

# THE SEVEN EPISTLES OF CHRIST

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## CONTENTS

Foreword

1. The Crown Jewel of Prophecy
  2. The Great Prophetic Drama
  3. The Unveiling of Christ
  4. The Salutation
  5. The Dedication
  6. The Goal of Bible Prophecy
  7. The Introductory Vision
  8. The Epistle of Christ to Ephesus
  9. Ephesus: The Era of Waning Love
  10. Smyrna: The Period of Suffering and Martyrdom
  11. Pergamos: The Epoch of State Religion
  12. Thyatira: The Church of the Middle Ages
  13. Sardis: The Reformation Period
  14. Philadelphia: The Era of Brotherly Love
  15. Laodicea: The Period of Luke warmness
  16. The Laodicean Disease and Remedy
  17. The Rebuke of Love
- Bibliography

### THE BOOK OF ALL NATIONS

Word of God-the grand unveiling  
Of His glory and His grace:  
When the lamps of earth are failing,  
Here is light for all our race.  
Word of truth-through all Time's changes  
Its glad messages abide;  
Homeward, past earth's cloudy ranges,  
Still our footsteps it will guide.  
Word of wisdom for the erring;  
For the weary, word of strength;  
Sure and steadfast hope conferring  
Daily all the journey's length.  
Thy good news to every nation  
In its own tongue now declare-  
Till the Author of salvation  
Find His homeland everywhere.  
Word triumphant!-spread thy pinions,  
Take from land to land thy flight,  
Till the earth's distraught dominions  
In the love of God unite.

## FORWARD

WITH THE exception of the four Gospels, the books of the New Testament were written in the form of epistles, or letters, to individuals, to local churches, or to the apostolic church as a whole. It is universally recognized, however, that this does not in any way affect the application of these scriptures to Christians and Christendom to the end of the gospel era.

Paul wrote nine epistles to seven local churches and three to two of his companions in labor, but no person has any difficulty whatever in applying their revealed truths to his own heart and life down here in the twentieth century. The same is true of the epistles of Peter and John. The person who reads or preaches from these epistles is in no danger of being challenged on the 'basis of the time they were written and the persons or groups to whom they were originally sent.

One of the books of the New Testament bears the name of Jesus Christ as its author. It is prefaced with seven epistles addressed to seven of the many churches of Asia Minor. Should not reason and logic place this book and these epistles of Jesus on the same basis as all the others of the New Testament, giving them a universal as well as a local application? In fact it would seem most natural and reasonable for the epistles written by Christ and with which He completed the canon of Scripture, to receive as much attention as or even more than those written by His apostles. However, the Apocalypse and its introductory epistles to the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, constitute the most neglected portion of the New Testament, if not of the entire Bible.

In the light of this amazing fact the writer is constrained to say to the members of the modern church, and especially to his brethren in the ministry, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." Many preachers and writers are earnestly trying to change this situation. For this we should thank God and take courage. To this end is this book being written and dedicated, with the prayer that it will inspire many to give the Revelation its proper place in modern religious thinking and preaching. The motto of the godly Bengel is especially appropriate in our attitude toward the last book of the Bible: "Apply thyself wholly to the Scriptures and apply the Scriptures wholly to thyself."

THE AUTHOR

## 1. THE CROWN JEWEL OF PROPHECY

THE REVELATION is the last book of the Book of books, the last installment of God's love letter to man. It therefore concludes and crowns the canon of Scripture. This last book of the Bible is the final revelation, which crowns the Scriptures with a crown of glory and seals divine inspiration with the seal of the living God. Not only is the Revelation one of the most brilliant gems among the sacred writings, but it is the crown jewel. One writer calls it "the capstone of divine revelation and inspiration." It puts the finishing touches on a perfect book that reveals to man the eternal purpose of the Most High. "The Apocalypse completes the Canon of Scripture; and with reverence be it said, the sacred Canon would be imperfect without it." (C. Wordsworth, Lectures on the Apocalypse.)

Not only does the Revelation complete and crown the Biblical canon, but it is also the summary of the entire Bible. It has therefore been appropriately called a mosaic of the rest of Scripture. Almost everything in the Apocalypse can be traced to some other part of the Bible. Of the thirty nine books of the Old Testament, twenty-six are directly quoted from in the Revelation, and of the four hundred and four verses in this last book, two hundred and seventy-eight are either quoted from or colored by Old Testament passages. The first five chapters contain twenty-seven, fifteen, thirteen, sixteen, and fourteen references respectively to various books of the Old Testament. Hengstenberg declared that "the seer of the Apocalypse lives entirely in Holy Scripture." This last book sends the searchers for truth into every part of the Scriptures. Thus it is proved to be an essential part of the whole gospel design. Then, too, the rays of divine light emanating from every other part of the Bible focus upon this final installment of revealed truth.

### The Epilogue

Genesis is the prologue of the Bible and the Revelation is the epilogue. It is the epilogue of divine

revelation, in which the principal topics are recapitulated in order to emphasize their importance. George W. Davis has said that "Moses and John clasp hands across the space of sixteen centuries, completing the full testimony of God."-The Patmos Vision, Page 10. The Bible would be as incomplete without the Revelation as without Genesis. The first two chapters of Genesis describe the Paradise that was lost through sin, and the last two chapters of the Revelation picture the Paradise that will be restored when sin and sinners are no more. Between these two perfect states is the long dark night of sin. What was begun in the prologue is finished in the epilogue. "In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end." (White, Acts of the Apostles, Page 585.) Here they come to a glorious climax.

Speaking of this purpose of the Revelation, one writer said: "The Apocalypse is an epitome of the whole Bible, a unique interweaving of all the symbols, types, shadows, figures and fundamental ideas of the entire Old Testament into one comprehensive book of brief compass. Just as the acorn contains in embryo and potentiality the entire oak with its roots, fiber, bark, branches and leaves, so Revelation as no other one book embodies in itself the entire volume of the Scriptures." -S. L. MORRIS, The Drama of Christianity, Page 11.

The Revelation is essentially a last days book, written especially for the last generation. It contains the instruction most needed by the church in the last days of the reign of sin. This is the chief reason that it sums up the entire Scriptures and is the epilogue of revealed truth. Its purpose is to prepare God's remnant people for the closing crisis of human history and the Second Advent of Christ. This book should therefore be of special interest to present-day Christians. "I come quickly" is said three times in the last chapter. All the prophecies and revelations of the book climax in the return of our Lord. The book therefore demands our careful study at this time.

Although this last book is divinely called a revelation, it is also declared to be a prophecy. In the first chapter the writer uses the expression, "the words of this prophecy," and in the last chapter he refers to what he has written as the prophecy of this book," "the book of this prophecy," and "the words of the prophecy of this book." Prophecy is history written in advance. It is the recording of events before they come to pass. One writer said: "As the ages roll by, history practically takes the place of prophecy, the foretold becoming the fulfilled." The Revelation is one of the greatest if not the greatest of the prophetic books of the Bible. It is the complement to the book of Daniel, and what Daniel is to the Old Testament, the Revelation is to the New. This last book foretells the events and condition of the last days in order that the remnant people of God may be safely guided through of the crises years of human history.

### **The Promised Blessing**

"Blessed is he that reads and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand." "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keeps the sayings of the prophecy of this book." Revelation 1:3; 22:7.

Of the sixty-six books of the Bible, no other begins and ends with such a promise to the reader, hearers, and doers. We may justly claim this beatitude as in this treatise we pursue our way through a portion of the Revelation. The word blessed means "happy, joyful, blissful, beautified, hallowed, consecrated." The revelations of this book place all who study and obey them in the very atmosphere of heaven, so that they will walk with God as Enoch did in days of old. This book opens with a beatitude and closes with the benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." This also is true of no other book of the Bible. This constitutes a divine endorsement of the book as a whole as well as an incentive to study and a promise that it can be understood. The church will never know the great loss sustained by neglecting its study. Bengel rebukes Christians for their attitude toward the Revelation, declaring that they have reversed the promise, making it read, "Blessed is he that reads not."

"Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear" indicates public reading by the minister and an attentive attitude on the part of the audience. "Blessed is he who reads aloud" is the James Moffatt translation. The Author intended that His book should be read publicly to the churches to which it was sent that public reading of the apostolic epistles was the custom of the time, just as the Law and the Prophets had been read in the synagogues from time immemorial. Only a few copies of the Scriptures were available, and they were in the keeping of the religious leaders. The laity did not have personal access to the scrolls of the prophets or to the epistles of the apostles. This custom continued till the invention of printing placed the Scriptures in the hands of the people in their own tongues. The custom of public reading from the Bible still prevails to some extent, although the former chief reasons for it no longer exist. The Bible is now in practically every home.

It is evident from verse 11 that only one copy of the Revelation was written by John, and it had to

be passed from church to church and read to the congregations by the elders. The promised blessing must also include private reading and study in these days when the art of printing has placed the book within reach of every individual. The present neglect of the Revelation by ministers in their private study and public preaching is doubtless largely responsible for the small amount of reading and study devoted to it by the laity. Suppose the book is difficult to understand and is filled with seeming mysteries. The promised blessing is unconditional to all who read and bear and are willing to obey the instruction as fast as it is revealed and understood.

Neither readers nor hearers can claim the promised blessing, unless they are willing to “keep” or “lay to heart” what is written. “Keeping strictly the things in it having been written.” (Emphatic Diaglott.) Strict obedience to the light revealed is an important condition to receiving the blessing. This is true of all the Scriptures. (Matthew 7:24-29; Romans 2:13; James 1:22; 2:12.) One of the authors of Pulpit Commentary tells what is meant by keeping the things revealed: “(1) Seize the principles of the book, and abide in them. (2) Study its prophecies, and wait for them. (3) Learn its promises, and lean on them. (4) Ponder its precepts and obey them.” (Revelation, Page 10.) Another writer asks: “How keep them?” and then answers: “One part in one way, another part in another; the commandments by obedience, the mysteries by thoughtful reception; as Mary, herself a marvel, kept mysterious intimations vouchsafed to her, and pondered them in her heart.” (C. Rossetti.) “Those things which are written therein,” must include the entire contents of the book, and not merely a few of the exhortations scattered through it. The statement “For the time is at hand” emphasizes the importance of immediate action and the danger of delay.

### **The Threatened Curse**

“For I testify unto every man that hears 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.” Revelation 22:18, 19.

No other book of the Bible contains such a malediction on those who treat it unfairly. This indicates that the book contains no nonessentials that need to be eliminated, and that it is too complete and perfect to be improved by the process of addition or subtraction. In divine revelation there is no room for improvement. To attempt to read into the Revelation anything that was not written or authorized by the Author, adds to it; and to lightly esteem or neglect as unimportant any part of its revelations places the guilty party under the threatened curse. The malediction also includes those who exalt their own opinions above divine truth, or who change the meaning to suit their own interpretation or convenience. When we attempt to add to what God has said, He adds to us the curse. If we attempt to subtract from His Word, He subtracts from us the blessing. (See Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32.)

In view of the way the Apocalypse has been neglected and mistreated, the warning is indeed timely. Commenting on the threatened curse, The Cambridge Bible says: “The parallel of those passages proves, that the curse denounced is on those who interpolate unauthorized doctrines in the prophecy, or who neglect essential ones; not on transcribers who might unadvisedly interpolate or omit something in the true text. The curse, if understood in the latter sense, has been remarkably ineffective, for the common text of this book is more corrupt, and the true text oftener doubtful, than in any other part of the NT. But it may be feared that additions and omissions in the more serious sense have also been frequently made by rash interpreters. It is certain that the curse is designed to guard the integrity of this Book of the Revelation.”-The Revelation of Saint John the Divine, Page 146.

### **The Author**

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show 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.” Revelation 1:1, 2.

Even though the Revelation, like all scripture, had its origin with God the Father, the Author and Fountain of all truth, and was given to man through the Son, who is the spokesman of the Godhead and the only Mediator between God and man, the human instrument or writer was John. Four times the writer designates himself as “John” or “His servant John,” but he gives no further means of identification has been some dispute as to whether this refers to John the apostle or to some other John, but the weight of authority is in favor of the former. Paul, Peter, James, and the other apostles used similar expressions in identifying themselves, indicating that they were too well known to require further identification.

The writer not only took it for granted that his readers would identify him as the only John among the disciples of Jesus, but he also declared that he had borne witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. "This is the John who taught the truth concerning the Word of God and the truth told us by Jesus Christ—a faithful account of what he had seen." (Weymouth.) Does this refer to the Gospel which he had previously written? It would seem so. He identifies himself as the John who had written the account of the life and teachings of Christ.

A careful examination will prove that the Gospel, the epistles of John, and the Revelation were written by the same author. More than twenty texts show a striking resemblance. It is a well-known fact that all writers use expressions peculiar to themselves. No other writer speaks so often of Jesus as the Word and the Lamb, or uses the words witness, overcome, manna, sheep, and shepherd, or refers to the "living water," as does John. A. T. Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume 6, Page 274) declares that "there are numerous coincidences in vocabulary and style between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse," and Dean R. C. Trench asks the question: "Who else, without arrogance, could have taken for granted that the bare mention of his name was sufficient to ensure his recognition, or that he had a right to appropriate this name in so absolute a manner as his own?"—Commentary on the Epistle to the Seven Churches in Asia, Page 3. For another to assume the mere title of "John" would seem akin to forgery.

The earliest Christian writers indicate that the church of early post apostolic days never questioned that John the apostle was the author of the Apocalypse. Justin Martyr, in the early part of the second century, testified that John the apostle was the author. In his Dialogue With Trypho the Jew, he said: "There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem." (Chapter 81.)

Eusebius, Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, and Victorinus, the latter being the author of the oldest extant commentary on the Revelation, and all living between the middle of the second and the beginning of the fourth century, unanimously testify that John the apostle was the writer of this last book of the Bible. Davidson declares that "enough has been given to show that the apostolic origin of the Apocalypse is as well attested as that of any book in the New Testament" (Samuel Davidson, An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, Volume 1, Page 245), and Robertson says that even though some attempt to throw doubt on the apostle John's authorship of the Revelation, "a respectable number of modern scholars still hold to the ancient view that the Apocalypse of John is the work of the Apostle and Beloved Disciple, the son of Zebedee." (Page 273.)

### **Date Written**

There is likewise a difference of opinion regarding the date of the writing of the Revelation. Some place the date during the reign and persecutions of Nero in AD 69, and others during the time of Domitian in the year 96. The weight of authority is in favor of the latter date. Irenaeus, who was but a few decades removed from John, speaking of the apocalyptic vision, declared that it "was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign." (Against Heresies, Book 5, Chapter 30.) Victorinus ascribed the writing of the book to the time of Domitian. He said: "When John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labor of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse." - Commentary on the Apocalypse, From the Tenth Chapter, v. 11.)

Eusebius, speaking of the fourteenth year of the reign of Domitian, declared that John was banished in that year to Patmos, where he had his visions, and Jerome, one of the most learned of the early writers, bore testimony to the same fact. He said: "Having been banished in the fourteenth year of Domitian to the Island of Patmos, he wrote the Apocalypse." (Treatise on Illustrious Men, Chapter 9.)

Further evidence that John was not banished during the reign of Nero is that the persecutions of that emperor did not extend beyond the city of Rome. According to Tacitus (Annals, Book 15, Chapter 44), the persecutions of Nero had no relation to religious belief but were mere outbursts of a tyrant's rage to shift the responsibility for the burning of Rome. Domitian, who reigned from AD 81 to 96, carried on the second of the ten bloody attempts of pagan Roman emperors to destroy Christianity and thus preserve the gods and religion of the Romans. Moffatt declares that the earlier date for the writing of the Revelation is "almost impossible," and such is the conclusion of the most dependable scholars.

### **John's Banishment**

It is believed that John was banished in AD 94 and that he received his visions during the latter part of 95 and the beginning of 96. According to Tertullian, the apostle was "plunged into burning hot oil

without being hurt and then banished to an island.” “John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. John was cast into a caldron of boiling oil; but the Lord preserved the life of His faithful servant, even as He preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.” - E. G. WHITE, Acts of the Apostles, Page 569, 570.

Trench says that “the deportation of criminals, or those accounted as such, to rocky and desolate islands was, as is well known, a common punishment among the Romans.” (Pages 22, 23.)

“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.” Revelation 1:9. John was banished because he was a witness for Christ in the preaching of the gospel. At that time Christianity was outlawed as a form of treason against the Roman gods. Paul declared that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” It has always been the fate of Christians, and especially of the prophets of God, to suffer persecution and sometimes martyrdom. Satan never persecutes his own citizens, nor does he afflict cold or lukewarm church members.

It was the godliness of the early Christians that brought on them the wrath of the great adversary. This explains why persecution is largely unknown to the modern church. This fact is set forth by a well-known Christian writer: “Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? The only reason is, that the church has conformed to the world’s standard, and therefore awakens no opposition. The religion which is current in our day is not of the pure and holy character that marked the Christian faith in the days of Christ and His apostles. It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin, because the great truths of the word of God are so indifferently regarded, because there is so little vital godliness in the church, that Christianity is apparently so popular with the world. Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled.” - WHITE, The Great Controversy, Page 48.

Christ prophesied that persecution would be the fate of His followers, including His immediate disciples. (Matthew 23:34-36.) This prediction was literally fulfilled. His forerunner, John the Baptist, was beheaded by order of King Herod; Christ Himself was scourged and crucified; Stephen was stoned to death; James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa. Philip was scourged, imprisoned, and crucified; Matthew was killed with a halberd; James the Less was stoned, and his brains were dashed out with a fuller’s club; Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded. Andrew was crucified at Edessa; Mark was dragged to pieces by an infuriated mob on the streets of Alexandria; Peter was crucified, head downward at his own request; Paul was beheaded at Rome by order of Nero. Jude, the brother of James, and who was also called Thaddeus, was crucified at Edessa; Bartholomew was beaten and crucified; Thomas was thrust through with a spear; Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. Simon Zelotes was crucified in Britain; and John was persecuted and banished to Patmos, and was the only one of the early disciples who died a natural death. (See Fox’s Book of Martyrs.)

Persecution for Christ’s sake has always been a blessing in disguise. Of the Israelites in Egypt we read that the more they were persecuted “the more they multiplied and grew.” Thus it has ever been. The ten pagan Roman persecutions of the early church were terrible beyond description, but during that period Christianity made its greatest progress. By the end of the first century it is estimated that there were more than six millions of Christians in the Roman Empire, and by the end of the third century Christianity had supplanted paganism as the religion of the empire. The first gospel seeds were watered by the blood of martyrs, and bountiful was the harvest. Tertullian wrote to a persecuting Roman ruler: “Kill us, torture us, grind us to dust. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in numbers we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.” (Apology, Chapter 50.) This experience was repeated during the persecutions of the Middle Ages, and will be repeated again just before Christ returns. (Matthew 24:21-22; Revelation 7:13, 14.)

### **Place of Banishment**

Patmos is a small island in the Aegean Sea about fifty miles southwest of Ephesus, the home of John in Asia. It is a mass of barren rocks, dark in color and cheerless in form. It has neither trees nor rivers, and the only land that can be cultivated is in a few little nooks between the ledges of rock. The island is about ten miles in length and five or six in width, or about thirty miles in circumference. The present population is about four thousand, mostly Greek miners and fishermen. It is also known as Palmosa or Palmos. In the side of its highest hill is a cave, or grotto, where tradition says John lived, and received and wrote his visions. There can be no question but that John wrote the Revelation on the island of his captivity. Twelve times he was told to write what he had seen in vision. Revelation 10:4 indicates that he wrote as the

successive visions were given.

Banishment was one of Rome's chief methods of punishment, and islands were often used as places of confinement in order to make it more difficult for the criminals to escape. There were two degrees of punishment determined on the basis of social and political rank. Prisoners of wealth and social standing and high political rank were given an allowance and permitted the freedom of the island. They were not compelled to labor, and could even work for hire. On the other hand the lot of the common prisoners was very severe. They were condemned to sleep on the hard floor or ground and were permitted few privileges. They soon died under the severe strain or sank to the level of beasts. It was a condition of hopeless despair.

Christians shared the fate of the common prisoners, and John was their "companion in tribulation." According to tradition, as given by Victorinus, John was condemned to work in the mines. These mines were doubtless marble quarries, as there is no discovered evidence of any other kind on the island. With no apparent hope of ever again seeing his home in Ephesus or visiting the churches of his love and care, he made the book of Revelation his last will and testament, as it were. However, the sudden assassination of Domitian on September 18, 96 AD, unexpectedly ended the banishment of John. Nerva, the new emperor, released the prisoners of his predecessor. Clement of Alexandria says of John that "on the tyrant's death, he returned to Ephesus from the isle of Patmos." He then describes John as traveling "to the contiguous territories of the nations, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, there to ordain such as were marked out by the Spirit." (Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved, see. 42.)

Out of a Roman penitentiary came the Apocalypse to bless Christendom. From the barren rocks of the volcanic hills of Patmos came the book that completes and crowns the canon of Scripture. Although his only earthly companions were criminals, John did not become discouraged and lose hope. He rose above his circumstances and environments. Although he had been compelled to sever his connections with home and loved ones, he maintained his union with God and held communion with heavenly beings. We should be thankful for the bleak and barren places of life that cut us off from all earthly help so that heaven can draw near. Lonely Patmos became to the prophet "the house of God" and "the gate of heaven." A monastery now crowns the summit of the most nearly central height, where tradition says John received his visions. It was built eight centuries ago and dedicated to "Saint John."

From the places of exile and affliction have come the characters and literature and music that have been the greatest blessing to mankind. While in exile, facing the wrath of his brother Esau, Jacob in his extremity found God, and his character was so transformed that he was given a new name to correspond to his new character. It was while Joseph was in exile in Egypt that he developed a character that gave him the blessings of heaven and the favor of Pharaoh. He became a savior of the nation and of his own people. Moses was a fugitive when he met and talked with God at the burning bush, where he received his commission to deliver Israel from affliction and bondage. While a fugitive from the wrath of Pharaoh he wrote the books of Genesis and Job.

The experience of David while fleeing from the wrath of Saul brought him the greatest blessings of his life. It was during this time that he produced the best and most spiritual of his psalms. Elijah was in exile fleeing from the wrath of the angry Jezebel when he heard the "still small voice" directing him to his last work, which culminated in his translation by means of the fiery chariot. Ezekiel and Daniel wrote their great prophecies during Babylonian captivity. Tyndale and Luther produced their Bible translations while fugitives from the wrath and power of papal Rome. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress came out of Bedford jail to bless the world. In the dark room of affliction and hardship the greatest characters have been developed and the greatest literature has been produced. Such also is the noble heritage of the Revelation.

## **2. THE GREAT PROPHETIC DRAMA**

THE FIRST three verses constitute the introduction, foreword, or superscription of the Apocalypse, which is the first division of the book. Every book has a preface or introduction to the main work, and this one runs true to form. It contains a brief summary of the contents of the book, with preliminary information in regard to the author and the purpose of its publication. In harmony with the divine plan of the book, the introduction is divided into seven parts. It contains the title of the book, its divine origin, the mediums of its revelations, the name and identity of the writer, the manner in which it was revealed, the purpose of its publication, and the promised blessing on the reader, the hearers, and the doers. Seven is the sacred number representing completeness and perfection. In all literature there cannot

be found an introduction that is so brief and yet so complete and perfect. Modern writers would demonstrate their wisdom by following this example. Perhaps then more of their introductions would be read.

The Revelation is the greatest panorama of prophetic events ever written, yet it is more than a prophecy. It is a revelation of the past, present, and future. Its visions reach back to the very beginning of sin and graphically describe its long, sad history. The Apocalypse reveals "things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." It describes the revolt of Lucifer and the war in heaven by which he was cast out of his high official position in the government of God. It pictures the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ the conquering "Lamb of God" and "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." The world-embracing scope of these visions which cover the past, present, and future history of the reign of sin and the triumphs of righteousness, is set forth in Revelation 1:19: "Write the things which thou has seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." The chief portion of the book, however, is prophecy revealing "things which must shortly come to pass."

It is because this book covers the past, present, and future that it is called "The Revelation" instead of "The Prophecy." In his book, Daniel dealt only with the present and the future. But the Revelation is the seal and summary of the whole Bible, and is therefore all-embracing. "Genesis presents before us man and his bride in innocence and blessedness, followed by man's fall through Satan's subtlety, and man's consequent misery, his exclusion from Paradise and its tree of life and delightful rivers. Revelation presents, in reverse order, man first liable to sin and death, but afterwards made conqueror through the blood of the Lamb. The first Adam, and Eve, represented by the second Adam, Christ, and the Church, His spotless bride, in Paradise, with free access to the tree of life and the crystal water of life that flows from the throne of God."-JAMIESON, FAUSSET, and BROWN, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, Volume 2, page 548.

"Paradise Lost" in the book of beginnings is replaced by the matchless vision of "Paradise Restored" in the book of consummations. Here is made known all that had been left unrevealed in the other scriptures. The Revelation is the climax and completion of the history of redemption, and a prophecy of the consummation of God's eternal purpose. In this revelation, therefore, all the books of the Bible meet and end.

The Scriptures abound in sharp and striking contrasts. Sin and righteousness are often placed side by side that we may shun the one and accept the other. The fearful results of transgression are placed over against the blessings of obedience so that we can decide whether we will suffer the penalty of sin or enjoy the reward of holiness. The Revelation is in a special sense the book of contrasts. It describes the sad conditions prevailing in the church in order that Christ may be pointed to as the only remedy. Apostasy is graphically portrayed in order to place the greater emphasis on the value of loyalty. Terrible war scourges are pictured as the natural aftermath of rejecting the overtures of the Prince of Peace. The antichrist is placed in contrast to the true Christ; the false prophet to the faithful messengers of truth; the harlot woman, symbolic of the church of Satan, to the beautiful virgin, representing the church of Christ. Satan's counterfeit system of religion is described as an incentive for the acceptance of the everlasting gospel.

### **Mediums of Revelation**

In Revelation I we are given, as in no other scripture, the divine order of the mediums of revelation: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass. And He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John." First is the Eternal Father, who is the fountain and origin of all light and truth. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second Person of the Godhead, is the Word of God and Spokesman of the Trinity. He is the channel of communication between the Father and man, the only Mediator between heaven and earth. He is the ladder of Jacob's dream, by means of which the angels carry on their mission of ministering to the heirs of salvation. Although the Apocalypse was given more than sixty years after His ascension, Jesus still received His revelations from the Father as while on earth. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is the third medium of revelation and is mentioned in verse 4. It was He who inspired all the holy prophets as they wrote their messages. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The fourth agency in the revelation of God is said to be "The angel," who was doubtless Gabriel, "the angel of prophecy." It was Gabriel, the mighty angel who stands in the presence of God, who brought Daniel his visions concerning many of the same events portrayed in the Revelation.

The fifth in the line, and the first human agent, was the prophet John. The beloved apostle was the scribe, or amanuensis, of the celestial beings-the one who transcribed the message in the language of man.

“The genesis of the Apocalypse has now been traced from its origin in the Mind of God to the moment when it reached its human interpreter.” (H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, Page 2.) Bengel says, “It is indeed John, the apostle, who wrote this book; but the author is Jesus Christ.” (*Gnomon of the New Testament*, Volume 5, P. 181.)

The prophet is designated “His servant John,” with the statement that he was commissioned to pass the revelation on to Christ’s other servants in the churches. Only servants of Christ can understand and appreciate the Revelation, for to them it was given and is dedicated. The last agency in reaching mankind with the gospel is the church, the organized body of believers or servants of Christ. (Verses 4, 11.) Through the church the revelations of God to man are to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, embracing “every creature.” This has ever been God’s method of revealing his will, and He has no other plan. From the original source, the Eternal, to the final recipient, the world, there are seven links in the chain that unites man with God and earth with heaven.

### **Method of Revelation**

The Revelation was “signified” by the angel to the prophet. Signify means “to make signs or tokens; to communicate by signs; to signify by symbols.” The messages of the book are revealed in signs and symbols. Its prophecies are symbolic. The Apocalypse is the companion to the book of Daniel, and the two must be studied together. “Daniel is the key to Revelation: Revelation is the key to Daniel. Both are complete together divided, they are incomprehensible.” (Davis, Page 16.) The language of both books is highly figurative, requiring great care in the interpreting of their symbols. The Bible is its own best interpreter and commentator.

The purpose of Christ “to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass,” also indicates a panoramic method of instruction. At the beginning of the various visions, John uses the expressions I “saw” thirty-five times, I “beheld” seven times, “I looked” five times, He “showed me” two times, “and there appeared” two times, I “heard” twenty-eight times. And eighteen times he was told to “behold,” and four times to “come and see.” In the two great prophetic books, events, conditions, nations, and religious movements and organizations are pictured in prophetic symbols. They are pictorial presentations or prophetic cartoons.

The Revelation is declared by one writer to be “God’s picture book,” and another calls it “a vast picture gallery.” There are many different kinds of pictures, some of which need no explanation, because in them everything is real or natural. But in symbols or cartoons each object represents something else than that which is pictured. There are many things that cannot be pictured except by symbols or cartoons, and for this reason the Lord makes use of a method well known and approved by man. A nation or a political party or a church can be pictured only in symbols. There is no other method of pictorial presentation.

Ordinarily the Scriptures must be understood in the natural sense in which they are written, unless there is every reason to believe that the language is figurative. The presumption, however, is always in favor of the literal interpretation until the interpreter can prove otherwise. The burden of proof is always on the side of the symbolic interpretation. God always means exactly what He says and in the way He says it unless there is sufficient evidence that figurative or parabolic language is being used to illustrate divine truths.

Whenever pictures are shown in the pictorial book under consideration, we naturally conclude that they have a symbolic meaning. This is a well-recognized rule among Bible students in dealing with prophetic interpretation. It is a very simple matter to understand a good cartoon if one is familiar with the symbols employed and the thing or event being pictured. At the same time nothing is more obscure and devoid of meaning, or subject to such a variety of interpretations, as symbolic pictures that are unfamiliar and therefore enveloped in mystery.

The language of the Apocalypse, like that of the book of Daniel, is not only figurative but highly dramatic. It was presented to and written by John in the form of a play or drama, as if the various scenes were acted out on a stage before him in prophetic vision, or thrown on a screen in a series of moving pictures. The Apocalypse is the great prophetic drama of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is a drama of life and death, and in it we must find ourselves as actors, “for we are made a theatre unto the world, and to angels, and to men.” 1 Corinthians 4:9, marginal reading. In the Revelation the curtain that veils the future is drawn aside by a divine hand and the events that affect the people of God in their contests with the forces of evil are presented in the form of moving parables or dramatic episodes. Christians should ever be grateful for the promise: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He reveals His secret unto His servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7.

The Revelation was written in the age of Greek drama, when parables, pageants, and panoramas were popular. Like the Greek pageant, the Apocalypse is divided into different scenes, participated in by different actors. At regular intervals between scenes that are dark and drear the chorus of victorious saints on earth or celestial beings in heaven is heard singing heavenly anthems or spiritual oratorios to bring cheer and consolation to the valiant soldiers of the cross. A drama consists of various parts such as a prologue, different acts and scenes with interludes, choruses, plots, and counter plots in which actor heroes suffer temporary defeats ending in ultimate victory. These are all found portrayed in the Revelation.

Many apocalyptic students divide the Revelation into seven scenes or panoramas in harmony with the divine arrangement of the entire book. These great scenes are subdivided into smaller acts or episodes. The entire Christian dispensation is covered by the whole. It would have been impossible to cover the entire Christian Era with its many events and various phases in one panorama. The interlude choruses of good cheer and consolation give silver linings to the dark clouds of the apocalyptic scenes. They are the songs in the night mentioned by the psalmist.

Many modern commentators make a grave mistake in attempting to prove that the various visions of the Revelation are successive instead of parallel. The Revelation follows the method used in Daniel of presenting the same great line of events from different viewpoints and thus covering the same periods of history. They may start at different dates and with different events, but they all end with the same great climax, the Second Advent of Christ to establish His everlasting kingdom.

The following quotation sets forth the design of the apocalyptic visions: "The Visions of the Book are not successive but parallel. One Vision brings us to the verge of the Second Advent, and so closes. Another Vision opens out of it, returning to the course of the Christian era dealt with in the previous Vision, and displaying another aspect of the great subject of the Book." - A Devotional Commentary, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Page 5. The efforts to fit everything after the first three chapters into a period of three and one half years immediately preceding the Second Advent is indeed pathetic. This false conception, for the purpose of maintaining a preconceived and erroneous position, has made almost completely useless many of the recent commentaries on the Revelation.

### **Why Symbols Are Employed**

In answer to the question of His disciples, "Why speaks thou unto them in parables?" Jesus set forth the chief purpose of symbolic or figurative language: "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." (See Matthew 13:10-16, 34, 35.)

A parable is defined as "a thing darkly or figuratively expressed, a figure or similitude." The word comes originally from the Greek parabol which literally means "to throw beside, to compare; a comparison." The figures and symbolic representations that passed before the prophet in vision were parables in action. In them the Lord revealed "things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world." The parabolic method of teaching is employed all through the Old Testament Scriptures, and was very popular in Christ's day. It was an approved and up-to-date method of imparting instruction.

Jesus taught in parables for various reasons, but chiefly that He might conceal truths from His enemies and at the same time reveal them to His friends and disciples. He was constantly hounded by spies seeking His destruction. The time came when Jesus could no longer use plain language that could be used against Him, and He spoke in parables in order to keep His work from being cut short before His mission was accomplished. He was thus able to proclaim great truths and at the same time administer severe rebukes in parables, and His enemies could not use them to condemn Him. When they attempted to interpret them they condemned themselves. (Matthew 21:33-46.) By the use of a parable the prophet Nathan caused King David to pass sentence upon himself, and thus in an impressive manner convicted him of his awful sin against Uriah. (2 Samuel 12.)

The purpose of parables or symbols is beautifully set forth by William M. Taylor: "Now let us ask why the Lord Jesus used parables in His discourses. And to that we may answer, first of all, that He employed this form of instruction as a means of attracting attention. But another reason why our Lord used parables in His teaching was to prevent His auditors from being repelled by too sudden revelation, either of His purpose or of His message. He had to reveal His truth to men 'as they were able to bear it. In the third place, He employed them [parables] to stimulate inquiry. Parable was the veil which Jesus put over the face of truth, to secure its safer perception to those who listen to His words. Parable was a veil which both revealed and concealed the truth. To those who had the spirit to discern, the outward covering brought the

truth nearer; but to those who lacked that spirit, there was nothing but the story.”-The Parables of Our Savior, Page 7-11.

“The form of His expressions whether He uttered parables, proverbs, maxims, or apparent paradoxes, was intended to spur men’s minds to profounder thought, to awaken the Divine consciousness within, and so teach them to understand that which at first served only as a mental stimulus. The form of teaching which repelled the stupid, and passed unheeded and misunderstood by the unholy, roused susceptible minds to deeper thought, and rewarded their inquiries by the discovery of ever increasing treasures.

“So far as they [the hearers] hungered for true spiritual food, so far as the parable stimulated them to deeper thought, and so far only, it revealed new riches.... And so, in proportion to the susceptibility of His hearers, the parables of Christ revealed sacred things to some and veiled them from others, who were destined, through their own fault, to remain in darkness.... The parables served to sift and purge the throng of Christ’s hearers.”-AUGUSTUS NEANDER, The Life of Jesus Christ, Page 102, 103.

In the use of symbols the lower and natural is used to illustrate the higher and the spiritual. All nature thus becomes alive to the spiritually discerning, so that illustrations of the truths of the kingdom of heaven are everywhere visible. The use of symbols and parables throughout the Scriptures is therefore not arbitrary, but is based on both usage and reason. In order to understand the parables and symbols of the Scriptures, it is necessary to study them in connection with the other volume of God’s holy word, the book of nature, the illustrated edition of the Bible.

When one thinks the matter through carefully, it is seen that the parabolic method of revealing the future is absolutely essential. In a special sense Daniel and the Revelation forecast the rise and fall of great earthly powers under satanic control and waging warfare against the church and saints of God down to the very close of human history. In order to protect these prophecies from the wrath of God’s enemies and preserve them for the future use of His people, it was necessary that they be couched in language that only the saints could understand. Had John named pagan Rome in his Apocalypse instead of describing it in symbols, his book would never have lived to reach the churches to which it was written. We may be sure that all writings were censored by a Roman official before being permitted to go on their mission to the mainland.

How much more difficult it would have been to preserve this book through the pagan Roman persecutions of the early church and the Scriptures as a whole through the persecutions of the Dark Ages if symbols had not been employed to describe pagan and papal Rome and their misdeeds.

### **Spiritual Discernment**

Christ dedicated the Revelation to “His servants,” and there is no promise that others will be able to understand its visions. The secret of wisdom in things divine and spiritual is given in Daniel 12:10: “None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.” Here is doubtless the secret of the present ignorance regarding the true meaning of these two great prophetic books of the Old and New Testaments. (Matthew 11:25; Mark 4:10-12; 1 Corinthians 2:11-14.) Spiritual things have always been foolishness to the unspiritual, just as the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians are foolishness to those who cannot read them. Only to a few dialectic students are they full of meaning. The importance of their message was unlocked by the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, by which an alphabet was made possible. Thus the meaning of the symbolic prophecies is plain to those who hold the key of spiritual discernment and cherish a willingness to obey the truths revealed. Some laugh at the idea of beasts and birds being used in the Scriptures to symbolize nations, but at the same time they speak reverently of the American eagle, the British lion, the Russian bear, and the Chinese dragon. God employed many of the very symbols of nations ;is they were used and recognized by men everywhere.

The Lord has promised to preserve His Word down through the centuries. "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shall keep them, O Lord, Thou shall preserve them from this generation for ever." Psalm 12:6, 7. This prophetic utterance has been completely fulfilled, so that in this last generation the Scriptures come to us fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, untarnished and unsullied. A divine hand has preserved their purity through all the ages. One of the greatest factors in the preservation of the Word of God has been the use of signs, symbols, and parables by which truth has been hidden from those who would destroy it, and revealed to those who appreciate and obey it. As the various truths are needed they become meat in due season to the people of God. Light is released from the great storehouse as it is needed and becomes applicable. It is thus that "the path of the just is as the shining light" that shines with ever-increasing brilliance "unto the perfect day."

Spiritual light will continue to increase, till the last generation is flooded with a blaze of glory. In one of his visions John saw an “angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.” Revelation 18:1. One writer has said that there has ever been an increasing flood of light, “from the solitary ray of Eden, to the clear, widespread beams of Daniel, and to the rich glow of the Apocalypse.” The patriarchs, with partial knowledge, looked forward to the advent of the Redeemer, the great goal of prophetic vision. The prophets saw even more clearly, and the apostles walked in the very presence of the Light of the world “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” But the accumulated light of all ages has been reserved for the last generation, when the great gospel commission is to be fulfilled in all the earth.

