbinic Judaism.” This new fabricated way of worship did not lift the veil to the Messiah but restricted it even more for Jews. These Jews were used by Satan to torment and bring suffering to as many Christians as possible.

b) [The LORD’s Warning – About to Suffer \(2:10a\)](#)

**Rev 2:10a 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days.'**

The LORD then warned the Church at Smyrna of the suffering which would be coming upon them. It would be “**so that you will be tested,**” and tested they would be. We do not have an absolute record of the Church members being imprisoned, but it can be inferred from the church history concerning ten of its pastors. This verse warned that the trouble would come to the Church in the form of “**tribulation for ten days.**” Where some dare not to try to discover the meaning of the 10 days, others associate it with the 10 rulers who would control Smyrna over the next centuries. This, however, is somewhat troubling when we look at the history because Smyrna flourished under Marcus Aurelius when he rebuilt the city, and the same is true under some of the other Caesars. In like manner, when the people in Smyrna suffered under a Caesar, all the other six churches as well as in Asia minor suffered also. So why would this suffering be presented only in the letter to Smyrna? The Lord was not writing to the city but to the Church. Our church history contains the record of only ten pastors who led the Church in Smyrna. Just as we have spoken of the Jewish revolt in Jesus’ day, while He was alive, it is possible that this phrase means that this persecution would happen in the days of the lives of some of its members during the existence. Strataes was the pastor of the Church when John sent the letter. He would soon die as a martyr in Smyrna. Ten pastors in succession would die for their faith, eight while they were pastoring in Smyrna and two after they left Smyrna for another assignment. Even the two killings elsewhere would be devastating to the Smyrna Church. Here is the list of the first ten pastors following the delivery of this letter to the Church.

1. Strataes, martyred in Smyrna– disciple of John
2. Bucolus, martyred in Smyrna – disciple of John
3. Polycarp, martyred in Smyrna – disciple of John
4. Papirius, martyred in another church after being a pastor in Smyrna
5. Camerius, martyred in Smyrna
6. Eudaemon, martyred in Smyrna
7. Thraseas of Eumenia, martyred in Smyrna
8. Noctos, martyred in another church after being a pastor in Smyrna
9. Pothinus, martyred in Smyrna
10. Irenaeus of Lyons, martyred in Smyrna

c) [The LORD’s Encouragement \(2:10b\)](#)

**Rev 2:10b Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

It seems that the Lord was correct when He said that Satan was about to test some of them. These pastors died for their faith. What did the Lord promise to those who died in the faith? The Crown of Life!

The Crown of Life was to be the first prize that all believers receive simply because they have placed their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as Savior. It is for those who have passed from this life through physical death to a new life in Christ. The ten pastors received this gift and so did all the faithful members of Smyrna. In fact, everyone who belongs to the LORD will receive a Crown of Life when it is time to enter eternity with the LORD.

**d) The LORD's Charge (2:11a)**

**Rev 2:11a 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

With Smyrna, as well as Ephesus, the promise to both applied to all Churches. With the first two Churches, believers are granted access to the tree of life for eternal life and the Crown of Life. What does that guarantee?

**e) The LORD's Gift – No Second Death (2:11b)**

**Rev 2:11b 'He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'**

The gift of the tree of eternal life and the Crown of Life guarantees that the “**second death**” will not affect a believer in any way. The first death is the passing from this earthly life to eternal life with the LORD. Not to get too far ahead in this story, a simple definition of the “**second death**” is appropriate. The “second death” occurs when a person stands before the Great White Throne Judgment, is found guilty of never accepting Him as LORD and is cast into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone forever, totally out of the presence of the LORD for all eternity (20:14).

**C. Pergamum – The Perverted Church (2:12a)**

**Rev 2:12a "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:**

Gaius, to whom this John addressed his Third Epistle, was the pastor of the Pergamum Church according to the Apostolic Constitutions (vii, 46). The town of Pergamum had been affected by the same earthquake that hurt Smyrna in 178 AD; however, it suffered much less damage and continued for hundreds of years. In 1336 AD, the Ottoman Turks captured the city and Christianity was outlawed. Islam was the only religion allowed. At that time, the pastorate seat of the Church (St. Sophia) was removed and its doors permanently shut. In 1398 AD, the old church of St. Sophia was converted into a mosque.