In a special sense the prophetic portion of the Bible belongs to the last days, inasmuch as most of the great lines of prophecy focus on the Second Advent. “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else. I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.” Isaiah 46:9,10: A well-known writer says: “Chronological prophecy was intended, as we have seen, for the benefit of later generations, and especially of the last. The lapse of time only could fulfil it, and the lapse of time only could explain it. The light that it sheds falls not on times near its own, but-as a lighthouse illuminates the ocean afar, and not the rock on which it stands-on remote future ages.”-H. GRATTAN GUINNESS, *Light for the Last Days*, Page 48. We have now come to the most remote of all generations since the prophecies were given, and it is time for the church to live in expectation of the translation of the visions of the prophets into joyful realities.

### **3. THE UNVEILING OF CHRIST**

THE DIVINE purpose of the last book of the Bible is to reveal Christ to the church and through the church to the world. He is the central theme of all its visions, the chief Hero in the various scenes of its dramatic panoramas. Its visions and symbols emphasize the eternal verities that are the very substance of revealed truth. The love, justice, holiness, and majesty of an omnipotent God are here set forth. Christ is portrayed in His combined offices of prophet, priest, and king. He is the eternal Son of God and also the Son of man. As the God-Man, Christ is revealed as Emmanuel, the only Mediator between God and man. In order to become this connecting link, He had to combine in Himself both the divinity of God and the humanity of man. He is the slain lamb, for it was by His death and resurrection that He secured the triumph over sin that is ours by faith. In His nail pieced hands He holds the destiny of nations. Here the Holy Spirit is also revealed in His ceaseless and sevenfold ministry.

The purpose of this book is revealed in its title. Revelation is the English for Apocalypse, which is the Anglicized form of the Latin from the Greek. Before the eleventh century this book was known only as the Apocalypse, as indicated all the early manuscripts. This is the only book of the Bible that was divinely named. The name given by the translators, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” is a contradiction of the inspired title as given in the first verse. John is not “The Divine,” and the book did not originate with him, nor was it written to reveal him.

The use of the word divine in connection with religions leaders in the Christian church seems to have had its origin with Eusebius, or at least it began in his time. Recent archaeological discoveries in the ruins of Ephesus show that “divine” was one of the titles used by the pagan priests of the Temple of Artemis, or Diana. Like many other pagan practices, its use came into the church during the great apostasy, or “falling away.” Although provision has been made through the gospel whereby man can be made partaker of the divine nature, he should never assume a title that ‘belongs alone to the Deity. We speak of the divinity of Christ because He is a member of the Godhead and is therefore divine.

Revelation is defined as “the act of revealing; a disclosure of what. was before unknown; also that which is revealed.” The word reveal comes originally from the Latin *revelare*, which literally means “to unveil.” All Apocalypse is therefore something disclosed, unveiled, discovered, or brought to light. An Unveiling is “the act of removing, turning back, or taking off the veil so as to discover what previously was hidden from New.” It conveys the idea of the drawing aside of the curtain Of concealment. When the curtain is drawn back, the scene behind it becomes clearly exposed to view and that which was hidden becomes visible.

“The Unveiling of Jesus Christ” is the rendering in the Concordant Version. Apocalypse carries

the meaning of both a revelation of information that had been kept at least partially concealed, and also the unveiling of some person, or persons, or events, so that they can be more clearly seen. The word Apocalypse combines the meaning of revelation and unveiling and is therefore the most appropriate title of the book. It is called The Revelation and not The Revelations. It contains many visions, but like the Bible itself it is one book, written for the one purpose of revealing Christ to man.

### **Book Not Sealed**

The contents of this book are not sealed or concealed; they are revealed, unfolded, made known. The author never intended that these visions should be an unsolvable puzzle, a mystery, or a conundrum. He expected them to be understood. In fact, the prophet was given explicit instructions not to seal the book. "And he said unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand." Revelation 22:10. We must conclude that this instruction was obeyed. The prevailing idea that the Apocalypse is a sealed book and cannot be understood is entirely refuted first, by the title; second, by the promised blessing on all who read, hear, and obey what is written in it. Third, by the instruction not to seal the book; and fourth, by the oft-repeated injunction that all who have ears to hear should "hear what the Spirit said unto the churches."

If the Apocalypse were a sealed book, a more appropriate title would have been The Apocrypha, which means just the opposite of apocalypse. An apocrypha is something hidden, obscure, unknown, veiled. Or the title would have been The Mystery, The Sealed Book, The Enigma, The Sphinx of the Bible, or The Book of Hidden Secrets. As we begin the study of this book we should thank God and take courage because it is a "revelation," and this fact in itself gives assurance of success. The erroneous idea that this book is sealed has been the chief factor in making it the neglected book of the Bible, and also constitutes the principal excuse for not studying it.

Those who thus excuse their neglect are described in Isaiah 29:11,12: "And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he said, I cannot. For it is sealed: and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he said, I am not learned." Here are the two principal excuses for neglecting the study of the Revelation. The learned say, "It is sealed," and the uneducated say, "I am not learned." The minister hides behind what he thinks makes it impossible for him to interpret the book, and the laity behind their lack of theological knowledge and training in the Scriptures. Nevertheless the divine promise is: "In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 29:18-19. Is this a prophecy of the universal study of the Revelation resulting in the bestowal of the blessings promised to those who read, hear, and obey?"

The book of Daniel is the only book of the Bible ever sealed, and then only till a certain time, "the time of the end," or the last days, when "many would search it through, and knowledge would be great." (See Daniel 12:4, 9.) This book has long since been unsealed and its glorious truths have been given to the church and the world. But notwithstanding all the internal and external evidences that the Revelation is an open book, many still persist in declaring it to be sealed and therefore unfathomable. Herder speaks of those in his day who considered it the mark of a sound understanding to abstain from the study of it. Archbishop Benson asked a friend, "What is the form the book presents to you?" and the answer was, "It is chaos." Dr. Robert Smith said that "the study of the Revelation either finds or leaves a man mad," and another writer declared it to be "a dark and inexplicable hieroglyphic, which it is humility and duty to leave unopened."

But we must remember that the hieroglyphics can now be read and understood, and so can the Apocalypse. William Milligan said of the Revelation: "To numbers it is not only absolutely sealed; they imagine, and are content with imagining, that no loosing of the seals is possible. Sometimes deliberately, almost always practically, the book is laid aside. The effect is more than negative; the result worse than loss. The symmetry and completeness of Scripture are marred. The idea of Revelation is disturbed.... The Book is there, and it must either be excluded from the New Testament, or the Church must continue her struggle to comprehend it until she succeeds in doing so."-Lectures on the Apocalypse, Page 4. It is cheering to note a recent change for the better in the attitude of Christendom toward this hitherto neglected book.

### **Christ Unveiled**

The Revelation is more than a prophecy given by Christ; it is a revelation of Him. "This is the

unveiling of a Person -Jesus Christ-and not merely a prediction revealed through Him" is the footnote in the Concordant Version. To reveal or unveil Christ to mankind is the chief purpose of all prophecy and especially of the last book of the Bible. No other portion of the Scriptures is so completely saturated with revelations of the personality, power, ministry, and eternal purpose of Christ. One writer declared that this last prophecy "arches over the guilty and suffering race like the grand vault of heaven, illuminated by the glorious central Sun-Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness."

In the Apocalypse the name of Jesus or its equivalent is found forty-nine times in the first chapter, thirty-nine times in the second, and forty-nine times in the third, or a total of one hundred and thirty-seven times in the first three chapters. Twenty-eight times in the Revelation He is called the "Lamb." To understand this book we must constantly look for the Man of the book, the One whom it was especially written to make known. Dr. Gordon tells of the lesson he learned from his little son to whom he had given a puzzle map of the United States. He was amazed because the map was so quickly and successfully put together. When he asked for an explanation the boy showed him a picture of Uncle Sam covering the entire back of the map. He had put the map together and in so doing had solved the puzzle. Only as we keep our eyes on Jesus can we understand the secrets of the Revelation.

Christ is the chief secret of all prophecy, for its purpose is to reveal Him. Peter wrote: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." 2 Peter 1:19. Christ is the Day Star, whose entrance into the heart brings the day's dawning and whose Second Advent ends the night of sin. To reveal Christ was the purpose of the lamb offered by Abel; the test of Abraham on Mount Moriah; the Mosaic tabernacle and its typical services; and the writings of all the prophets. After Jesus rebuked the disciples for their ignorance and unbelief concerning His sufferings and death, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." Luke 24:27. Jesus said to the Jews, "Had you believed Moses, you would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me." John 5:46.

It was the revelation of Christ in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost that brought conviction and conversion to three thousand sinners. The name Jesus appears nearly one thousand times in the New Testament, and the word Christ more than five hundred times. The Emancipation Proclamation has been so written that as it is read the face of the author, Abraham Lincoln, becomes visible on the face of the document. To those with spiritual discernment every page of the Scriptures reveals its divine Author.

The Old Testament reveals Christ in promise and prophecy; the Gospels unveil Him in His earthly life, ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Acts and the epistles disclose the early triumphs of the church under His Spirit's ministry; but the unveiling would be incomplete without the revelation of the closing book. This is the crowning revelation of the entire Scripture. One writer calls it, "A panorama of the glory of Christ." Gregory Nussen terms it "the last book of grace." In it Christ is pictured in heavenly glory at the right hand of God as the High Priest and Mediator of the "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." He is also described as the supreme Judge, at whose tribunal all men and nations must appear. The final scenes picture Him as the "King of kings, and Lord of Lords," reigning forever over the saints in Paradise restored. The Revelation is the final act in the unveiling ceremony which began at the gates of Eden with the first gospel promise. It makes possible an unobstructed vision of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Genesis begins with Paradise lost and the fall of man, and Revelation ends with man redeemed and Paradise restored.

Not only is the Apocalypse a revelation of Christ in person; it also discloses Him in the "things," or events, "which must shortly come to pass." All prophetic events focus on Christ, and we should be able to discover His stately steppings in the history of mankind. In one sense He is in all the events that fulfill His word and lead to the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. William A. Sunday said: "I ascended to the observatory of the prophets, where appeared photographs of far-off events and stars all focused upon the great Star which was to arise as an atonement for sin." In a special sense the Revelation is a photograph gallery of the events that reveal and unveil the Son of God. He speaks to mankind through events and judgments. They are His messengers, and their mission is to reveal Him. Thus a knowledge of the prophetic word makes it possible to see Jesus in the happenings of the past, and in the news items of the daily press. To see Him is the supreme need of all men, and to make Him more clearly visible is the purpose of the Apocalypse.

## 4. THE SALUTATION

REVELATION 1:4-8 is known as the salutation, and is therefore not strictly a part of the Apocalypse proper. Since the book is written in the form of an epistle, it is appropriate that it begin with an apostolic salutation, or greeting. The introduction and salutation together constitute the prologue of the book. Revelation 22:8-21 is the epilogue. The salutation begins with an invocation of divine grace and peace upon those who read, hear, and obey what is about to be revealed. Grace is the unmerited favor of God expressed in manifold ways, and peace is the state of security and tranquillity that comes to those who enjoy the smiles of divine approval. Both grace and peace are said to come from the Triune Godhead.

Through the prophet, the Holy Trinity salutes the church and seals the message to be delivered. This is indeed a marvelous salutation. In all literature there cannot be found a more sublime and appropriate opening for a book, nor a message backed with such complete authority. Such salutations were customary in Bible times. (See Daniel 4:1; 6:25; 2 Corinthians 13:13, 14; Jude 1, 2.) Sometimes the greetings appeared at the beginning and sometimes at the close of a book or epistle, and sometimes both. But none is more complete and full of meaning than that with which the Apocalypse begins.

There can be no real peace without the favor of God. Because God cannot extend grace to the wicked, they have no peace. The prophet said: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked." Isaiah 57:20, 21. Webster defines grace as follows: "Clemency; mercy, forbearance. A dispensation, privilege or pardon, granted not by right but by favor. In English law, a general and free pardon by act of Parliament; called also 'act of grace.' In a theological sense, (a) the free unmerited love and favor of God; (b) divine influence or the influence of the Spirit in renewing the heart and restraining from sin. (c) A state of reconciliation to God; (d) virtuous and religious affection or disposition, as faith, meekness, humility, patience, etc., proceeding from divine influence; (e) spiritual instruction, improvement and edification."

The Revelation, the promised blessing, and grace and peace, come from all three members of the Godhead, but like the book itself they have their origin with the Eternal Father, with a no beginning to His past and an endless future. He is identified as the One "which is, and which was, and which is to Come." He is "the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity" Isaiah 57:15. His existence is "so limitless that we imagine nothing as either before or after it." (E. H. Plumptre, A Popular Exposition of the Epistles to the Emlern Churches of Asia, Page 28.) "Such a title of the Eternal Father stands fitly among the first words of a book which reveals the present in the light both of the past and of the future." (Swete, Page 5.)

In Revelation 1:8, 11 Christ is also described as being eternal. He declares Himself to be the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending, the One "which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." The eternal existence of the Son with the Father is beautifully set forth in Proverbs 8:22-30. In Isaiah 9:6 Christ is called "The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." He is the great "I AM" of Exodus 3:14, 15. In the song of Moses the Lord thus described Himself: "Behold, now, I am He who Am and Was, and Will be." Deuteronomy 32:39, Targum of Palestine. To the Jews, Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am." (See John 8:56-59.) In Revelation 3:14 He declares Himself to be "the beginning and Lord of God's creation." (Weymouth.) Christ is set forth in the Scriptures as the Creator, Lawgiver, and Redeemer. He also survives all changes and is the end. All beginnings were made by Him, and He will bring about all consummations. He is "the Author and Finisher of our faith."

### The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, is described as "the seven Spirits which are before His throne." Seven represents the fullness and perfection of His power and the diversity of His operations. He is known in the Scriptures as (1) "the Spirit of God," (2) "the Spirit of His Son," (3) "the Spirit of holiness," (4) "the Spirit of wisdom," (5) "the Spirit of love," (6) "the Spirit of grace," and (7) "the Spirit of glory." See Isaiah 11:1 and 21 for a description of the sevenfold nature of the operations Of the Holy Spirit through the Messiah.

Although we are told that there is but "one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:4), His being designated here in Revelation as "the seven Spirits of God" does not constitute a contradiction. It is a symbolic representation of the many aspects of His work in the plan of redemption. This is the position of the rest of the apocalyptic students. Philip Mauro, in his book, *Of Things Which Soon Must Come to Pass*, page 52, quotes the following: "The seven fold nature does no violence to the trinity. It merely points to the fullness and variety of the powers that are embraced in the unity," and Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown explain the statement as

“the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold (i.e., perfect, complete, and universal) energy.” (Volume 2, Page 551.) A. T. Robertson says: “A difficult symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit here on a par with God and Christ, a conclusion borne out by the symbolic use of the seven spirits in 3:1; 4:5; 5:6 (from Zechariah 4:2-10). There is the one Holy Spirit with seven manifestations here to the seven churches, unity in diversity.” (Page 286.)

There are those who claim that this statement has reference to seven angels, but this is not possible. “The seven Spirits” could not be created beings, for they are coupled with the Father and Son as the source of blessings, grace, and peace, and are here placed between the first and third Persons of the Godhead. Since seven different times the admonition is given for the churches to whom the Apocalypse is sent to “hear what the Spirit said unto the churches,” it would hardly seem possible that He should be left out of the picture. The text without doubt refers to the Holy Spirit who “does His sevenfold gifts impart.”

In verse 14 Christ is said to have eyes like “a flame of fire, and in Revelation 5:6 He is described with “seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Through the Holy Spirit, who directs the work of the angels, or “ministering spirits,” the Father and the Son see all that takes place on earth. (See 2 Chronicles 16:9.) In Zechariah 4:6, 10-14 Christ and the Holy Spirit are called “the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” The “seven Spirits” in our text are said to stand “before His throne.” Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father,” and Paul said that “we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” (John 15:26; Ephesians 2:15.) We are also admonished to do our praying “in the Holy Ghost,” for we have the assurance that “the Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses; for we do not know what prayers to offer nor in what way to offer them. But the Spirit Himself pleads for us in yearnings that can find no words, and the Searcher of hearts knows what the Spirit’s meaning is, because His intercessions for God’s people are in harmony with God’s will.” Jude 1:20; Romans 8:26, 27, Weymouth. From the Holy Spirit, pictured as “the seven Spirits of God” before the throne, the “seven golden candlesticks” or “lamps” symbolic of “the seven churches,” receive their light that makes them “the light of the world.”

### **Revelation of Christ**

Since Jesus Christ is the immediate source of the revelation, blessings, grace, and peace, and the purpose of the Apocalypse is to reveal Him, the Father and the Holy Spirit are placed before Him in this description of the Trinity. He is mentioned last because it is of Him that the writer is about to speak at length. This makes it possible for the description of Him whom the book especially reveals to be more complete. Though all three members of the Godhead co-operate in the work of redemption, as they did in the work of creation, the chief purpose of this last gospel message is to reveal or unveil Jesus Christ. He is the first cause and the last effect; the origin of all and the goal of all; the first to seek the sinner and the last to forsake him. True to the title and design of the book, we are given a revelation of His eternity, divinity, ministry, character, love, and final universal dominion. He stamps the Apocalypse with the authority of His threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.

“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. 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.” Revelation 1:5, 6. Here is a beautiful sevenfold ascription of honor and glory to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is first described as “the faithful witness,” or “the truthful witness.” (Weymouth.) In Revelation 3:14 He is called “the faithful and true witness.” In chapter 11, verse 10 the “two witnesses” are also called the “two prophets.” In a special sense God’s prophets have been His witnesses, and since Jesus was the greatest of all prophets, He was also the chief of all witnesses. The Apocalypse is called “the testimony of Jesus” in Revelation 1:2 and 19:10. Christ and the Holy Spirit are the two chief witnesses for God to man and for man before God. “The testimony of Jesus,” who is “the faithful witness,” is absolutely dependable, for it is “impossible for” Him “to lie.” What a contrast is His testimony to that of the majority in this age of “false accusers” and “trucebreakers,” when perjury on the witness stand has become one of the universal crimes of mankind.

He is also “the first begotten of the dead,” or “the chief born of the dead,” according to the Emphatic Diaglott. This expression and similar ones are used five times in the New Testament. “First” as used here must be in point of quality rather than time. The “first fruits” were also called the “chief fruits.” Christ was not the first to be resurrected in point of time. Moses was raised from the dead a millennium and a half before, and others were raised during Christ’s earthly ministry. However, all other resurrections depended on the raising of Him who is “the resurrection, and the life.” Moses was awakened from his death

sleep only on condition that Christ would be raised from the dead.

The resurrection of Moses was a pledge that the Son of God would die for the sins of the world and be raised again to life. This was the reason for the dispute between Christ and Satan over the body of Moses, as pictured in Jude 9. Satan doubtless contended that the Son of God had no right to resurrect anyone from the dead until after His own resurrection, provided He succeeded in His earthly mission. This also explains why Moses and Elijah came down to meet Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration "and encouraged Him concerning His death." If He failed, death could be their only portion, because they were in heaven by means of a resurrection and a translation on condition He would not fail. The resurrection of Christ was the crowning and overwhelming proof and demonstration of His divinity and messiah ship. It was the event also that sealed His priesthood. He could not be priest till He had become the God-Man, Emmanuel. After His resurrection He entered upon His mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary. His triumph over death and the grave was the assurance of a new creation, the fruition of a new hope.

Jesus is also "the Prince of the kings of the earth," or "the Prince over the kings of earth." (Moffatt.) The psalmist reports the Father as saying of the Son: "Also I will make Him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Psalm 89:27. Ruler ship over kings is the result of His triumph over death. It was by His resurrection that Jesus won sovereignty over principalities and kingly powers, the very position the devil offered Him on the basis of surrender, and which He rejected. His office as king will be occupied in its fullness only when redemption is complete. The title here is at least partly prophetic of the time Christ occupies the throne of His glory and reigns as "King of kings" over the twelve apostolic kings and the twelve nations of the saved in the new earth state.

But in one sense Christ is now the Prince, or Ruler, "over" or above the kings of the earth. To Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, He declared that "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the basest of men." Daniel 4:17. The proud king had to learn by a tragic experience that "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will." (See verses 30-36.) In Ephesians 1:20-21, we are told that after His resurrection and ascension the Father placed Jesus "at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

This is a hard lesson for kings and rulers to learn. The ten plagues of Egypt failed to fully teach Pharaoh that God's sovereignty is complete and supreme. Belshazzar, if he learned the lesson at all, learned it too late to profit by it. The handwriting on the wall of the banqueting room was an irrevocable decree: "Thy kingdom is finished and given to the Medes and Persians." Napoleon while in exile on the island of St. Helena is reported to have said: "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself, have founded great empires: but upon what do these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus, alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. Jesus Christ was more than man." (Bertrand's Memoirs, cited in Liddon's Bampton Lectures, 1866.) "Thus, in these three epithets of Christ, are briefly set forth His life on earth, His glorious resurrection, His present and eternal universal dominion." (A Devotional Commentary, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Page 11.)

"Unto Him that loved us," or "loves us." (RV) The love of Christ is not past only, but continuous. The supreme act of (lying for us did not extinguish His affection. Of course Calvary was the greatest of all demonstrations of that undying divine love. The cross alone measures the height and depth and breadth of His affection. By that means only are we "able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge." (Ephesians 3:17-19.) According to Isaiah 49:15,16, the marks of the crucifixion will be the visible evidence of that love throughout all eternity. Love is the very essence of God's character and the foundation principle of His government. The apostle says that "he that loves not knows not God; for God is love." 1 John 4:8. We should more fervently love Him, for we are the supreme objects of His love, and He craves our love in return. It is a tragedy to love and not have affection reciprocated. No wonder Christ is grieved when the objects of His love relax their love for Him. Not the love of power but the power of love controls the supreme Lover of mankind.

"And washed us from our sins in His own blood." "Loosed us," says the American Revised Version. The past tense indicates an accomplished fact. The love is ever present and continuous, but the washing was done when the crimson flow was loosed on the cross of Calvary and a fountain was opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness. "Christ loosed us once for all, but loves us always." (Robertson, Page 287.) On this point Joseph A. Seiss says: "As God's great love, in all its fullness, is a present love; so our absolution through the blood of Christ is a past absolution. We have not to wait and

work to be forgiven. The work has long since been done. The decree went forth, the releasing word was spoken, the forgiveness was declared, when Jesus left His tomb; and all that any man has to do on that subject is to believe it, and to appropriate to himself the glorious reprieve.”-The Apocalypse, Volume 1, Page 50.

A happy man answered the question as to when he had been cleansed from sin by saying, “It happened two thousand years ago, but I only found it out yesterday.” Through Christ we are not merely pardoned from sin but we are delivered from its power and dominion. “The snare is broken and we are escaped.” The chains of Satan have been snapped asunder, and we are free. Sinners are represented as captives of Satan, in bondage to his will and slaves to vicious habits. In fact we are told that men “are taken captive by him at his will.” (Isaiah 49:24, 25; 2 Timothy 2:26.) The purpose of the gospel is to free us from these fetters. (Isaiah 61:1-3.) Pardon alone is not enough. We must be both pardoned and loosed from captivity. It would be useless to pardon a man and then leave him in prison. That would completely nullify the pardon. The deliverance from bondage is a necessary part of the transaction. So Christ both “loosed us” and “loosed us from our sins.”

To be washed from the stains made by sin is an important part of the gospel. Under the terrible guilt of sin, David Cried out: “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Psalm 51:2, 7. To disobedient Israel the Lord pleaded: “Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil.” “Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Isaiah 1:16, 18.

Scarlet, the symbol of sin, is one of the hardest colors to remove from cloth without destroying the fiber. Satan’s government is symbolized by a great red dragon, and his church by a harlot clothed in scarlet. The blood of Christ is the great sin remover. It is the only means of removing the scarlet stains of sin on our character garments so that they are left clean and white. We are told that those who pass through the final great tribulation will “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:14. We could not be redeemed with such “corruptible things, as silver and gold,” but only “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” 1 Peter 1:18, 19. Only the Creator could redeem or re-create, and only the Lawgiver could save from the curse of the law and remit the death penalty for transgression. Although Christ paid an enormous price to redeem us, we should rejoice in the knowledge that He will never regret it, for when the work of redemption is finished, “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” Isaiah 53:11.

And last but not least, Christ “bath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father.” “A kingdom, to be priests,” is the American Revised Version, and “kingdom of priests for God,” is the Twentieth Century New Testament rendering. In 1 Peter 2:9 Christians are called “a royal priesthood,” which is an exact quotation from the Septuagint of Exodus 19:6. They are doubtless kings in their relation to the world and priests in their relation to God. The royal and sacerdotal dignities are the highest that can be bestowed on man. “Hath made us kings and priests” indicates a present experience, but according to Revelation 5:10 and 20:6 it also has an application to a future state. In God’s eternal purpose the church is commissioned to present all individuals and nations before the throne of grace in intercession and mediatorial ministry. The knowledge of the fact that every genuine Christian has been divinely appointed as a priest of the kingdom of God with direct access to Him at all times should have a profound effect on his life and conduct.

### **The First Doxology**

“To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen,” is the first of the many doxologies that are offered to Christ in the Revelation. The following is an appropriate summary of the identification given Christ, and the doxology with which it closes: “The glory brightens as the account proceeds. That we should have a place in the affectionate regard, and tender, effective love of the great Lord, is much. That we should have forgiveness for all our sins, made perfect by His free grace at the cost of His own life’s blood, is almost too much for belief. But, to affection is added honor, and to salvation, official dignities. We are not only loved, and freed from our sins, but, if indeed we are Christians, we are princes and priests, named and anointed for immortal regencies and eternal priest hoods. Let men despise and contemn religion as they may, there is empire connecting with lowly discipleship, royalty with penitence and prayers, and sublime priesthood with piety. There is not a believer, however obscure or humble, who may not rejoice in princely blood, who does not already wield a power which the potencies of hell cannot withstand, and who is not on

the way to possess eternal priesthood and dominion.” (Seiss, Page 51, 52.)

The prophet John was enraptured with the prospect of a ruler ship and dominion under King Jesus, whom he had known and loved. After declaring that His glory and dominion will continue forever, he adds, “Amen,” which means “so be it.” Because the kingdoms of this earth are transitory and oppressive, and their rulers are often corrupt, haughty, arrogant, and cruel, every saint should join the apostle with a hearty “Amen.” The rule of Christ will “be in justice and equity, and will be permanent. His throne “is for ever and ever,” because righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom.

The prophet Daniel declared that in the days of the present kings and nations “shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” Daniel 2:44. The prophet Isaiah said that when the government of this world rests on the shoulders of the Prince of Peace, “of the increase of His government and peace there shall be -no end.” (Isaiah 9:6, 7.) An ever-increasing peace will characterize the reign of the Prince of Peace. No wonder John was enthusiastic in anticipation of such a King and dominion.

## 5. THE DEDICATION

JOHN to the seven churches which are in Asia.” “What thou sees, 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.” Revelation 1:4, 11. This is known as the dedication of the book of Revelation. All books are dedicated to some person or persons; to an organization or an institution; or to the general public. Law books are dedicated to attorneys, medical books to physicians, music books to musicians, and so forth. Some religious books are dedicated to the church only, and others to the general public.

The Apocalypse is dedicated to the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia. “In Roman Asia,” and “in the province of Asia,” are other translations. This was only a small part even of Asia Minor, about the size of the State of Pennsylvania. This book is not dedicated to cities, provinces, or nations, but to the church and its members. Only children of the kingdom can therefore grasp its secrets, for to them it was written and dedicated. To those who have spiritual discernment the Revelation becomes “a land full of fountains and springs and wells, out of which flows the river which makes glad the city of God.”

The question is often asked as to why the Apocalypse was sent to only seven of the many Christian churches of that period. At Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Corinth, and in many other places throughout the Roman Empire there were scores if not hundreds of Christian churches, many of which were much larger in membership than the seven named. Even in the Roman province of Asia there were many others besides the seven. We read of churches in Troas, Assos, Miletus, Colosse, Hierapolis, Tralles, Magnesia, and in the home of Nymphas. There must have been others in the many cities and villages of the province.

It is evident that the seven named were chosen as representatives of all the churches of that generation, and in fact of all Christendom. Seven is the sacred number of the Scriptures, and especially of the Apocalypse. Numbers in the Scriptures are as significant and important as words. The Bible contains a divine arithmetic as well as a divine message. Since the creation, when the weekly cycle of seven days was instituted to divide time and safeguard the Sabbath, seven has been a sacred number. Trench declares that “the evidence of this reaches back to the very beginning. We meet it first in the hallowing of the seventh day in pledge and token of the covenant of God with man.” (Page 63.)

The number seven is prominent throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It seems to be the sign of God’s covenant relation to His people. The Hebrew word seven is bound up in the word which signifies an oath, or a covenant confirmed with an oath. It is the number of sacrifice, by which the covenant is maintained in vitality and strength. All the typical feasts were ordered by seven, or seven times seven. The Passover was followed by “the feast of weeks.” The Israelites compassed Jericho seven days and seven times on the seventh day of their investment of the city, that they might know that God had given them the city as the result of their covenant relation with Him. There were seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in Egypt. Naaman was instructed to dip seven times in the river Jordan as a recognition that the God of Israel was his healer.

King Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity continued seven years that he might know that the judgment came from the God of Daniel. Examples of the use of the sacred number seven are scattered through both

the Old and the New Testament Scriptures. Seven is the combination of the numbers three and four, which are also prominent in the Bible and especially in the Revelation.

To a striking degree the Apocalypse is the book of sevens and its divisible numbers three and four. This is doubtless because it is the culmination and climax of all the Scriptures. It contains seven great visions, many of which are divided into seven parts. There are seven epistles, addressed to seven churches, and each of these is divided into seven parts. The seven churches are symbolized by seven golden candlesticks, and the seven angels, or ministers, by seven stars. Christ is pictured as a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes representing the seven Spirits of God. There are seven angels, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues, seven thunders, seven heads, seven crowns, seven mountains, seven kings, and a sevenfold ascription of praise to God and the Lamb. Most of these sevens are divided naturally into four's and three's, as is especially emphasized in the seven epistles, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven last plagues. The number seven is used at least fifty times in the Revelation.

The chief reason for the prominence of the number seven is the fact that it signifies fullness, completeness, and perfection. It stands for universality and unity in variety. Trench says, "The Seven, must be regarded as constituting a complex whole, as representing an ideal completeness." (Page 29.) Just as the seven spirits before the throne are used to represent the Holy Spirit in the fullness and completeness of His character and office, His power and operations, so the seven churches are used to represent the one universal church in its complete being and history from the time of the apocalyptic visions to the Second Advent of Christ. The seven churches to which the Apocalypse was sent were therefore representative of the whole church in all ages. The Revelation is for this reason applicable to the church universal and is as up to date as any of the other epistles of the New Testament.

#### **Covers Christian Era**

A few quotations will suffice to show that the position here taken is in harmony with the teachings of many students of the Revelation. "The Seven Churches represent 'the Holy Church throughout all the world.' . . . The letters to the seven churches, it is obvious, are full of moral and spiritual instruction to the church of all ages." (Cambridge Bible.) "These seven represent the universal Church of all times and places." (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Volume 2, Page 551.) "Seven churches are selected, the condition of which appeared most suitable to the purpose which the Apostle has in view; and these seven represent the Church of Christ in every country of the world, down to the very end of time. The universal Church spreads itself out beneath His gaze; and before He instructs He blesses it."-WILLIAM MILLIGAN, *The Book of Revelation (The Expositor's Bible)*, Page 5, 6. "The seven churches stand for the entire Church, the complete society of professing Christians, the Church universal, in the whole of its membership and the entirety of its earthly condition and career." (Seiss, Page 130.) This is the view of most commentators, and it is sound in its reasons and conclusions. In fact, no other position would harmonize with the message and purpose of the book.

Not only do the seven churches represent the universal church between the two ad-vents of Christ, but they divide the Christian Era into seven parts, or Periods. The seven churches represent seven phases of Christian history, reaching between apostolic days and the return of our Lord. In the names of the seven churches and the letters addressed to them is set forth the main features of the condition of the church universal during the different periods. One of the earlier students of the Revelation said: "May it not seem that these seven Churches, besides their literal respect, were intended to be as patterns and types of the several ages of the Catholic Church a principio ad finem [from the beginning thereof unto the end] according to the several ages thereof, answering the pattern of the seven churches here." - JOSEPH MEDE, *Works*, book 5, Chapter 10, Page 905.

The following are samples of scores of excellent quotations showing that this is well-nigh the universal view of Biblical scholars:

"The epistles to the seven churches we hold, with many of the best commentators, to be a prophetic setting forth of the successive stages of the church's history-its declines and its recoveries, its failures and its repentances, from ascension to advent." - A. J. GORDON, *The Ministry of the Spirit*, Page 132, 133.

"These seven letters are prophetic. The churches addressed are not necessarily the outstanding churches of the first century, but churches with certain dominant characteristics, the description of which makes a prophetic picture of seven periods of collective earthly church history. While describing church conditions and characteristics as a whole in the first century, they also describe church conditions and characteristics in every period of church history. Each letter also describes dominant church conditions of

[sic] characteristics of a particular period.” - WILLIAM McCARRELL, *Christ’s Seven Letters to His Church*, Page 8.

This was the view of Victorinus and Tichaenius of the fourth century; Arethas and Primasius of the sixth; Girdstone and many others of later periods. “It is the opinion of very learned writers upon this book, that our Lord, by these seven churches, signifies all the churches of Christ to the end of the world. And by what He said to them, designs to show what shall be the state of the churches in all ages, and what their duty is.” - MATTHEW POOL, *Annotations Upon the Holy Bible*, Volume 3, Page 952.

The seven epistles of Christ are therefore of as universal application as the epistles of Paul to the seven churches of Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica. All agree that these are universal in their application, and are still up to date, even though they were addressed to local churches of the first century. Why should the seven letters of Christ to the seven churches of Asia be localized and confined to the first century any more than the epistles of Paul to local churches of the same period?

### **The Order Named**

Why are the seven churches always named in the same exact order? Every detail of Scripture has an important meaning. Nothing in divine revelation is thrown together in a careless or haphazard manner. The churches are named in the order in which a messenger from Patmos would deliver a message or letter to them. The seven churches formed a circle with Ephesus as the imperial gateway to the province. Along the coast of the Aegean Sea was a great Roman highway which was built between the years 133 and 130 BC. It passed through Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos. An imperial post road ran east from Pergamos, the capital of the province, through Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, where it joined another post road direct from Ephesus on the coast. This was a recognized circuit of imperial, provincial, and commercial postmen. This was the order in which John had often visited these churches from his home in Ephesus.

At the time this book was written there were three ways of sending letters. First by private messengers employed by those who could afford them, or by volunteer carriers. Most of Paul’s letters were sent to the churches by private messengers, Christian helpers who volunteered to deliver them. The second method was by messengers of commercial organizations which carried on commerce between the cities and provinces and nations of the world. These postmen could be hired to carry private messages if such service did not interfere with their regular work or take them off their regular route. The third method was by imperial and provincial postmen. Roman officials were constantly sending letters to all parts of the province or the empire. This was doubtless the method used by John in getting the Apocalypse to Ephesus, as all other avenues were naturally closed to him. This may be one of the reasons why only the seven located directly on the circuit were named. It is evident that each of these seven represented the center of a small group of other and smaller churches which doubtless also received the Apocalypse. Sir William Ramsay, in *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, says: “You can trace the outline of a complicated and elaborate system of symbolism, which is very characteristic of this book [the Revelation]. There are seven groups of Churches in Asia: each group is represented by one outstanding and conspicuous member: these representatives are the Seven Churches. These Seven representative Churches stand for the Church of the Province; and the Church of the Province, in its turn, stands for the entire Church of Christ.” (Page 177.) Of course after the church of Ephesus received the Apocalypse, the members there may have seen that it reached the church of Smyrna, and so on around the circle.

Although this last book was dedicated to all seven of the churches representing the seven periods of the Christian Era, the evidence is conclusive that it was written especially for the church of the last period. Its chief purpose is to prepare the remnant of the church for the revealing of Christ at His Second Advent. This is well stated by another: “The importance of studying the Apocalypse increases with the lapse of time. Every revolving century, every closing year, adds to the urgency with which attention is challenged to the concluding portion of Holy Writ. And does not that intensity of devotion to the present, which characterizes our times and our country, enhance the reasonableness of this claim? Never, surely, was there a period when some mighty counteracting power was more needed. The Revelation of Jesus Christ duly studied supplies an appropriate corrective influence. Would that all Christians might in fullest measure receive the blessing of “them that hear the words of this prophecy, and that keep the things which are written therein; for the time is at hand.” AUGUSTUS C. THOMPSON, *Morning Hours in Patmos*, Page 28, 29.

## 5. THE GOAL OF BIBLE PROPHECY

BEHOLD, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kingdoms of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen." Revelation 1:7.

The return of Christ is the ultimate goal of all Bible prophecy, and this is especially true of the Revelation. The final revealing of our Lord in His Second Advent is the goal and focal point of all the contents of the Apocalypse. It is the most outstanding event of the book; the keynote of its messages; and the hub around which its apocalyptic visions revolve. Each scene in this prophetic drama climaxes with the coming Christ. The Old Testament prophecies place the chief emphasis on His first advent, while those of the New Testament emphasize His second coming.

It has been estimated that one verse in every eleven in the New Testament refers to the Second Advent of Christ. But in no other part of the Scriptures is this subject so prominently set forth as in the Apocalypse. Its very name implies that this is the chief subject of its contents. Of the eighteen times the word apocalypse appears in the Greek New Testament, six of them refer to the Second Advent, or revealing, of Christ. Near the beginning of this last book is the exclamation, "Behold, He Comes"; and in the closing chapter "I come quickly" is three times repeated. His return is also the dominant note of all between. It is mentioned in five of the seven letters. It is the grand theme of the book.

W. C. Stevens writes: "Abruptly verse 7 throws upon the screen the objective of the book, 'Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kingdoms of the earth shall wail because of Him.' The visibility to this earth of the returning Jesus while it is not here flashed upon the reader's first attention as the theme of Revelation-is yet presented as the great focal event of all the contents of the book. It gives the reader his proper position and attitude in confronting the whole book. This is the event which, next after Calvary, focalizes all rays of Scriptural prediction from Genesis 3:15 onward. The annunciation of this august event will evoke from the sanctified heart a fervent 'Even so, Amen.' " -Revelation, the Crown-Jewel of Biblical Prophecy, Volume 2, Pages 36, 37.

One writer has said that in the word behold it seems as if the prophet were pointing to the frontispiece of his book and therefore to the chief object of its publication. This first announcement of the coming King of kings and Lord of Lords closes with divine attestation of certainty and validity, "Even so, Amen," and the book itself closes with the testimony of its divine Author, "Surely I come quickly. Amen." The doctrine of the Second Advent is no myth or fable. It is dependable truth.