**1. The LORD's Identification (2:12b)**

**Rev 2:12b 'The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:**

To Pergamum, the perverted Church, the LORD identified Himself as “**The One who has the sharp two-edged sword.**” We have already discovered that the original wording for this sword indicated that it was more like a dagger used in hand-to-hand, bloody combat.



That was the intention of the LORD for the city in which this Church rested. The LORD purposefully intended to bring death to His enemies in this city.

## 2. The LORD's Oracle to Pergamum

### a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (2:13)

Rev 2:13 **'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.**

Satan's throne was not truly in the city of Pergamum because his place was still before the LORD where he constantly, even to this day, accuses the brethren who belonged to the LORD. But there in Pergamum, the city had built a building which was literally called *The Great Altar of Pergamum* and known as *Satan's Throne*. When the LORD said, **"I know where you dwell,"** He understood the predicament the Church was in by living in a city of such evil influence. He also knew that, in spite of the Church's surroundings, He could say, **"you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."** The word for "hold fast" is *krateo* and it means *to be strong*. In other words, despite the city's Satanic temple, Pergamum's Church was still *holding strong* to the holy name of Jesus. It would not "deny" its faith even when it saw the arrest and martyrdom of one of the Church's most upstanding members, Antipas. No doubt, he was hated by the city's people because of his testimony concerning Jesus. *Satan's Throne, the Great Altar of Pergamum* is now in the *Museum of Berlin*, moved there by Adolf Hitler. The base of this altar was not moved but remains on the upper part of the *Acropolis* in Pergamum. This altar is believed to have been dedicated to Zeus. Other notable structures still locatable on the upper part of the *Acropolis* include:

The Sanctuary of Trajan (also known as the Trajaneum)

A Theater with a seating capacity of 10,000

The Sanctuary of Athena

The Royal palaces

The Haroon - a shrine where the kings of Pergamum worshipped

The Temple of Dionysus

The Upper Agora

The Roman bath complexes

In 29 AD, Pergamum became the first city in Asia to establish a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavia Caesar). Hence, Pergamum was the center of emperor-worship.

### b) The LORD's Complaint – Some Idolaters (2:14-15)

Rev 2:14 **'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. <sup>15</sup> 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.**

The LORD's complaint for the Church at Pergamum replicated the LORD's complaint about Balaam found in Numbers 22. In that Old Testament story, Balaam, a true prophet of the living LORD God, had been called by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Nation of Israel as it made its track up the east side of the Jordan River to prepare to enter and take the Promised Land. Balak took Balaam to three locations on three mountain peaks to show Balaam the vast expanse of the Nation of Israel as it camped next to the Jordan River. At each location, Balaam instructed Balak to build seven altars and sacrifice seven bulls. Twenty-one altars and twenty-one bulls were sacrificed while Balaam sought counsel from the LORD. What was wrong with that? The answer is interesting. Balak built all those altars and sacrificed all those bulls to Baal or Beelzebub (Satan), not the LORD. Balaam worshipped his LORD but did not direct Balak to worship Him too. That was Balaam's sin. Balaam was focused on his salvation but not that of the Moabites who were the cousins of the Israelites. Just as Balaam should have directed the worship of Balak to the LORD, Pergamum should have re-directed the worship at *Satan's Throne* to the True and Living LORD, but they did not. Worship of Beelzebub included acts of sexual immorality and the eating of food offered in praise and worship of Satan. For that, the LORD had Balaam killed. For that, the Church of Pergamum would be vacated. Had it only said, "Stop! Worship the One LORD God Almighty!" But it did not. It kept to its own worship and allowed the Satanists to continue in their sin.

The Church in Pergamum also faced another problem within its walls, the Nicolaitans. **"So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."** They were counterfeit Christians who had taken charge in Pergamum and were including immoral acts in their worship practices and were guilty of putting stumbling blocks in front of non-believers to lead them astray so that they would not believe the true Gospel of Jesus. They needed to repent.