The coming of Christ is the climax not only of the last book of the Bible but also of each of its visions. Like the prophecies of Daniel, they all focus on the same great event. The closing chapters of the Revelation describe the coming King and His re-established kingdom of glory. The exiled apostle was so enraptured by the prospect of such a Ruler, whose glory and dominion would continue forever, that he cried out, Behold, He comes." Who comes? The One he had just been describing in the previous verses. Behold is an expression or exclamation used to arrest attention and prepare the way for an important announcement. It is used twenty-six times in the Revelation. John recognized the fact that man has failed in his ruler ship of the world and that Christ alone is able and qualified to take its government upon His shoulder and rule with justice and equity. He only can restore the throne and dominion of the first Adam. This event will bring rejoicing to the entire universe, which is waiting and longing for the end of the reign of sin in this rebel world. (Romans 8:19-23; Revelation 11:15-17; 19:5, 6.)

John was thrilled with the thought that the same Jesus he had known and loved, and for whose return he had looked and prayed, was to come again to reign as King on the throne of David. He could never forget Christ's first announcement of His departure and the effect it had on him and the other disciples. Nor could he forget the wonderful promise Jesus made on that occasion, which he himself recorded. (John 14:1-3.) The parting scene was also still fresh in his memory. He had heard the final message of the Master and had witnessed the ascension from the summit of Olivet. He saw the two angels and heard their assurance that the Jesus they loved would return again in the same manner they had seen Him depart. (Acts 1:9-11.) The disciples had watched the cloud dwindle into invisibility. The Advent hope became the comfort and inspiration of the apostolic church, and all who truly love Him now will long for His return.

### **Most Public Event**

At the time of His ascension the angels told the disciples that Jesus would return "in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven." When He was taken up, "a cloud received Him out of their sight,"

and our text says, "Behold, He comes with clouds." (Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:27; Revelation 14:14.) This is not the ordinary cloud that we see in the heavens, but the cloud or group of angels that make up the celestial chariot. In Isaiah 19:1 we are told that "the Lord rides upon a swift cloud," and in Psalms 104:3, 4, that He "makes the clouds His chariot" and "walks upon the wings of the wind." He also "makes His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire."

In Psalms 68:17 it is said that "the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels," and that "the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place." In other words the cloud covering Mount Sinai at the time of the giving of the law and the cloud of glory over the Mosaic sanctuary were composed of the group of mighty angels that constitute the chariot of God. In Psalms 18:10 and Ezekiel 1:1-14; 10:9, 13-15, we are told that these chariot angels are the cherubim and seraphim who surround the throne and are the special ministers and messengers of the Almighty. In Daniel's vision of the judgment scene he said that "His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire." (Daniel 7:9, 10, RV) This was doubtless the "chariot of fire" that came to escort Elijah to heaven at the time of his translation.

That the Second Advent of Christ will be the most public event of all human history is evident from the fact that "every eye shall see Him." The most important event of all time will not take place secretly, as many contend. There will be no secret or private "rapture" known only to the favored few. It seems to be God's plan that every descendant of Adam shall have at least one look at the Christ, the second Adam. This opportunity will be given all the living at the Second Advent of Christ, and to all others at the close of the millennium, when "the-dead, small and great, stand before God" to receive their rewards.

That the favored few who love and serve Him are not the only ones who will witness the return of Christ is evident from the fact that "every eye shall see Him" come in the clouds of heaven, and this will include the eyes of those "also which pierced Him." This must include the Jews, who demanded His death and were responsible for His crucifixion; Pilate, who issued the sentence that sent Him to the cross; and the Roman soldiers who drove the nails through His hands and feet and pierced His side with the spear. It also embraces those living in the last generation who by their defiant attitude and willful sins "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Hebrews 6:6.

Speaking of the last-day teachings that His return would take place secretly, Jesus said: "Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert; go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:26, 27. From this most public and spectacular of all events none can hide. From Psalms 50:3-5 and Habakkuk 3:3-5 it is evident that Christ does not touch the earth at His Second Advent, but as the earth turns on its axis His people are gathered to Him by the angel reapers. (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18.)

#### Includes His Enemies

Jesus told Caiaphas, the high priest who presided at His trial before the Sanhedrin, that he would witness His return and see Him "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:62-64; Zechariah 12:9, 10.) This is possible only by means of a special resurrection just before Christ returns, and this special and partial resurrection of many of both the righteous and the wicked is foretold in Daniel 12:1, 2. There was a partial resurrection of saints at the time Christ came triumphantly from the tomb. (Matthew 27:51-53.) These special resurrections must not be confused with the two general resurrections at the beginning and close of the millennium, known as the resurrections of "the just" and of "the unjust," and "the resurrection of life" and "the resurrection of damnation."

The wailing and mourning of "all kingdoms" at the second coming of Christ indicates that the world will not be converted and ready for the event. Their rejection of His last warning message under the power of the Holy Spirit leaves them without excuse. That they have heard the warning is evident from the fact that they recognize the event when it comes. (Isaiah 13:6-8; Luke 13:28; Revelation 6:14-17.) There are two kinds of sorrow and mourning-the sorrow of the world at the results of sin, and godly sorrow that leads to repentance and reformation of life. (Joel 2:12-17; 2 Corinthians 7:9-11.) The mourning described in our text is not that of penitence, but of anguish and dismay. It is not the sort of mourning mentioned in one of the beatitudes, that brings comfort and divine blessing. All who do not experience the godly sorrow for sin that leads to repentance and reformation will in the day of God's wrath cry bitterly. (Zephaniah 1:14-15.) This will include "the mighty men" who trusted in their own wisdom and strength. Jesus said: "Woe unto you that laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep." Luke 6:25.

### **The Righteous Rejoice**

At the return of Christ when “He will swallow up death in victory” and “the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces,” the righteous will say of their returning Lord, “Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord. We have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” Isaiah 25:8,9. All who mourn over their sins in this life will rejoice “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” when Jesus returns to make their salvation complete. Those who laugh at sin and find pleasure in unrighteousness now, will weep, wail, and mourn then with an anguish that will be unspeakable and full of bitterness. We must take our choice between a silly, giddy, foolish, and hilarious life now and bitter wailing then, or a serious, sober, godly life now and “exceeding joy” then. When the dark night of sin and sorrow ends in the blazing light of our returning Lord, the righteous will celebrate the event with joy and singing.

Is it any wonder that Paul speaks of the Second Advent of Christ as the “blessed hope” that leads those who embrace it to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”? (Titus 2:11-14.) This has been the hope of God’s people in all ages. It was the hope of Enoch and Job and David; of Isaiah, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and all the prophets and apostles “since the world began.” (Acts 3:20, 21.) The Second Advent is mentioned more than three hundred times in the New Testament. Moody declared that there are two thousand five hundred texts in the Bible mentioning this topic. At one time he was asked the secret of his success and untiring efforts in soul winning. With tears in his eyes he replied, “The secret of my work has been my looking for the coming of Jesus Christ.”

Many great religious leaders have testified of the transforming power of belief in the Second Advent of Christ in their own lives and ministry. J. Wilbur Chapman said: “Long years ago I came to see this wonderful truth, and I have no hesitation at all in saying that it completely transformed my ministry. If I have had any success in soul-winning, if I have had any ability to turn men to righteousness, I think I must attribute it all to the influence of this wonderful truth. It has kept me with my eyes fixed on His coming, it has kept me with my heart longing for His return.” Dr. R. J. Torrey said there were four marked epochs in his Christian experience, the fourth being “when I came to see the truth concerning the second coming of Christ. The latter truth transformed my whole idea of life, it broke the power of the world and its ambitions over me, and filled my life with the most radiant optimism even under the most discouraging circumstances.”

This is the result of the Advent hope as set forth in the Scriptures. The apostle Peter, after speaking of the coming of the day of the Lord “as a thief in the night” and the destruction of the works and results of sin, says: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” 2 Peter 3:10, 11-14. John declared that “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” He then added, “And every man that hath this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure.” 1 John 3:2, 3.

### **Christian Fundamental**

Belief in the return of Christ is one of the fundamentals of the Christian religion. Dr. Joseph A. Seiss says of the importance of this doctrine: “He comes. Few believe this, and still fewer lay it to heart. Many sneer at the very ideal and would faintly laugh down the people who are so simple as to entertain it. But it is nevertheless the immutable truth of God, predicted by all His prophets, promised by Christ Himself, confirmed by the testimony of angels, proclaimed by all the apostles, believed by all the early Christians, acknowledged in all the Church Creeds, sung of in all the Church Hymn-books, prayed about in all the Church Liturgies, and entering so essentially into the very life and substance of Christianity, that without it there is no Christianity, except a few maimed and mutilated relies too powerless to be worth the trouble or expense of preservation. That religion that does not look for a returning Savior, or locate its highest hopes and triumphs in the judgment scenes for which the Son of man must reappear, is not the religion of this book, and is without authority to promise salvation to its devotees.” (Page 55.) Another well-known church leader says:

“If a man tells me he believes in God, I don’t know what he believes; I don’t know -whether he believes in the Pantheistic view of God, or in the Deistic view of God, or in the personal God. If a man tells me he believes in the inspiration of the Scriptures, I still don’t know what he believes. He might claim universal inspiration, and say the Bible was inspired in the same way that Shakespeare was inspired. If a man tells me that he believes in the divinity of Christ, I still don’t know what he believes: he might say he believes all men are divine.

“But when a man tells me he believes in the literal, personal, bodily, visible, imminent return of the Lord to this earth as king, I know what he believes on every other question. I know that he believes the Bible literally. I know what he believes concerning the Godhead, I know what he believes concerning the Virgin Birth, I know what he believes concerning the Atonement, I know what he believes concerning the Resurrection. I know that he is not a modernist, and I know that he does not believe in the evolutionary hypothesis.” - J. FICANK NORRIS, quoted in *The World’s Work*, September, 1923, Page 469.

### **Response of the Godly**

John was so thrilled with the prospect of his returning Lord that he cried out, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” Others who have learned to love Him and His appearing have responded in like manner. The Scotch preacher, Samuel Rutherford, said: “O, that Christ would remove the covering, draw aside the curtain of time, and come down! O, that the shadows and the night were gone”; and Richard Baxter exclaimed, “Hasten, O my Savior, the time of Thy return! Send forth Your angels, and let that dreadful, joyful trumpet sound. Thy desolate bride said, Come. The whole creation said, Come. ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus.’”

John Calvin wrote: “We must hunger after Christ till the dawning of that great day when our Lord will fully manifest the glory of His kingdom. The whole family of the faithful will keep in view that day.” And John Milton, the blind poet, cried out, “Come forth out of Thy royal chambers, O prince of all the kings of the earth! Put on the visible robes of Thy imperial majesty; take up that unlimited scepter which Thy Almighty Father have bequeathed Thee. For now the voice of Thy bride calls Thee, and all creatures sigh to be reviewed.” Uriah Smith thus expresses his anticipation of the blessed hope: “O day of rest and triumph, and every good, delay not thy dawning. let the angels be quickly sent to gather the elect. Let the promise be fulfilled which bears in its train these matchless glories. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” A great galaxy of godly men and women in these troublous times join wholeheartedly in the response of these noble men in saying, “Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly.”

## **7. THE INTRODUCTORY VISION**

HAVE completed our study of the prologue, which contains the introduction, the salutation, the dedication, the purpose, and the goal of the Revelation. We now come to the introductory vision, which is the first scene in the great prophetic drama of Jesus Christ. This is found in Revelation 1:9 to 20. This vision is introductory not only to the messages of Christ to the seven churches ‘but also the entire book. “All its following visions depend for their significance upon what these letters disclose. They give a picture of the Universal Church, with the trials and triumphs of which the rest of the book is concerned... It is for this reason that the letters are preceded and the whole book is opened by an introductory vision in which Christ is pictured as abiding in the midst of the Church.” - CHARLES R. ERDMAN, *The Revelation of John*, Page 38, 39.

It is interesting to note that the messages to the seven churches, the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, and the pouring out of the seven vials are each preceded by an introductory vision of the mediatorial work of Christ in His sanctuary in heaven and of His church on earth. The entire book therefore centers in the atoning ministration of our great High Priest. Through a beautiful symbolism this introductory vision reveals the relationship between the priestly service of Christ before the Father in the heavenly temple, and His constant watch care over and supervision of His people in the church-temple on earth through His Vicegerent, the Holy Spirit. It shows that the connection between God and His people is close and decided. In one sense this vision constitutes the portal of the Apocalypse, the key to all that follows.

Before proceeding to write what had been shown him in vision, the prophet reveals the circumstances under which the Apocalypse was given him., He was sharing with Christians everywhere the baptism of blood that was their lot under the bitter persecutions of Domitian. He reminded the members of the seven churches that he was a partner with them in their afflictions. Written during the dark days of suffering, the book “breathes throughout the very air of martyrdom.” (Trench, Page 24.) Speaking of the circumstances under which the Apocalypse was written, one commentator says: “Its revelations, like the stars in the sky, shine most brightly in the cold, dark night.”

John also tells his brethren that Christ is also identified with them in their tribulations. Patience as

used here has the meaning of endurance or steadfast endurance, and is sometimes so translated. Chrysostom declared that endurance is “the queen of graces.” Christ’s followers were entering into the “fellowship of His sufferings.” He was being persecuted in the person of His people. John’s steadfastness under tribulation was twofold. He was on Patmos because of his obedient hearing of “the word of God,” and for his courageous speaking of “the testimony of Jesus Christ.” He had been banished because he was the spokesman of “the true Witness.” We are told that “tribulation works patience” and produces perfection, and that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” The remnant of the church will pass through “great tribulation” just before they enter the kingdom of glory.

Through the pagan Roman persecutions Satan attempted to destroy Christianity, but all his efforts resulted only in its advancement. It was demonstrated that even the wrath of man praises God, and the remainder He restrains, and that the enemies of God “can do nothing against the truth, ‘but for the truth.’” (Psalm 76:10; 2 Corinthians 13:8.) Judaism was hated by the pagans above all other religions, and Christianity was looked upon as the most hateful form of the Jewish religion, because it was the most active and fruitful. Domitian thought he had forever silenced the testimony of John, but during his banishment the apostle accomplished far more for the church than would have otherwise been possible.

We are told that “the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance,” “but the name of the wicked shall rot.” Psalm 112:6; Proverbs 10:7. The emperor Domitian has been virtually forgotten except as the persecutor of Christians and the one who banished John to Patmos, but John is better known with each passing year. His writings are read in more than a thousand languages, and his name is emblazoned on one of the twelve foundations of the celestial city. He will be one of the twelve kings of the ransomed, and his ruler ship and kingdom will never end. Daniel’s fame increases with each passing generation, whereas the names of his enemies have decayed and disappeared from history. The same is true of John Bunyan and his foes.

### **Vision Given on Sabbath**

That this introductory vision was given to John on the Sabbath is evident from the statement, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.” This text has been greatly misused and misunderstood. It has often been used as evidence of the observance of Sunday in the apostolic church. Such claims, however, are without the authority of Scripture. Milligan remarks, “The Lord’s day here referred to may have been Sunday. But it seems doubtful if this is the true interpretation. Proof is wanting that the first day of the week had yet received the name of ‘The Lord’s Day.’ ” - The Book of Revelation, Page 13.

“The Lord’s day” could not possibly have been Sunday, for the first day of the week was never observed as the Sabbath until several centuries after the ascension of Christ. In the Scriptures only one day was ever known or designated the Lord’s day, namely the seventh day, or Sabbath. In the fourth commandment of the Decalogue the seventh day is called “the Sabbath of the Lord thy God,” and the day that is the Sabbath of the Lord must be the Lord’s day. In Isaiah 58:13 God calls the Sabbath, “My holy day,” and in Mark 2:28 is recorded the statement of Jesus, Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath day.” Of course the day He is Lord of is the Lord’s day.

Some have attempted to apply the statement “the Lord’s day” to “the day of the Lord,” or the second coming of Christ. This is also unreasonable. It must have been on a definite day when John was “in the Spirit” and Christ appeared to him in vision. That day must have been the day the apostle had observed as the Sabbath all his life. While in exile he followed a lifelong custom and retired on the Sabbath to a quiet place for study, meditation, and prayer. While he was thus engaged, Jesus visited him and he was taken off in vision.

Only men and women of prayer are given heavenly visions. Those who know how to intercede with God in fervent and effectual prayer have made the deepest and most lasting impressions on this world. Abraham prayed, and angels visited his habitation; Jacob was in prayer when his brother’s heart was softened, and his own character so changed that he became a “prince of God,” who prevailed, with both God and man. Joseph prayed, and the prison doors were opened and he was invited to become the second ruler of the kingdom of Egypt. Moses was a man of prayer, with whom God communicated as with a friend. Elijah’s prayers closed and opened the heavens and finally called down the fiery chariot of Jehovah to escort him to glory land. Daniel prayed three times a day, and the angel Gabriel visited him with visions of future events. He was on his knees when the angel arrived to tell him that he was greatly beloved in heaven.

Christ was the Man of prayer. He was praying when the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of

a dove and the voice of the Father claimed Him as His beloved Son in whom Me was well pleased. He was also in prayer when He was transfigured with heavenly glory. The disciples were gathered for prayer in the upper room when the Pentecostal blessings came. Cornelius was praying when angels of God visited him; and Peter was praying when he was given a vision to prepare him to answer the prayer of the Roman centurion. Paul and Silas were praying in the Philippian jail when deliverance came and the jailer and his family were converted. Stephen was praying at the time of his martyrdom, when he was given a vision of the Son of God at the right hand of the Father, and John was in prayer when he was given the wonderful visions of the Apocalypse. The book of Revelation was not given without prayer; nor without prayer can it be appreciated and understood.

John declared that while he was in the Spirit he heard behind him a great voice “like the blast\* of a trumpet.” Voice is used more than sixty times in the Apocalypse. By the blasts of a trumpet Moses and the Israelites were prepared to hear the voice of God in the giving of the law from Mount Sinai. The trumpet was used in connection with important announcements all through Old Testament times. The temple door was opened and the morning service begun at the sound of the trumpet. The year of jubilee was ushered in by the blasts of the silver trumpet. The solemn Day of Atonement was announced by the blowing of trumpets. The dead will be called forth and the silence of the tomb broken by the “voice of the Archangel” and “the trump of God,” for “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” “A great voice, as of a trumpet” summoned the apostle to witness and write the visions of the Apocalypse, and the same voice summons us to hear and lay to heart the things revealed. The loud voice doubtless startled the prophet, for he thought he was alone in his meditations.

The Speaker introduced Himself as “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and correspond to A and Z in the English. It was a Jewish custom to use the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet to represent the whole of a matter from beginning to end. “From aleph to tau” was a well-known expression. Alpha and Omega leaves no room for any other. Jesus is the “all, and in all”; the first as well as the last in both time and rank. He is eternal in His existence. He virtually announced Himself as the Eternal, who exists through all eternity.

Genesis is the Alpha of divine revelation, and the Apocalypse is the Omega. In this last book all the revelations which compose the Biblical canon and of which He is the author are finished. Christ is “the author and finisher of our faith.” Just as letters are the units of word and words are the medium of thought and wisdom, so Christ is both the letter and the Word by which God reveals His will to man. The command to “write in a book” what he was about to see and hear indicates, first, that the apocalyptic visions were to be acted out before the prophet and, second, that the entire book was to be delivered to each of the seven churches and is therefore for the benefit of the universal church.

### **The Vision of Christ**

“And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the chest with a golden girdle.” Revelation 1:12,13.

After introducing Himself as the eternal Son of God, Jesus reveals Himself in person to John. “I turned to see who it was that was speaking to me.” (Weymouth.) The description of the heavenly visitor as given in verses 13 to 18 identifies the speaker beyond a shadow of doubt. It was Jesus, whom John had known and loved during His earthly ministry. Jesus reveals Himself in this introductory vision as the very center of the heavenly sanctuary service in behalf of His people on earth, the One of whom the visions of the book are a revelation.

If we would understand the Apocalypse, like the Seer of Patmos, we must turn from all other interests and attractions and behold its Subject and Author. Our attention should focus on the Portrayer of the events of the book rather than on the events portrayed. For the time being we shall pass by the seven golden candlesticks, or lamp stands, and their significance, and center our attention on the description John attempts to give of the Christ as he sees Him in His glorified state. The language is highly figurative, yet it is the best word picture ever written of the supernal glory of the person of our ascended Lord, and doubtless is the way He will appear in His Second Advent.

Jesus had prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Your own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” John 17:5. Before the incarnation of Christ He had the glory of the Father, “being in the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.” But when He came to this earth, the Son of God veiled His divine glory in human flesh so that sinful man could behold Him. “He stripped Himself of His glory, and took on Him the nature of a bondservant by becoming a man like other

men." Philippians 2:7, Weymouth. He was thus "Emmanuel," or "God with us." He was God "manifest in the flesh" which is "the mystery of godliness." The prophetic description given of Jesus in His humiliation indicates that there was nothing strikingly attractive about His physical appearance. "He had no beauty to attract our eyes, no charm to make us choose Him." Isaiah 53:2, Moffatt. From His position as Michael, which means "like unto God," the Son of God humbled Himself to become "like unto His brethren," or "in the likeness of sinful flesh."

It would be impossible to paint a true picture of Christ in His earthly state. The pictures we have of Him are of very doubtful origin, and probably bear but little resemblance to Him. In most of them He is made altogether too effeminate. It is doubtless in the providence of God that no picture of Jesus has been preserved, inasmuch as men are prone to worship the likeness in place of the reality. Such worship is the very essence of idolatry. In order to fulfill His divine mission Jesus could not present a striking physical appearance, but must draw men and women to Himself because of His matchless character and appealing message. The world is altogether too ready to be attracted and blinded by physical beauty.

In this vision we have the first view of Christ after His ascension, and it indicates that His prayer to the Father had been fully answered. He had been glorified with even more glory than He had before His incarnation. His glorification took place on the day of Pentecost. In John 7:39 we are told that "the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." It is also said that Jesus "humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11.) We should study this apocalyptic description of the glorified Savior, because it is a photograph of the way He will look when He returns in glory and the redeemed "see the King in His beauty," or "in all His splendor." (Isaiah 33:17, Moffatt.)

John thus describes His glorified Lord: "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame 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 shines in his strength." Revelation 1:14-16. This vision of the glory of Christ is almost identical with the one given the prophet Daniel more than six hundred years before. (Daniel 10:5-12.) One of these word pictures describes Him before His humiliation, and the other after He had received back the glory He voluntarily released in order that fallen man might be elevated and glorified.

The effect of the vision was the same on both prophets. Blinded by the effulgent glory, they fall to the ground faint and helpless. Such a vision had the same effect on Saul of Tarsus at the gate of Damascus. No wonder the wicked cannot look upon Christ when He returns "in His own glory, and in His Father's" and the glory of all "the holy angels." These are the only two authentic pictures of our glorified Lord ever given by eyewitnesses. Is it any wonder that Jesus had to introduce Himself to His beloved disciple?

But the glorified Son of God is still "like unto the Son of man." Though glorified, He is still the God-man, Emmanuel, forever linked with humanity as our "Elder Brother." He ministers in our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary as "the Son of man," doing a work that He could not do when only the Son of God. Being made "in the likeness of men," He is able to intercede for mankind, because while on earth He was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Because of this new relationship to the human family Jesus requested the Father that He never be separated from His earthly brethren. (John 17:24.) For this reason He will take with Him wherever He goes a group of the redeemed out of the last and most wicked generation. (Revelation 14:1-5.) In harmony with the general plan of the book this description of the glorified Christ is divided into seven parts, representing the fullness of His beauty and the completeness of His authority to minister to the spiritual needs of the seven churches, and thus to the universal church.

### **"A Crown of Glory"**

"His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." In Daniel 7:9 the Father, "the Ancient of Days," is described as clothed in a garment "white as snow," with "the hair of His head like the pure wool." Since Jesus is "the express image of His person," He too has snowy white hair, representing His age, beauty, glory, and wisdom. The Scriptures declare that "the beauty of old men is the gray head," because "with the ancient is wisdom"; therefore, "the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." (Proverbs 20:29; 16:31.) Venerable age should indicate increased wisdom and experience. Old age for counsel is a Scriptural principle.

Because of His age, wisdom, and experience the Lord is “great in counsel.” He is vested with the attributes of eternity. “His understanding is infinite” because His age is infinite. In Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” He is the Alpha and Omega of wisdom. In Him is the accumulated wisdom of the eternal ages. Also Jesus “ever lives to make intercession” for His people, because He is without ancestral beginning or end of days. In this life white hair may represent feeble health and declining strength, but with the members of the Godhead it is the emblem of wisdom, glory, and antiquity. In this first vision of the Apocalypse the One whom the book reveals is pictured as crowned with the immaculate wisdom and glory of eternity. It was thus that, Jesus appeared during His brief glorification on the mount of transfiguration, when the three disciples saw Him in His glorified state as His divinity flashed through His humanity.

### **His Flashing Eyes**

“His eyes were as a flame of fire,” or like 9amps of fire,” as described in Daniel’s vision. “Like flaming fire,” is another translation, and “His eyes flashed like fire” is the rendering by James Moffatt. Later Jesus said, “I am He which searches the reins and hearts.” Revelation 2:23. The penetrating gaze of Jesus discerns the thoughts and motives that give birth to words and deeds. He knows all men and what is in man. He is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” He is omniscient. He has all-penetrating intelligence and knowledge. He has the power to read all secrets, and nothing can be concealed from His searching, piercing, penetrating gaze. His flaming eyes search all hearts and bring all secret and hidden things to light. They penetrate the darkest and uttermost depths of the soul and light up sin’s most secret hiding places.

Christ’s eyes flash fire as He beholds iniquity in the churches for whom He ministers. They burn with holy indignation against all wrong. “For His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He sees all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” Job 34:21, 22. “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.” Hebrews 4:13.

It was said that one of the marks of Caesar’s power over men was his fiery eyes-his penetrating and revealing gaze, before which his enemies could not stand without quailing. The blazing eyes of Christ represent not only His infinite wisdom and penetrating knowledge but also “the indignation of the Holy One at the discoveries of evil which He thus makes. These ‘eyes of fire’ do not merely look through the hypocrite and sinner, but consume him, him and his sins together.” (Trench, Page 38.) His eyes also light up with pleasure as He beholds the development of godly character: “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.” 2 Chronicles 16:9.

### **His Glowing Feet**

“And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” Like “polished brass,” is Daniel’s description. In other translations of our text we read that “His feet glowed like burnished bronze,” or “like fine brass glowing with fire,” or “like silver-bronze when it is white-hot in a furnace.” Brass is considered the most enduring of all metals. Brass or bronze is used here to denote unwearied endurance and stability-irresistible strength and power. Christ is able to uphold all who put their trust in Him. His faithfulness endures forever. The feet of Jesus were doubtless bare, as were the feet of the priests as they ministered in the sanctuary.

The original Greek word for brass as used in our text, according to Suidas, refers to the famous metal made by the Greeks and Romans from a mixture of gold, silver, and copper. It is spoken of in Ezra 8:27 as “yellow, or shining brass” which was as “desirable” or “precious as gold.” (Margin.) It was sometimes called Corinthian brass, and is thought by some to be “of far higher value than even gold.” It is said that during the refining process of this metal the furnace threw off flames of indescribable glory. It is now an unknown metal.

This vision of Christ makes more meaningful the description of the messengers of God in Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace; that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that said unto Zion, Thy God reigns!” This description of the feet of those who preach the gospel must have special application to Christ, “the Messenger of the covenant.” How beautiful are His feet as He walks about among the churches, ministering to the spiritual needs of His people. They are beautiful to those who love Him, but terrible and consuming to those who are to be trampled underfoot. The altar of burnt offering in the court of the tabernacle was

made of brass. At that altar the wrath of God was appeased, the guilt of man expiated, and the judgments against sin were executed.

### **His Majestic Voice**

“And His voice as the sound of many waters.” “Many waves” and “many streams” are other translations. Daniel spoke of His words as “the voice of a multitude,” and Ezekiel as “the voice of an host” and “a noise of many waters.” (Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2.) The symbol represents volume, majesty, and musical harmony. “The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty,” declared the psalmist, and another prophet spoke of “His glorious voice.” (Psalm 29:4; Isaiah 30:30.) It is “voice,” and not “voices.” Jesus is the spokesman not only of the Godhead but also of the hosts of heaven. When He speaks it is the voice of the universe.

When the Son of God speaks, His messages have the beauty, harmony, and majesty of the united notes of an orchestra, the harmonious voices of a well-trained choir, or the symphonic melody of the waves of the sea or a mighty waterfall. On Patmos, John was accustomed to the melody of the waves of the Aegean Sea. These roaring waves and foaming billows spoke with a united voice. The voice of Jesus is multitudinous in its majesty, comprehensive in its fullness, far reaching in its effects with a message that is deep, beautiful, and harmonious.

### **The Seven Stars**

“And He had in His right hand seven stars,” which are interpreted in verse 20 as symbolic of the “angels of the seven churches,” or “the ministers of the seven churches.” (Weymouth.) Here is a wonderful lesson as to the holiness of the office and the solemnity of the responsibility of the ministers of Christ. The figure indicates that the power and authority to minister to the spiritual needs of God’s people have their origin not with the church but with Christ, the head of the church. Jesus upholds the ministers who, as His spokesmen, preach His Word. The right hand is the symbol of power, authority, and honor. The stars in the right hand of Christ indicate the high honor bestowed upon His ambassadors as well as His absolute control over them. It also indicates their safety amid the dangers that surround them because of the continuous attacks of the enemy. Christ is their possessor, upholder, and protector. The symbolic picture demands unswerving fidelity and unquestioned loyalty on the part of the ministers of Christ in their service in His stead among the churches.

### **His Cutting Messages**

“And out of His mouth went a sharp two edged sword.” It is a “broad sword” (Emphatic Diaglott), or “a sharp sword with a double edge” (Moffatt). The illustration is doubtless taken from the Greek Thracian broadsword or the Roman double-bladed sword. It represents “the sword of the Spirit” that cuts its way even to the “thoughts and intents of the heart.” The Word of God in the hands of the Spirit does a double service. It convicts and converts the righteous, and it condemns and destroys the wicked. In Revelation 19:15 is a description of Christ at His Second Advent, when “out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations.”

“He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword” is a prophecy of Christ in Isaiah 49:2, and in Isaiah 11:4 we are told that when Christ comes the second time “He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:8 it is said that at His Second Advent “the Lord shall consume” the wicked “with the spirit of His mouth,” and “shall destroy” them “with the brightness of His coming.” The symbol is an appropriate representation of the all-penetrating word of Christ by which the secrets of the heart are revealed. He goes about among His churches speaking His word, and His messages are cutting and penetrating. He smites to wound that He may bind up and heal, as on the day of Pentecost.

How appropriate is the appeal: “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.” Hosea 6:1.

### **His Brilliant Countenance**

“And His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength.” “The sun shining with his full strength,” or “in the fullness of his power,” are other translations. In Daniel’s vision of Michael he said that His face had “the appearance of lightning.” The sun is the symbol of divine majesty. It is the best illustration of glory and brightness known to man. The churches are symbolized by lamps, the ministers of Christ by stars, but Christ by the glory of the sun shining in the fullness of its noonday power. Such was the

appearance of Christ at His transfiguration, and when Paul saw Him near the gate of Damascus he was blinded by the light that shined “above the brightness of the sun.”

Although the sun is so bright it is terrible to look upon, it is nevertheless the source of life and light and power. Christ declared that He was “the light of the world,” and the prophet Malachi called Him “the Sun of Righteousness” because He is the supreme Life-giver and Light-giver of the spiritual world. No man in his sinful state can behold the face of the glorified Christ and live. Only those who behold His character and become like Him now, can look upon His countenance and live when He returns. Then the wicked will call for the rocks and mountains to fall upon and hide them “from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” Revelation 6:16.

Two recent writers thus sum up in a beautiful way the vision of the glorified Christ we have just been considering: “His eyes emit shafts of spiritual intelligence, love and omniscience. His countenance radiates beams of spiritual power like the midday sun. His voice is resonant with the majesty of many distant Niagaras, and out of His mouth proceeds utterance penetrating and dividing like a two edged sword.” (Stevens, Page 53.)

“The white hair, like sunlight gleaming on snow, pictures divine purity. The eyes flashing with fire picture divine knowledge piercing to the innermost secrets of the heart. The feet of burnished brass represent the ability to tread down all opposition. The Voice was, to John, like the sound of the surf roaring on the shore of his rocky isle, a symbol of irresistible power. The right hand holding the seven stars shows the angels of the churches to be under the absolute control of Christ and under His protecting care. The sharp sword proceeding out of His mouth is an image of His word of judgment which can punish and destroy, which none can resist or escape. The countenance like the unclouded sun symbolizes the heavenly glory and majesty of Him upon whom, with unveiled face, none could dare to gaze.” (Erdman, Page 41.)

#### **Effect on the Prophet**

“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 lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” Revelation 1:17, 18. This was the same effect the vision of Michael had on the prophet Daniel. (Daniel 10:7-12.) Moses, Job, Isaiah, Paul, and the Roman guard at the tomb of Christ all had similar experiences when they beheld the glory of God or of the angel Gabriel. This glory will slay the wicked at the Second Advent. If we do not permit the two-edged sword of the Spirit to destroy sin in us now it will slay us then.

When one contemplates this beautiful portraiture of the great High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary walking majestically amid the symbolic blazing lamps, clothed and girded for mediation ministry. Crowned with snow-white locks, and reflecting the light and purity of His character, treading a conqueror on feet glowing like silver-bronze, a voice so majestic and terrible that it shakes the heavens and earth. His right hand holding fast His shining messenger jewels, His mouth uttering words that penetrate and divide, and His countenance blazing with the light of the sun in the meridian of his power. He is almost overwhelmed with the supernal splendor of the scene and gladly bends the knee in humble submission to His sovereign will, or falls prostrate at the feet of Him who has been exalted “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”

Jesus tenderly placed His right hand—the hand of power, with which He upholds His ministers—upon the stricken apostle, and reminded him that He is the One who is vested with the attributes of eternity, the One whose existence is not temporary even though He had died on the cross. As the first and the last He upholds all things through the endless interval between the eternity of the past and the eternity of the future. With a beginningless past and an endless future, the temporary break of Joseph’s tomb does not interfere with His eternal purpose but rather confirms and assures its complete fulfillment.

“I am the first and the last, and the Living one.” (RV) All mere creatures in this rebel world are dying ones. Christ’s announcement to John indicated that since His resurrection He again is vested with the fullness of His pre-existing glory. John was nearing the century mark in age and must soon die and enter the prison house of the tomb. Christ’s words brought a comforting assurance that the power of the grave had been broken by His resurrection victory. Because I live, you also shall live, was His message. Jesus reminded the exiled prophet that He too had been condemned by a Roman court and sentenced by a Roman judge. He had been placed in a tomb secured by a Roman seal and guarded by Roman soldiers. But all the power of the iron monarchy of Rome could not hold Him captive. Moreover, He brought with Him from the tomb the keys of death and the grave. The keys that unlock the prison house of death were in the

keeping of a friend.

“The keys of the gates of death” is the Weymouth translation. “The gates of death” and “the gates of hell” are Old Testament expressions. The key is the symbol of authority to open and shut. (Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:19.) In the Targums and Talmud the key to the grave is declared to be one of the four keys which God does not entrust to a ministering angel but reserves for His own use. Jesus tells John that He possesses supreme authority over the dominion of death and the grave. In the Scriptures death is reckoned as a prison house. (Job 3:18.) Satan claims the dead as his captives, but does not have the power to release them. (Isaiah 14:17, margin.)

Death is a mighty power which locks up and holds fast all who come under its cruel sway. It has been estimated that more than one hundred and forty billions of people have lived on the earth and all but two billions have died and returned to the dust. The earth is a vast cemetery, and every-where death’s victims lie in fetters of silence and darkness, awaiting the call of the Life-giver, into whose keeping has been delivered the keys of death and the grave. With the breaking of the fetters of death and the unlocking of the doors of the tomb, the righteous will come forth to life eternal, and death, “the last enemy,” will meet its eternal doom. Because of His resurrection victory, the power over death is now in the exclusive and permanent possession of Him who is “the resurrection and the life.”

John was instructed to write what he had already seen in the introductory vision, the conditions that then prevailed in the seven churches, and what was yet to be revealed in apocalyptic vision concerning future events to the end of the reign of sin. These disclosures were to be made by the divine Author of the Revelation by virtue of His office as the Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, as “the first and the last,” the “ever living One,” and the possessor of the keys of death and the grave. “It is in view of such divine power, and as the agent of such a divine Person, that John is commissioned to compose his prophecy.” (Erdman, Page 42.) The importance of the first vision is emphasized by the fact that in it the entire Apocalypse is wrapped up in embryo, for the whole plan of redemption centers on the mediation work of Christ.

## **8. THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST TO EPHESUS**

UNTO THE angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things said He that holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou cannot not bear them which are evil. And thou has tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars: and has borne, and has patience, and for My name’s sake has labored, and has not fainted.

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou has, that thou hates the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Revelation 2:1-7.

The epistle of Christ to the church of Ephesus is the first of seven that He dictated to His scribe John and sent to the seven churches of Asia. While the entire Apocalypse was sent to all seven, to each church Christ wrote a personal letter to give the whole book a more personal application. The word church means a company who have been “called out of” or “from among.” It is an assembly of those who have been called out of the world and from among unbelievers and then sent back into the world as Christ’s ambassadors. The church of Ephesus was composed of the Christians of that city, who had been called out of Judaism and heathenism by the gospel. The Greeks used the word church to denote a select assembly of free citizens to transact business. In Christianity the church is the organized society of the called, or elected, to transact business for the Lord.

### **Sevenfold Division**

Each of these seven letters is divided into seven parts, indicating that it contains a perfect and complete message to the church and period to which it applies, containing all the warnings, reproofs, counsels, and promises necessary to correct the prevailing conditions. These divisions are (1) the superscription, which names the recipient, or the church addressed; (2) the identification of the writer, or divine Author; (3) a description of the spiritual condition that was praiseworthy, or commendable. (4) The-

things to be reproved, censured, or condemned; (5) the exhortation- to repent in view of the need; (6) the appeal to hear, and the identification of the Holy Spirit as the joint Author of the letter; (7) the promised reward to the overcomer.

The only variations in this order are that in the first three letters the appeal precedes the promised reward and in the last four it follows, and that Smyrna and Philadelphia are given no reproof and Sardis and Laodicea receive no praise.

The Author of the letter to the church of Ephesus identifies Himself in the opening statement. In harmony with the custom of the time, the writer gives his name or identity in the opening salutation rather than at the close, as we do today. See the beginning of Paul's epistles and also Acts 23:26. In each of the introductions of the seven epistles of Christ, He identifies Himself by one of the sevenfold descriptions given of Him in the introductory vision, the one that is the most appropriate to the needs of that particular church. The sum of the seven introductions makes up the complete picture of the glorified Christ in His mediatorial ministrations in the heavenly sanctuary. "The seven different types of delineation to our Lord contained in the second and third chapters are in the first chapter combined in one. Each salutation of the seven epistles is thus part of the description of the Son of man in the first chapter of the book." (Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, Page 29.)