**c) The LORD's Warning (2:16)**

**Rev 2:16 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.'**

It was most important to the LORD that the Church change its attitude about its tolerance of the evil worship in the city and its acceptance of the Nicolaitans within its congregation. He said, **"Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth."** The Church did not repent; therefore, the LORD sent the sword of Islam to end its existence in 1336 AD.

**d) The LORD's Charge (2:17a)**

**Rev 2:17a 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

The LORD's charge to Pergamum was not different from the charge to all seven Churches. We can say it this way, "Perk up you ears and listen to Me and what the Spirit is telling you to do!"



e) [The LORD's Gift – Manna and Stone with New Name \(2:17b\)](#)

Rev 2:17b **To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'**

Within the walls of Pergamum's Church, some were faithful to the LORD in every way. For them, as well as the saints of all the seven churches and every believer of all time, manna will be given in heaven for them to eat and each one will receive a white stone with a special name on it, a name known only to the LORD and the believer. Manna fed the Nation of Israel for forty years while they were living in the wilderness after leaving Egypt (Exodus 16:35). In his Gospel, John compared "manna" to the bread of heaven that gives eternal life (John 6:30-58). Isaiah prophesied the "New Name," with the new city of Jerusalem in his prophecy as a gift to the righteous at the coming of the LORD (Isaiah 56:5; 62:2; 65:15).

**D. Thyatira – The Promiscuous Church (2:18a)**

Rev 2:18a **"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:**

Thyatira would be the home of a Christian community until 1922 when the members of the Christian Orthodox church were deported, and the Church in Thyatira ceased to exist. The Muslim Turks were the reason for the deportation, and this coincided with the same struggle that brought the church of Smyrna to an end the year before.

1. [The LORD's Identification \(2:18b\)](#)

Rev 2:18b **The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:**

The LORD identified Himself as "**The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze.**" Therefore, He introduced Himself as the second Person of the Trinity and attached the title "The Son of God" to Himself.

In the Church at Thyatira, there was enough wrong to make His eyes "flame like fire." All the sins of excess were found in this city and it had crept into the Church. She was modern in every way for that day. The town was famous for the production of purple cloth. Lydia, of Philippi, whom Paul had encountered, was from Thyatira. She dealt in the sale of purple cloth from her home city. The women of Thyatira produced the cloth; they also ran the sales force of exporting the same. No doubt, this enterprise had slipped into the Church. "**His feet are like burnished bronze,**" with bronze being a symbol of *judgment* throughout the Holy Writ. His eyes and his burnished bronze were focused on the Church there in Thyatira.

2. [The LORD's Oracle to Thyatira](#)

a) [The LORD's Acknowledgment \(2:19\)](#)

Rev 2:19 **'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.**

Deeds and service have to do with works! Works are perfectly fine when completed with a proper heart, attitude and intention. That was not the case with Thyatira. The statement “**deeds of late are greater than at first**” reminds us of the issue that Jesus had to correct with Mary and Martha when He visited their home. Mary was anointing Him with oil. Martha was cooking in the kitchen. Mary’s work seemed unimportant in the time sensitive moment. Martha’s work seemed like it should have been the priority. Martha had it all wrong. Anointing Jesus for His death was paramount at that time and in that place. In Thyatira, something had changed just a little bit; they were doing a little better; but they were not doing well enough. Heresy had come to the Thyatira Church.

**b) The LORD’s Complaint – Immorality (2:20)**

**Rev 2:20 ‘But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols.**

In the LORD’s complaint we have found the heresy. It had been caused by the teaching of a woman named Jezebel. Her teaching was off base, and it caused the LORD’s bondservants to go **astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols.**” Mark this on your heart and remember it in your mind. Any acts of immorality or association with idols were and shall ever be heresy! No wonder the LORD’s eyes were burning, and punishment was on His feet. His eyes showed His temper, His feet showed His desire.