Speaking of this point, Sir William Ramsay says: "Corresponding to this sevenfold division in the Church, the outward appearance and envisages of the Divine Author of the Seven Letters is divided into seven groups of attributes. And one group of attributes is assumed by Him in addressing each of the Seven Churches, so that the openings of the Seven Letters, put together, make up His whole outward and visible character." (Page 177.) This fact is stated by A. T. Robertson as follows: "Each of the messages to the seven churches picks out a metaphor in the first picture of Christ in chapter 1 and there are frequent other allusions to the language in this picture." (Page 276.)

In other words, in each of the seven introductions is recalled one or more of the characteristics of Christ as recorded in the first vision, the seven completing the whole. Also that part of the imagery of the introductory vision is selected which is most appropriate to the needs of the particular church addressed and the nature of the message sent to it.

### **The Seven Stars**

Jesus identifies Himself as "He that holds the seven stars in His right hand." "In the grasp of His right hand." (Weymouth.) Anderson Scotty in the Century Bible, says: "In the image before the eye of the Seer the seven stars probably appear as a chain of glittering jewels hanging from the hand of Christ." These stars may have been in the form of a star-studded "crown of glory" or "royal diadem" in the right hand of Jesus. (Isaiah 62:3.) In Jeremiah 22:24 we read, "As I live, said the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon My right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence."

Trench declares that "in all the typical language of Scripture stars are symbols of lordship and authority, ecclesiastical or civil." Of Christ, the prophet said, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob"; and when Jesus was born the event was announced by a star that guided the wise men to the place of His birth. He is called "the bright and morning star"; and Lucifer before his fall was called "the day star" (margin), or "sun of the morning." In the dream of Joseph the twelve patriarchs were represented by twelve stars, and in Revelation 12 the woman symbolizing the church is crowned with twelve stars, representing the twelve apostles, the twelve leading lights of the church of Christ, and the twelve kings of the nations of the saved. In Daniel 12:3 faithful teachers of the gospel are represented as stars, that shine forever and ever; and in Jude 13 false teachers are called "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Just as the literal stars are placed in the heavens to shed light on their respective planets, so God has placed stars in the firmament of the spiritual heavens to shed light on mankind groping in darkness. These spiritual stars shine as long as they remain in the right hand of Christ. When they stray from Him they become "wandering stars," and eventually disappear in the darkness.

It is evident that the seven stars in the right hand of Christ represent the elders, or ministers, of the seven churches. "Messengers of the seven Congregations," is the rendering in the Emphatic Diaglott, and "The ministers of the seven churches," is the Weymouth translation. The word angel means "messenger," and in the Scriptures is applied to priests and ministers as well as to celestial beings. (Haggai 1:13; Malachi 2:7; 3:1.) As angels are called saints in Deuteronomy 33:21 it is not inappropriate for saints to be called angels in our text. The angels are likewise called stars. (Job 38:7; Revelation 12:4.) They are also called "ministering spirits" in Hebrews 1:14.

Trench declares that "the angel must be some person or persons in the church on earth" (page 58);

and Plumptre says: "That these bishop-angels of the Churches should be represented by the symbol of the stars must have seemed, as soon as the key was once given, to be simple and natural enough. They too were set in the firmament of heaven, of the kingdom of heaven, to give light upon the earth." (Page 48.) Since but one copy of the Apocalypse was written by John, it was only natural that it should be sent to the minister, or pastor, of each church who would in turn read it to the congregation. Timothy was doubtless the angel, or minister, of the church of Ephesus at that time, for according to tradition he was martyred at Ephesus in AD 97.

These letters were each addressed to "the angel of the church," but it is evident that the instruction was intended for the entire church. The two are inseparable, because the minister represents the whole church and is held responsible for its spiritual condition. Commenting on this text, an old writer said, "He makes one person of the angel and the church." In other parts of the Revelation the church proclaiming a heaven-sent message is symbolized by an angel from heaven. (Revelation 7:1-3; 10:1-7; 14:6-9; 18:1-6.) Swete declares that "in this symbolical book the angel of a Church may be simply an expression for its prevailing spirit, and thus be identified with the Church itself." (Page 22.) There is no contradiction or inconsistency between these two positions.

The right hand is the symbol of power and authority. (Isaiah 41:10-13.) Of those who follow Him Jesus said: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." John 10:28. Jesus "hath" or "holds!" His ministers in His right hand while they preach His Word as His spokesmen. "He holds the stars as one who rejoices in their brightness so long as they shine clearly, who sustains, protects, and guides them as He guides the stars of heaven in their courses, who can and will cast them away, even though they were as the signet on His right hand, should they cease to shine." (Plumptre, Page 61.) This symbolic representation is a great encouragement to the ministers of Christ, to whom He has given "the ministry of reconciliation" so that as "ambassadors for Christ" and "in Christ's stead" they plead with wayward men and women to be "reconciled to God." Ministers of the gospel should never forget their "high calling" as the angels of the churches, with the fearful responsibility and solemn implications involved in the term.

### **The Lamp Stands of Gold**

But Christ is the supreme head and bishop of the church universal. He is seen walking about among the seven golden candlesticks, or lamp stands. He who "walks to and fro among the seven lamp stands of gold." (Weymouth.) This symbol carries us back again to the introductory vision. The candlesticks, or lamp stands, of the Mosaic tabernacle were not tallow candles, but lamps with bowls for oil and wicks for the flame. There can be no question but this symbol is borrowed from the Old Testament, as are many of those used in the Revelation. In the holy place of the Mosaic tabernacle was a lamp stand with seven branches of pure gold. It was made in the likeness of an almond tree, with a central lamp with three lamps on each side in opposite pairs. The entire standard was elaborately ornamented with engraved figures and flowers. (Exodus 25:31-39.)

The seven-branched candlestick of the tabernacle contained a talent of gold, valued at about \$25,000. It was five feet in height and three and a half in width and weighed more than one hundred pounds. The lamps were supplied with pure beaten olive oil, and the lights were kept continually burning. (Exodus 27:20,21.) In Solomon's temple there were ten candlesticks. (1 Kings 7:49.) The seven-branched candlestick was carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, and was used by Belshazzar to help light up his banquet hall the fatal night of Babylon's doom. It was later carried to Rome by Titus to help grace his triumph, and when the Vandals captured the city of Rome they took it with them to Carthage, whence it disappeared.

Every article of furniture in the typical sanctuary was symbolic, and in the vision of John we are given the significance of the seven golden candlesticks. "The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." Revelation 1:20. This language cannot be misunderstood. What more appropriate symbol could be found of the church which Jesus declared to be "the light of the world?" Jesus spoke of the church as a lighted candle on a candlestick so that "it gives light unto all that are in the house." (Matthew 5:14-16.) The church of Christ is the light bearer to those who are in darkness. It is God's agency for the dissemination of the gospel light. Christians are represented as "lights in the world; holding forth the word of life." Philippians 2:15,16. The wise man

declared that "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." Proverbs 20:27. "Lamp" is the marginal reading. A lamp stand such as John saw in vision was an accepted symbol of the people of God, who, when filled

with His Spirit, give the light of divine truth to a world in gross darkness.

It is interesting to note that the only means of lighting the holy place of the typical sanctuary was the light from the seven-branched candlestick. In order to show that the light that makes the church the light of the world is that of divine grace rather than of nature, and that Christ is the source of all light, the light of day was excluded from this apartment of the tabernacle. The church is Christ's appointed witness, or light bearer, on earth. Aside from her teachings, there is no other source of light and truth in spiritual things. "A candelabrum was a light-bearer. Seven of these are exhibited in vision to the eye of John, to signify to him, as the sequel shows, that the church of the living God is the divinely constructed and completely equipped light-bearing institution of the world." - WILLIAM J. McKNIGHT, *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*. Page 24.

Seven is the symbol of unity in diversity. It represents perfect unity in the manifold operations of the church, or body, of Christ. The seven branches composing a single candlestick or lamp stand represent the church universal in all its branches, or congregations, throughout the ages of the Christian Era and in fact in all ages of the reign of sin. A well known Christian writer declared that "all of God's people upon the earth are one body, from the beginning to the end Of time. They have one Head that directs and governs the body." (White.) The seven lamps of the typical sanctuary had for centuries borne their testimony that God is Light, and that that "Light revealed itself in manifold variety growing out of central unity." (Plumptre, Page 33.)

The stars and candlesticks are both spoken of as a "mystery" in Revelation 1:20, which doubtless has the meaning of symbol. It is something previously hidden and now being revealed. It is paraphrased, "The hidden divine truth, now made known, but made known to God's favored ones only." (Cambridge Bible.) Only a few things are called mysteries in the Apocalypse, and these are explained. The seven candlesticks represent the seven churches of Asia, and they in turn the universal church. "The seven golden candlesticks of the Patmos vision represent seven churches, the mystery of which is that they in turn represent a sevenfold unfolding in regard to the entire history of Christendom." - W. LAMB, *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, Page 33. "The seven churches represent for us the whole church. There were many other churches in Asia that might have been used but it was sufficient for the purpose to select seven, and these representative of various aspects of the whole historical church." - HERBERT H. GOWEN, *The Revelation*, Page 15.

Gold is symbolic of purity and glory. The most precious of all metals is often mentioned in the Revelation. We read of the "golden girdle," "golden crown," "golden vials," "golden censer," "golden altar," "golden reed," and the city of "pure gold." Gold was both the sacred and the royal metal of the ancient world. Trench declares that "throughout all the ancient East there was a sense of sacredness attached to this metal." (Page 33.) The golden candlesticks indicate the high estimation in which Christ holds His church. It is "the apple of His eye," "the object of Christ's supreme regard." Nothing on earth is as dear to Christ as His church, which is represented as His "body," and His "wife," or "bride."

Jesus is seen in vision walking about "in the midst of the seven lamp-stands of gold," indicating His ceaseless service and unwearied activity and vigilance in behalf of His people, That His work is that of a priest is evident from the description of His garments. He wears "a priestly garment down to the foot." (See Exodus 28:1-8, Rhemish Translation.) It is the garment worn by Aaron and his sons. Jesus is here represented as the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, where He carries on His mediatorial work in behalf of His people on earth. "The book of Revelation finds Christ just where the book of Hebrews leaves Him."

The location of the golden girdle indicates that Jesus is more than a priest. He is the Priest-King. (Isaiah 22:21, 22.) He has a "girdle of gold across His breast" (Weymouth), or "a long robe, and a belt of gold around His breast" (Moffatt.) (Daniel 10:5.) The girdle of the high priest was only interwoven with gold. The antitype always exceeds the type. It is the girdle of Christ's righteousness and faithfulness mentioned in Isaiah 11:5. The gold is the emblem of both regal and sacerdotal dignity. Inasmuch as a king was more exalted than a priest, the kingdom of Christ is spoken of more often than His priesthood. Jesus, as He ministers among the churches, is prophet, priest, and king.

#### In the Holy Place

It is also evident that the ministry Of Christ as seen by the prophet in vision is that represented by the holy place rather than the most holy, as some contend. The position of Jesus among the candlesticks positively identifies the phase of ministry upon which He entered after His ascension. You are ushered right through the Outer Court into the Holy Place. The theme to be studied is the spiritual life of the church-its

development, expansion, growth in grace, its sanctification. The golden candelabra make us conscious that we are in the vicinity of the table of 'show bread' and the 'altar of incense.' The church is being considered as a body of men and women who are feeding on 'the bread of the Presence,' and who through the intercessions of their great High Priest at the golden altar are being kept in constant communication with Him who sits within the veil upon the Mercy Seat, in order that they may become, by means of these provisions, the joyous, consistent, triumphant light bearers of the world." (McKnight, Page 52, 53.)

In the Mosaic tabernacle service the high priest and his assistants were types of Christ. As they served in the court, the priests represented God in their ministry to the people. In the holy and most holy places they represented the people before God. Because Christ is the God-man He is the representative of both God and man in His ministry in the court on earth and before the Father in heaven. In the introductory vision He is pictured in His priestly ministration in the heavenly sanctuary, and in His letters to the seven churches He is described as ministering among the churches on earth. It is one ministry in both places. "While Jesus ministers in the sanctuary above, He is still by His Spirit the minister of the church on earth." WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, Page 166. In the vision Jesus is seen moving about among the symbolic lamps, supplying them with the oil of His grace so that they can accomplish their light-bearing mission in the world.

One of the duties of the typical priests was to keep the lamps trimmed and burning, and so Christ is seen in the garments of a priest, walking among His churches, speaking messages of warning and reproof, His piercing, blazing eyes seeing everything, and with His right hand upholding His messengers, who preach His Word. Supplied with the heavenly oil, the churches shed a celestial radiance in the midst of terrestrial darkness. The light is the Word of God. (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23.) Jesus is declared to be the living Word, the Truth, the Light of the world. The church is only the light bearer.

The representation in the apocalyptic vision seems to be borrowed from Zechariah 4, where "the two anointed ones" are symbolized by "two olive trees" which stand by the "seven lamps" and through "two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves" into the 'bowls that feed the lamps and keep them burning. A well-known Christian writer says: "When the anointed ones empty themselves through the golden pipes, the golden oil flows out of themselves into the golden bowls, to flow forth into the lamps, the churches." (White.)

Although Christ upholds the angels, or ministers, responsible for the oversight of His flocks, He is Himself the Chief Shepherd. Commenting on the Revelation vision of Christ, the same writer says: "This figure illustrates the eternal vigilance of our Savior. Christ is in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks walking from church to church, from congregation to congregation, from heart to heart. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." - *The Watchman Magazine*, May 19, 1908.

Again we read from the same author: "With untiring wakefulness and unremitting vigilance, He watches to see whether the light of any of His sentinels is burning dim or going out. If the candlesticks were left to mere human care, the flickering flame would languish and die; but He is the true watchman in the Lord's house, the true warden of the temple courts. His continued care and sustaining grace are the source of life and light." - *Acts of the Apostles*, Page 586.

### **The Seven Epistles**

The seven letters of Christ to the seven churches of Asia represent a complete gospel message to the universal church of Christendom. These prophetic letters constitute a foundation for the entire Apocalypse. They are not merely historical portraits of the apostolic church, but prophetic types of conditions in the church universal to the end of time. "These letters hang before our eyes not only literal photos of those seven churches, but types also of churches and of believers throughout the present militant career of God's children, as they march through the path of tribulation, besetment and peril till the end of the high priestly dispensation of the glorified Jesus." (Stevens, Page 63, 64.)

Dr. Bengel placed these seven epistles of Christ above everything else in importance and commended them to the special study of young ministers. Seven times the command is repeated to hear the instruction contained in them. And yet no other portion of the Bible receives so little study. Although they are of equal importance with the other epistles of the New Testament they have not received a tithe of the attention. Hundreds of books have been written on the discourses of Christ as recorded in the Gospels, whereas there are scarcely tens devoted to His seven epistles, even though they were written under His direct dictation and their truths attested to by His own signature, and every Christian is urged by a sevenfold admonition to hear and give serious consideration to the revelations they contain.

Each of these seven letters has a threefold application. It contains a prophetic history (1) of the city

in which the church was located, and (2) of the church itself, and (3) of the period of the church universal represented by the church addressed. All seven together picture the Christian church between the ascension of Christ and His Second Advent. Though the chief application of the message to the church of Ephesus is to the initial period of Christian history, we will notice now the history of the city and of the local church which first received the Apocalypse from the exiled apostle. Ephesus was the home of John, and according to Polycarp he died and was buried there. The mother church of the province received the introductory epistle.

### **City of Ephesus**

The word Ephesus means “desirable.” It is also said to carry the meaning of “having relaxed” or “let go.” It was considered the most desirable city of the province and of Asia Minor. Ephesus was built in the eleventh century before Christ, probably by Androclus, the son of the last king of Athens. It was located at the mouth of the Cayster River on the slopes of the hills overlooking the Aegean Sea. Its beautiful location, together with the fertile soil and excellent climate, made it a very desirable place to live. During its earlier history Ephesus had one of the finest harbors of the world, which was protected by high hills and a narrow channel easily guarded from enemy ships. The ships of all nations visited this harbor, and Ephesus became one of the chief commercial centers of the west coast of Asia. By imperial edict it was made the gateway to the province of Asia for Roman officials.

Stamped on coins found in the ruins of Ephesus are the titles, “First of all the greatest,” and “The first and greatest metropolis of Asia.” Strabo called Ephesus “the greatest emporium of Asia west of the Taurus.” Sir William Ramsay pictures two coins indicating the prominence of Ephesus. One of them shows “a Roman war-vessel, propelled by oars, not sails, lightly built, active and independent of winds. The legend ‘First Landing’ marks it as the ship that conveys the proconsul to his landing place in Ephesus.” The other coin pictures “a ship under sail”; it indicates “the maritime trade that frequented the harbor of Ephesus.” (See Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*.) The city was known as “the light of Asia” and “the first City of Asia.” Ephesus was the meeting place of several important Roman highways. One of these was the great trade route from the valley of the Euphrates which ran through Colosse and Laodicea. Another came from the province of Galatia through Sardis. And the third was the great coastal highway running northward through Smyrna and Pergamos and southward through the Maeander valley. Since the emperor of Rome visited the provinces through his representative, the proconsul, “Ephesus was the spot where the Majesty of Rome first set foot on the soil of the Province.” (McKnight, Page 81.)

### **Archaeological Discoveries**

Archaeologists have traced thirty-six thousand feet of the wall built by Lysimachus enclosing one thousand and twenty seven acres within the city of Ephesus. The wall was ten feet thick, with towers every one hundred feet and with six gates. From the harbor to the city was a very wide and beautiful boulevard entering the city under a triumphal arch, and lined with monumental buildings. The city was adorned with magnificent temples built by Nero, Hadrian, and Severus, besides the famous temple of Diana (Latin), or Artemis (Greek). The city was consecrated in the minds of the people by many myths and legends of gods and goddesses, making it one of the sacred cities of the pagan world. It was also a city of festivals and pleasures. The floor plan of its principal theater has been uncovered and is still intact. It extends up the slope of the hillside, rising tier upon tier. Its estimated seating capacity was twenty-five thousand.

The Temple of Diana alone made the city famous. This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The earliest temple was a century in building, and was completed in 480 BC, Or about the time the Jews under Ezra were returning from Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem. This temple was burned in 356 BC, on the night Alexander the Great was born. It was later claimed that Artemis, the goddess of childbirth, was away from the temple attending the birth of Alexander, and the temple was burned because left unguarded by its goddess. Alexander offered to rebuild the temple at his own expense, but the offer was refused. It was rebuilt by donations from all Asia, and its erection required two hundred and twenty years. The second temple was destroyed by the Goths in AD 262 and was never rebuilt.

The location of the Temple of Diana was unknown in modern times until discovered by archaeologists in 1869. Mr. J. T. Wood led the expedition that started searching for the temple site on May 2, 1863. Through an inscription found in the ruins of the city it was learned that the temple was not located in the city itself, where all others had been searching for it. The searchers discovered a magnificent gate, through which ran a street thirty-five feet wide paved with stones of fine marble. Following the roadway, they found the boundary wall of the temple on May 2, 1869. Later the same year they discovered the

foundations of the temple at a depth of twenty feet. Mr. Wood spent five years excavating among the ruins of the temple, employing from one hundred to three hundred men. He found six sculptured drums from ancient columns, each of which was twenty feet in circumference and six feet high. The temple was built of white, red, blue, and yellow marble of the finest quality. At least part of this material had doubtless been brought to Ephesus from Patmos, where large marble quarries were located.

The foundation on which the temple stood was four hundred and twenty-five feet long and two hundred and twenty feet wide, and was reached by a flight of ten steps. The temple itself was one hundred and sixty feet by three hundred and forty feet, and was supported by one hundred and twenty seven pillars sixty feet in height. This left a porch surrounding the building proper between thirty and forty feet wide.

Instead of mortar, gold was reputed to have been used between the joints of marble blocks. The interior, like that of most Grecian temples, was open to the sky. The temple was a place of worship, a museum, a place of refuge, and a treasure house. Kings and wealthy men stored their riches in the temples of their gods and goddesses. (Daniel 1:2.) The Temple of Diana was therefore a bank where treasure was kept under the protecting care of the great goddess. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of priests were connected with the temple ritual. There were also multitudes of priestesses dedicated to prostitution in the service of the temple.

The greatness of the Temple of Diana in Paul's day is indicated by its description in Acts 19:27. In the margin of Acts 19:35 Ephesus is called "the temple keeper," and various inscriptions have been found in the ruins declaring that the city was the "temple-keeper of Diana," "the temple-keeper of the divine emperor." One inscription reads: "The first and greatest metropolis of Asia and twice temple-keeper of the Emperors, according to the decrees of the sacred assembly of the temple-keepers of Artemis." Artemis was not only the chief deity of the city and province but one of the principal goddesses of the pagan world. This is indicated in Acts 19:27, 28. It was the temple "whom all Asia and the world worshipped."

Diana was reckoned as the daughter of Jupiter and the twin sister of Apollo. She was known as the moon goddess, and was doubtless one of the many manifestations of Semiramis, the "Mother of the gods." Inscriptions call her the "Savior goddess" and the "Mother of God." She is represented as a many-breasted goddess seated with an infant in her arms.

She is sometimes represented as holding a tambourine in one hand and a cup in the other. In AD 431 a great council of the Christian church was held at Ephesus, at which time the phrase "Mother of God" was applied to Mary. "For fifty generations or more the people of Asia Minor had worshipped a great mother goddess, often with her consort son. It was at Ephesus, the center of the worship of Diana, that ecclesiastics, many of whom had but a slight training in Christianity, adopted this article into their statement of religious faith."-The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 1, Page 282, art. "Asia Minor." Thus at the reputed home of Mary, who lived with John till the time of her death, the pagan Madonna became the emblem of the virgin mother of Jesus.

Acts 19:23-41 records the persecution that resulted from the preaching of Paul, and the consequent loss of faith in paganism and loss of business in the selling of shrines of the goddess. Traffic in shrines was one of the principal industries of Ephesus. The sale of these idols, or shrines, to pilgrim worshipers from all parts of the world resulted in an enormous profit. Not only were they worshiped as gods but they were supposed to charm away evil spirits and protect the devotee from danger of all kinds. An inscription has been found with the name of "Demetrius son of Menophilus," which indicates that he was president of the board of magistrates, or city fathers. This probably accounts for his great influence and authority and explains his ability to stir up the whole city against Paul.

Hundreds of shrines have been discovered, with inscriptions indicating that the shrine business constituted one of the chief industries. Records of gifts of gold and silver shrines valued as high as \$850,000 were found on inscriptions. One inscription was found written on black marble, giving rules of magic. This throws light on the statement in Acts 19:18, 19. These books of "curious arts," magic, charms, and incantations were sold to visitors at fabulous prices, and constituted another lucrative source of income that helped make Ephesus wealthy and famous.

### **City of Change**

The message to the church of Ephesus and the subsequent history of the city indicate that the "desirable city" would become the city of change and decay, the declining city. After the destruction of the temple in the third century and the filling up of the harbor with sediment from the Cayster River, Ephesus rapidly declined. Efforts to hold the water back and deepen the harbor were made by making narrower the channel between the harbor and the sea, but this only seemed to hasten the in filling process. All dredging

operations proved unavailing.

Today the site of the once proud and prosperous Ephesus is six miles from the sea, and what was once the entrance to the spacious harbor, is a shallow, sandy beach unapproachable by ships. The harbor was abandoned in the fourth century, and its wide expanse is now a pestilential morass covered with mud and rushes, or windswept plains overgrown with weeds. The city soon suffered the cruel fate of the temple and harbor, and is now a part of the desert waste. The city has literally been moved "out of his place," as Christ threatened to do with the candlestick of the church of Ephesus.

The candlestick was removed, and "the first city of Asia" was no longer a brilliant light in the commercial and political world. "The Light of Asia" went out in total darkness. Silence, malaria, and death now brood over the ruins of the once-magnificent city. The heavy masonry of her ruined temples and walls lies scattered in profusion where the metropolis of Asia once reveled in her pride and glory. "Remnants of cyclopean walls, causeways, temples, streets, and houses, line the plains and hills and mountain-sides of a vast area which was once filled with their glory; but the whole place is a complete desolation, enveloped in a poisonous atmosphere, and tenanted only by things unclean and vile." (Seiss, Page 122.)

## 9. EPHEBUS THE ERA OF WANING LOVE

THE MESSAGE of Christ to the church of Ephesus is prophetic not only of the history of the city, which began in a desirable condition and ended in a heap of ruins, but also of the local church in Ephesus. The charter members of the Ephesian church were a small group of the disciples of John the Baptist. The church was later visited by Apollos, who also knew only the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla were doubtless the first Christians in Ephesus, and Apollos was their first convert.

When Paul visited Ephesus in AD 56 he reorganized the church, with a membership of about twelve, who after their rebaptism received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The entire city was mightily stirred by Paul's message. According to Acts 20:31, Paul remained in Ephesus for three years. Since Ephesus was the metropolis of Asia, the message during this period spread over the whole province. It was doubtless during this time that the other churches of the province were established. (Acts 18:24-28; 19.)

The church of Ephesus had received the labors of Apollos, Paul, John, and Timothy. It was the home of John, and the ruins of a church still remain where it is said he was buried. The mother of Jesus doubtless lived here till the time of her death, for Jesus gave her into John's keeping just before He died on the cross. Here Timothy died a victim of mob violence because of his protest against the unbridled licentiousness during one of the festivals in honor of the goddess Diana. Paul said he labored in Ephesus three years "night and day with tears," and wonderful were the results.

The modern preacher may be cultured and eloquent, yet there are but few tears in either the pulpit or the pews. Paul's ministry of tears produced great results, stirring all Asia with the gospel message. The power and progress of Christianity in the city was so great that it threatened the supremacy of the great goddess Diana and the shrine industry under the control of Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, and mob violence was the result. It would be far better if modern preaching met with such a reception rather than the present lifeless indifference.

Jesus enumerates seven marks of faithfulness in the Ephesian church, which He commends. Their love, faith, and zeal were manifested by their works, labor, patience, hatred of evil, zeal in testing false apostles, perseverance under persecution, and steadfastness to the faith. The Ephesian Christians demonstrated their love and faith by their works. "I know thy works" is common to all seven letters, but it does not always mean good works. It has the meaning of "life," "character," or "conduct." The statement indicates that, Christ is omniscient and that His piercing eyes see all. Nothing escapes His vision.

Labor in the Greek carries the meaning of "labor unto weariness," and patience means "persevering endurance" or "the brave and persistent endurance of the Christian." The patience of the Ephesians, however, did not indicate indifference to sin. Though these early Christians could not bear evil and evil men, they could bear persecutions, ridicule, and reproaches for Christ's sake. They were intolerant of evil, but tolerant of all else. They could bear anything except the presence of evil and impostors in their membership. They had the discerning of spirits, and had taken to heart Paul's warning concerning the coming of false apostles. (Acts 20:28-30.)

A careful reading of Acts 19 and 20 is enough to convince anyone of the unparalleled zeal of the members of the local church of Ephesus. When they accepted Christianity they burned in the public square

before “all men” their books of magic. This is a worthy example for modern Christians in disposing of the filthy and trashy literature which is far more demoralizing than the Ephesian books of magic. These books could have been sold, but these earnest believers did not intend that others should be corrupted by them. They were not ashamed of their faith. Mighty miracles were wrought among them—some of the greatest recorded in the Scriptures.

To the Ephesian church Paul wrote one of the best and most spiritual of all his epistles, containing some of the deepest and most sublime of his revelations of divine truth. It contains practically no reproofs, and indicates that a splendid spiritual state existed at that time. Ephesus was located on the highway between Palestine and Rome, and through it passed a continual stream of visitors and strangers, and the church often had to discriminate between pretended believers and apostles and those who were genuine. For their ability and carefulness in this respect Jesus highly commended them.

But the desirable condition of the church of Ephesus did not long continue. The early love, zeal, patience, liberality, and spiritual power waned, and strife and dissension took the place of unity and brotherly love. The prediction of Paul came true, and false teachers and counterfeit doctrines multiplied. Worldliness crept into the church, and evil men were tolerated. Miracles and missionary work diminished and finally disappeared. Paul’s warning recorded in Ephesians 4:14 was no longer heeded. The church began to decrease in membership with the decline of the city, and was finally disbanded. One who visited the ruins of Ephesus less than a hundred years ago found near by a few miserable huts. Among the inhabitants were three professed Christians, and they were so ignorant that they scarcely had heard of the names of Paul and John. Like the city, the local church began in a desirable condition and ended in ruins.

### **The Ephesian Period**

Of the Ephesian period of the church of Christ, Joseph A. Seiss says: “In the first place, the seven Churches represent seven phases or periods in the Church’s history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ, the characteristics of which are set forth partly in the names of these Churches, but more fully in the epistles addressed to them. There has been an Ephesian period—a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others, and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and Church officers.” (Page 142.)

The name of Ephesus and the Ephesian message are prophetic of the universal Christian church during the days of the apostles, or the first century of Christianity. The beginning and history of the apostolic period of the universal church are strikingly similar to those of the local church of Ephesus. The Christian church began with twelve charter members, several of whom had received the baptism of John, the forerunner of Christ. As a result of the upper-room experience this little group received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. With this power they went forth conquering and to conquer. Jerusalem was mightily stirred, and was filled “with their doctrine,” just as was the city of Ephesus. The disciples of Jesus went “every where preaching the word,” and multitudes accepted the faith. Mighty miracles were wrought, and the progress of the Christian religion was phenomenal. According to the historian Gibbon, there were between five and six million converts in the empire alone by the close of the first century. The gospel went to all the world in a single generation. (Colossians 1:23; Titus 2:11.)

The early church was noted for its unflinching zeal and patient endurance under persecution, its uncompromising attitude toward evil and evildoers, its ability to put pretending apostles to the acid test of Scripture, and its fearless exposure of lying claimants to fellowship and leadership. Their ability to detect and expose false apostles indicates that there were other apostles besides the twelve. Paul declared that the faith of the early Christians was “spoken of throughout the whole world.” They were noted for their love, unity, pure faith, missionary zeal, and abounding liberality. The Lord supplied all the men and means needed for evangelistic endeavor. Miracles were performed even greater than those wrought by Christ Himself, as He had promised. (John 14:12; Acts 2:43-47; 4:31-35; 5:12-16; 9:31.) “The Church, however, throughout the whole of Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria, had peace and was spiritually built up; and grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord and receiving encouragement from the Holy Spirit.” Acts 9:31, Weymouth.

Just as the progress of the gospel in Ephesus diminished the income of the silversmiths and brought persecution, the progress of the gospel during the Ephesian period threatened the prestige and authority of the Jewish leaders and diminished their income through the sale at exorbitant prices of sacrificial offerings in the temple service. Joseph and Nicodemus, two of the members of the Sanhedrin and among the wealthiest men of the nation, became Christians and poured their riches into the coffers of the

church. Saul of Tarsus soon followed their example, and the persecutor became the persecuted. The gospel seeds were watered by the blood of martyrs. Christ commended the patient endurance of the early Christians under trials and tribulations. Jesus said, "I know your doings." (Weymouth.) The Ephesian message is given from the viewpoint of Christ's close scrutiny and intimate knowledge of the spiritual state of His people. He perceived all, and appreciated their virtue, especially their ability to detect wolves in sheep's clothing and put them to the Scriptural test. They had "found them liars." They were the agents of Satan masquerading as the apostles of Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15.) Wherever it was possible in the seven letters, Jesus gave praise, and wherever necessary He gave reproof. But He always recognized and mentioned that which was praiseworthy first, indicating that He is more interested in finding the good in His people than in discovering evil. This is a noble example for all who have to deal with the erring. After praising the virtues of the Christians of the first century, like a faithful friend Jesus points out their faults. He is able to see much to admire where human beings see much to deplore and condemn. Jesus has a very keen eye for that which is good. (2 Chronicles 16:9.)

After commending them Jesus added, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee." This notwithstanding their good qualities. Their greatest fault was that they had left their first love and love works. They had "relaxed," or "abandoned," their first love. "You no longer love Me as you did at first." (Weymouth.) Their love for Christ had not been entirely extinguished; it had diminished and become half-warm. When Paul wrote his epistle to the same church more than thirty years before, they were still in their first love. (Ephesians 1:15.) At that time there were apparently no signs of spiritual declension.

The Lord can never forget the first love and love works of His people. To ancient Israel He said: "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of your espousals, when thou went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of His increase." Jeremiah 2:2, 3. His love for His people was unchanged; the coldness was wholly on the part of the early Christians. He had commended them for their works, labor, and patience. What was wrong? It was not the "work of faith," the "labor of love," the "patience of hope." (1 Thessalonians 1:3.) Of faith, hope, and love Paul says that "the greatest of these is love." Love was lacking, and works without love are dead and useless. Love is the fountain of all true service. "For the love of Christ constrains us" declared the apostles regarding the motive and compelling power of their zeal and works.

### **A Serious State**

When Christian love diminishes,- it is evident that some other person or attraction has superseded Christ in the affections. The Ephesian church had not abandoned the doctrines of Christ or the form of godliness. Her failure was in becoming untrue to the Person who is the very center and substance of Christianity. She had deserted her Lord in the pathway of love. In spite of the orthodoxy and doctrinal purity of the church, her love had cooled. The warmth of affection had given way to cold and lifeless orthodoxy. The machinery of a church may be in perfect working condition and at the same time love and love works be on the decline. Missionary activity was displacing Christ, and programs and ceremonies were endangering spiritual experience and fellowship. The church was busy doing for Christ rather than being like Him.

Commenting on this loss of love, Charles Spurgeon said: 'Thou has left thy first love.' 'Is that serious,' said one. It is the most serious ill of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth; if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my brethren, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with Him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a church, we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the Great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and deliver us from it. No peril can be greater than this. Lose love, lose all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy and holiness."

Love is the sign and evidence of Christian life. Zeal for mere doctrines may degenerate into hatred for those who differ in belief. A church may be sound in doctrines and patient under bitter persecution and yet be guilty of relaxing the love once manifest. "The great fault lies not in the outward but the inner life, visible only to Him 'Who sees in secret.' The task, the work, the organization, the bands of workers, the crowd of worshipers-all as great and splendid as ever, but that which made the whole to be living and true had gone. And only Christ sees it. Is it, in any measure, so with ourselves? It is so easy to offer our Lord the

head the hands, the feet, while the heart is far from Him. It is easy to drift into being an earnest and devoted Church worshiper and worker, devout in our services, busy in various departments of Church work, teaching, visiting, speaking, praying, and yet to have left the first love." - A Devotional Commentary, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Page 29.

### **The Warning**

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent," is the solemn warning. "Remember the height from which you have fallen," is the Moffatt translation, and Weymouth gives it, "Be mindful, therefore, of the height from which you have fallen." The loss of love for Christ is a fall from a high spiritual plane to a depth far below. It represents a back sliding condition that needs to be repented of. When the church ceased to be occupied with Christ and fervent in her love for Him, she fell, and great was the fall thereof. The church had fallen from love, and "God is love," therefore the church had fallen, or back slid from God. The "first works" had come out of their "first love," and when love diminished, the works did also. "Repent and live the life you lived before," or "Repent, at once and act as you did at first," are other translations. There can be no love works without love. A return to the first-love experience is the prerequisite to a repetition of the first love works. Works do not produce love, but genuine love shows itself in works. The relation between Christ and His church is illustrated in the Scriptures by that of a bridegroom and bride, or a husband and wife. Loss of love in the home, if not regained, will eventually prove fatal, and end in divorce.

The only remedy for waning love is to "remember" the first-love experience and then never be satisfied till it returns. Christ can never forget the first-love relationship. He remembers the beautiful love experience, and regrets its departure. The fault, however, is not His. It is the church that has relaxed her affection. A remembrance of the happy love state that once existed is sure to create a desire on the part of a Christian to return to it. The return journey, however, requires more effort and time than the fall. Looking back on the height of affection and experience once achieved, we must with slow and often painful steps begin the ascent again. The very memory of the ground lost produces humble contrition and persistent effort.

### **The Threat**

Unless there took place a speedy reformation, the candle stick would be removed and the church would cease to be the light of the world. This was no idle threat, for Christ had already removed the candlestick from the Jewish church and given it to another. To the Jews, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." It is the loss of love that forfeits the light and privilege of light bearing, of witnessing for Christ. The testimony of loveless members value and power. God values the service of love, and when this is lacking the mere round of ceremony is offensive to Him.

The very continuance of the testimony of the church depends on her love for Christ, to whom she belongs. The removal of the candlestick indicates removal from high standing and special privileges in the sanctuary of God. Love and light are closely related, for "God is light" and "God is love." When the church loses her love she will soon also lose her light, as well as a sense of duty to let it shine. Inasmuch as "love is the fulfilling of the law," the first works of obedience disappeared with the first love. "God is Light because God is Love. It is a case of cause and effect. Therefore, the light of the church must fail when the love fails; and there is no remedy but to 'repent and do the first works.'" -PHILIP MAURO, Of Things Which Soon Must Come to Pass, Page 94.

Love is the supreme grace of the Christian religion, and the cooling of that love is the first sign of decay and the first step toward a general apostasy. From the decline of love the early church marched steadily onward away from God, till apostasy climaxed in the scarlet woman, Babylon the Great. The church that started out as the light of the world finally plunged the world into the Dark Ages. The candlestick was removed, and darkness covered the earth till the blazing torch of gospel light was again held aloft in the great Reformation of the sixteenth century. "The candle of the wicked shall be put out" is a Biblical statement.

After ministering this severe rebuke Jesus added some more praise to mitigate the sting: "Still, you have this in your favor: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, and I hate them too." (Moffatt.) The bringing forth of a new virtue after giving such severe reproofs and dire threatening is an evidence of the most tender love and sympathy. All feelings of righteous indignation against evil which lead to a loathing

of those things which defile is welcomed by Christ as an evidence of life. There is hope where hatred of evil prevails. To love the things Christ loves and hate the things Christ hates is indeed praiseworthy. The Ephesian church did not fall into the common error of believing that doctrine can be divorced from obligation and that an intellectual acceptance of the gospel is superior to moral character. Failing in love was their only error.

There has been much conjecture regarding the origin and identity of the Nicolaitans, but they are doubtless included among those whom Paul predicted would arise in the church of Ephesus and “draw away disciples after them not sparing the flock.” (Acts 20:29-31.) Paul declared that “the mystery of iniquity” had already begun to work in his day. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7.) It is believed by some that the word Nicolaitan comes from Nicolas, meaning “conquering the people,” and indicates the danger of supplanting Christ and Christianity by false and counterfeit systems of religion. The exaltation of the clergy exercising lordship over the laity was one of the developments that appeared at an early date in the apostolic church.

According to Acts 6:5 one of the seven deacons was a man by the name of Nicolas, who was declared to be “a proselyte of Antioch.” Some believe that this indicates that he was not a Jew. Irenaeus says that this Nicolas was the founder of the sect of the Nicolaitans. Clement of Alexandria declared that Nicolas was a man of strong passions and principles, who was willing “to do violence to the flesh,” but unable to conceive the higher ideal of “the flesh being subdued by the Spirit.” He adds that Nicolas was not really responsible for the excesses of his followers. Some of the best modern students question the reliability of the testimony of these early writers regarding the origin of the Nicolaitans.