**c) The LORD’s Intent (2:21-23)**

**Rev 2:21 ‘I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. <sup>22</sup> ‘Behold, I will throw her on a bed of *sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. <sup>23</sup> ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.**

Longsuffering is an eternal attribute of the LORD. But do not misconstrue the fact that the LORD will wait and be patient with heresy forever. The LORD has never attacked evil at the moment it comes into view. The LORD will give individuals time to recognize the evil, repent and please the LORD. But Jezebel would not! All the disciples of this woman were to be punished in public as an example. Paul says, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20). On the other hand, the LORD says, “**I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.**” Some in the congregation were not following this Jezebel. The LORD knew who they were, and He would not allow them to feel His wrath like the others.

We can only wonder how she had obtained such a position in this church. Perhaps she was attached to or married to one of the Nicolaitans who taught immorality and other heresies. Meat in the ancient world was dedicated to the gods at the pagan temples before it was sold in the public markets; many Christians refused to eat such meat sacrificed to idols. Thyatira was known for its trade guilds, which would hold banquets in the pagan temples.

After eating and drinking, the diners often engaged in sexually immoral acts on the couches. Jezebel and the Nicolaitans apparently condoned such behavior because of a false understanding of freedom in Christ. The fate of Jezebel was simply doom from the Lord.

d) **The LORD's Salute (2:24-25)**

Rev 2:24 **'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.**

Jezebel did not hold all the congregation under her spell because the LORD says, **“the rest who ... who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, ... I place no other burden on you.”** In other words, those who rejected Jezebel's teaching were guilt and sin free. Yet, they still needed to “hold fast,” or, as those words mean, *stay strong*, until the coming of the LORD. Pause here and consider this. It matters not whether the LORD comes to accompany a believer to heaven at the moment of earthly death, or, if He comes to earth at the time of His Second Coming. The point is this. He wanted the believers in Thyatira (as well as all believers throughout all generations) to be free from the Jezebels of this world until He comes for each of them individually.

Evidently, the Thyatira Church received and understood the LORD's message because shortly after receiving this letter, Epiphanius reported that the Church had corrected the problem and we also find that, by the beginning of the third century almost all citizens of Thyatira were Christian. Among the pastors of Thyatira were Seras in 325 AD, Fuscus in 431 AD, Diamonius in 458 AD, and Basilius in 878 AD. In 1336 AD, the Turks took over the area, built a town by the ruins and changed the name of Thyatira to that of Ak-Hissar.

e) **The LORD's Gift – Authority to Rule and Morning Star (2:26a-28)**

Rev 2:26a **'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; <sup>27</sup> AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star.**

For as long as the Church in Thyatira existed as a true and faithful Church, the LORD had a special plan for those who had overcome the influence of the city and the sinners within the Church. He would give to them **“AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON,”** (Psalm 2:8-9; Revelation 3:21; 12:5; 19:15; 20:4). What does that mean? It means a job in His kingdom where He is the King of kings and the LORD of lords. Heavenly power from the LORD! The Father had given the LORD His power and the LORD had the authority to pass it on to His believers. Notice also that Jesus warned that **“THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES,”** (Isaiah 30:14; Jeremiah 19:11). Not to get too far ahead in the story line of REVELATION, at the LORD's Second Coming, the mighty band of the heavenly host called the Bride will have been given jobs during the marriage and the authority to enforce those jobs during the 1,000-year kingdom of the LORD here on earth. At the Second Coming,

called the Day of the LORD throughout Scripture, all the evil people of the world who have followed Satan, the first beast and the second beast will be “**broken to pieces**” by their Creator and His Bride.