This sect is mentioned again in the epistle to the church of Pergamos, and the statement indicates that they were gaining headway in the church. They seem to have been liberals or modernists, who felt that the church was too strict in its standards, and they advised compromise. They were known as libertines, and were doubtless of the Gnostics, who arose to plague the early church. They seemed to have practiced immorality on the ground of spiritual liberty. Such a false conception of freedom from law early invaded the church, and is still popular in many quarters. Many believe in continuing in sin “that grace may abound.” The Nicolaitans believed in and practiced polygamy, and taught that it was lawful to eat food sacrificed to idols. The genuine Christians hated their evil deeds. Hate is the reverse of love, and there is a hate that is true to love. Jesus loved righteousness and hated iniquity. (Hebrews 1:9.)

### **Appeal and Reward**

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” The appeal to hear the voice of the Spirit is seven times repeated in the epistles of Christ. While Christ revealed Himself to John as the author of the Apocalypse, it was the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophet to write it. The voice of Christ is also the voice of the Holy Spirit. They two are chief of the witnesses through whom God speaks to man. The term churches indicates that all seven churches were to profit by each of the seven epistles.

It is a dangerous thing to refuse to listen when the Holy Spirit speaks, to close the ear to His appeals. In Zechariah 7:11-14, refusing to hearken and pulling away the shoulder and stopping the ears are said to lead to serious consequences. The heart finally becomes as hard “as an adamant stone,” on which no impressions can be made. “To day if you-will hear His voice, harden not your heart” is the admonition of Scripture in regard to the voice of the Spirit. The appeal to hear the message of the Apocalypse applies with special force to the church of this last generation. A refusal to hear and obey will lead to the unpardonable sin. It constitutes a rejection of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Ears as here used must include “faith, the ears of the soul.” Only those who are born of the Spirit have spiritual ears.

The seven promised rewards make up the sum of all the good things that were lost through disobedience, and that are to be regained through faith. “The word overcomes implies that the Christian life is a warfare from which there is no discharge, but it is a warfare, our author teaches, in which even the feeblest saint can prove victorious.” - R. H. CHARLES, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, Page 53, 54. Continuous overcoming brings to the victor a continuous supply of the fruit of the tree of life, for Paradise must begin here. The Scriptures in a symbolical sense constitute the leaves of the tree of life, and “its branches hang over the wall,” providing spiritual fruit to the saints on earth as a pledge and foretaste of the privilege of the Paradise restored.

Paradise is definitely located in Revelation 22:1,2,14 as being at the headquarters of the government of God. Man lost his right of access to the fruit of the tree of life and the blessings of Paradise through disobedience. The overcomer will return to his long-lost Eden home and again have a right to its

glories untold. The tree of life disappeared from the earth because of sin. It will reappear when Paradise is restored. What was lost through the disobedience of the first Adam will be restored through the obedience of the second Adam. Paradise is a Persian word adopted in both Greek and Hebrew. It means a park, or pleasure ground. It is called "the garden of God," and "the garden of the Lord." Paradise is "the garden of all delights." This promise to the members of the church of Ephesus constitutes a mighty and eloquent appeal for repentance and faithfulness, to "hear what the Spirit said unto the churches." Thus the first promise of the first epistle of Christ is of the restoration of the first thing lost through sin-access to the tree of life and its life-giving fruit.

## **10. SMYRNA THE PERIOD OF SUFFERING AND MARTYRDOM**

AND UNTO the angel of the church in Smyrna write; "These things said the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. 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. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches; He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death." Revelation 2:8-11.

Smyrna was the next city and church of importance in the province of Asia, and was the nearest to Ephesus, being about forty miles to the north. For this reason the church of Smyrna was the second of the seven to receive the Apocalypse. It was probably delivered to the minister or elder of the church in Smyrna by some member of the church of Ephesus after it had been read there. A copy may have been made and kept in Ephesus for further study. This epistle also has a threefold application, namely, to the city, to the local church, and to the Smyranean period of the universal church of Christendom.

Smyrna is synonymous with myrrh, which was an aromatic substance used sometimes as a healing ointment but more especially for embalming the dead. According to Psalms 45:8 and Canticles 3:6, myrrh seems to have been the special perfume of Christ as King and Bridegroom. One of the chief ingredients of myrrh was made by crushing and bleeding a plant of the same name. This thorny plant, or tree, grows about eight or nine feet high, and is found in Arabia and to some extent in Palestine. It is very bitter to the taste but has a fragrant odor, and the more the plant is crushed and bruised the greater the fragrance. The name Smyrna, therefore, indicates suffering and persecution which prove a blessing. Smyrna would be crushed by cruel persecutions, but as a result of her sufferings would be anointed for a death and burial that would end in a resurrection and renewal of life. Although the afflictions would be bitter to the victim, they would result in releasing to the world the perfume of heaven.

In the introduction to this epistle Christ identifies Himself as "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." "He who died and has returned to life," is another translation. (Revelation 1:17,18.) This introduction is well suited to a church that has passed through bitter persecution. To the church of martyrs was sent a message of cheer from the One who had triumphed over death and the grave, and had the keys of the tomb in His keeping. By His death and resurrection triumph, Jesus had robbed death of its sting and the grave of its victory. In identifying Himself, Jesus uses the attributes that would bring courage and support to His people during persecution and martyrdom. If they would be "faithful unto death," they would be given "a crown of life."

The church of Smyrna would be crushed but not permanently killed. There would come a new life more glorious than the first. The severe trials would prove a blessing in disguise. Jesus intimates that this was true in His own experience, for He too had been persecuted and slain, but now he is "alive for evermore." It was persecution and suffering that made manifest the beauty of the character of Christ and made Him a worthy example of patience under tribulation. (John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 2:20-23.) "From the desert to Calvary, the storm of Satan's wrath beat upon Him, but the more mercilessly it fell, the more firmly did the Son of God cling to the hand of His Father, and press on in the blood-stained path. All the efforts of Satan to oppress and overcome Him, only brought out in a purer light His spotless character."-WRITE, The Desire of Ages, Page 759.

### **City of Smyrna**

Smyrna is one of the oldest cities of the world, with a very eventful history. It is located at the

head of a beautiful bay, or arm, of the Aegean Sea about thirty miles from the coast line. On ancient coins have been found the inscriptions "First of Asia in size and beauty" and "The Ornament of Asia." Its size, location, and magnificence made Smyrna one of the finest cities of Asia, rivaling Ephesus to the south and Pergamos to the north.

Smyrna was said to "be the birthplace of Homer. It was celebrated not alone as a center of wealth and prosperity but also as a center of learning and religion. It was famed for its schools of science and medicine, for its fine library, magnificent temples, sacred festivals, and athletic contests. On the slopes of Mount Pagus was a theater seating twenty thousand people, the ruins of which are still visible. In AD 23 a great temple was built by and dedicated to the worship of Emperor Tiberius.

Mount Pagus is a conical-shaped mound more than five hundred feet high, and was located in the center of the ancient city. Its summit was crowned with a shrine dedicated to Nemesis, a Greek goddess who was supposed to be a form of Artemis. Because of its splendor and its garland of magnificent buildings, this hilltop was also known as The Crown of Smyrna. Circling the base of the mount "like a necklace on a statue" was one of the finest streets of the ancient world, called The Street of Gold. When Apollonius visited the city he advised the proud citizens to prefer a crown of splendid men rather than a crown of beautiful buildings. The city itself was sometimes called The Crown of Ionia. This historical background gives significance to the promise of Jesus, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The promise had a forceful and peculiar meaning to the suffering members of the church of Smyrna.

All through her long and eventful history the city of Smyrna has suffered from besieging armies, massacres, earthquakes, fires, and plagues. About 600 BC the Lydians captured and almost completely destroyed the city. It lay in partial ruins for four hundred years. It was crushed almost to death but was rebuilt by the Greeks and again became a flourishing city. It was restored to life and prosperity. The city was destroyed by a terrible earthquake in AD 178, only eighty years after the church received the Apocalypse. It was again crushed to death but was destined to recover, for it was "the city of life." The city was restored to more than its former beauty and glory by Emperor Marcus Aurelius. There has seldom been a period of two years without an earthquake. The city was almost completely destroyed by a severe quake in 1688, when the earth opened and swallowed up five thousand people. In 1758 a plague almost depopulated the city, and in 1922 the Turks captured and partially destroyed the modern Smyrna.

Smyrna is the only one of the seven cities of Asia which retains anything of its ancient standing. It is today the largest city of Asia Minor, and is the commercial center of the Levant. The population was recently reported to be 154,000. The present name under Turkish rule is Izmir. More than seven thousand ships of all nations visit the beautiful harbor of Smyrna each year, and its annual trade is valued at many millions of dollars. One of its chief exports is the famous Smyrna figs. Large quantities of woolen cloth are also exported. Thus has the city of Smyrna often risen from apparent death "to become one of the first stars in the brilliant belt of the cities of Asia Minor."

### **The Local Church**

The local church of Smyrna was repeatedly crushed by bitter persecutions and was several times virtually destroyed, but has always been restored to life. This church felt the full force of the pagan Roman persecutions of the second and third centuries. Smyrna was the home of Polycarp and the scene of his martyrdom in AD 168. The hillside of Mount Pagus, where he was burned at the stake, has since been reddened by the blood of fifteen hundred Christians at one time and eight hundred at another. Visitors are shown the spot where Polycarp was supposed to have been martyred and the tomb where he was buried.

Many believe that Polycarp was the "angel," or "minister," -of the church of Smyrna at the time the message of Christ was delivered. This is based chiefly on the statement he made just before his death. When asked by the judge to renounce Christianity with its Christ, he replied: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong, how then can I blaspheme my king, who bath saved me?" Tertullian tells us that Polycarp was consecrated bishop of Smyrna by the apostle John, and with this conclusion agree also the testimonies of Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Jerome.

Tamerlane, the Tartar chieftain, captured the city of Smyrna in AD 1402 and massacred its inhabitants, concentrating on the Christians. Tradition says that he built a pyramid of the heads of his victims. Smyrna was the last Christian city to hold out against the Turks when they overran Asia Minor. When they finally captured it, in 1424, they put to death most of its Christian population. The destruction of thousands of Smyranean Christians by the Turks in 1922 is fresh in the memories of many. But the local church still lives. Smyrna has for some time been the headquarters of several denominational mission

enterprises. Located there are a number of Christian schools. A few years ago it was said that more Christians lived in Smyrna than in any other Turkish city in the world. The local church will doubtless continue till the second coming of Christ, when all the faithful will be given “a crown of life.”

### **The Smyrna Period**

“Then came the Smyrna period—the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection in the establishment of casts and orders, the license of Judaizing propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel.” (Seiss, Page 142.) The Smyrna period covered about two hundred years, or the second and third centuries. It was the age of martyrdom, when the pagan Roman emperors attempted to destroy Christianity with the violence of the sword, considering it a form of treason. Christians who refused to forsake their faith were threatened with the loss of all citizenship rights, confiscation of property, imprisonment, torture, and death.

During this period Roman rulers and writers bitterly denounced Christianity and reckoned Christians as the off-scouring of the earth, and Suetonius called Christianity “a novel and wicked superstition.” Christians were “hated for their shameful deeds.” Pliny declared that Christianity was “an inflexible obstinacy,” “a depraved and excessive superstition.” These false accusations made Christians outlaws against the religion and state of the Romans, and thus brought upon them bitter and relentless persecutions.

The Smyrna period is known as the era of martyrdom. Justin Martyr, with six other Christians, was scourged and beheaded in AD 165. Irenaeus is believed to have been put to death in 202 during the persecutions of Severus. Cyprian died under the persecutions of Trajan in 258, and Victorinus in 304 during the martyrdoms under Diocletian. Eusebius said of these terrible times: “We saw with our own eyes the houses of prayer thrown down to the very foundations, and the Divine and Sacred Scriptures committed to the flames.” “We . . . have observed [in Thebais] large crowds in one day; some suffering decapitation, others torture by fire; so that the murderous sword was blunted, and becoming weak, was broken, and the very executioners grew weary and relieved each other.” (Ecclesiastical History, Book 8, Chapter 2.)

But the church of myrrh and bitterness was agreeable and precious to Christ. Though it was persecuted unto death, the very crushing released the fragrance of love and grace and patient endurance that is so precious in the sight of the Master. Someone has said that “during this persecution the alabaster box of Christian fragrance was broken and the perfume has filled the centuries.” It is impossible to estimate the number of Christian martyrs during those days of persecution, but the persecutors were so sure that the hated sect was entirely exterminated that a coin was struck in celebration of the triumph of the pagan gods over the faith of Jesus.

### **The True Riches**

Jesus declared that He was fully acquainted with the tribulation and poverty of His people during this period, but He said they were rich in spiritual things. The poverty was doubtless the result of their tribulation, which often ended in death. Their earthly possessions had been confiscated ‘by the state. They had suffered “the spoiling of their goods.” Jesus assured them that He fully sympathized with them in their tribulation and poverty because of His own experience. The original word for tribulation means “to be in straits.” It is distress resulting from being hard pressed, or hemmed in on every side.

Jesus comforted the Smyrneans with the assurance that their poverty in temporal things could not rob them of their spiritual riches. “But thou art rich” is His message to them. They were rich in grace and faith, and had laid up “treasure in heaven.” (Romans 8:32; Colossians 2:3; 1 Timothy 6:18; James 2:5; Matthew 6:20.) During the first three centuries the church was characterized by material poverty and spiritual power Whereas the modern church is noted for its material wealth and spiritual weakness. She claims to be “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” but in God’s sight she is spiritually “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and in need of all things that would qualify her to be the light of the world. Trench says that in the sight of Christ “there are both poor rich men and rich poor-men.” (Page 107.)

Spiritual riches constitute the true wealth—that which alone will endure. Many of the most wealthy in material things are moral paupers and spiritual bankrupts. Jesus alone can furnish spiritual treasure, and this He offers to the poverty-stricken church of our generation. He says, “I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich; and white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that thou may see.” Revelation 3:18.

Smyrna was a rich poor church and Laodicea a poor rich church. It is far better to be poor in the estimation of the world and rich in spiritual things than to be rich in one's own esteem and the world's but poverty stricken in the sight of Christ. Persecution and physical suffering usually bring material poverty, but they also have a tendency to increase spiritual riches. Persecution for the sake of righteousness has always been a blessing in disguise. The crucible and the burning fiery furnace are the purifying instruments of love and grace rather than the obnoxious weapons of torture.

The psalmist beautifully sets forth the beneficial results of divinely permitted trials: "For Thou, O God, has proved us: Thou has tried us, as silver is tried. Thou brought us into the net; thou laid affliction upon our loins. Thou has caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou brought us out into a wealthy place." Psalm 66:10-12. Here is the secret of a spiritual experience that leads out of the barren desert into a spiritual oasis.

### **Church of Satan**

Christ also had knowledge of those false disciples who claimed to be "Jews," but were rather of the church or "synagogue of Satan." Although we know upon the evidence of the Scriptures and profane history that the Jews in general joined the heathen in hating and persecuting Christians, the term Jew is here used to depict the disciples of Christ. The term is sometimes used in the Scriptures to represent the true people of God in contrast with the Gentiles, or unconverted. (Romans 2:28, 29; Revelation 2:9; 3:9.) The usual term however is Israel, or Israelite, which is synonymous with Christian. Paul declared that the children of faith are the true children of Abraham, and that if we are Christians then we are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:7, 29.) The term Israel had its origin the night Jacob wrestled with the angel. This is the term used in most instances, and the one more appropriate than Jew, yet we should not be too prejudiced against the latter, because Jesus was a Jew and so also were all His apostles and prophets. Jesus declared that "salvation is of the Jews."

The false brethren were not really members of the church of Christ even though their names were enrolled on the church records. They were of "the synagogue of Satan." Synagogue and church are virtually synonymous terms, meaning "congregation," or "assembly." Ancient Israel is called "the church in the wilderness" in Acts 7:38, and "the congregation of the Lord" in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Christian church is called a "synagogue" in the marginal reading of James 2:2. Satan, the great deceiver and imitator, has a church, or synagogue, which God designates as "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the earth." Revelation 17:5. There are but two churches, and they are rivals. Between them there is no neutral ground. All who are not of the church of Christ are of the synagogue of Satan. The apostasy that began through the loss of love in the latter part of the Ephesian period, continued to develop, and false apostles and disciples multiplied in the church. "The mystery of iniquity" was working even in "the congregation of the Lord."

### **Future Persecutions Foretold**

In verse 10 future trials are predicted, including imprisonment. Jesus said, "And you shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." In love and mercy He foretells what is coming, and promises deliverance. Regarding the experience of Paul, Jesus said: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:16. Christ never entices recruits for His cause by promises of an easy task and a pleasant life.

In our text the persecution of the saints is traced to the agency of the devil, the great adversary. The devil cast some into prison that they "may be tried," or rather tempted. The persecution was a temptation from the devil to cause them to become discouraged and give up their faith and hope rather than a trial or test from God, although the Lord often permits temptations to come to us from the enemy in order to test our powers of endurance and to separate the chaff from the wheat. If we take the proper attitude, what the devil designs for our ruin will result in his defeat, our good, and God's glory.

Practically all the Roman emperors during the Ephesian and Smyranean periods persecuted the Christians, but ten of them were more pronounced in their enmity. These were Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian. As the Pontifex Maximus of the religion of the state, the emperor was the "protector of the Roman gods." It was therefore his duty to guard the religion of the empire against the inroads of other systems.

For ten prophetic days the persecution was to continue, and during that time Christians would be put under pressure and given "the third degree" of torture. As the result of this the persecutors were finally convinced that it would be useless to prolong the process. The last and most bloody of these ten

persecutions took place under Diocletian, and lasted ten years from AD 302 to 312. Dr. Adam Clarke and other commentators believe that the “ten days” refer especially to this ten-year period, the conclusion being arrived at on the basis of a day representing a year in symbolic prophecy.

The “ten days” of trial mentioned in the Smyranean letter represent a period that would test God’s people to the limit of their endurance both in severity and duration. Christians were to pass through a complete baptism of suffering and martyrdom with the assurance of the fullness of Christ’s love and sympathy and the promise of a “crown of life” as the reward of loyalty and steadfastness.

### **The Promised Reward**

The reward offered the church of Smyrna was not only “a crown of life,” but the voice of the Spirit adds the promise, “He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.” “Be faithful to the end even if you have to die, and then I will give you the victor’s wreath of life,” is the Weymouth translation. The promise is not alone to those who maintain their faithfulness to the end of life in a natural sense, but especially to the persecuted when death was the price of their loyalty. The reward is for those upon whom the enemy inflicts his worst tortures, ending even in death itself. The recompense for faithfulness even unto martyrdom is “a crown of life.” Elsewhere Christians are promised “a crown of glory,” “a crown of righteousness,” and a “crown of rejoicing.”

The crown of our text is not a crown of royalty but rather a “garland of life” or a “victor’s wreath.” Smyrna was noted for its athletic contests, when garlands of victory were given to the successful contestants. During this period of persecution millions of Christians died for their faith, but more millions still became Christians as the result of their steadfastness “even unto death.” The ‘blood of martyrs was the seed that produced a bountiful harvest of souls.

To the church of martyrs Jesus declared Himself to be the One who had also suffered martyrdom, but was again alive, with a life that would never end. His death was a triumph, and all who are faithful unto death will be given the crown of everlasting life. Nero lost his crown and Paul his head, but the latter died a victor, with the promise of “a crown of righteousness” and a part in the Paradise restored. Polycarp remained faithful even unto martyrdom, and a crown of life and glory awaits him at the resurrection of the just.

Those who maintain their loyalty unto the first death will escape the second death, which will be eternal and from which there will be no resurrection. We need not be too much concerned about the first death, which is temporary and comes to all alike, provided we have maintained that union with the Life-giver by which we can escape the second death. On the other hand those who are born only once must die twice.

The candlestick of the church of Smyrna was not removed. It is the only church of the seven that exists today and is still letting its gospel light shine. Smyrna has been known to the Turks as “Infidel Smyrna” because of their inability to destroy the local church. Nor were the emperors of pagan Rome able to extinguish the light through the agency of persecution. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only two of the seven churches that received no reproof or condemnation, and they are the only two of the seven cities that retain anything of their former importance and glory. The Christians of the Smyrna period needed encouragement. There were things that needed to be corrected, but they had about all they could stand without reproof. The fires of persecution had purified the church, and much of the lost love and works had been regained. Tribulation will also play an important part in the purification of the remnant of the church in preparation for translation. Of them it is said: “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9, 13, 14.)

## **11. PERGAMOS THE EPOCH OF STATE RELIGION**

AND TO the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things said He which bath the sharp sword with two edges. I know thy works, and where thou dwells, even where Satan’s seat is. And thou boldest fast My name, and has not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against thee, because thou has 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 has thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or

else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches. To him that overcomes 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 knows saving he that receives it." Revelation 2.12-17.

Pergamos, or Pergamum, was located about forty miles northeast of Smyrna in the Caicus valley and on the imperial highway running along the coast of Asia. Pergamos was fifteen miles from the Aegean Sea on the banks of the little river Caicus, a branch of which, the Selinus, flows through the present city of Bergma, or Bergama, which has a population of more than 13,000. The city of Pergamos was built and named by the Aeolian Greeks soon after the fall of Troy in the twelfth century before Christ, making it one of the oldest cities of Asia and of the world. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos were rivals for first place among the cities of the province and also of Asia Minor.

The city was named for the lofty hill on which the ancient city was built. The name therefore means tower, height, or elevation, and carries with it the idea of exaltation. It was the exalted city. The name also indicates a union as through marriage. The lofty hill on which the ancient city was built and from which it took its name was an immense rock rising one thousand feet abruptly out of the broad and fertile valley. The walls of the elevation \* were almost perpendicular, except on one side, where there was a steep and narrow passageway to the top, which was easily fortified and guarded. Because of its natural defenses the city of Pergamos was considered an impregnable stronghold. The only way it was ever captured was by stratagem. In Pergamos, Lysimachus deposited his treasure, valued at \$10,000,000, because he considered it the safest place in his kingdom.

### **A Famous City**

Pliny called Pergamos the most illustrious city of Asia. It was the educational center of Western Asia. There Homer, one of the earliest poets, and Herodotus, "the father of history," studied and wrote, because of the great library, which it according to Plutarch contained 200,000 volumes. It was second only to the world-famous library of Alexandria. These libraries caused a long and bitter rivalry between the two cities. Egypt, in order to curb the growth of the Pergamum library, withheld shipments of papyrus, the ancestor of paper. To meet the emergency the Pergamenians dressed the skins of animals, on which to do their writing, calling the new writing material Pergamus, and later, parchment. The rivalry between the two cities ended when Mark Antony removed the Pergamum library to Alexandria as a gift to the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, with whom he was infatuated.

"A royal city," exclaimed Sir William Ramsay as he viewed the ruins of the ancient city of Pergamos. He said: "Beyond all other sites in Asia Minor it gives the traveler the impression of a royal city, the home of authority: the rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain of the Caicus so proudly and boldly." (Page 281.) It was indeed "a royal city" and a royal residence. The history of Pergamos can be traced back into the fifth century before Christ. Its superiority and leadership in Asia began in 282 BC. It was the capital of the kingdom of Pergamum under the Attalid kings. Attalus III bequeathed his capital and kingdom to the Romans in the year 133 BC, and they formed it into the Province of Asia.

For 250 years Pergamos was the official capital of the province. It was also the seat of the Commune of Asia. From Pergamos the decrees of the Caesars were executed throughout the province. This gives force and meaning to Christ's introduction to the church of Pergamos: "These are the words of Him who wields the sharp sword with the double edge." (Moffatt.) The broad double-bladed Roman sword was known as "the cut and thrust sword." It was the emblem of the highest official authority, carrying with it the power of life and death, and this power was vested in the proconsuls of the province, who lived at Pergamos. The governor wielded the sword of Rome from this impregnable fortress.

According to Pliny, Pergamos was also the seat of a Roman supreme court. To this city prisoners were brought for trial from all parts of the province, and were sentenced by the power that ministered life and death to all. Therefore the sword that proceeded out of the mouth of Christ is a symbol of His judicial authority. He too wields the power of life and death to all who hear His message. His Word "is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12. The One who has all power and authority speaks to the church located in the city where official authority and power dwells.

### **Throne of Satan**

Jesus said to His people in Pergamos, "I know where you dwell. Satan's throne is there" (Weymouth), or "Where Satan sits enthroned" (Moffatt). "Throne" is a better rendering than "seat," for the same original is translated "throne" in Revelation 1:4 and 3:21. The capital of the province was also the headquarters of the pagan religion of the province, for in all ancient nations church and state were united. The ruler of the state was also the head of the religion of the state. Satan is called both "the prince of this world" and "the god of this world," and he attempts to pattern all earthly kingdoms after his own. He has ruled the world through human governments, which he has controlled by means of his false and counterfeit system of religion.

When Rome ruled the world, the capital of the empire was also the throne of Satan. In Revelation 13:2 we are told that "the dragon," or Satan, gave the beast "his power, and his seat, and great authority." He offered this throne and world ruler ship to Christ in exchange for His worship and obedience, but the offer was spurned by the Son of God. The same offer was later accepted by the one who falsely claims to be the vicar of Christ on earth. Caesar, who ruled the world as the human agent of Satan, was also the "Pontifex Maximus," or supreme pontiff, of the pagan Roman religion. He was "the protector of the Roman gods." What was true of the empire was also true of each province, the capital being the headquarters of the provincial religion. Politics and religion seem to mix successfully only when the religion is false and pagan.

Pergamos was a city of heathen temples and a pantheon of pagan deities. Jupiter was said to have had his origin there, and to him and other Greek and Roman gods were erected many beautiful and costly temples, giving it the name of "the city of temples." It was the metropolis of heathen deities. Temples were built and dedicated to Jupiter, Zeus, Athena, Dionysius, and Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine, and also called "the god of Pergamum." It was also the center of emperor worship. In AD 29 a great temple was erected to the worship of Augustus Caesar, who was to be prayed to as "Lord Caesar." Domitian decreed that all peoples should address him as "Our Lord and our God." Pergamos contained a sacred grove called "the glory of the city." The city was known as the "temple-keeper" and "temple-warden" of the gods of paganism. It was the seat of the imperial church and the symbol of "rampant paganism." (Swete, Page 35.)

The Temple of Zeus was the most celebrated of all the temples of Pergamos, and was dedicated to Aesculapius, "the serpent god" or "god of healing." It was also known as the Temple of Aesculapius, who was called "the Great Physician" and "the Savior." He was also given other titles showing that he was a counterfeit of Christ. In this temple a living serpent was kept and worshiped. Serpent worship was so universal in Pergamos that many coins have been found with a picture of a serpent entwined around a pole. It is unfortunate that this pagan emblem of healing has become the caduceus of the modern medical profession. In the Temple of Zeus many miracles of healing were supposed to have been performed. In connection with this temple was also a famous school of medicine.

Satan is known in the Scriptures as "that old serpent," doubtless because the serpent was his agent in bringing about the fall of man. The symbol of poison and sin and death became the god and emblem of healing and life in Satan's false religion, and thus it remains to this day. The Temple of Zeus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the ruins of which are still visible. They have been excavated by archaeologists. The temple was built on a stone foundation 16 by 114 by 124 feet. Its altar was made of black marble 40 feet high, and was covered with 'beautiful carvings. A replica of this altar has been placed in the Museum of Berlin. Bacchus, the god of wine, and Venus, the goddess of lust, were also worshiped in Pergamos. There paganism reigned supreme, with all its impure and licentious rites. Satan's throne was there.

When Cyrus captured the city of Babylon, the ancient seat of Satan's counterfeit system of religion, the supreme pontiff of the Chaldean mysteries and his retinue of priests fled from the city and ultimately made their residence in Pergamos. Here they re-established their Babylonian worship and made the kings of Pergamum the chief pontiffs of their religion. When Attalus III, the last of their priest-kings, died in 133 BC, he bequeathed both his royal and priestly offices to the Romans. A century later Caesar became both emperor of Rome and Pontifex Maximus of the religion of the empire. He was given divine honors, which he handed down to his successors. These were later assumed by the popes, the supreme pontiffs of ecclesiastical Rome. Thus Pergamos became the connecting link between the two Babylons, the ancient and the modern. The papal system is patterned after that of Babylon and Rome. This is another reason for the statement of Jesus that Pergamos was the place "where Satan dwells."

Jesus recognized the evil environments under which the members of the local church of Pergamos lived. There was a maxim among the Jews that where the law of God is not obeyed, there Satan dwells. The Christians of Pergamos lived at the very headquarters of Satan, "the man of sin" and lawlessness whose

religion is “the mystery of iniquity.” The fact that they were in such close proximity to Satan was no excuse for failure or defeat, for “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” The place of our birth and the circumstances under which we live are taken into consideration in the judgment. (Psalm 87:4-6.) There is no use attempting to escape entirely from the environment of evil in this rebel world. God often places His people under very unfavorable conditions that they might be shining lights among those who sit in darkness. The local church of Pergamos could not escape the situation without an ignominious retreat, and Satan refused to surrender his stronghold.

### **The Pergamos Period**

Not only does Pergamos carry the meaning of power and exaltation, but it also indicates union through marriage. The Greek word *gamos* means marriage. During the Pergamos period the church was exalted to royal power and kingly authority through a union, or marriage, with the state. Satan had failed to crush the church and destroy Christianity through persecution, and he therefore changed his policy. Christianity had won in its great struggle with paganism, and Satan, as it were, joined the church in order to ruin it from within through amalgamation with the world and union with the state. When Satan failed to accomplish his purpose through violence, he corrupted the church through worldly alliance. Rome boasted of her ability to assimilate anything that contributed to her strength. In the person of Constantine, the church mounted the throne of the Caesars and reigned as queen. The church that was “espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ” was united in marriage to pagan Rome. The Pergamos period covered about 250 years, from the so-called conversion of Constantine to Justinian the Great, whose decrees made the popes the successors of the Caesars.

During the Pergamos period the transition between pagan and papal Rome took place, and the church became “that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” (Revelation 17:18.) Seiss speaks of “the Pergamile period, in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into a system, and the Church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft.” (Page 143.) Constantine was the human agent used by Satan to bring about the union of church and state.

The historian Gibbon declared that “the gratitude of the Church has exalted the virtues and excused the failings of a generous patron, who seated Christianity on the throne of the Roman world; and the Greeks, who celebrate the festival of the imperial saint, seldom mention the name of Constantine without adding the title of equal to the apostles.” (Volume 2, Chapter 20.) As an outward evidence that the name and worship of Christ stood triumphant above prostrate paganism, Constantine placed on his coins the *labarum*, with the monogram of Jesus above the conquered dragon.

During this period Paul’s warnings applied and his prophecies were fulfilled. (Acts 20:29, 30:2 Thessalonians 2:2-7.) Pagan beliefs and practices were brought into the church, and Christianity was so changed by heathen influences that it virtually became “baptized paganism.” During this time Isaiah 2:2,3 was fulfilled, and the church was established in “the top of the mountains” or government of Rome, and “above the hills, or smaller states, where she dictated the laws of the land and became so popular that “all nations” flowed into it. The Bishop of Rome assumed the title of pope and became the supreme pontiff, or Pontifex Maximus, of the new semi pagan religion, “controlling kings, dictating laws to ancient monarchies, and binding the souls of millions with a more perfect despotism than Oriental emperors ever sought or dreamed.” - JOHN LORD, Beacon Lights of History, Volume 5, Page 96. Isaiah’s prophecy will again be fulfilled just before the end, when the message to the church of Pergamos will again be applicable and meaningful.

### **Commendation**

During this period of compromise and apostasy Christ had loyal followers who held fast to His name without denying the faith, even though they lived “where Satan dwells.” Jesus commended these faithful disciples. Antipas, one of the saints who suffered martyrdom in the city of Pergamos, is set forth as a symbol, or representative, of all the faithful of that period. This is the only mention of Antipas in the New Testament, but no other reference is necessary to make him a real character. He was doubtless a prominent leader in the local church, and probably the bishop or pastor. According to tradition he was bishop of Pergamos, and was martyred during the persecutions of Domitian by being shut up in a brazen bull which was heated till it was red hot. He ended his life with praises and thanksgiving to God.

Some believe that Antipas means “against all,” and indicates that he stood out against all that was taking place in connection with the licentious rites and ceremonies in Pergamos, and for this reason he was

martyred. Like Luther at the Diet of Worms, Antipas stood against all compromise with the world and sealed his faith with his blood. This was the fate of millions who stood out against the paganizing of Christianity during the period of amalgamation with the world and marriage with the state. There is no authority for the assumption that Antipas means antipapal.

### **The Reproof**

Jesus asserted that He had some things against the Pergamos believers, chiefly because they were accepting the doctrines of Balaam. and the Nicolaitans. The language indicates that worldliness and apostasy were rapidly gaining ground. In the Ephesian period Christians refused to tolerate evildoers, and they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans; now they not only tolerate them in their midst but listen to their teachings. "Some that cling to the teaching of Balaam." (Weymouth.) Balac was the king of Moab, and Balaam was the prophet of God who turned traitor to secure worldly gain and kingly favors. He is definitely symbolic of the compromises of the Pergamos period, when believers turned traitor to the cause of genuine Christianity to gain the favor of Roman officials. Josephus and Philo declare that Balaam. showed Balac how to set a trap for the children of Israel so as to entice them into the twofold sin of idolatry and fornication, which always go hand in hand. (Acts 15:20.)

Idolatry in any form is disloyalty to God. "Balaam is here represented as the prototype of all corrupt teachers." (Charles, Page 63.) (Numbers 25:1, 2; 31:15, 16.) Just as Balaam bartered his religion for wealth and honor, so the priests of the paganized Christian church bartered religious rites, ordinances, relies, and indulgences for worldly gain, and making the church of God "an house of merchandise."

Nikalaos means "those who conquer the people," or the laity. The forces were working that finally conquered the church and turned it into a semi pagan system in which the officials exalted themselves to kingly power and royal authority over the laity. It is said that Balaam in the Hebrew language has practically the same meaning as Nicalos, or Nikalaos, in the Greek. Thus the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans are mentioned together here because of their similarity. There were not necessarily two different groups in the church who were apostatizing.

As Israel of old was deceived, entrapped, and corrupted by the doctrines and practices of Balaam, so also were the Christians of the Pergamos period being contaminated by the teachings and practices of the Nicolaitans, the antitype of Balaam. These more modern Balaamites had refused to obey the decision of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:20, 29) condemning idolatry and fornication, but rather encouraged a return to the lax moral standards of the pagans. Irenaeus declared that "they make no scruple about eating meats offered in sacrifice to idols, imagining that they can in this way contract no defilement. Then, again, at every heathen festival celebrated in honor of the idols, these men are the first to assemble." The writer then adds that "others of them yield themselves up to the lusts of the flesh with the utmost greediness." (Against Heresies, Book 1, Chapter 6, Section 3.)

### **The Warning**

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth," was the warning, or threat, of the Author of the epistle to the church of Pergamos. The entire church was called upon to repent, indicating that all had been affected by the developing apostasy. The threat, however, was against those who had accepted and were teaching the false doctrines. "I will contend with such men with words that will cut like a sword," is the Twentieth Century New Testament translation. There must be no delay in the work of repentance and reformation. They must 49repent at once." (Weymouth.) Jesus virtually said: "If you do not repent and reform at once, I will fight these apostates and compromisers with the sword of My mouth."

It was with a drawn sword that the Lord withstood Balaam to thwart his evil purpose against Israel of old. So Christ here represents Himself as standing before the church of Pergamos with a drawn sword threatening all who refuse to take heed to His cutting message with the fate of the ancient false prophet who was slain by the sword of Israel, which was in reality the sword of the Lord. While the minister and the church in general are responsible for prevailing conditions, Christ does not say, "I will fight against thee," but "against them," that is, the guilty ones in the church. "Or else" implies that if the minister and officials failed to perform their duty, the supreme Head of the church would visit the apostates with judgments. It was the duty of the pastor to do such faithful reproving that "he would either recover them for the truth, or else drive them wholly from the communion of the church." (Trench, Page 131.)

### **The Promised Reward**

As an incentive to repent, Christ offers access to the hidden manna and also a white stone containing the overcomer's divinely given new name describing his new character. A pot of manna was placed in the ark of the covenant in the most holy apartment of the earthly sanctuary as a pledge that all who obey the law will be fed. (Hebrews 9:3, 4.) This became known as the "hidden manna," because it was hidden from all except the high priest. Christ declared Himself to be the real manna or "bread of life." (John 6:26-63.) He said that only those who eat of the living Bread that came down from heaven can have eternal life.

In the same wilderness where Balaam, tempted ancient Israel, the Lord fed His people with "angels' food," or the "corn of heaven." This bread of heaven was secretly provided during the night. The promise is that all who resist the temptations of the evil one will enter "the secret place of the most High" and experience a close and lasting fellowship with the "Bread of Life." Just as the manna was hidden in the unapproachable holy of holies of the earthly sanctuary, and Christ is hidden from our view in the heavenly sanctuary, so the heavenly manna, the Word of God, when hidden in the secret chambers of the heart, gives spiritual nourishment and protects from evil. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee," said the psalmist. The Jews believe that the ark of God and all its contents, including the pot of manna, were hidden in a secret cave when the temple was destroyed, and will be discovered and revealed when the Messiah comes.

Reference to the "white stone" is doubtless borrowed from one or more of several well-known customs in which white stones or pebbles were used. Sir William Ramsay wrote: "The truth is that the white pebble with the New Name was not an exact reproduction of any custom or thing in the social usage of the time. It was a new conception, devised for this new purpose; but it was only a working up into a new form of familiar things and customs, and it was therefore completely intelligible to every reader in the Asian Churches. It had analogies with many things, though it was not an exact reproduction of any of them." (Page 304.)

Trench declares that " 'White' is everywhere the color and livery of heaven." (Page 135.) All who lived in Pergamos, the capital of the judicial system of the province, were acquainted with the custom of judges in using white and black stones, or pebbles, in making their decisions, the white standing for acquittal and the black for condemnation. Dryden the poet speaks of this custom in the following lines:

"A custom was of old, and still remains, Which life or death by suffrages ordained.  
White stones and black within an urn are cast, The first absolves, but fate is in the last."

The Masonic and other lodges still use white and black balls in balloting for candidates for office. The divine promise is that Christian victors will be given the decision of acquittal by the supreme court of heaven.

White stones also were given to gladiators who were victorious in athletic contests in Greece and Rome. The name of the victor was inscribed in the white stone, and this entitled him to special privileges, including maintenance at public expense the remainder of his life. This stone was called "the pebble of victory." Such stones were also used as tickets and badges of friendship, and were called "tessera." White is the color of innocence, purity, joy, and victory. The white stone given to the overcomer not only is symbolic of victory but also indicates a pledge of an eternal friendship with Christ.

It was also the ancient custom to give to the person who was initiated into the mysteries a white stone with the secret name of his god, which he learned for the first time, engraved on the stone. The name must be kept secret under pain of death. Trench suggests that the illustration is borrowed from the Urim and Thummim worn by the high priest. He believes this was a white diamond. None but the high priest knew the name that appeared in this stone. The promise indicates that the victor over sin will be given a passport to heaven because he has been absolved from all guilt; that he will be given a new name to describe his new character; and that he will be given angels' food, and have right to the tree of life. Taking into consideration all the implications of the hidden manna and the white stone, this is one of the most precious promises contained in Holy Writ, and should be a great incentive to repent and accept all the counsel of the mighty Counselor. This "exceeding great and precious" promise is just as verily for us as for the members of the church of Pergamos.

## 12. THYATIRA THE CHURCH OF THE MIDDLE AGES

AND UNTO the angel of the church in Thyatira write; .A These things said the Son of God, who has His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass. I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works. And the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou suffers that woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto 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 searches the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 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 you have already held fast till I come.

“And he that overcomes, and keeps 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 said unto the churches.” Revelation 2:18-29.

### City of Thyatira

Thyatira was located about twenty-five miles southeast of Pergamos, and according to Strabo was a little to the left of the main road. The city was founded by Seleueus Nicator, one of the generals of Alexander. It was a garrison city built on the plains, with no natural fortifications, and was captured, destroyed, and rebuilt many times. On coins found in its ruins the city is represented by a horseman bearing a double-bladed battle-ax indicating that it was a cavalry post. The name is said to signify “sweet savor of labor,” or “sacrifice of contrition.” Sir William Ramsay says that the name indicates “weakness made strong” (page 316), and other writers give the meaning as “never weary of sacrifice.” The present population is about 12,000.

Thyatira at the time of this epistle was an important manufacturing city, its citizens being mostly poor and humble laborers, just the opposite of those in Pergamos. They were made contrite by sacrifices, and their lives were made fragrant by the blessings of labor. The workmen of Thyatira were organized into labor unions, or “guilds.” The two leading industries were the manufacture of instruments of brass, bronze, and other metals, and the manufacture and dyeing of cloth, especially of the royal purple. Homer speaks of the dyeing of red and purple cloth as being characteristic of the city. Several inscriptions mentioning dyers and their guilds have been found. Agents traveled far distances selling Thyatiran cloth. Over in Philippi of Macedonia the apostle Paul brought the gospel to “a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira.” Acts 16:12-14. It is believed that the local church of Thyatira owed its origin to the labors of Lydia after she returned home. Large quantities of purple and scarlet cloth are still shipped from Thyatira to Smyrna. It is significant that purple and scarlet are the chief colors worn by the popes and cardinals of the ruling church of the Middle Ages, the Thyatira period of the universal church. (Revelation 17:3-5.)

Christ introduced Himself to the church in Thyatira as “the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass.” “Eyes like flaming fire” and “whose eyes flash like fire and whose feet glow like bronze,” are other translations. This language was very familiar to a people who labored in foundries with their flaming furnaces, where fine brass, bronze, and other metals were manufactured into all sorts of articles for the market. During this period Jesus traveled everywhere and saw everything. Nothing escaped His piercing, penetrating gaze, and there was a great deal to see that made His eyes blaze with righteous indignation. His eyes searched “the reins and hearts” of all who professed His name. His feet trod down His enemies and broke them to shivers like a potter’s vessel. The symbols represent the Son of God as searching out every evil deed, and trampling in judgment upon the doers of iniquity.

This is the only time the title “the Son of God” is used in the seven epistles or in the entire book. During this period the place and authority of the Son of God were usurped by symbolic Jezebel, representing an apostate religious system. The back sliding and apostatized church failed to recognize His priestly service and sovereign authority, and assumed prerogatives that belonged alone to the “Son of God.”

To Thyatira was sent the longest of the seven letters, and it covers the longest of the seven periods of church history, embracing a thousand years, or half of the Christian Era.

### **The Middle Ages**

It is appropriate that the church in the middle of the seven should be symbolic of the church of the Middle Ages. The Thyatira period of the universal church covers the period of papal supremacy after the church was elevated to kingly power. McCarrell says this period began with the first pope in the sixth century. (Page 37.) And Philip Mauro remarks, "Our view is that in this letter to Thyatira we are given to see the inception of that masterpiece of satanic deception, that monstrous heresy, whose fullest development has been manifested in Romanism." (Page 106.)

Of this period Seiss says: "Then came the Thyatiran period—the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness for truth. The age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the Church usurped the place of Christ, and the witnesses of Jesus were given to dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of the false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation." (Page 143.) If an exact date were chosen for the beginning of the Thyatira period it would be AD 538, when the decree of Emperor Justinian and the arms of Belisarius elevated the Bishop of Rome to sovereign power.

The bitter controversy over the papal throne between Vigilius and Silverius, ended with the death of the latter and the enthronement of the former, in 538. Cardinal Baronius, a noted Catholic historian, declared that during the reign of Pope Vigilius an idol was erected in the temple of God, that the abomination of desolation stood in the holy place, that the son of perdition occupied the papal chair, not as the vicar of Christ, but as the predicted antichrist. He referred to the Papacy under this notorious pope as the imperial Jezebel of the Revelation.

B. Holzhauser, an eminent Catholic commentator on the Apocalypse, whose explanations are regarded by Roman Catholics as being almost divinely inspired, says: "Thyatira, the fourth age of the church, began when the downfall of pagan Rome was accomplished, and the devil was chained up for a thousand years. The body of the church, freed from the tonic of persecution, fell away from its high calling, and embraced luxury. This message reveals the interior condition of the church of the Middle Ages, which extended from the sixth to the sixteenth century. If we apply this letter to the fourth, it may be said to coincide with it from the historic point of view in a remarkable manner. For both the church and the world speak of this period as the 'Middle Ages.' In this it may be said that we built better than we knew: for Thyatira is the middle church of the seven, and consequently stands as the symbol of the church of the Middle Ages." Apocalypse, Volume 1, Page 155, 158.

It is interesting to note that the Reformation expositors were almost unanimous in their conclusions that imperial Rome fulfilled the prophecy of the fourth beast of Daniel 7, and that papal Rome met the specifications of the little horn of the same prophecy, the man of sin predicted by Paul, the beast of Revelation 13, the mystic Babylon of Revelation 17, and Jezebel the false prophetess of the Thyatiran letter.

### **The False Prophetess**

Some believe that Thyatira is equivalent to Thyatira, meaning "a daughter," and indicating feminine oppression; that the local church was led into apostasy by a woman who claimed to be a prophetess; and that this false prophetess was an adulteress. Of the Jezebel of this prophecy, A. T. Robertson says: "This woman was not a real prophetess, but a false one with loud claims and loose living. One is puzzled to know how such a woman had so much shrewdness and sex appeal as to lead astray the servants of God in that church. The church tolerated the Nicolaitanes and this leader whose primary object was sexual immorality (Charles), and became too much involved with her to handle the heresy." (Page 30g.)

Spiritual Jezebel was the tempter to the church of Thyatira as was literal Jezebel to Ahab and Israel of old. Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, who married Ahab, king of Israel. She brought with her the pagan religion of the Phoenicians and led all Israel into idolatry. We are told that as the result of his marriage with this heathen woman, Ahab "did sell himself to work wickedness" and "did very abominably in following idols." (1 Kings 21: 25, 26.) Ethbaal was not only king of Sidon but also priest of Astarte, and Jezebel was probably a priestess and prophetess of Baal worship.

Jezebel soon became the dominant power over the king and kingdom of Israel. Her will was supreme. She hated the prophets of God and persecuted them. To supplant the worship of Jehovah she

imported 850 prophets of Baal, the Sun god and chief deity of the Phoenicians, and made that heathen system the supreme religion supported and enforced by the state. From the time of Jezebel's marriage to Ahab the apostasy of Israel became general, and finally assumed such proportions that all but seven thousand of the millions of Israel were bowing their knees to Baal. Likewise from the time the church married the state, during the Pergamos period, the apostasy that began in the latter days of the apostles became so universal that the church and the world were led into the Dark Ages. In corruptness, Jezebel is compared to Semiramis and Cleopatra.

### **The Scarlet Woman**

The symbolic woman of Revelation 17 is doubtless identical with the Jezebel of the Thyatiran letter. There she is pictured as being "arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication." She is said to be "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." In her "forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTIL"

Purple and scarlet were the predominant colors manufactured in Thyatira. Both of these symbolic women are declared to be harlots, being guilty of spiritual fornication. Jehu told Joram, the son of Jezebel, that there could be no peace "so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many." (2 Kings 9:22.) Whether or not the local church was deceived by a literal woman who claimed the prophetic gift, Jezebel certainly is an appropriate symbol of the semi pagan religious system that dominated the world (luring the Middle Ages. "The deeper the church penetrated into paganism the more she herself became heathenish; this prepares us for the expressions 'harlot' and 'Babylon,' applied to her afterwards." (Auberlen.) "For such Protestant expositors as see the Papacy in the scarlet woman of Babylon, the Jezebel of Thyatira appears exactly at the right time, coincides with the Papacy at its height, yet at the same time with judgment at the door in the great revolt which was even then preparing." (Trench, Page 248.)

Spiritual Jezebel "calls herself a prophetess." This is the claim of the church of which she is symbolic. The office of it prophetess being a religious one proves that the Jezebel of our prophecy is symbolic of a religious system. It is a well known fact that the Papacy claims divine inspiration and guidance even to the extent of infallibility. She terms herself "the oracle of God." Catholics themselves symbolize their church by a woman, speaking of her as "Mother" or "Holy Mother." The Papacy designates herself "The Mother of Christendom."

It is believed by some that Thyatira means "unwearied about sacrifices," or "never weary of sacrifices," which is in keeping with the never-ending ritualism of the papal religion, centering in the sacrifice of the mass. "It suggests continuous, public, formal and spiritually shallow ritualism." (McCarrell, Page 37, 38.)

Jezebel was swift to shed the blood of the prophets of God. During her relentless persecutions the seven thousand of Israel who did not worship Baal, had to flee to the mountains and hide in the caves of the earth. A price was set on the head of Elijah, the great reformer of ancient Israel. The period during which spiritual Jezebel dominated the earth was likewise a time of persecution for the people of God. During this period the following prophecies were fulfilled: Daniel 7:21, 25; 8:10-13, 24; 11:11; Matthew 24:21, 22; Revelation 12:6, 14; 13:5-9; 17:6.

The undisputed role of Jezebel continued three and a half years, which was a time of spiritual drought and darkness. It was the "Dark Ages" of Israel's history. It ended in a reformation led by Elijah, Elisha, Jehu, and others. This reformation, however, came to a standstill and was not completed till apostolic times, when the church was brought all the way back to the faith of Abraham and Moses. Spiritual Jezebel ruled the world and persecuted the saints for three and a half prophetic years-a time of spiritual drought and darkness. During this time God's loyal people had to flee to the mountains and remain in hiding. Millions suffered martyrdom because they refused to join the great majority in doing obeisance to an apostate power.

Joseph A. Seiss says of spiritual Jezebel: "And in all history there is not another character which so completely represents the Papal system-its character, works and worship as the unclean wife of Ahab, the Jezebel of these Epistles. She was a heathen, married to a Jew; and such is the character of the Papal system in its main elements-Paganism joined to an obsolete Judaism. She is described as calling herself a prophetess, and as undertaking to be the teacher of God's servants; and Popery claims and professes to be heaven's only infallible teacher of God's truth. She was a persecutor and murderess of God's prophets and witnesses; and the Papacy is marked by nothing more than its severity towards such as stood out against its

impious pretenses, and its public and secret tortures and butcheries of the saints.” (Pages 194, 195.)

Unfaithfulness to God is called fornication because throughout the Scriptures the covenant relation between God and His people is represented by marriage. Christ represented Himself as the Bridegroom and His church as the Bride. Any transgression would therefore be a form of spiritual adultery, harlotry, or fornication. This would especially be true of any union between the church and the state or the world.

### **Threatened Judgments**

An opportunity was given spiritual Jezebel to “repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Through Elijah, Jezebel was warned and threatened and given ample opportunity to repent before she met her doom. Likewise spiritual Jezebel was given time to repent and reform. All through the long Thyatiran period call after call to repentance was made through messages of rebuke and warning delivered by men in and out of the church who sensed the need of revival and reformation. Among these reformers were cardinals, priests, monks, and other church officials. Popes were charged by church leaders with being the predicted antichrist in the temple of God, which they believed was evidence that Christ’s return was near at hand. The long delay of retribution did not indicate that the Lord was overlooking and winking at sin, as many seem to believe. (Ecclesiastes 8:11.) It rather indicated the patience and long-suffering of a merciful God.

Jezebel is threatened with sore judgments if she does not repent and reform. I “will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and I will severely afflict those who commit adultery with her.” (Weymouth.) “I will lay her on a sickbed, and bring her paramour into sore distress.” (Moffatt.) The bed of sin would become the bed of sickness and suffering. The place of her sins would become the place of her punishments. This is the fate of all harlots and adulterers. Disease and suffering are the reward of their immorality. Jezebel is charged with spiritual adultery. Her lovers, or paramours, are “the kings of the earth” who have committed fornication with her. (Revelation 18:1-5.) The unlawful union of church and state will eventually bring terrible retribution to both church and state. The testimony of history proves that the predictions concerning spiritual Jezebel were literally fulfilled. Ethbaal means “with Baal” or “in coalition with Baal.” Jezebel, like her father, was an ardent and loyal supporter of Baal worship. Under her reign church and state were united. Israel joined in unlawful union with a pagan system of religion, and was therefore guilty of spiritual fornication. Terrible were the consequences.

The weapons of Jezebel were turned upon her own head. Elijah the prophet said to her: “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even your.” 1 Kings 21:19. Jezebel was so eaten by ravenous dogs that “they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.” 2 Kings 9:35. In Revelation 19:17, 18, we are told that modern Jezebel, or Babylon, will be devoured by birds and beasts of prey. The fate of Jezebel was foretold by “His servant Elijah,” and the fate of her antitype was predicted by “His servant John.” The execution of the terrible threat against Jezebel is pictured in chapters 17 and 18 of the Revelation. Here is described the bed of torment into which spiritual Jezebel will eventually be cast. Babylon will be rewarded on the basis of her treatment of the saints of God. She will be recompensed according to her works.

### **The Jezebel Family**

“And I will kill her children with death,” or “her children I will exterminate” (Moffatt), is the judgment threatened upon the family of Jezebel. Ahaziah, Jezebel’s son, became a cripple from a fall, and spent the remainder of his life on a bed of anguish and affliction. The entire family was finally exterminated, as the Lord decreed. The two sons who became kings were slain, and the agents of Jehu “took the king’s sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them unto him to Jezreel.”

Spiritual Jezebel and her family will also be utterly destroyed. In Revelation 17:5 the “children” are described as the “daughters” of the harlot “mother.” Papal Rome calls herself “mother,” and continually speaks of Catholics as her “children.” The Protestant churches are sometimes spoken of as wayward children who will someday return home, and when they do a hearty welcome awaits them from the “mother church of Christendom.” Jesus declared that the judgments upon the Jezebel family would be open and manifest to “all the churches.” “The doom of the offenders was to be known as widely as the scandal had been.” (Charles, Page 72.)

“I will kill her children with pestilence” is the note in the Revised Version. Although this doubtless has reference to the seven last plagues in which is “filled up the wrath of God” against Babylon and her family, it may also have an application to the plagues and pestilences which swept Europe between

the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. Besides the pneumonic plague which destroyed millions of lives, there was the terrible plague known as The Black Death. It was reported to Pope Clement at Avignon that throughout the East, with the exception of China, 23,840,000 people had died of the plague. Many other millions died in China. Hecker estimates a total of 25,000,000 deaths in Europe, and this is considered conservative. These terrible visitations were at the time considered judgments from God because of the corruption that existed in the church and among the nations.

The judgments upon Jezebel would reveal the fact that the One who “searches the reins and hearts” and gives to every one according to his works is indeed “the Son of God.” This constitutes a promise to those who remained faithful to Him during this trying period, and a threat to those who united with the apostate church. The language indicates a time of investigative judgment before the execution of the sentence decreed. The threatened judgments included the “children” as well as the mother. Here we have the verdict of Christ upon Romanism and the semi papal religious establishments that grew out of, and have retained many of the objectionable features of, the semi pagan mother system. Jezebel and her family include all the religious systems or churches that separated from the Papacy but still cling to her doctrines and practices and who commit spiritual fornication with kings and nations by uniting with them when opportunity presents itself.

Under the reign of Jezebel the religion of Israel was paganized. Just so the “falling away” produced the semi pagan papal church of the Middle Ages. “Roman Catholicism is a God-dishonoring mixture of Judaism, Paganism and Christianity. Protestantism increasingly follows in its train.” (McCarrell, Page 41.) Of this combination, Seiss says: “Pagan life was transferred in Christian veins, heathen pomp and ceremony commingled with Christian rites and sacraments, and the professed Bride of Christ transformed into a queenly adulteress, the harlot mother of a harlot household.” (Page 194.)

In Thyatira was a great temple dedicated to Apollo, the sun-god and chief deity of the city, in which was an altar to a goddess who was the high priestess of Apollo. Baal was the sun-god of the Sidonians, and under the reign of Jezebel became the chief god in the apostasy of Israel. Jezebel was the high priestess and spokesman of Baal. Sun worship is the foundation of all pagan religions, and has been perpetuated in the papal system. The Papacy forsook the Sabbath of Jehovah, the memorial of creation and the sign of true worship, and adopted the sun’s day, or Sunday, as the day of worship, and almost all Protestant churches follow her example without a particle of Biblical evidence for the practice.

### **The Reformation**

It is believed that the Reformation is referred to in verse 19, where a change for the better is to take place toward the close of the period. “I know that of late you have toiled harder than you did at first” and “I know that your life of late has been better than it was at first” are other translations. Martin Luther and his fellow Reformers, through the power of the Word in the hands of the Spirit, broke the power of spiritual Jezebel and brought an end to the three and a half prophetic years of drought and darkness. Luther was the Elijah of the sixteenth century. It is regrettable that the Reformation, like that begun by Elijah, came to a standstill, and is still incomplete. It will be finished when the final warning message “in the spirit and power of Elias” the prophet lightens the earth with its glory.

“But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira” (RV), indicates that the remainder of the epistle is addressed to those who espoused the cause of the Reformation, and have not known “the deep things of Satan” (RV). “The deep mysteries of Satan” is another rendering. Satan’s religious system is called “the mystery of iniquity,” and his church, “Mystery, Babel the Great.” The Catholics boast of having adopted and Christianized paganism in order to defeat Satan with his own religion. Thus paganism with its “mysteries” and “the deep things of Satan” became the religion of the church during the Thyatiran period.

The Gnostics of the second century and onward spoke of their knowledge as “the depth” or “the deep things of God” or “the deep things of depth,” in contrast with the simple faith and doctrines of the primitive church. The expression “the depth of knowledge” is a quotation from the great Ephesian philosopher, Heraclitus, of the sixth century. His ideas were so obscure and mysterious that he was called “Heraclitus the Obscure.” What the Gnostics called “the deep things of God,” the Lord called “the depths of Satan.” They boasted of their superior wisdom, especially regarding the mysteries or “deep things of God.” Christ “thus intimates with a severe irony what was the real character of those ‘depth’ into which they profess to have entered, and into which they sought to guide others.” (Trench, Page 154.)

“None other burden” was to be laid upon the faithful of the Thyatiran period except to keep themselves unspotted from, and to continually protest against, the Jezebel abominations. Abstinence from those evil things that are divinely forbidden is called a “burden” in the decree of the Jerusalem council

recorded in Acts 15:28, 29. The Gnostics misapplied Paul's teachings on justification and the law, and made him say that the law was abolished as the rule of life and conduct in order that they might be freed from its strict requirements, just as so many of their successors of the modern religious world have done. The law is rejected by many as if it were an intolerable burden. No other burden, or duty, was to be required of God's people during this evil period than to hold fast to what they already possessed till Christ came to bring them more light during the coming Reformation. Only hold fast to that you have received until I come, is the admonition given. With the giving of additional light during the Reformation, more responsibility would be enjoined. All men are held responsible in proportion to the light received or the truth that is available.

"Till I come" must include the promise of the Second Advent, which would soon follow the reign of spiritual Jezebel. Paul declared that the "falling away," or great papal apostasy, would end with a great reformation and the coming of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8.) This is the first of the seven epistles that mentions the return of Christ, and indicates that the Thyatiran period would reach to the near approach of that great event, to the time when the Second Advent message would be due the world. God's people were to hold so fast to what they had of sound doctrine and spiritual experience that none could wrest it from them, till the coming of Christ would bring an end to the long and painful struggle between truth and falsehood. "Ever and ever in Scripture, not the day of death but the day of the Lord Jesus, is put as the end of all conflict." (Trench, Page 156.)

### **The Promised Reward**

Jesus declared that the overcomer who "keeps My works unto the end" would be given power over the nations, which he would rule with a rod of iron, and that He would give them "the morning star." "He who conquers and is careful to live My life to the end" or "who obeys My commands to the very end" or "who lays to heart what I enjoin," are different translations. The works of Christ are here contrasted with the works of Jezebel. To the disciples Jesus said of the one who would believe on Him: "The works that I do shall he do also." The works of Christ are such as He can approve of, works that are in harmony with His Word and law.

"Unto the end" doubtless has special reference to the end of the Christian race, or "the end of the world." (Matthew 24:13-14. Revelation 3:10,11.) It is not the beginning but the end of the race that determines the prize. To conquer is not enough; the victorious experience must be maintained to the end of the conflict. "I will give him authority over the nations" (Moffatt), is the promise to those who get the victory over sin. The tables will turn, and the saints who have been persecuted pilgrims and strangers in this rebel world will inherit and rule over the earth as was God's purpose in the beginning when He gave the dominion to Adam. The royal power and authority of Christ will be shared with His victorious saints, who constitute His bride and queen. (Matthew 19:27, 28; Revelation 3:21.)

Verse 27 is a quotation from Psalms 2:9, which is a prophecy of the Messiah. The Hebrew word for "break" is rendered "rule" in the Greek Septuagint. It literally means "shepherd." Shall be their shepherd" is the Septuagint. "Rod" is better rendered "scepter" as in Hebrews 1:8. The rule of Christ will be as absolute as that of an Oriental shepherd over his sheep, or a potter over the vessels he makes and then breaks in pieces in order to make better vessels. The breaking in pieces "as the vessels of a potter" probably has reference to the destruction of the wicked nations, an event that must precede the absolute and everlasting reign of Christ as the Shepherd of His people. (Daniel 2:32-45.)

The new order of things must be preceded by the breaking up of the old. The Master Potter breaks the old so He can reconstruct the new. Christ breaks in pieces all the wicked nations so that He might restore the dominion of Adam and the kingdom of David with Himself as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The statement, "As I received of My Father," is doubtless also taken from Psalms 2:7-9. Satan offered the throne and kingdom of this world to Christ, but He spurned the offer because of the conditions imposed and the fact that Satan was a usurper with no real right to the earthly principality. (Luke 4:5-8; 22:29; Revelation 11:15.) The cross as the only pathway to the crown was appointed by the Father.

### **The Morning Star**

"I will grant him to see the Morning-star" (Moffatt) was the climax of the promise. Star in the Apocalypse is symbolic of one in authority. Christ promises to share not only His throne but also His kingly authority and glory. He will clothe His victorious soldiers of the cross with the glory of the brightness of the stars. (Daniel 12:3; Matthew 13:43.) The redeemed will reflect the glory and brightness of Christ, and shine with Him in the kingdom. Jesus is the royal Star that arose out of Jacob. He is the "Day

Star” that brings the “day (lawn” to those who take heed to the “more sure word of prophecy.” He is the “bright and morning Star” who is to reign over the throne of David forever. (Num. 21:17; Matthew 2:2; 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 22:16.) The morning star rises during the darkest part of the night just before the dawn, which is ushered in by the rising sun. Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, and will bring with Him the dawn of eternal day.

The promise of the morning star indicates that a night, or period of darkness, was coming a close. The morning star is the sign and promise of greater light. It does not disperse the darkness but is a sign that the soon-rising sun will scatter the darkness of night and usher in the dawn of day that will be followed by the “perfect day” of noontide glory. Wycliffe in the fourteenth century and Savonarola in the fifteenth were morning stars of the Reformation. They and others were beacon lights heralding the coming dawn of a new day of light and truth and liberty, when the morning stars would give place to the Sun of Righteousness. The Thyatiran period would be followed by the Reformation,, which would prepare the church for the coming of Christ. The epistle of Christ to the church of Thyatira takes us through the apostasy of the Middle Ages and brings us to the Reformation period.

### **13. SARDIS THE REFORMATION PERIOD**

AND UNTO the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things said He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou has a name that thou lives, and art dead. 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 has received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shall not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shall not know what hour I will come upon thee.

“Thou has 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 overcomes, 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 said unto the churches.” Revelation 3:1-6.

#### **The City of Sardis**

Sardis was founded in the twelfth century before Christ, and was one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia. It was located about thirty-five miles southeast of Thyatira. Until captured by Cyrus in 549 BC, Sardis was the capital of the kingdom of Lydia, and became so again after the fall of the Roman power in Asia in AD 395. Lydia was one of the richest kingdoms of the ancient world. The Lydians are reputed to have been the inventors of coined money. Speaking of their wealth, the historian Ridpath says: “A great cause of the prosperity and wealth of the Lydian kingdom was the natural fertility of the country. No other of all Asia Minor had so rich a soil.”-History of the World, Volume 1, Page 231. Croesus, the reigning king when Cyrus captured Sardis, was famed for his wealth. Solon, the great Athenian legislator, spent some years in Sardis during the reign of Croesus. He was one of the seven wise men of Greece.

The ancient city of Sardis was built on a plateau of crumbling rock rising 1,500 feet above the plain. The plateau was a part of Mount Tomolus, whose height was 6,700 feet. The walls of the elevation on which the city was built were almost perpendicular, and the city was inaccessible except by one narrow passage which was steep and easily fortified and guarded. At the base of the cliff flows the little Pactolus River, once famous for its golden sands. Sardis was considered an impregnable fortress. From Sardis, Cyrus marched against Artaxerxes, and at that place Xerxes gathered his mighty army before the expedition into Greece which ended in ignominious defeat at Marathon. In AD 1402, Tamerlane destroyed the city, and it was never rebuilt. A miserable little village near by still goes by the name of Sart.

#### **Citizens Overconfident**

The natural defenses of Sardis made the guards and citizen proud and overconfident. The walls were carelessly guarded, with sometimes fatal results. Because of the failure of the guards to watch, Cyrus captured the city by stratagem in 549 BC Solon had warned Croesus not to be too confident of safety from attack, but even after the army of Cyrus appeared on the plain below, he saw no reason for concern. But the unexpected happened. One dark night a Persian soldier resolved “to approach the citadel” and attempt to

climb the precipice “at a place where no guards were ever set.” There the rock was so “precipitous and impracticable” that it would seem impossible to scale it. Herodotus says that the soldier “climbed the rock himself and other Persians followed in his track, until a large number had mounted to the top. Thus Sardis was taken, and given up entirely to pillage.” But the lesson was soon forgotten, for 330 years later the city was again captured through stratagem by Antiochus the Great. Solon had warned the overconfident Croesus that “no human being is self-sufficient in every respect-something is always lacking. In every matter it becomes us to mark well the end, for oftentimes the divinity gives men a gleam of happiness, and then submerges them in ruin.”

### **Appropriate Message**

In the light of the historic background of the city of Sardis, the epistle of Christ to the Sardian church was very appropriate and its language very impressive. He told them to “be watchful,” and “if therefore thou shall not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shall not know what hour I will come upon thee.” The city had fallen and was finally destroyed because the ruler and citizens had been overconfident. Its sentinels had failed to maintain a diligent watch. The enemy took them off guard. Jesus warned the church that if they too failed to watch because of overconfidence He would overtake them “as a thief” in the most unexpected moment. In the early days of World War II, Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave the following solemn warning to the citizens of the British Empire: “But I must drop one word of caution, for next to cowardice and treachery, overconfidence leading to neglect and slothfulness, is the worst of martial crimes.” This has also been one of the greatest dangers of the church militant in all ages, but never more so than in its remnant phase.

Sardis means “those escaping” or “that which remains.” The name, the message, and the subsequent history of the city and church, indicate a good start but a bad finish, a change for the worse. Sir William Ramsay calls Sardis “the city of death.” Its history is just the opposite of that of Smyrna, which “was dead and is alive”; or is “the city of life.” Sardis had “a name that thou lives, and art dead.” Like Ephesus, the city and church of Sardis began with a glorious history and ended in a heap of ruins.

Sardis is now heaps of ruins, with no signs of life. It is indeed “the city of death.” Describing his visit to the site of the ancient city, Emerson wrote: “There were more varied and vivid remembrances associated with the sight of Sardis, than could possibly be attached to any other spot on earth. But all were mingled with a feeling of disgust at the smallness of human glory. All-all had passed away! There were before me the remains of a dead religion, the tombs of forgotten monarchs, and the palm-tree that waved in the banquet hall of kings. While the feeling of desolation was doubly heightened by the calm, sweet sky above me, which, in its unfading brightness, shone as purely now as when it beamed upon the golden dreams of Croesus.” What happened to the city was also the fate of the local church. It began as a flourishing community and ended in nothing except the memory of a glory that was past.

“The feet of the avenging gods are shod with wool,” is an old Greek proverb that was known to the citizens of Sardis. But they failed to heed its warning. “Though the failure to watch, however, the acropolis had been successfully scaled in 549 BC by the Median soldier, and in 218 by the Cretan.” - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4, Page 2692p art. “Sardis.” The mountains around Sardis have always been a favorite haunt for thieves, who swoop down unexpectedly upon unsuspecting travelers and villagers. No government has been able to fully subdue them, even to the present day. The country is also subject to frequent earthquakes. Sardis was destroyed by the severe quake of AD 17, which laid twelve cities of Asia in ruins. Tiberius gave a large sum of money to help the city rebuild and remitted the taxes for five years. “Thou shall not know what hour I will come upon thee” was an appropriate warning. Divine judgments, like the thief, approach silently and stealthily, and accomplish their tragic mission suddenly and without warning.

Sardis never fully recovered from the earthquake of AD 17, and was only partially rebuilt. When this epistle was written, the city was rapidly waning in prestige and glory, but its inhabitants were still boastful of the reputation and history of the past. Decay and death were inevitable, but the Sardians refused to recognize the fate of the city and continued to live on its ancient glory. The city had a name only, whereas in reality it was dead, or rapidly dying. There is nothing more desolate than a dead or dying city which once teemed with life and bustled with activity, and there are few things more pitiable than for the few remaining citizens of such a city to talk with boasting of the past and vainly hope that the future will restore what has departed forever. This is strikingly illustrated by some of the ghost towns of the West.

### **The Sardis Period**

Sardis symbolizes the church of the Reformation. The Sardian period covers the sixteenth, seventeenth, and most of the eighteenth centuries in a special sense, but doubtless embraces the entire history of Protestantism to the end of the gospel dispensation. "Then came the Sardian period-the age of separation and return to the rule of Christ. The age of comparative freedom from Balaam and his doctrines, from the Nicolaitanes and their tenants, from Jezebel and her fornication. An age of many worthy names, but marked with deadness withal, and having much of which to repent; an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant countries before the great evangelical movements of the last hundred years, which brought us to the Philadelphian era." (Seiss, Page 143) The letter to Sardis pictures "the inauguration, development, corruption, and judgment of Protestantism." (McCarrell, Page 45.) It represents the glory of a past splendor in contrast with a present unabated spiritual decline, another "falling away," or apostasy.

To Sardis, Christ introduces Himself as the possessor of "the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." The seven Spirits represent the Holy Spirit in the fullness and completeness of His power and operation. To the church that was spiritually dead and whose lamp of faith was flickering and almost extinguished, Christ represents Himself as having the fullness of spiritual power and the completeness of spiritual gifts. The Spirit is sometimes called the "Giver of Life." With this gift there is hope even for a dead church.

"The seven stars" represent the human guides and teachers of the church, including "the angel of the church in Sardis." Here is shown the relation between Christ as the giver of the Holy Spirit and as the head of a ministry of human agents. The success of Christ's ministers depends upon the gift of the Holy Spirit. Here is positive proof that the seven Spirits and the seven angels are not the same, as some contend. It is the seven Spirits who make the seven stars shine. When ministers lose the gift of the Spirit they cease to shine in God's firmament, and become "wandering stars." (Jude 13.)

The Sardians had a name and reputation of life, but in reality they were dead. "Men say you are living, though you are dead," and "You are supposed to be alive but in reality you are dead," are other translations. Every professed Christian says by his very profession that he is alive and in possession of eternal life. By calling himself a Christian, he is living on the name of Christ. If he is dead spiritually, he is making a false claim and is under a terrible deception, likened to a corpse making a pretense of life. Like Samson of old the modern church is spiritually dead and "know not that the Lord was departed."

The church may have much organization and the most up-to-date machinery, so that it hums with activity, making every pretense of life and vitality. Swete speaks of Sardis as "the paradox of death under the name of life." (Page 48.) There is "a form of godliness" with a denial of "the power thereof." There is nothing wrong with a form of doctrine and service provided it is vitalized by the presence and power of Christ. Otherwise it is lifeless and therefore worthless. To God life is more important than all else. "With Him a name to live amounts to nothing when it happens to be fastened to a corpse." (McKnight, Page 227.)

One writer says: "The Reformers began well, but many of their successors were not so consecrated as they and so their works were not found perfect before God. They had a name to live and yet were dead, and the life of vital godliness which sprang from the great doctrines of the Reformers, gradually degenerated into lifeless formalism, until at the time of John Wesley the conditions were such that many of the ministers of the Established Churches of Europe were drunkards and libertines and were among the lowest of the people. Men like the Wesleys, Whitfield, the Puritans and the Pietists began to protest against these things with such earnestness and unction of the Spirit of God that they succeeded in bringing about the modern revival and missionary period typified by the conditions at Philadelphia." - SAMUEL H. TURNER, Outline Studies in the Book of Revelation, Page 13.

Speaking of this period of lifeless formalism, Matthew Arnold wrote:

"Its form still stood without a breach,  
When life and warmth were fled,  
And still it spoke its wonted speech;  
But every word was dead."

Protestantism was founded on a protest against the doctrines and corrupt practices of Romanism. The name continues large with life and reputation, but it has largely lost its significance. The average Protestant is ignorant of the great truth of justification by faith and other doctrines on which Protestantism was founded. Lack of a knowledge of the Scriptures has produced spiritual weakness and worldly

conformity in many churches, and thus robbed most Protestants of their protest.

The modern church has built up an enviable reputation for activity. Its services are orthodox in form and are fairly well attended. It has many rallies, campaigns, and anniversaries. Many prominent people are numbered among its membership, and yet with all this machinery and pretense to life the modern church is declared to be dead. This is evident first of all by the almost total absence of spiritual life. Very few souls are being saved, and even the saints are slipping in their religious experience. In the second place the lives of many church members are tarnished by sin so that only a few "have not defiled their garments,"

### **Modern Protestantism**

James Anthony Froude thus describes modern Protestantism: "Protestantism has made no converts to speak of in Europe since the sixteenth century. It shot up in two generations to its full stature, and became an established creed with defined boundaries; and the many millions who in Catholic countries proclaim their indifference to their religion, either by neglect or contempt, do not swell the congregations of the Protestant church or convent. Their objections to the Church of Rome are objections equally to all forms of dogmatic and doctrinal Christianity. And so it has come about that the old enemies are becoming friends in the presence of a common foe. Catholics speak tenderly of Protestants as keeping alive belief in the creeds, and look forward to their return to the sheepfold. While the old Antichrist, the Scarlet woman on the seven hills, drunk with the blood of the saints, is now treated by Protestantism as an old sister and a valiant ally in the great war against infidelity. The points of difference are forgotten. The points of union are passionately dwelt upon, and the remnants of idolatry which the more ardent Protestants once abhorred and denounced are now regarded as having been providentially preserved as a means of making up the quarrel and bringing back the churches into communion. The dread of popery is gone. The ceremonial system, once execrated as a service of Satan, is regarded as a thing at worst indifferent, perhaps in itself desirable. And even those who are conscious of no tendency to what they still call corruption are practically forsaking the faith of their fathers, and re-establishing, so far as they can or dare, those very things which their fathers revolted against."

Sardis not only represents "those escaping" or "that which "remains" after the great apostasy and terrible persecutions of the Middle Ages, but some authorities believe that the word Sardis means "remnant" or "an escaped few," and therefore represents Protestantism after what was vital in it had evaporated so that there are only a few faithful ones remaining. There would be a "remnant" who would continue the work of reform even after the Reformation had waned and Protestantism in general was dead. There would be "a few names," or "a few souls" (Moffatt), in Sardis who had "not defiled their garments."

The promise is that during the decadence of Protestantism a few would maintain their loyalty and spiritual experience, even in a church that had more profession than vital godliness. In the beginning Protestantism was very much alive and acquired a name that has long outlived its spirituality. In Daniel 11:32-34 is described the days when men of God did "exploits" in breaking the papal power and ushering in the dawn of a new day for Christendom. This prophecy also indicates a later popularity of the movement that brought the Reformation to a standstill. Success brought feelings of pride and overconfidence, so that the church ceased to "be watchful." The various church factions hid behind man-made creeds and refused further light. They began to live on the names and reputations of their founding fathers and failed to watch, with fatal results.

### **A Partial Reformation**

"I have not found thy works perfect before God," is the divine indictment. Perfect as used here means "fulfilled," or "up to the mark or standard." "I have found no works of your perfected before my God" is the American Revised Version, and "fully performed" is the rendering in the Emphatic Diaglott. This indicates that the Reformation was started but not completed. It came to a standstill, and was not carried to its consummation. The good work of reform that was so nobly begun did not come to perfection, and Christ's people were therefore not complete before God. The great truths which were "received and heard" were not appreciated and remembered.

The new spiritual life engendered by the message of the Reformers soon languished, and eventually ended in stagnation and death. With all the boasting and pretense of life there was little left except a hollow shell and a lifeless form. The great enemy had gained a victory on a new battlefield. He had entered the church in disguise and as a fifth columnist accomplished from within what he had never been able to do from without. Seiss declares that with this change Protestantism "was one step further in its

process of ripening for ultimate rejection.” (Page 184.)

Protestantism became stagnant and lifeless because it ceased to protest and therefore failed to finish the work of reform. Dr. Philip Schaff, in his *History of the Christian, Church, The German Reformation*, Volume 1, Page 7, 8, says: “The Reformation of the sixteenth century is not the finale, but a movement still in progress,” and Sir Robert Peel, while Prime Minister of England, in 1840, said: “The day is not far distant, and it may be very near, when we shall have to fight the battle of the Reformation over again.” The Reformation cannot be completed until God’s people are brought all the way back to the faith once delivered to the church by Christ and His apostles.