But the believers, untainted by the evil of the world, will also receive “**the morning star.**” This star is the power in heaven, from the LORD, from the Father. It is no other than the LORD Jesus Christ Himself (Revelation 22:12). Just as Joseph’s brothers had to learn that their 12 stars and 12 sheaves of the dream would ultimately bow down to Joseph in Egypt, so too, all people will bow down before the *Bright and Morning Star*. At the beginning of Jesus’ last week here on earth, He left the city of Jerusalem and looked back at her from the Mount of Olives and said something like this. *Never again will you say “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD” until I come again.* When He comes, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is LORD.

f) **The LORD’s Charge (2:29)**

Rev 2:29 **‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’**

The charge has not changed for this church or any of the others. If you have heard the LORD’s message, it is from the Spirit and it is for all believers to hold on to and guard. Regardless of the age or generation, the promise of the LORD applies to every Church.

**E. Sardis – The Performance Church (3:1a)**

Rev 3:1a **“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:**

Clement, a disciple of Paul and John, was the pastor in Sardis but he had been appointed to the Church by John since Paul had been dead for more than 25 years in 95 AD. The city had been destroyed by an earthquake in 17 AD, but was quickly rebuilt. From 1071 AD to 1402 AD, the city fluctuated between the Christian and Muslim struggle for control. Finally, in 1402 AD, the Muslims captured the city and ousted all Christians and the Church closed its doors.

1. **The LORD’s Identification (3:1b)**

Rev 3:1b **He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this:**

The LORD identifies Himself by mentioning the seven Spirits before the throne continually and the seven stars – both are dear to Him. It means that Sardis was dear to Him too and He did not like the shape it was in at the time of this letter. It needed revival within its walls.

2. **The LORD’s Oracle to Sardis**

a) **The LORD’s Acknowledgment (3:1c)**

Rev 3:1c **‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.’**

Evidently, the church was just playing church because of the language the Lord uses here. The LORD knew the deeds of the Sardis Church and it was dead. This letter was a wake up

call to this congregation. Yes, they were meeting as a Church but nothing good was being accomplished in the city for the LORD. Were the deeds of the Sardis church complete? No!

b) [The LORD' Warning – Wake up from the Dead \(3:2-3\)](#)

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

The Lord encouraged the Church to remember what they had received from Him and heard about Him. He asked the Church to repent.

c) [The LORD's Promise \(3:4\)](#)

Rev 3:4 **'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.**

But, there were a few Church members at Sardis who pleased the Lord. Notice that the LORD said, **“a few ... have not soiled their garment.”** Notice also the blessing to those who had not soiled their garments and will therefore walk with the LORD in white garments! We know for sure that these few were not totally sinless, but, their sins were not totally intentional. King David in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel was probably one of the greatest sinners in all the Bible pages, yet, he was absolutely the greatest repenter of them all. That is why the LORD loved his heart. The LORD loves those who will repent of their sins. Those are the worthy ones, worthy to walk with the LORD in a robe of white, purer than the driven snow.

d) [The LORD's Gift – White Garment, Name in Book of Life and Presented to Father and Angels \(3:5\)](#)

Rev 3:5 **'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.**

The LORD has a grand gift for the one who is worthy of a garment of white in His kingdom. That gift is that the overcomer's name will never be erased from the **“Book of Life.”** Hallelujah, what a Savior!

When the LORD created the heavens and the earth, a **“Book of Life”** was created with the names of every human who would ever live on this earth, from Adam and Eve to the last child to be born before the *Great White Throne Judgment* and the establishment of the sinless heaven and earth, also called the *New Heaven* and the *New Earth*. We often think that heaven is sinless today, but it is not. Satan still has access to the throne of God in order to complain about the sins of the believers who are being inaugurated into life eternal. He is never successful at this task, but Satan continues to attempt to cause at least one believer to be rejected by the LORD.

The all-knowing God recorded every name in the “**Book of Life**” in the beginning (Revelation 13:8). As each person comes to this earth and lives his life, if he trusts in the LORD with all his heart, makes Him LORD of his life, then his name is permanently in the “**Book of Life**” when that person dies; he will go to be with the LORD for all eternity. The names of those who fail to make Him their LORD in this life will be erased from the “**Book of Life**” at their death. They will go to the place in Hades called *torment*. Notice that the LORD says, “**I will not erase his name from the book of life.**” **That same thought is found in David’s Psalm** (Psalms 69:28). It is another responsibility of the LORD, one of His duties. He is the only One who knows the heart of a human and can rightfully and justifiably erase one’s name from that book and refuse to allow that person to enter into eternity with Him forever.

The LORD also said, “**and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.**” He said the same in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8). That means that at death, each believer will be taken by the LORD to the throne room of God the Father and introduce to him to the Father and all the angels surrounding the throne. How many in the Sardis Church were worthy of these three blessings? Only a few!

The church and the city of Sardis would struggle to survive. Diocletian would reorganize the region in 295 AD and Sardis would become the capital of the district of Lydia, the seat of the governor and metropolitan Catholic archbishop. The Council of Rimini deposed pastor Hortasius of Sardis in 359 AD because he had been ordained without the sanction of the bishops of Lydia. Arabs sacked Sardis in 716 AD, but the city remained a part of the Byzantine Empire until the aftermath of the battle of Manzikert in 1071. In 1118 AD, Byzantine general Philocales recaptured Sardis from the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum. Ottoman Turks captured Sardis in 1306 but the Church held on. Timur suddenly and unexpectedly destroyed the city in 1402 AD and that was the end of the Church as all Christians were ousted from the city. The LORD had sent the Muslim and his hordes to bring an end to the Church there in the city.

The first systemic investigation of the ruins of Sardis came in 1910 AD with an expedition from Princeton University. Excavations in 1912 AD revealed a small "church," containing coins that dated back to the 5th century. In 1959 AD, a landslide revealed several church artifacts and a throne that archaeologists believe may have been used by the pastors of Sardis.

e) **The LORD’s Charge (3:6)**  
Rev 3:6 **'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

The warnings and promises to Sardis are no different from those to all Churches and true believers. Therefore, if anyone hears this message, believes it, then the blessings of the few in Sardis will be granted to the one who hears the words of the Spirit.

**F. Philadelphia – The Pillared Church (3:7a)**  
Rev 3:7a **"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:**



In 1390 AD, the city was taken by Sultan Bayezid with his Muslim force and all Christians were either removed from the city or killed and, obviously, the Church closed its doors. The walls of the city were built with the dead bodies of those who were killed.

The Church of Philadelphia was a wonderful Church and the LORD does not have one hint of a complaint against them. However, it is a feeble Church, needing strength that only the LORD can give. He will give it to them to make it a strong and sturdy Church, pillared we might call it.

### 1. The LORD's Identification (3:7b)

Rev 3:7b **He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:**

In Isaiah 22:22, we find the reference to the “key of David.” It was a reference to the key that unlocked the treasury of the king. One of David's servants kept the key. In this case, Jesus is the keeper of the key that unlocks the door to the treasury of the King of kings. He is the only One authorized to open and shut its doors.

### The LORD's Oracle to Philadelphia

#### a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (3:8)

Rev 3:8 **'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.**

The LORD was pleased with the Church at Philadelphia. Within its walls it had stayed true to Him and because of that, the LORD had kept its doors open. But the Church had “**little power;**” it was feeble but faithful in the community in word and deed.

#### b) The LORD's Wrath (3:9)

Rev 3:9 **'Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you.**

But, once again, the Lord speaks of trouble caused by the Jewish synagogue. The LORD's wrath will come upon this synagogue, making it bow at the feet of the believers. The members of the synagogue will not get away with their antics much longer. They will soon be extremely aware of the love the LORD has for this Church.

#### c) The LORD's Promise – Keep from Hour of Testing (3:10-11)

Rev 3:10 **'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.**

When the LORD brought his wrath on the synagogue of Satan, the Church of Philadelphia was “**kept from the hour of testing.**” It was 95 AD and John had appointed