The statement “ready to die,” indicates some signs of life. Swete declares that “amid the general reign of spiritual death Christ detected vestiges of life, though they were on the point of becoming extinct.” (Page 49.) The elements of spiritual life, love, faith, missionary energy, and watchfulness were “ready to die” and would soon disappear if not revived and strengthened. “Strengthen those thy remaining few graces, which in thy spiritual deadly slumber are not yet quite extinct.” - HENRY ALFORD, *The Greek Testament*, Volume 4, part 2, Page 580. The command is to awake and watch. Christ does not say, “Arise from the dead,” because there is some life left which might be fanned into a flame. The situation is not hopeless, because Christ is able to give life even to the dead forms of religion.

The message to Sardis bears witness to a spiritual decline from a far better state. As in the Ephesian message, the Sardian letter applies chiefly to the close rather than the beginning of the period. It applies to the time when rationalism denied the faith of the early Reformers, and the church became deadened by cold formalism. Protestantism today is filled with members who are dead spiritually. There are still many works; in fact, they have largely supplanted faith, and have “become to the majority the all-important thing in religion. But dead faith can only produce dead works. Such works may reach the standard of man’s perfection, but they are not “perfect before God.” They do not measure up to 1E1is requirements. The call to modern Protestantism is to wake up and become watchful before being overtaken by sudden and unexpected disaster.

#### **Further Reformation Demanded**

The divine call is for a further or continuing reformation. Remembering the great truths of the Reformation of the sixteenth century and what they accomplished in liberating the world from the slavery of papal domination, the church today is asked to “hold fast” to the truths then revealed, and then “repent,” or “reform.” (Emphatic Diaglott.) The call is for a new or further reformation, for the finishing of the one that had been arrested by a second “falling away,” or apostasy. There must be an awakening from spiritual death. “Wake up, rally what is still left to you, though it is on the very point of death.” (Moffatt.)

A sleeping sentinel is considered a traitor. The same must be true of a sleeping minister or watchman of the church. No person can reach such a high pinnacle of Christian attainment that he is safe from the danger of falling and can with safety be off guard for a single moment. “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” is the warning. Self-deception is perhaps the greatest of all sins. To boast of life when on the verge of death is a tragic state. The call of the Sardian message is to return to the spiritual experience and high standards of the reformers and founders of the church and then complete the work they had so well begun. The appeal is summed up in the statement, “Awake thou that sleeps, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” Ephesians 5:14.

Because Protestants have lost much of what the pioneers had, they are admonished to remember the past glorious history and experience, and to return to “the faith once delivered unto the saints,” but forgotten by their children. What marvelous doctrines the saints had restored to them by the Reformation, and what wonderful spiritual revivals have swept through the church from time to time since those days of spiritual heroes with their mighty exploits. It would be profitable for modern Christians to contemplate not only the work of Luther and his fellow Reformers, but also of the Wesleys, Whitefield, Knox, Finney, Spurgeon, and Moody. We need more of the faith and works of our fathers.

The similarity between the Ephesian and Sardis periods is striking. Both had a glorious beginning, with a corresponding spiritual decline to a condition of half warmness in affection and deadness in spiritual life. The Christians of both periods are therefore urged to remember the past and to repent and return to the love and faith and practice of their fathers. Because of the wonderful opportunities for advancement in knowledge and spiritual experience, the modern Sardians have no excuse for their back sliding state, and for them Christ has no praise or commendation.

As an incentive to watchfulness Christ said to the Sardians, “You will certainly not know the hour at which I will come to judge you.” (Weymouth.) The Sardian period reaches to the time of the judgment

and the coming of Christ. The secret coming of judgment “in such an hour as you think not” and as the visit of a thief in the night is referred to in Matthew 24:40-44; Luke 21:34-36. (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:3-5.) Just as the overconfident and self-satisfied citizens of Sardis were suddenly surprised and overtaken by judgments, so the religious world in general will be caught in an overwhelming surprise because of the failure to watch.

But there is to be a faithful remnant. Jesus declared that there are “a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.” The promise is “And they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.” Names here has the meaning of “persons” – “a few souls.” (Moffatt.) They are the persons whose names are in the book of life. Christ knows His people by name. The reference may indicate a registry in the Sardis church typical of the registry in heaven in which the names of the saints are enrolled.

There will be a remnant in decadent Protestantism who will repent and carry the Reformation to completion. They will be watching and waiting when Jesus returns. Their character garments will not be defiled by sin. While Christendom as a whole will be unready for the crisis, a remnant will be prepared and saved. (Joel 2:32; Revelation 12:17.) There can be living souls even in the midst of a dead church. Garments soiled by sin can be cleansed by the blood of Christ and made “as white as snow.” This remnant will walk with Christ in white in Paradise restored, “for they are worthy.” They are worthy on the basis of grace and God’s acceptance rather than actual perfection as measured according to strict justice. The worthiness is relative rather than absolute.

### **The Promised Reward**

The promise to the faithful remnant in Sardis is threefold. They are to be clothed in the symbolic white robes of victory, their names -will not be blotted out of the book of life, and Christ will confess their names before His Father and the angels. The Hebrews regarded holiness as a beautiful white robe that could be soiled by sin. When a white-robed priest committed a sin that disqualified him for the duties of his sacred office, his white garment was taken from him and he was given a black robe in its place. His name was also stricken from the sacerdotal register. In the Scriptures white is used as the symbol of both purity and triumph. (Zechariah 3:3-5; Revelation 7:13, 14; 19:7, 8, 11-14.)

It was the custom of the early Christians who were candidates for baptism to put on white robes and march in a procession to the place where the sacrament was ministered. This was the evidence to all that they had become Christians. This custom still prevails to some extent in the South among the colored Baptists. The white robe of our text is the robe of righteousness and glory worn by the redeemed and furnished by the Divine Host. We are told that the Lord is “clothed with honor and majesty,” and covers Himself “with light as with a garment.” (Psalm 104:1, 2.) The symbol is doubtless that of the glittering and dazzling linen garments worn by the high priest on important occasions. Of the transfiguration of Jesus we read: “His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.” Mark 9:3. The glorified saints are promised such a covering as they march in triumph through the gates of pearl into the celestial city and kingdom of glory.

In ancient Rome the white toga was symbolic of joy and victory, and black garments were symbolic of mourning and defeat. Black was worn by captives and slaves. Successful candidates for office were clothed in white robes by their friends and marched in a triumphal procession to their new official headquarters. On days of a Roman triumph all citizens were dressed in white and Rome was called “The White City.” The victorious general and his staff wore white togas and rode on white horses or in chariots drawn by white horses. The poet Juvenal wrote:

“And now the imperial eagle, raised on high, With golden beak, the march of majesty; Trumpets before,  
and on the left and right, A cavalcade of nobles, all in white.”

In Greek and Roman cities the names of the citizens were registered as in modern times. It was a special privilege to be a registered citizen and a terrible disgrace to have the name expunged, or blotted out, because of unworthy conduct. The blotting out of the name from the citizenship registry was the preliminary step to the execution of the sentence of death or banishment for life. The names of the spiritually dead members of the Sardis church could not be retained in the book of life. When the investigative judgment is over, only the names of the spiritually alive will be found recorded in the family record in heaven. The book of life is for the names of the victors in the warfare against evil. (Revelation 20:12, 15; 21:27.)

On the other hand the names of hypocrites and backsliders, together with their recorded good

deeds, will be erased. (Exodus 32:32, 33; Nehemiah 13:14.) Either the name is blotted out of the book of life or the sins are erased from the books of record. Peter said, "Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Acts 3:19. Only the sins of those who openly confess Christ as their Advocate will be blotted out. (Matthew 10:32, 33.) The promise of our text implies a solemn warning to those who do not confess and overcome sin. It indicates that it is possible to fall from grace. The picture is doubtless drawn from a Roman triumph given a victorious general and his army, which is used as a type of the final triumphal procession of Christ and the redeemed into the celestial city. As they approach the city, the command goes forth to the angel gatekeepers, "Open you the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in." Isaiah 26:2.

## **14. PHILADELPHIA - BROTHERLY LOVE**

AND TO the angel of the church in Philadelphia write. These things said He that is holy, He that is true, He that bath the key of David, He that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou has a little strength, and has kept My word, and has not denied My name. 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.

"Because thou has 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 that fast which thou has, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcomes 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 comes down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name. Re that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches." Revelation 3:7-13.

Philadelphia was located about twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis. The city was founded in 189 BC by Attalus Philadelphus, for whom it was named. Some believe that it was so named also because of the love and loyalty existing between Philadelphus and his brother, the king of Lydia. The city was also known as Decapolis, because it was one of the ten cities of the plain. It was sometimes called Little Athens because of the magnificence of its public buildings. Its modern Turkish name is Ala Shehr, which means "The City of God" or "The Exalted City." Philadelphia has thus been given a number of new names.

Philadelphia guarded and commanded an important pass through the mountains between the Hermus and Meander valleys. It was thus the keeper of the key to the door, or gateway, to the eastern highlands, with the power to open and close according to the will of the officials. Through this portal passed the mail and trade and commerce of the west to the wide regions of central and eastern Lydia. The introduction of Christ in His epistle therefore had a forceful meaning to the Philadelphians. He reminded them of other and more important doors, to which He alone holds the key, with the power and authority to open and shut.

### **A Place of Trial**

Philadelphia was subject to frequent and severe earthquakes. Trench (page 181) declared that "no city of Asia Minor suffered more, or so much, from violent and oft-recurring earthquakes," and the historian Strabo, who lived between 64 BC and AD 21, said that Philadelphia was "full of earthquakes." He may have been there at the time of the great earthquake that destroyed the City in AD 17. That was only one of a series of quakes that kept the citizens in a state of fearful expectancy. Strabo wrote: "Philadelphia has no trustworthy walls, but daily in one direction or another they keep tottering and falling apart. The inhabitants, however, pursue their original purpose, ever keeping in mind the writhing pangs of the ground, and building with a view to counteracting them." (Book 12, Chapter 8.)

Strabo was astonished that a city should ever have been founded in such a locality, and he questioned the sanity of the people for re-entering the ruined city and planning to rebuild to withstand the future shocks which were momentarily expected. He felt that when people are driven from a city by earthquakes they ought to be wise enough never to return. He declared that the walls of the houses were incessantly opening, and sometimes one, and sometimes another part of the city was experiencing some

damage. The citizens therefore lived in constant dread of quaking earth and falling buildings.

Because of this situation the people often fled to the open country and lived in tents or booths in earthquake seasons in order to keep themselves beyond the range of disaster. Although the city was often shattered and the migrations from its ruins were frequent, so that its citizens lived in constant terror, yet in spite of an ever present sense of danger the brave Philadelphians were determined to make the city realize the aims for which it was founded. This constant fear of the day of trial, when the citizens must flee for their lives, made the language employed by Christ very striking. (Verses 10-12.) He encouraged His people with the promise that if faithful they would one day enter the New Jerusalem, the city of God, where they could dwell safely and “go no more out.” When the Tartars captured the city of Philadelphia in 1403 it is said that they built a wall around it with the bodies of their victims.

### **The Philadelphian Message**

This message reveals the best spiritual condition of any of the seven churches. The letter is addressed to a small but exceptional company who had remained faithful in the midst of a large number who had failed. The message indicates a commendable change for the better from the Sardian condition of spiritual deadness. To the Philadelphians had come a renewal of life and love and missionary zeal, a resurrection from spiritual death, a return to the first love of the early Ephesian period. Suffering Smyrna and tried Philadelphia are the only two of the seven churches that received no rebuke, and with Thyatira are the only ones that remain of the original seven. The present city has a population of about 15,000, a third of whom are professed Christians. Philadelphia held out against the conquering Turks long after the other cities of Asia, except Smyrna, had fallen. After being besieged by a powerful Ottoman army till the inhabitants were reduced to the verge of starvation, they held out for eleven years before yielding, in AD 1390, surrendering on excellent terms.

The courage and heroism of the Christian defenders of the city aroused the admiration of the historian Gibbon, who wrote: “In the loss of Ephesus the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick, of the Revelation; the destruction is complete. The circus and three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes; Sardes is reduced to a miserable village; the God of Mahomet, without a rival or a son, is evoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos. . . . Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above fourscore years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in the scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honor and safety may sometimes be the same.” (Gibbon, Volume 2, Chapter 64.) Gibbon doubtless refers to the lone pillar that for so many years stood like a sentinel amid the ruins of the ancient city. I will make you “a pillar in the temple of My God” is the divine promise to the Christian victor.

### **The Philadelphian Period**

The era of brotherly love came as the result of a great revival in Protestantism. The period covers the latter part of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, until the beginning of the Laodicean state. In 1865 Joseph A. Seiss declared that “the Philadelphian era [was] marked by a closer adherence to the written word, and more fraternity among Christians, but [is] now rapidly giving place to Laodicean half warmness.” (Page 143.)

The Philadelphian condition of brotherly love and missionary zeal must again prevail in the remnant who are to be translated when Christ returns. The message shows clearly that this period reaches to the end. It began with the great foreign missions movement, which sent a revival through Protestantism and ushered in an era of love for both God and man such as had not been known since apostolic days. Love for the Elder Brother always leads to love for the other brothers. This is the love that was lost during the Ephesian period. It is not fully regained till just before Jesus returns. Its return to the church will bring a repetition of Pentecostal power.

Those who escaped from the dominion of Jezebel and the spiritual deadness of Sardis, began to remember how they had “received and heard,” and repented. The arrested Reformation was started again. Dead Christendom was mightily stirred ‘by great spiritual revivals bringing renewed life and love and unity. The church entered upon a program of world evangelism to fulfill the great commission. May 31, 1792, William Carey preached his memorable sermon on foreign missions from Isaiah 54:2, 3. This date is reckoned as the birth of modern missions, and if an exact date can be chosen it may also mark the beginning of the Philadelphian period of the universal church.

The revival movement spread through all denominations and broke down many of the barriers that had hitherto separated the different religious sects. The Wesleys and Whitefield had an important part in this great movement that ushered in the era of brotherly love. Of this movement one writer said: "Thus early the prophetic hope was expressed that this uprising for the world's redemption 'will spread to every Christian bosom, to the Dutch, German, American, and all Protestant churches, till the whole professing world shall burn with fervent love, and labor to spread in every heathen land the sweet savor of the Redeemer's name.'" -Quoted by D. L Leonard, *A Hundred Years of Missions*, Page 87. On page 86 he quotes Dr. Bogue as saying: "This will be ever remembered by us as the era of Christian benevolence."

In speaking again of the dawn of this new day, the same author said: "In January, 1797, it could be affirmed concerning the religious fervor resulting far and wide: Christians in every corner of the land are meeting in a regular manner, and pouring out their souls for God's blessing on the world. And again: The efforts most successfully made to introduce the Gospel to the South Seas have had a most powerful tendency to unite the devoted servants of Christ of every denomination in the bonds of brotherly love, and to awaken zeal to help the perishing multitudes in our own country, and also the Jews. Inspiring letters came too from Basle, which since 1771 had been the seat of a wide-spread movement to maintain evangelical doctrine and piety. Certain devout German brethren sent their congratulations couched in these glowing words: "It is like the dawn promising the beautiful day after the dark night. It is the beginning of a new epoch for the kingdom of God on earth." - *Ibid.*, Page 89-91.

In 1797 the first missionaries landed in Tahiti in the South Pacific. Robert Morrison went to China in 1807, and Robert Moffat to Africa in 1817. In the same year John Williams began the work of exploring and Christianizing the South Sea Island races. In 1840 David Livingstone began his missionary explorations of Africa. The British and Foreign Bible Society was organized in 1804, and the American Bible Society in 1816. The multiplication of Bibles in various languages was an essential part of the program of world evangelism that began with the Philadelphian era.

### **The Second Advent Movement**

This great revival of Christian love resulting in a burden for world evangelism naturally culminated in the Great Second Advent Movement. Church leaders around the world began the study of the prophetic word, and almost simultaneously came to the unanimous conclusion that the end of the reign of sin was near and that Jesus would soon return in fulfillment of His promise. In fact no other conclusion is possible from the study of Bible prophecy. This prophetic investigation centered on the books of Daniel and the Revelation, and the great sermon of Christ in answer to the question of the disciples, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

On May 19, 1780, the sun was supernaturally darkened in fulfillment of prophecy, and the predicted shower of falling meteors followed on the night of November 13, 1833. Thousands of ministers of many denominations began to proclaim the message of the Second Advent, and all Christendom was stirred. Based on the 2300-year time prophecy of Daniel 8 and 9, many came to the conclusion that Christ would return in 1843, and, later, in 1844. There swept over the Christian world the greatest revival since Pentecost and early apostolic times. The believers in the Advent hope were brought into a state of brotherly love and unity and godliness such as had not been known since the beginning of the Christian Era. It has been suggested that the Philadelphian period began in 1798 with the close of the 1260 years of papal dominion, and reached to the close of the 2300-year time prophecy in 1844, when the investigative judgment began in heaven and the Laodicean state of the church was ushered in by the disappointment.

To the holiest of the seven churches Christ introduces Himself as "He that is holy" and "He that is true." "The Holy One of Israel" is speaking to His people. The Head of the church lays claim to divinity, and every word He speaks is true and dependable. His divinity is also proved by the fact that He has "the key of David" because He is the "Son of David," with the right to occupy his throne. Christ holds the key to the house of David, which is the kingdom of heaven. He has the authority to open and close the heavenly kingdom and decide who can and who cannot enter. All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Citizenship is possible only through Him.

The declaration that Christ has possession of the key of David, with the authority to open and shut, is a quotation of a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 22:22. "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder; so He shall open, and none shall shut; and He shall shut, and none shall open." (See also Luke 1:32, 33.) A key is the means of locking and unlocking doors, and is therefore a symbol of power and authority. Since the year 605 BC, when Israel's last independent king, Jehoiakim, was dethroned by

Nebuchadnezzar, the house and throne room of David have been closed and locked. The throne of David will remain vacant “until He come whose right it is.” (See Ezekiel 21:23-27.) The Philadelphian message indicates that the time is near when Christ, the Son of David, is about to take His rightful place on the long-unoccupied throne of Adam and David. We are told that this will take place at His Second Advent. (Matthew 25:31-34.)

There are several other doors that Christ alone can open and shut.

1. The door of the tomb. The keys of death and the grave are in the keeping of Him who is “the resurrection, and the life.” (Revelation 1:18.) When the Philadelphian message applies to the church, the time of the resurrection of the righteous is drawing near.

2. The door into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, which was opened in 1844, at the close of the 2300 years. This door into the final phase of the mediatorial ministry of Christ is mentioned in Revelation 4:1; 11:18, 19.

3. The doors of missionary opportunity. Paul said that when he visited Troas “to preach Christ’s gospel a door was opened unto me of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 2:12.) Paul and Barnabas related to the church of Antioch how God “had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” (Acts 14:27.)

Philadelphia had the power to open and close the door through the mountains reaching to the cities of the great tablelands of Asia. The Philadelphian period of Christendom is that of the open door to foreign missions. It was the beginning of the modern missionary age, when the door of the kingdom of heaven is to be open wide to all nations. During this period a divine hand began to open the hitherto closed mission fields of the world so that the gospel commission could be finished and the prophecy of Revelation 14:6-14 fulfilled.

4. The door of probation, which will be closed when Christ completes His priestly mission and becomes the Lord of lords and King of kings. Christ alone through His atoning death has the authority to open and close the gates of Paradise. Jesus said: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Luke 13:24.

#### **A Faithful Remnant**

Some believe that Philadelphia not only means “brotherly love” but also “faithful remnant.” The Philadelphians constitute the faithful remnant of the universal church, 9 who will be translated when Jesus comes. The statement ‘For thou has a little strength,’ has been rather difficult to explain. It seems that the open door of missionary opportunity was set before them because they had a little strength, the only spiritual strength left in Christendom. The Sardians were wholly dead and powerless. Now God had found a people with a little strength for missionary endeavor. They had responded to the appeal to “be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain.” They were doubtless also conscious of their weakness, and therefore qualified to do service for Christ. They were not overconfident, like the Sardians, or self satisfied, like the Laodiceans. Their “little strength” led them to rely on the Word and power of God. Others take the position that the reference has to do with their small numbers and material weakness. Trench declares that they were “a little flock, poor in worldly goods, and of small account in the eyes of men.” (Page 187.) The former seems the more probable explanation. The first qualification for service in the cause of Christ is a recognition of our spiritual poverty.

The promise that those who claimed to be Jews but were rather of the synagogue of Satan would be made to worship at the feet of the true Israelites and to know that God had loved them, was an even better promise than a similar one made to Smyrna. In the Smyrnan letter an assurance was given that the enemies of Christ would not prevail against the church. But here the promise is that the church would prevail against her enemies who made hypocritical pretensions of being God’s chosen people. It is a solemn warning against apostasy.

The Jews bitterly persecuted those of their nation who became Christians, and treated them as the outcasts of Israel. They were put out of the synagogue and excluded from the temple and its services and even from the city of Jerusalem, which had long been the city of God. Now the true Messiah, who has the authority to open and close the door into the fold of the true Israel, admits genuine Christians as the only true Jews, and excludes their opponents. He promises the persecuted Christians an entrance into the New Jerusalem, which He calls “the city of My God,” and from which they will “go no more out.” All will someday acknowledge that the love of Christ is centered on those who are Israelites indeed, the faithful of all nations.

Verse 10 pictures a world crisis: “Because in spite of suffering you have guarded My word, I in turn will guard you from the hour of trial which is soon coming upon the whole world, to put to the test the

inhabitants of the earth.” (Weymouth.) It is evident that this is still future, which fact is proof that the Philadelphian condition will be revived and continue to the very end. It seems that the last four of the seven churches continue in some respects till the coming of Christ. Just before the end the church and the world must pass through the crucible so as to separate the dross from the gold. Before Christ returns there must be a clear distinction between the church and the world, and this is made possible by a great crisis.

The distinction between true and false professors of religion is not always apparent at the present time. Malachi 3:2, 3 pictures Christ as a silversmith refining and testing His people. The fiery trials of the furnace burn out the dross till He can see in them the reflection of His own image. “The word of My patience” doubtless includes the whole gospel, which is the teaching which finds its central truth in the patience of Christ. True Christians will be kept from falling, because they have kept His word. In Deuteronomy 4:34 the plagues of Egypt are called “temptations.” Those who keep the Word of Christ’s patience during the last crisis will be kept from the seven last plagues. The language indicates that pressure will be used to compel God’s faithful remnant to let go their hold on His truth. It is to this time that Revelation 12:17 applies.

### **Second Advent Near**

The statement “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou has, that no man take thy crown” indicates that the Second Advent of Christ is at hand. Beckwith declares that this is “the keynote of the book,” and Trench says that “the speedy coming of the Lord” is “the ever-recurring keynote of this book.” (Page 191.) The language indicates that the severe test will not be of long duration. The patient endurance of the saints will soon ‘be rewarded, and in the brief interval they must “hold that fast” which they had received, till deliverance comes. The crowns of victory depend on the keeping of the Word of Christ’s patience to the very end. There is no reward for the quitter.

The admonition does not mean that one person gains the crown that another loses, as in an athletic contest. “That your wreath of victory be not taken away from you” is the Weymouth translation. Paul wrote: “Let no man beguile you of your reward.” Colossians 2:18. The person who deceives another so that he loses his crown of eternal life and righteousness does not himself get the lost reward. The Greek and Roman athletes who gained crowns, or wreaths, of victory made every effort to keep others from taking them away from them in subsequent contests. The Christian must maintain his spiritual experience or lose his eternal reward.

The language of our text seems to indicate a delay of the Second Advent beyond the expectation of the church. Christ’s Advent was indeed very near at the close of the Philadelphian period proper, when the faithful of Christendom were expecting that great event and had made preparation for it. But His coming has been delayed by the entrance of the church into the terrible Laodicean condition of half warmth in affection and flagging missionary zeal. In the parable the ten virgins, who represent the people of God who are expecting the coming of the Bridegroom, “all slumbered and slept” while “the ‘bridegroom tarried.’” (Matthew 25:1-5.)

This is the divinely indicated reason for the delay in the Second Advent of Christ that makes the admonition of our text necessary. Only those who patiently hold fast through the tarrying time will be saved and crowned with wreaths of victory. According to Hebrews 10:35-37, “the word of my patience” seems to have to do with the attitude of the church during the delay of the Second Advent. It is because of this delay that many cast away their confidence and lose their reward. They do not live and walk by faith but say in their hearts, “My Lord delayed His coming,” which leads them to smite their fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken. (Matthew 24:48-51.)

### **The Promised Reward**

The overcomer is to be made a permanent pillar in the temple of God, on which is to be inscribed the new name representing the character of God. The new home of the Christian victor is the New Jerusalem. In the New Testament the chief men in the church are called pillars, and all Christians are called living stones in the church temple. It is the pillars that keep in place and uphold the multitude of lesser stones of a temple. A pillar is symbolic of dignity, beauty, permanence, stability, and strength. In Solomon’s temple were two brazen pillars thirty feet in height, called Jachin, meaning “He shall establish,” and Boaz, “In it is strength.” The promise to the overcomer is that “ ‘he shall be one of the great and beautiful stones on which the others rest,’ but ‘he shall be so placed that he cannot be removed while the whole fabric stands.’” (Cambridge Bible.)

Just as the pillar cannot be moved as long as the building stands, so the Christian victor in the

closing crisis shall “go no more out” of the temple of God. His triumph is permanent. “He shall never go out from it again” is the Weymouth translation. Charles declares that “fixity of character is at last achieved.” (Page 91.) There will be no more back sliding. God’s faithful remnant reach the highlands of holiness, the plateau of perfection, so that they go triumphantly through the final day of test and trial. They have not been turned aside by the dragon’s roar, or defiled by the corruption of the world. They are clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ’s righteousness, and their names are enrolled among the faithful of all ages in the Lamb’s book of life. Augustine said: “Who would not yearn for that city out of which no friend departs, and into which no enemy enters.”

Philadelphia was a city of many new names. When the city was destroyed by the great earthquake Of AD 17, Tiberius gave \$600,000 to help rebuild. In appreciation the citizens changed the name of the city to Neo-Ceasarea in honor of the donor, but when the emperor became a cruel tyrant, the Philadelphians became ashamed of the new name. During the reign of Vespasian the name was again changed, to Flavia, in his honor, as he was the first of the Flavian family to rule. These changes of name doubtless called for great celebrations of dedication, when the whole city worshiped the emperor in whose honor the new name was given. Such occasions brought an hour of trial to every Christian in the city.

The victors are called pillars, on which the character of God is written. Important writings were engraved on the pillars of the ancient temples, especially the names of the emperors who built them and to whom they were dedicated. MeCarrell declares that “in Apostolic days, pillars were erected to rulers and generals with testimonies of their accomplishments chiseled upon them.” (Page 64.) This was also true of the triumphal arches dedicated to victorious generals. The emperor who erected a temple was usually given divine honors and worshiped as a god. This meant persecution for those who like the three Hebrew worthies refused to bow the knee.

A new name is necessary for those who develop a new character. This is a renewal of the promise of Revelation 2:17. When Jacob’s character was changed the Lord changed his name, for the purpose of a name is to describe the character. The New Jerusalem is the capital city of the renewed kingdom, on whose throne will sit the Son of David. The overcomer will be a citizen of that kingdom forever. In that city the names of all its citizens are enrolled. (Heb. 12:22, 23.) With the name of God and the name of the city of God written on the overcomer, “the gates of hell shall not prevail” to keep him from reaching the promised destination.

## **15. LAODICEA THE PERIOD OF LUKEWARMNESS**

AND UNTO the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things said the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou were cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth. Because thou says, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knows not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich. And white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that thou may see. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches.” Revelation 3:11-22.

The message of Christ to the church of the Laodiceans is most strikingly significant in the setting of the history of the city of Laodicea. The city was located about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia and one hundred miles east of Ephesus. It was founded by Antiochus II between 261 and 246 BC, and was named in honor of his wife, Laodice, who afterward poisoned him. This is the Antiochus who formed the marriage league with Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, in fulfillment of Daniel 11:6.

Laodicea was mostly populated with Syrians and Jews transported from Babylon. The city was located on the Lyeus River, and was distinguished from no less than six other cities by the same name by being designated Laodicea on the Lyeus. It was located at the junction of the two post roads from Ephesus and Pergamos running eastward into Syria. The highway entered on the west through the Ephesian Gate and left the city on the east through the Syrian Gate. East of the city was a pass through the mountains

called The Gate of Phrygia, of which Laodicea was the gatekeeper.

### **A Wealthy City**

Laodicea was located in the midst of a rich farming country and was famed for its wealth. In it extensive banking operations were carried on. Cicero proposed to cash his treasury bills of exchange in Laodicea because of these facilities. The city had large markets controlled mostly by the Jews, of whom there were 7,500 besides women and children at the time the epistle was written. So wealthy were the citizens that when the city was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60, they refused the help offered by the imperial Roman government and rebuilt at their own expense. This example of self-sufficiency was so rare that it made the city famous. Because of their situation Christ's statement regarding the pride of spiritual wealth on the part of the church members is full of meaning. He spoke to the rich merchants and bankers of this wealthy mercantile city in their own dialect.

The city was also noted for the black cloth manufactured there from wool produced in the valley. The wool was glossy black and of a soft texture almost like silk and became famous throughout the whole region. Black garments were almost universally worn by the Laodiceans, and of them they were very proud. Christ advised the Christians of the city to buy of Him "white raiment," which represented the beautiful robe of His own righteousness. The people of Laodicea were familiar with the white toga worn by Roman citizens and officials. To be privileged to wear this white garment was esteemed a high honor. To the Romans it was symbolic of victory, and to the Christians it represented purity of character through the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ.

### **Noted Health Resort**

In connection with the Temple of Karu was a renowned school of medicine. This temple was one of two hundred throughout the Greek and Roman world dedicated to Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine and the pagan counterfeit of the Messiah. He was known as "The Great Physician." In this temple was made the famous Plixygian eye salve, called collyrium, which was sold in all parts of the then-known world. This gives forceful meaning to the counsel of the Great Physician, who advised the spiritually blind Laodiceans to buy eye salve of Him that they might have spiritual vision.

Also near the city were a number of hot, cold, and lukewarm springs, and especially the latter. Most of these waters contained minerals with supposed healing properties. Thousands of sick people journeyed to Laodicea to be physically benefited by the eye salve, the mineral water, and the hot and lukewarm baths. Although the water was pleasing to the body for bathing, most of it was nauseous to those who drank. This makes very appropriate the language used by Christ in this epistle. He declared that because the Christians of Laodicea were lukewarm in their affections, He was about to spew, or vomit, them out of His mouth.

### **Proud and Self-satisfied**

The boast, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," has in it not only a ring of independence but also a spirit of insolence and arrogance. The citizens wanted the world to know that their mercantile city at the meeting place of three important highways was no pauper. The inhabitants were noted for their skill in manufacturing and dyeing garments, rich in color and exquisite in texture. In extravagant fashions and fine apparel the city was the Paris of its time.

Laodicea was also famous as a pleasure resort for the physically strong and prosperous, and a health resort for the sick. The magnificent stadium, which was twelve years in building, had an arena nine hundred feet in length, in whose basin a modern ocean liner could easily anchor. There were at least two, and probably three, theaters, one of them with seats of polished marble with bases carved in the form of a lion's feet. Its gymnasium was a work of art, containing chambers and porticoes and baths. There was also a library with reading rooms. The city had a remarkable water system in which pure water was brought from the hills through a stone aqueduct, the ruins of which are still visible.

At the time of this epistle the Lyeus valley was a beautiful spot. The crooked Lyeus River flowed through Colosse and past Laodicea and Hierapolis before joining the Maeander. Near Colosse the Lyeus disappeared and flowed underground for more than half a mile, a phenomenon that attracted much attention. Its tributary streams left deposits of minerals along their courses, and these remarkable formations added much to the beauty and fame of the valley. Of these formations Lightfoot wrote: "These incrustations spread like a stony shroud over the ground. Gleaming like glaciers on the hillside they attract the eye of the traveler at a distance of twenty miles, and form a singularly striking feature in scenery of

more than common beauty and impressiveness.”

Another writer thus describes the glory of this miracle of nature: “In no place known to the ancients was the power of nature more strikingly revealed. The waters of almost all the streams in the Lyeus valley deposit limestone; but the splendid hot springs of Hierapolis exceed all the rest in this quality. If a tiny jet of water is made to flow in any direction, it soon constructs for itself a channel of stone. The precipices immediately south of the city, about a hundred feet or more in height, over which the water tumbles in numerous little streams, have become an immense frozen cascade, the surface wavy, as of water in its headlong course suddenly petrified.” - RICHARD CHANDLER, *Asia Minor*, Page 68.

This frozen, or petrified, cascade of limestone deposits has been called a Frozen Niagara. This scene was near the village of Hierapolis, five or six miles north of Laodicea, from which it was clearly visible. Because of its limestone deposits Hierapolis was sometimes called the Cotton Castle. The following pen picture by Lightfoot stimulates one’s imagination: “It is at Hierapolis that the remarkable physical features which distinguish the valley of the Lyeus display themselves in the fullest perfection. Over the steep cliffs which support the plateau of the city, tumble cascades of pure white stone, the deposit of calcareous matter from the streams which, after traversing this upper level, are precipitated over the ledge into the plain beneath and assume the most fantastic shapes in their descent. At one time overhanging in cornices fringed with stalactites, at another hollowed out into basins or broken up with ridges, they mark the site of the city at a distance, glistening on the mountain side like foaming cataracts frozen in the fall. The streams to which the scenery owes the remarkable features already described are endowed with remarkable medicinal qualities, while at the same time they are so copious that the ancient city is described as full of self made baths,” and “to this fashionable watering-place, thus favored by nature, seekers of pleasure and seekers of health alike were drawn.” These features constitute a background for the expressions used in the epistle to Laodicea which made it meaningful to the members of the local church, and greatly add to the impressiveness of the message to the Laodicean period of the church universal.

### **The Local Church**

The church in Laodicea was doubtless established by some of Paul’s fellow laborers during his three years’ stay in Ephesus, when “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 19:10.) According to Colossians 2:1, it seems that Paul never visited Laodicea and the other churches in that vicinity. He did send the Laodiceans a letter, and asked that it be read also to the Colossian church, which was near by. He also gave instructions that his letter to the Colossians be read to the Christians in Laodicea. (See Colossians 4:13-16.)

Many believe that the Laodicean letter referred to was not one that has been lost, but his Ephesian epistle, which he desired should be read in all the churches of the province. There has been considerable conjecture over this so-called “lost epistle of Paul.” The famous Council of Laodicea was held in AD 364, with thirty-two bishops present. Christ’s message was finally rejected and the Laodicean candlestick removed. The local church is no more, and not even one Christian is to be found in the vicinity. The city has long been deserted, and most of the stones have been removed to build near-by villages. The ruins of the stadium and two theaters are still visible, as is also the stone aqueduct that furnished the city with an abundant supply of fresh water.

### **The Laodicean Period**

The Laodicean period of the universal church reaches from about the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the Christian dispensation, or until a mighty revival and reformation brings God’s remnant people back to the Philadelphian state of fervent love for God and man. The Laodicean message is a sad comment on modern Christendom. The last of the seven letters of Christ applies to the last era of the history of the church militant in the last generation. Laodicea is made up of two Greek words, laos, meaning “people,” and dika, or dikee, meaning “righteous judgment.” It therefore means “the judging of the people,” or “the judgment of the people.” It is the church living in the time of the judgment.

The Laodicean message is applicable during the time of the investigative judgment, which began at the close of the 2300-year time prophecy of Daniel 8 and 9, in 1844. At that time the door into the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary was opened by Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, and the last phase of His mediatorial work began. No man or angel can close this door till the solemn work of judgment is finished in heaven, and the judgment-hour message is carried into all the world. (Revelation 14:6-14.) To prepare the way for this last solemn message, the doors of the mission fields of the world have been opened by a divine hand, and by the same power they will be kept open till the work is finished. A faithful remnant

will accept the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans and will return to their first love and thus be fitted for the latter rain and translation.

### **The Application**

In the year 1865 Dr. Joseph A. Seiss declared that the Philadelphian era is “now rapidly giving place to Laodicean half warmness, self-sufficiency, empty profession, and false peace, in which the day of judgment is to find the unthinking multitude who suppose they are Christians and are not.” “And will it answer to say that all this is not largely and characteristically the state of things at this very hour? Can any man scrutinize narrowly the professed Church of our day, and say that we have not reached the Laodicean age? Is it not the voice of this Christendom of ours which says, ‘I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing?’ And is it not equally the fact that this selfsame Christendom of ours is ‘the wretched, and the pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked?’ Did the ‘Mene, mene, tekel upharsin’ of Belshazzar’s palace better fit the ancient heathen than this modern Christian Babylon?” (Pages 143, 200.)

The same writer further declares: “The key exactly fits the lock, the impression answers to the stamp, the cast bears the precise outlines of the mould; and it would seem to me like trifling with the truth not to admit that, in the mind of Jesus, they belong together. Let us see to it, then, that we hear as the text commands, and learn to view the Church’s errors, corruptions, mistakes, and sins, as Christ views them; to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, and to hope only as He has given us authority to hope. And to this may almighty God grant us His helping grace! Amen. (Pages 202-03.) Another writer said that “the prophetic and historical fit each other as wax to the seal. It is the honest and sincere conviction of many careful Bible students of various denominations that the universal church is now in the Laodicean stage of its existence.

### **The Introduction**

To the Laodiceans, Jesus introduces Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” This is the only instance in the Scriptures where Amen is used as a personal name. It is here given as one of the 250 names and titles attributed to Christ in the Scriptures. Amen is a Hebrew word that has been transferred without change into the various languages into which the Bible has been translated. The root idea carries the meaning of firmness, solidity, or stability is rendered “truth” in Isaiah 65:16. It means the True One. Jesus is the Amen of the Godhead. Paul says of Him, “For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God by us.” 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Regardless of the number of promises of God to man, they all have their confirmation in Christ, and through Him they meet their fulfillment in us. Christ is the spokesman of the Godhead, who not only speaks the word or the truth, but He is Himself the Word and the Truth. He is the Amen. Therefore the message of the Amen comes to us with absolute authority and finality. Amen also has the meaning of “It is true, or “So be it.” What Jesus says, is true and dependable. He is the divine Amen personalized. He places His own personal guarantee on the truths He proclaims.

Coming at the close of a sermon or prayer, Amen indicates the end or the last. It indicates that the Laodicean message finishes Christ’s appeals to His people, and that there is no more to be said. It is the last of the seven epistles to His church during the Christian dispensation, and therefore constitutes His final appeal before probation closes. No other message will follow. The divine Amen will never speak again to the church militant. Those who reject the Laodicean message will never hear another divine call to repentance and salvation.