Demetrius to be its pastor. Although it was a small congregation, the Jews still tried to disturb its worship, work and ministry. The Church did not flinch at their attempts. St. Ignatius of Antioch later sent to the Christians of Philadelphia an interesting letter warning them about the Jews. It is interesting that Lord did not want the Philadelphia Church to lose its Crown of Life. That was already guaranteed to the members of the Church because they were all faithful to the LORD. It is also interesting that part of this congregation's church building remains today as the main archaeological attraction in the modern city. The town suffered greatly and decreased to just a few people. The church disappeared in 1071 AD with the arrival of the Ottoman Turks. All that remains of that church building are the two pillars that led into the basilica. When the town was obliterated by the Turkish conquest 1093-94 AD, the city that was eventually rebuilt at Philadelphia was renamed Ala Sheir. The city ruins were recovered by the Byzantines in 1098. In the seventeenth century it had 8000 inhabitants, of whom 2000 were Christians. Today it has about 15,000 inhabitants including 3500 Greeks. It possesses numerous ruins, a theatre, stadium, two walls, many Byzantine churches, etc., and mineral springs.

**d) The LORD's Gift – Pillar in Temple Forever and Name of God and the New Jerusalem (3:12)**

**Rev 3:12 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.'**

All the faithful members of the Philadelphia Church were promised an inheritance in the eternal city of God the Father, the New Jerusalem, built on the first day of creation in heaven and it will come to earth to remain for all eternity one day. Ezekiel tells us the name of the city is *the LORD is there* (Ezekiel 48:35). Each member of this Church, at the writing of this letter, was promised this great gift, to live eternally in the city of God.

**e) The LORD's Charge (3:13)**

**Rev 3:13 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

But the great gift of the heavenly home of God is for all believers, too. *Listen up* if you have ears and hear what the Spirit is saying to all the Churches, these seven Churches and all that will read this letter. The New Jerusalem will be the eternal home of all believers.

**G. Laodicea – The Pathetic Church (3:14a)**

**Rev 3:14a 'To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:**

Laodicea was originally called Diospolis, the "City of Zeus", and afterwards Rhoas. It was changed to Laodicea by Antiochus II Theos, in 261-253 BC, in honor of his wife Laodice. Laodicea suffered regularly from earthquakes. During the days of Nero, in 60 AD, the city was completely destroyed. But the inhabitants declined imperial assistance to rebuild the city and restored it with their own money. Its wealthy citizens embellished Laodicea with beautiful monuments. Antiochus the Great transported 2000 Jewish families to Phrygia from Babylonia and thus many of Laodicea's inhabitants were Jews. The Laodicean Church had

been founded by Epaphras of Colossi. The Church met in the beginning in the home of Nymphas for worship. Paul asked the Laodicean and Colossian Churches to trade the letters he sent to each of them and read them publically in their worship assemblies. We do not have Paul's letter to Laodicea.

During the life of Paul, Archippus (Colossians 4:17) and Nymphas (Colossians 4:15) were two of the pastors in Laodicea. But by 95 AD, we do not know the pastor's name for sure. However, the Church was like the city – wealthy.

The Church *Counsel of Laodicea* was held there from 363 – 364 AD. The city was desolate by 1450 AD, when the Church essentially ceased to physically exist even though the Roman Catholic Church kept the potential for a pastor on the books until 1968 AD. A pastor was never assigned to Laodicea after 1450 AD.

### 1. The LORD's Identification (3:14b)

Rev 3:14b **The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:**

For this seventh Church, the LORD identified Himself with four facts. First, He is the “**Amen**” which mean *True or Truly*. Second, He is the “**faithful**,” meaning *Trustworthy*. Third, He is the “**Witness**” meaning the *martyr or one who suffers death in cause of the truth*. Fourth and finally, He is “**the Beginning of the creation of God.**” Do not make the mistake of thinking this means that the LORD was the first creation of God, He was not. This phrase means that the LORD was *the origin or source of the creation of God*. When Wycliffe (1380 AD) and Tyndale (1525 AD) used the word “beginning” it meant *the start of something*. In other words, the LORD *started creation*. He created everything and nothing has been created by anyone but Him (John 1:3). This phrase, “**the Beginning of the creation of God**” was not included in the original description of the LORD found in chapter 1. There, in place of this phrase we see the words, “**the first born of the dead.**” The LORD was both, the source and creator of creation and the first to carry on eternal life after physical death here on earth.

### 2. The LORD's Oracle to Laodicea

#### a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (3:15)

Rev 3:15 **I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.**

What are you when you are not? You are nothing. The deeds of the Church of Laodicea were neither good nor bad, right nor wrong, moral nor immoral, respectable nor disrespecktable. Thus, the Church was totally ineffective in the city for the cause of the LORD.

A classic example of the Laodicean Church is found in the Genesis story of Lot. When the angels arrived in Sodom, they had a difficult time even speaking with Lot. He knew they were there for Him and he tried to protect them from the debauchery he knew from his knowledge of the evil sin of the men and boys in the town. After much pleading, the angels agreed to stay in Lot's home instead of the city square. That night, the men and boys of Sodom showed their sin and the angels became impatient with them. Lot should never have

been in the city. Wealthy when he arrived there, that night he became poor, lost his fortune and half of his family. He wanted the world and God too and that did not suit God at all. Lot could not decide what he wanted. It would have been better for him if he had chosen a side, but he was lukewarm about the sin of the men of Sodom. Lot was not wicked, nor was he righteous, he was nothing. So, too, were the members of the Laodicean Church. They, too, wanted the world and God at the same time, and that did not suit God at all. They were neither wicked nor righteous, they were nothing. **“I wish that you were cold or hot,”** He said about the Church.

b) [The LORD’s Complaint – Lukewarm \(3:16-17\)](#)

Rev 3:16 **'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,**

The Church in Laodicea may have been nothing, but they had a major problem, they had **“need of nothing,”** and that, in reality, meant they had no need for the LORD. They may have been wealthy in earthly terms but they were **“wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,”** in heavenly terms. This whole pitiful world in which we live is filled with people just like those of the Laodicean Church. They just do not know how sinfully sick they are as they act like they have enough of God but do not really have any part of Him.

c) [The LORD’s Advise \(3:18\)](#)

Rev 3:18 **I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.**

The LORD had a bit of advise for this pathetic Church. He did not just make a suggestion to this Church. He said, **“I advise you.”** That, my friends was a last warning for the Church to make an immediate change. Parents use those words when their children need redirection. Employers use those words when employees need a “last ditch” turn around in their work and attitude. The LORD used those words when one of His Churches needed Salvation. Every member of this Church was in need of redemption, none were saved, no not one. In the Bible, refined gold always refers to salvation, garments of white always means imperishable purification and, anointing of the eyes always means clarity of direction.

The Laodicean town folk were renowned for their production of an eye powder that was supposed to heal the eyes when infected. It was not a salve, but the Church would have understood that the LORD’s eye salve would provide perfect and holy sight.

d) [The LORD’s Promise \(3:19-20\)](#)

Rev 3:19 **'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.**

Even though every member of this Church was lost, without a relationship with the LORD, He still loved each one. Because He loved them, He reprovved (which means *to expose*) and disciplined (which means *to train*) them. Their sins needed to be exposed and they needed training, but that required a “**zealous**” (which means *to have a warmth or feeling for or against something*) change. They also needed to “**repent**” (which means *to change one’s mind and heart*). To this Church the LORD made this incredible offer! “**Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.**” The refined gold, the white garment and the eye salve could be purchased by simply opening the door. The LORD is knocking, the LORD is calling, the LORD will enter and fellowship with each person if he will just open the door. This promise was not just for the Laodicean Church members. The LORD’s offer is for “**anyone**” who hears the LORD calling. Evidently, this letter must have shaken this Church to its foundation because it remained in the city until 1450 AD.

e) **The LORD’s Gift – To Sit on the LORD’s Throne (3:21)**

Rev 3:21 **‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.**

The LORD’s gift to this Church, as well as to everyone in the world, was the promise of a place to sit on the LORD’s throne with Him and the Father. Any heart that refuses this offer must be cold and dead.

f) **The LORD’s Charge (3:22)**

Rev 3:22 **‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”**

As with all the other Churches, the LORD’s charge was the same. If anyone opens an ear to hear “**what the Spirit**” is saying to all the churches, eternal heavenly rewards await.