Not only is this message the last call to repentance, but like its divine Author it is “faithful and true.” It is a true picture of the spiritual condition of God’s remnant people in the last generation. It is an appropriate introduction of the last of the seven epistles, because it ends with a divine confirmation of the whole. Amen literally means, “It is fixed and cannot be changed.” The eternal certainties of Christ’s message to His people are sealed with the stamp of His unchangeable authority. Amen is rendered “verily,” or “verily, verily,” twenty-five times in the Gospel of John. Jesus often said, “Amen, amen, I say unto you.”

Jesus is also “the faithful and true witness.” This is said to be the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Amen. The testimony, or revelation, to the Author of truth is dependable. There are three requisites of a faithful and true witness. First, he must be an eyewitness and speak from personal knowledge. Second, he must be competent to relate what he knows. Third, he must be willing to bear testimony to the facts. There must be no misrepresentation or exaggeration. Man often testifies of what he thinks he knows, but Christ speaks from absolute knowledge. Jesus said to the Jews: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and you receive not our witness.” John 3:11.

Jesus never glosses over or whitewashes conditions to make them appear better than they really are. When He speaks, we ought to listen, for on our attitude toward His testimony depends our eternal destiny. True witnesses are very scarce in this generation of trucebreakers and false accusers. The ninth commandment is almost universally transgressed. But the Laodicean message is one hundred per cent true, for “these are the words of the Unchanging One.” (Twentieth Century New Testament.) The church may change, but Christ is always the same, “yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” The church has compromised with the world, but Christ looks upon compromise with the same antipathy as during the Ephesian, Pergamos, and Sardian periods of church history.

### **Message of Creator**

Christ also introduces Himself as “the beginning of the creation of God.” “The origin of God’s creation,” “The Progenitor of God’s creation,” and “The beginning and Lord of God’s creation,” are other translations. This text was used by Arius to disprove the divinity of Christ and to show that He was a created being. But it manifestly cannot be given this interpretation, or else it would contradict many other Scriptures which plainly declare Christ to be the Creator. (John 1:1-3, 10-14; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:13-16; Hebrews 1:1-3,10.) Our text declares rather that all things had their origin and beginning with Christ, because He was the Creator. He is the Beginner, Author, Source, and Moving Principle of all creation, because as the Spokesman of the Godhead He called all things into existence. “Not the first of creatures as the Arians held and Unitarians do now, but the originating source of creation through whom God works.” (Robertson, Page 321.) In the Laodicean message the Amen and Creator bears witness to the spiritual condition of the modern church, and as the Creator-Redeemer He has the power to renew spiritual life and to restore to the favor of God. Christendom today needs the creative power of the new birth that produces new creatures in Christ Jesus.

This introduction is also appropriate because the modern world is saturated with the evolution theory of the beginning of life and matter. It is a rebuke and challenge to the modern scholastic philosophy that denies the Genesis record of creation. In this faithless and skeptical generation, when even many professed Christians give the glory and honor of creation to the creature rather than to the Creator, Christ sends a searching message to His church, with the announcement that He is the Creator and Lord of all creation. He intimates that the same mighty power that created and upholds the worlds can recreate and uphold the modern Laodiceans who accept His counsel. In Him there is complete victory even over the spirit of self-deception and pharisaism. He is abundantly able to cleanse from the terrible sin of half warmness, self-complacency, and worldly conformity.

### **A Severe Indictment**

The Laodicean message is a terrible indictment of modern Christendom. Christ’s professed people have lost the love and devotion of the Philadelphian period and have become lukewarm in their alTection. The members are not dead cold and untouched by spiritual life, neither are they fervently hot with apostolic love and zeal. Fervent comes from the Latin *fervenlis*, present participle of *fervere*, from which we get the word fever. It literally means “boiling” or “to boil.” Hot, or fervent, carries the idea of a glowing, ardent, earnest, and animated Christian. It indicates a divine heat, or fire, or fervor; a love that warms and animates the whole being.

The spiritual life of the church is tepid, like the water in most of the springs in the vicinity of Laodicea. The church has just enough spiritual warmth to nauseate her glorified Head. His love is so fervent that the halfhearted response of the church to His love is disgusting to Him. He would prefer that the affections of His bride be either frigid or fervid. Frigidity would be preferable to half warmness. Christ’s statement is “in form a wish, it is in reality a regret.” (Trench, Page 206.) Even Sardis had a few faithful souls who were commended, but in Laodicea there seems to be nothing commendable, for Jesus gives no praise whatever. Philadelphia received no reproof, and Laodicea no commendation.

The coldness the Master prefers to half warmness is that of the unregenerate heathen who have never been touched by spiritual life. It does not mean negatively cold, but icy cold, having never been heated or mixed with the hot. Christ prefers that Laodiceans be either Christians or pagans rather than a compromise between the two. There is more hope for those who have never been warmed by the gospel than those who were once fervid and then cooled off to a lukewarm state. This is indicated by many scriptures, including Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:15-22.

Defining the meaning of cold in our text, Trench says: “One hitherto untouched by the powers of grace. There is always hope of such an one, that, when he does come under those powers, he may become a

zealous and earnest Christian. He is not one on whom the grand experiment of the Gospel has been tried and has failed.” (Page 207.) Alford said that, “we must take it as meaning, not only entirely without the spark of spiritual life, but also and chiefly, by consequence, openly belonging to the world without, and having no part nor lot in Christ’s church, and actively opposed to it.” (Page 588.)

Speaking of the lukewarm state, Trench says: “But the ‘half warm,’ is one who has tasted of the good gift and of the powers of the world to come, who has been a subject of Divine grace, but in whom that grace has failed to kindle more than the feeblest spark. The publicans and harlots were ‘cold’, the Apostles ‘hot’. The Scribes and Pharisees were lukewarm.” (Page 207.) Half warmness is a compromise between hot and cold. The water from the hot springs near Laodicea soon mingled with the cold water and became lukewarm and nauseating to the taste.

Of the spiritual state of the modern church another writer says: “Lukewarm water is a mixture of cold water and hot water and symbolically stands for the mixture of religion and worldliness which was utterly nauseating to Jesus Christ. Following the great revival of the early 19th century, there came a great reaction among those who were not willing to submit to the power of God as it was then manifested, and they made opposition against it which has resulted in an increasing worldliness in the Church so that today we see on every hand a vast falling away.” (Turner, Page 16, 17.)

The church in its lukewarm state is divided between Christ and the world. It is too religious to entirely cast off the name of Christ and too worldly to take a firm and united stand for Him. There is much pretension but little genuine Christianity. Works are plentiful, but faith is scarce; profession is abundant, but there is but little spiritual life to correspond. Worldly pleasure and riotous living are closely associated with the Lord’s supper and so-called Christian benevolence. The church is partly cold and partly hot. This compromise with the world has cooled the fervent love and devotion of the church of the Philadelphian state. Because of this condition those who are brought in contact with holy fire by the gospel are not heated by it into a fervor. One writer declared that “respectability ‘heavy as frost’ reigned in Laodicea.”

### **The Divine Threat**

To strengthen His severe warning and appeal, Jesus threatens to spew the lukewarm out of His mouth unless they repent. “I am about to vomit you out of my mouth” and “Before long I will vomit you out of my mouth” are other translations. “I am ready to,” or “I have it in mind to, is the meaning of the text. It implies that the threat may not and need not be executed. Repentance will avert the threatened judgment. Christ’s dealings with us depend entirely upon our attitude toward Him and His message. His statement, As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent,” shows clearly that His intention is not final. It is a threat rather than a pronouncement.

Christ demanded that the Laodiceans be fervent Christians or none at all. There is no middle ground or neutral position that is acceptable to Him. The sickening half warmness of modern Christians is so nauseating to our divine Lord that it produces in Him feelings of disgust and loathing. The threat is of a final and absolute rejection unless His message is accepted and His counsel acted upon. This is no idle threat. The execution has already begun for many individuals. The spewing out will take place on a vast scale during the shaking or purging time, when the church is cleansed and prepared for the latter rain of divine power and the coming of the Bridegroom. The Laodicean message should be considered as the appeal of love and mercy and compassion rather than threatened judgments of certain doom. It is the love message of the great Lover.

## **THE LAODICEAN DISEASE AND REMEDY**

WE MUST not forget that the city of Laodicea was a health resort to which sick people came from near and far to be healed. It was therefore the temporary abode of persons suffering from all sorts of diseases. They came to have their vision restored by the famous Phrygian eye salve, to drink of the lukewarm mineral water with its reputed healing properties, to bathe in the hot springs with their remedial virtues, or to be healed by magic in the Temple of Aesculapins, the Greek god of medicine, who was known as “The Great Physician.” It was claimed that no disease was too difficult for this pagan counterfeit of the Messiah to heal. It is because of this historic background that Jesus describes the Laodicean church as suffering from a serious spiritual malady and introduces Himself as the great sin Physician with a complete healing remedy.

### **A Sick Church**

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou were cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth. Because thou says, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knows not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

This is the Great Physician’s diagnosis of the spiritual disease of the modern church. The church of the Laodiceans is not only lukewarm in zeal and devotion but also spiritually sick. There is still some life, but the terrible Laodicean malady has left the church sluggish and only semiconscious. And worst of all she knows not her danger. Death is inevitable unless the offered remedy is applied, but the Laodiceans approach the tomb boasting of their spiritual health, riches, and prosperity. The disease that is sapping the life of modern Christendom is similar to that which afflicted ancient Israel. (Isaiah 1:4-6.)

The prophet Jeremiah shed so many tears over the “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” of back sliding Israel that he was known as “the weeping prophet.” Message after message was sent to sin-sick Israel offering a complete remedy. Finally the Great Physician Himself visited His people and made a final appeal, and because it was rejected He wept over the city and nation and then died of a broken heart. In the words of the prophet He expressed His astonishment because His remedy was not accepted: “For the hurt of the daughter of My people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on Me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of My people recovered?” Jeremiah 8:21,22. But Israel’s sin finally reached the fatal stage. Because there were “no healing medicines” her bruise was declared “incurable.” (Jeremiah 30:13,12.) The church of Israel had to be spewed out of the mouth of her divine Lord.

The Laodicean message presents a true picture of the modern church. It is the testimony of “the faithful and true Witness,” who never makes a mistake and never exaggerates. The remedy must be applied soon or it will be too late, because the disease will reach the incurable stage. The condition is alarming, and calls for an alarm message. This alarm message to God’s remnant people is also described in Joel. 2:1,12-17. When God sends such a message to Zion, or the church, conditions must be very serious. The situation demands a ministry of tears, a weeping ministry sounding an alarm message to a weeping church. Such a message results in the early and latter rains and the triumph of the church in an abundant harvest when the Spirit is poured out on “all flesh.”

The Laodicean message is the last call Christ will ever make to modern Israel, and is comparable to His final plea to ancient Israel as He wept over the doomed city. It would be difficult to find language strong enough to expose the folly of the Laodiceans, who imagine they are spiritually wealthy and in need of nothing, when they are actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, lukewarm, and fit only to be spewed out of the mouth of Christ as an object of loathing. Is it not time for some modern weeping prophets who are capable of grasping the seriousness of the situation to awaken the church from her blissful dream of self-satisfaction? Would not the many tears of such leaders be like the tears of Jesus over His beloved city, Jerusalem?

### **Object of Pity**

Christ found nothing praiseworthy in Laodicea. To Him she is an object of pity. Swete declared that “a blind beggar, barely clad, was not more deserving of pity than this rich and self-satisfied church.” The condition of Laodicea was the opposite of that of Smyrna, which was poverty stricken in material things but rich spiritually. Laodicea was rich in material things but bankrupt spiritually. Jesus made no complaint of Laodicea’s doctrines. The church was not deceived by the teachings of the Nicolaitans, Balaam, or Jezebel. Her great light and opportunity for service make her more responsible than the church in any other period, and the malediction is pronounced accordingly. (Matthew 11:20-24.) The Bible does not contain a more scathing rebuke than is given the Laodiceans, whose boasting is similar to that of Ephraim who “feeds on wind” in that she said, “Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labors they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.” (See Hosea 12:1,8.)

There can be no greater sin than self-deception. It seems that only drunken or insane persons could boast of wealth, health, and prosperity when they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” In the insane asylums are those who boast of wealth, but they are objects of pity. Self-conceit is one of the most difficult sins, if not the most difficult sin, to conquer. One writer has said: “There is nothing so offensive to God, or so dangerous to the human soul, as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable.” - WHITE, Christ’s Object Lessons, Page 154. Yet this is the sin of the

Laodiceans.

There is no stronger delusion than that which makes men believe that they are righteous and accepted of God, while at the same time they are sinning against Him, and are in a deplorable spiritual condition. A lukewarm state naturally leads to self-sufficiency. The very first step toward the kingdom of heaven is a recognition of one's spiritual poverty. The attitude of the Pharisee and that of the publican in the temple represent the difference in a person before and after he receives a vision of his true spiritual state. His 'boasting changes to the cry of the penitent, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

The transformation of the character of Saul from a proud and boastful Pharisee to a humble and contrite Christian apostle is an illustration of what Christ desires to do for the members of the Laodicean church. After Paul had been transformed by the vision of the glorified Christ, what a contrast there was between his attitude toward his spiritual state and that of proud Laodicea. Hear him crying out in great agony of spirit, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Even though he lived one of the most noble of all lives he was constantly concerned lest he should himself be a castaway. In contrast think of the poor self-deceived and self-satisfied Laodiceans, boasting in words and looks and actions that they "have need of nothing." Christ first sets forth the modern church's estimate of herself, and then He reveals the terrible reality. The difference is as great as that of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple, the one thanking God for his virtues and the other begging for mercy because of his sins.

### **A Difficult Task**

It is not enough for a physician to correctly diagnose the patient's disease. The knowledge of danger and of a sure remedy will never cure a sick person unless he accepts the doctor's verdict and applies the suggested remedy. Many persons are sick and do not know it, and when told they do not believe it. It is often a difficult task to convince the patient that his life depends upon obedience to the physician's counsel.

This is the chief difficulty with the modern church. She is desperately sick with a disease that will eventually prove fatal, but she does not know it. "And knows not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," is the verdict of the Great Physician. The most difficult thing about the Laodicean message is to convince present-day Christians that it is applicable to them, that they are spiritually sick, and that the Laodicean remedy is their only hope. There is no need of prescribing the remedy or attempting to apply it until we are fully convinced of our need.

Christ came to this earth "to seek and to save that which was lost." He came to save sinners, but no sinner will accept salvation until he knows he is lost. To convince and convict of sin is the first work of the Holy Spirit and of the gospel message. The statement of Jesus to the self-satisfied Jews is applicable to modern Laodiceans: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The Pharisees felt righteous and in need of nothing, and Christ was therefore unable to help them. He could give them nothing, regardless of their great needs. The attitude of modern Laodicea is the spirit of Pharisaism. To convince them of their spiritual condition and needs seems almost an impossible task.

The Laodiceans were not being persecuted, and there was no synagogue of Satan to disturb them. Compared to the Smyrneans they were having an easy time. Doubtless the church machinery functioned perfectly and they had the most up-to-date methods and equipment. The ritual was beautiful and impressive. The ministers were well paid, and their sermons logical and eloquent. But all this is in vain when the members are ignorant of their spiritual destitution. This is the state of the church of our day, and nothing but the convicting power of the Holy Spirit can ever bring the spiritual revival and reformation demanded by the Laodicean message, and for this heavenly visitation every godly minister and earnest Christian should fervently pray.

"I know thy works" indicates that Laodicea is busy planning, organizing, raising funds, erecting buildings, establishing institutions, and apparently doing everything possible to fulfill the great commission. The church is not lazy. She is busy with programs, campaigns, conventions, social functions, and home and foreign mission extension work. Like ancient Israel the Laodiceans are deceived by the results of their many activities.

A well-known writer said: "In the estimation of the rabbis, it was the sum of religion to be always in a bustle of activity. They depended upon some outward performance to show their superior piety. Thus they separated their souls from God, and built themselves up in self-sufficiency. The same dangers still exist. As activity increases, and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the

disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity.” - WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, Page 362.

### **Deceived by Material Prosperity**

“I am rich, and have gotten riches” is the Revised Version. Laodicea not only believes she is spiritually rich but takes all credit to herself. What she has is her own acquisition, and she is proud of it. She carries the pride of wealth into her spiritual life. Spiritual self-sufficiency is usually fostered “by material wealth, just as poverty of spirit is often the result of material poverty. The Laodicean church not only feels abundantly supplied with all the spiritual riches needed for the present ‘but also has a sufficient supply for the future. “I am rich, and have wealth stored up,” is the Weymouth translation. Spiritually the church is poverty stricken, but imagines she is rich; wretched, but feels perfectly satisfied; miserable, but pretends great happiness; blind, but prides herself in her wisdom and vision; naked or clothed in the filthy rags of her own righteousness, but is strutting about as if on dress parade. “And you do not know that if there is a wretched creature it is you.” (Weymouth.)

It is evident that Laodicea is deceived regarding her spiritual state because of her material prosperity. From this we learn “that prosperity is not favorable to a true estimate of ourselves; that we are never in greater danger than when our course is smooth, that health and ease and the constant occupations of life may lull us to sleep, and that we may mistake our very sloth and apathy for peace of conscience. Laodicea was the deepest sunk in self-deception, and most fully convinced that she was rich and endowed with goods, and had need of nothing.” - ADOLP SAPHIR, *The Lord’s Prayer*, Page 319.

Because the church is so fully occupied with material and temporal things to the neglect of the spiritual and eternal, she has become self-centered and overconfident and therefore proud and boastful. Impoverished spiritually, she fails to realize that true riches and real satisfaction can be found only in Christ, who for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. Laodicea is proud of her magnificent churches, intelligent congregations, and scholarly preachers; of her fine music and splendid services and well-manned institutions; of her great army of missionaries in all parts of the world field and the liberality of the members in supporting them. What more could be desired?

### **True Progress**

There are two kinds of progress-material and spiritual. It is possible for the church to experience the former without the latter, as many examples demonstrate. Because of material prosperity it is the general opinion that “the church is flourishing, and that peace and spiritual prosperity are in all her borders,” whereas at the same time there has “been a steady retreat toward the world. While gaining in membership and developing in extent, influence, and facilities, the church has been waning in piety and retrograding in spiritual power.

If numbers and material prosperity were evidences of success. Satan and his false and counterfeit systems of religion could claim the pre-eminence over Christ and Christianity. The real test of spiritual prosperity is the degree of moral power, virtue, intelligence, and piety found in the members of the church, rather than numbers and material wealth. One writer has said that God “values His church, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of its members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience. He looks for the principles of love and goodness.” - WHITE, *Prophets and Kings*, Page 565, 566.

A recent writer beautifully explains the real cause of Laodicea’s self-satisfaction: “Is Laodicea then a victim of spiritual hallucinations? We think not. What, then, is the reason that God, contemplating the condition of the church of Laodicea, sees one thing, while Laodicea, considering her own status, beholds an entirely different condition? The reason lies in the fact that God and Laodicea are really looking at two different things. Laodicea gazes upon material things. She tends to observe her achievements, which are not inconsiderable. She thinks of her missionaries at the ends of the earth. She recalls the hospitals and dispensaries which her wealth has erected and which her generosity maintains. She surveys the schools, academies, and colleges in which she purposes to lead her young people in the way that is right. She counts her printing presses and publishing houses, established to enlighten the world. She remembers her stately houses of worship, erected in many cities of many lands. She counts her membership, and analyzes her offerings. Her mind goes back to her humble beginnings, and traverses with a subtle and unconscious pride the years of growth, of progress, of attainment. It is a splendid showing. Laodicea is happy, is complacent. She has a flawless doctrine, a competent organization, a triumphant message. Who can deny these things?”

- GWYNNE DALRYMPLE, "The Church of Laodicea," in Signs of the Times," Nov. 14, 1933.

The same writer then gives God's viewpoint of the reason for Laodicea's weakness: "But God, the infinite Father of all, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, looks beyond all this. His awful gaze penetrates past Laodiceans' schools, sanitariums, publishing institutions; past her fine buildings and worth-while equipment; past her growing membership and constantly widening sphere of influence, and looks only down upon Laodicea's heart. There He witnesses pride, the sin by which the angels fell; and desire for human praise; and love of the world with all that the world offers. He sees little of sacrifice, and much of self-importance. He sees dangerous conformity to unchristian customs, and a perilous striving for preeminent place. The gold of character is strangely lacking, its place being taken by brilliant tinsel which does not deceive the heavenly Watcher. The raiment of Christ's righteousness, at once so simple and so ample, is not worn; instead there is an ingenious arrangement of the filthy rags of Laodicea's own righteousness. And upon the eyes, festering with the sores of worldly shortsightedness, is no healing salve, to cleanse, to strengthen, and to sanctify." Ibid.

This is the secret of the Laodicean condition of the modern church, and until God's people get a clear vision of the spiritual disease that makes them distasteful to Christ, there is no need of suggesting the remedy that has been so graciously and abundantly provided by the Great Physician. To the sin-sick Laodiceans, Christ says: "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich. And white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that thou may see."

### **The Divine Remedy**

The Great Physician graciously stoops to the words and language of the Laodiceans. He appeals to them as if people always ready to listen to any counsel as to how to buy to advantage in order to enrich themselves in material things. He asks them to listen to His counsel on how to obtain spiritual wealth. One writer refers to Christ's counsel as "gentle and loving irony," and another said: "There is deep irony in this word. One who has need of nothing, yet needs counsel on the vital points of self-preservation." Instead of commanding, Christ tactfully counsels. The same Physician who so accurately and honestly diagnoses Laodicea's disease also provides a healing remedy that will completely restore her to spiritual health and favor with God. The acceptance of this counsel means life; its rejection will bring death. It is a life-or-death message that can be lightly esteemed only at the peril of the soul. There is but one Physician who can heal the terrible Laodicean disease, and He alone has a healing medicine.

The divine merchant says to the spiritually bankrupt Laodiceans, "I counsel thee to buy of Me." Christ is declared to be the Mighty Counselor. He is the source of the "unsearchable riches" of the universe. In Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." In Proverbs 23:23 we are told to "buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." But it would be impossible for a poverty-stricken soul to purchase this remedy if it were not sold "without money and without price." This means without the price of money, for everything worth while costs us something. The cost is often greater than the price of silver and gold. The pearl of great price in the parable cost all that the purchaser had.

Christ virtually says to the Laodiceans, "Thou has nothing to give, but thou must give all that thou has." The price is one that even the beggar can pay. It places all on an equality as far as spiritual riches are concerned. The price is penitence, confession, and self-surrender. The gifts of God can be purchased only at the cost of moral endeavor, humble repentance, and courageous faith. All the truth and wisdom and understanding we have acquired have cost us something in time and effort, if not in actual money. The person who is not willing to sacrifice and endure to attain the heavenly treasure, must remain without it, for it will be given to no one without a price.

### **The Symbolic Gold**

Spiritual wealth is symbolized by "gold tried in the fire," or "gold refined by fire." (RV) The gold is fresh from the fire or furnace which had tested its purity and burned out all dross. Gold has always been the symbol of wealth, and it is a fit symbol of spiritual riches. Christ promised the Laodiceans sterling spiritual riches in contrast to their counterfeit wealth, of which they were boasting. What constitutes the spiritual riches of the church? (1) The Word of God. (Psalm 12:6; 18:30; 119:127.) (2) Faith. The "rich in faith" are declared to be the "heirs of the kingdom." (James 2:5.) None are richer than those who have faith in the Word of God. I know thy "poverty, (but thou art rich)," was Christ's message to the suffering Smyrneans. (3) Love. In Galatians 5:6 we are told that faith works by love, and in Romans 13:8, 10, that "love is the fulfilling of the law." The Laodiceans are lukewarm because they have lost their first love.

Christ offered to the spiritually bankrupt Laodiceans His Word, faith in His Word, and a love that leads to obedience to His Word.

The first cause of spiritual poverty is the attitude of the modern church toward the Scriptures. She has settled down in contentment and self-satisfaction because of the light and truth she possesses. This attitude has kept her from advancing in the ever-increasing light that shines from the Scriptures and will continue to increase till “the perfect day” of revealed truth. (Proverbs 4:18.) The church today is making the same mistake which was made by the church of the Reformation that ended in the Sardis state of spiritual stagnation and death.

The church is boasting that she has the truth-as if there were no more light for the people of God to the end of time whereas the inexhaustible mine of divine truth is literally filled with gems awaiting the diligent searcher for heavenly treasure. The Bible is today “the neglected Book,” even of the professed people of God, and will remain so until the counsel of the True Witness is accepted and acted upon. One of the greatest needs of the church is a rebirth of the old-time searching of the Scriptures, to confirm the truths already discovered and to seek for more and more of the heavenly treasure.

Closely akin to the gold of truth is the gold of faith. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17. It is evident that genuine faith in the Word and promises of God will be very scarce in the last days. At the close of a parable illustrating the rewards of importunity in prayer, Jesus asked the question: “Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8. (See also 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:14.)

We are told that faith in the near Advent of Christ will be at a low ebb just before He returns. Many will cast away their confidence because of decreasing faith. During this time those who hold fast to the end must “live by faith,” and to them is promised a “great recompense of reward.” (Hebrews 10:35-39.) When Jesus returns He will find a people waiting for Him who have held fast to His Word and have kept the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 3:10, 11; 14:12.) This lost faith, which is due largely to the influence of skeptical modernistic preaching, must be restored in the remnant who are prepared to meet their returning Lord.

Paul declared that of the three eternal and priceless virtues of faith, hope, and love, “the greatest of these is love.” Love is the first fruit of the Spirit, and therefore the chief of the golden treasures of the kingdom of heaven. The love that was lost during the Ephesian period must be regained. The church is greatly lacking in love for both God and man, the two attitudes on which hang “all the law and the prophets.” Love is the most fundamental principle of the heavenly kingdom. It is the very foundation of the throne of God. It is the motive that should inspire all our actions.

“The love of Christ constrains us” was the motto of the apostolic church, and glorious were her accomplishments. It is love that impels us to do right and restrains us from doing wrong. Seiss declares that “the primal source of all defective saint ship, and of all that the Divine Judge censures in any of His professed people, is the wane of love. Let a man be alive in love to God, and make it his joy to give his whole heart to Jesus, and his title is clear, and his acceptance sure.” (Page 223.) The brotherly love of the Philadelphian period must return and possess God’s people. Love will be one of the chief characteristics of the faithful remnant who will be ready to meet Christ when He returns to gather His jewels.

Christ counsels His people to buy of Him “white robes, that you may be clothed and your shameful nakedness be hidden,” or “so as to hide your shameful nakedness,” according to other translations. The spiritual nakedness of the Laodicean church is indeed shameful, and ought to put her to shame. But instead of being ashamed of her nudity, she is proud and boastful. It is because she “knows not” that she is naked or clothed in filthy rags. A real vision would quickly bring shame and remorse, followed by repentance and reformation.

### **The White Raiment**

Laodicea is deceived because of her blindness and self deception. If her eyes could be opened, there would quickly follow the confession of Isaiah 64:6: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” The white robe Christ offers to the Laodiceans is the beautiful garments of His own righteousness. It is the royal robe of the King of glory. (Isaiah 52:1; 61:10.) It is the wedding garment of the bride in preparation to meet the Bridegroom. (Revelation 19:6, 7.) The imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ is the real clothing of the soul. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer in justification and imparted in sanctification.

The white raiment which constitutes the wedding garment of the church-bride of Christ is a gift

from the Bridegroom. "To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Revelation 19:8. The word granted indicates that the character raiment is obtained by an act of faith and not on the basis of works, or merit. In the parable recorded in Matthew 22:144 it is evident that the garment is provided by the divine Host of the wedding banquet, so that there is no excuse for 'being without this character robe.

Our only hope is to "abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." 1 John 2:28. The shame of those without the robe of Christ's righteousness will then be made manifest. When Adam and Eve sinned their glorious character robes departed, and they were naked. In shame they hid themselves from the divine presence. In the Orient to strip a person of his clothes is to put him to "an open shame," and to clothe him with linen is an act of great honor. It will be either open shame or divinely bestowed honors when the Bridegroom comes to claim His bride.

### **The Eye Salve**

The Phrygian eye salve sold in Laodicea was used principally to benefit the partially blind, whose eyesight was growing dim. It may imply that the Laodiceans are not entirely blind, just as they are not entirely naked or spiritually dead. They have on filthy rags, and there are some signs of life. The modern church is defective in spiritual vision, and unless this is regained she will surely perish. The wise man said that "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18), and he was speaking chiefly of spiritual vision. Jesus declared that when the blind leaders lead a blind people "both shall fall into the ditch." Like ancient Israel, Laodicea is living under the blazing light of prophetic vision, and is at the same time spiritually blind. A church with the gift of prophetic vision, with great light and truth, and with a glorious history and heritage, which is at the same time spiritually blind to its own condition and needs, is in a most pitiable condition. Such is the sad state of Laodicea.

It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that opens 'blind eyes and guides into all truth. (John 16:8, 13; 1 John 2:20, 27.) This spiritual anointing was the secret of the success of Christ and His apostles. We are told that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power." Acts 10:38. "The Holy Spirit's unction, like the ancient eye-salve's, first smarts with conviction of sin, then heals. He opens our eyes first to ourselves in our wretchedness, then to the Savior in His preciousness." (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, Page 562.)

The spiritual eye is the conscience, or inner light of the soul. It is the means by which we can see spiritual things. The eye salve is that spiritual discernment that enables us to see the wiles and deceptions of the enemy and shun them, to detect sin and abhor it, and to see truth and obey it. John 9:6, 7, 39-41 is a splendid illustration of what would happen if the Laodicean church would apply the spiritual eye salve. The greatest need of the church of today is the anointing of the Holy Spirit in preparation for the outpouring of spiritual power in a repetition of Pentecost. With the psalmist every Christian should fervently pray: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." Psalm 119:18. On the answer to this prayer depends our every hope.

## **17. THE REBUKE OF LOVE**

THE SEVEN epistles of Christ to the seven churches constitute a perfect and complete message to the church militant throughout the Christian Era. The reproofs given point out all the dangers that beset the church, and the promised rewards embrace the restoration of all that was lost through sin. These letters were not sent to apostate churches, but to the most faithful of each period, whom Christ claims as His own and who constitute His church, or bride.

The Laodicean message if accepted will bring about a complete restoration of the favor of God and prepare the remnant of the church for translation. It is Christ's last appeal to His own people in the last days. Just as truly as the threefold message of Revelation 14:6-14 is Christ's last warning message to the world, the epistle to the Laodicean church constitutes His last warning message to His people. In regard to this message Bengel's motto should be ours: "Apply thyself wholly to the Scriptures, and apply the Scriptures wholly -to thyself."

### **A Love Message**

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. He that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches.” Revelation 3:19-22.

None other of the seven messages opens with such a sharp rebuke of unsparing severity, and none closes with such a tender love appeal and the offer of such a glorious reward to the overcomer. Christ demonstrates His love by showing the Laodiceans their faults instead of flattering them with smooth things that would encourage their self-complacent attitude. Someone has said that His is “the love of gratuitous affection independent of any grounds for esteem in the object loved.” It was just like Jesus to close His severe rebuke with a love appeal. It has been said that “severity which conceals love defeats its own end.” After giving the terrible indictment, Jesus virtually says, “Do not suppose from this that I do not love you.”

Jesus reminded the Laodiceans that His severe rebuke and chastisement was an evidence of His love. “I reprove and discipline those whom I love” and “All whom I hold dear, I reprove and chastise” are the Moffatt and Weymouth translations. In this experience the Lord makes no exceptions. Reproof and discipline constitute the greatest evidence of divine love. To each of us the Lord makes the personal appeal, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.” Hebrews 12:5-8.

The Laodicean message presents a very dark picture of the present-day church, and it would be hopelessly discouraging if it were not for the fact that the rebuke is the rebuke of love. The Laodicean message is a love message from the great Lover of mankind. It makes a vast difference whether a rebuke is spoken in anger or love, whether the motive is to wound and destroy, or heal and restore. Those who use the Laodicean message to denounce and discourage are using it wrongfully. Jesus reproves and chastens the Laodiceans only because they are very dear to Him. It is easy to accept reproof and even severe discipline when the one who administers them is controlled not by envy or anger but by a love that always acts for the best interests of the reprovéd. The rebuke of genuine love awakens a response of love in the part of the offender, for love always begets love.

### **Honestly Deceived**

One reason for Christ’s love and sympathy for the Laodiceans is that they are honestly deceived regarding their condition. Thou “knows not” indicates that they are not hypocrites, making a pretense of being what they are not for the purpose of deceiving others. While their condition is deplorable in the sight of God and they are in a terrible deception, yet they are honest in that deception. This is the one bright spot in the picture, and constitutes the single gleam of hope. There is always hope for honest men and women even though they are completely deceived. The sin of ignorance is always gladly and willingly forgiven. To the Athenians on Mars’ Hill Paul said regarding their ignorant worship of “the unknown God,” “And the times of this ignorance God winked at: but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30.

Honest people always accept wise counsel and repent when the truth is revealed and the deception made known. The publican in the temple was honest and the Lord heard his prayer and absolved him of all guilt. The boasting prayer of the Pharisee revealed a deception akin to the Laodicean condition. When the modern church gets the vision of the publican, there will be a great revival and reformation in Christendom. The Laodicean message is a test of honesty and sincerity. All honest hearted Laodiceans will accept the counsel of the True Witness when it comes to them. If they reject the love message, it is evidence that they are not honest.

### **Not a Rejected Church**

It is evident that the Laodiceans are not a rejected and cast-off people as some contend. “Sharp has ‘been His rebuke to this lukewarm church. But it does not mean that He had turned away and abandoned them, or was about to do so. It means just the reverse. For He was standing near, and ready to supply their need, and to enrich them with all His treasure; and His rebuke was a proof of His unchanging love. Nor will He fail to use the rod of correction, if His ‘counsel,’ and His call to ‘repent’ be unheeded. Of this he warns them, and then says, ‘Be zealous therefore, and repent.’ ” (Mauro, Page 135.)

How different is the attitude of Christ toward His remnant people from that of their enemies,

whose rebuke is the rebuke of hate; whose motive is to tear down and destroy. It is Christ who reproves His people, and He alone is qualified, because of His unchanging love. He has never delegated this work to enemies or disgruntled apostates, whose purpose is to scatter those whom Christ has gathered within His fold and to tear down what He has built up. Those who receive the Laodicean message as coming from Christ because of His love will never join those who denounce the church as being rejected by Him and unworthy of His love.

To claim that the Laodicean church because of her lukewarm and poverty-stricken state is rejected of Heaven and abandoned by Christ, is to charge Christ with the height of inconsistency for sending a love message to a church no longer His own. To denounce the church upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard and of which He is the Head as well as the Bridegroom not only is inconsistent but constitutes an insult that will never go unpunished in the judgment. And to contend that the faithful remnant and bride of Christ whom He loves with supreme affection is Babylon or even a part of fallen apostate Babylon and therefore a degraded harlot to be shunned and denounced, is blasphemy of the worst type. The genuine Christian will make a personal application of the Laodicean message to his own life rather than use it to denounce and discourage others.

### **Purified by Chastening**

The message of rebuke, if unheeded, will be followed by chastening and discipline. This has ever been God's method in dealing with His people. His counsels have always been followed by judgments. The prophet said: "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Isaiah 26:9. Discipline in judgments constitutes the Lord's last resort in His attempts to turn men from sin to righteousness, and is therefore one of the greatest evidences of His love.

The psalmist declared: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word." Psalm 119:67. By this means Christ learned perfect obedience to His Father's will and reached the perfection that made Him a perfect Savior. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him." Hebrews 5:8, 9. Judgments may increase the rebellion of the wicked, but they also increase the righteousness of the sons of God.

Paul declared, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12), and Jesus said, "In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33. Christian pilgrims and strangers in this rebel world cannot escape this baptism of suffering. In all ages of the reign of sin saints have been afflicted. This is doubtless for their good so they will not become too much at ease in this world of sin and will the more earnestly long for the world to come, wherein dwells righteousness. Moody said that people will not long for a better world till they get tired of the one they are in. There is no sainthood that is exempt from the sorrows and frowns of the world, and most of God's people have lived the lives if not suffered the deaths of martyrs. The remnant of the church are to pass through great tribulation, from which they will emerge clothed in the white raiment of Christ's righteousness. (Revelation 7:13, 14.)

After assuring Laodicea of His love, Christ calls her to repentance and reformation. "Be zealous therefore, and repent," or "reform," as one version renders it. Genuine repentance includes a reformation of life. Zealous means to glow with warmth and fervor, in contrast to half warmth. Laodicea is asked to become "hot," or "zealous," in contrast to coldness or tepid half warmth. A spiritual revival and reformation in Laodicea will quickly kindle the fires of persecution, which will be blended with celestial glory in a return of Pentecost power.

The reason why the present-day church in its Laodicean condition is not being persecuted is beautifully set forth in the following quotation: "Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? The only reason is, that the church has conformed to the world's standard, and therefore awakens no opposition. The religion which is current in our day is not of the pure and holy character that marked the Christian faith in the days of Christ and His apostles. It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin, because the great truths of the word of God are so indifferently regarded, because there is so little vital godliness in the church, that Christianity is apparently so popular with the world. Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled." - WHITE, *The Great Controversy*, Page 48.

The revival will bring the persecution, and not the persecution the revival. Both, however, will work together for the purification of the remnant in preparation for the Second Advent of Christ.

### **Outside the Door**

The secret of Laodicea's lukewarm and wretched state is that Christ is being kept outside the door. The Great Physician with His healing remedy is denied entrance and therefore cannot minister to the spiritual needs of His church. He asks for the privilege of abiding within, because from without, His work of restoration is ineffectual. It may be that His name is artistically inscribed on the doorplate, and He is Himself kept outside. This illustration seems to have been taken from the Song of Solomon 5:1-7, where Christ and His church are represented as lovers. The slowness of the bride to open the door to her divine Lover answers to the lukewarm and indifferent state of Laodicea.

Jesus enters the church temple by way of the individual heart. "If any man hear My voice, and open the door" indicates that the appeal is to the individual, at whose heart He stands and knocks and calls. Inside the chamber of the heart is the only satisfying place of fellowship between Christ and the soul. He will linger long before the heart of a single individual in a church that refuses to give Him entrance. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches" also shows that the appeal is made to the individual member, who need not wait for the entire church to respond to the call.

He who is the door at which we are bidden to knock and through whom we enter the kingdom of heaven, is the One who knocks at the door of our hearts and bids us open so that He may enter and rule the kingdom of the soul. He must enter and rule the kingdom of the heart before we are qualified to ascend His throne and help Him govern the kingdom of glory. Someone has said that "if we refuse to answer to His knocking now, He will refuse to hear our knocking at His door hereafter." The appeal of Christ is not made from heaven, but He comes down to seek man where he lives. The royal Majesty of the heavens comes to the abode of the Laodicean pauper, and with a voice of yearning devotion seeks a reconciliation and refuses to withdraw when insulted and disowned.

A door is either the means of entrance or a barrier against it. It either lets a person in or keeps him out, according to the will of the householder. The locks and bars are on the inside. The door that keeps the Savior out is barred by the sinner, and He cannot enter till the barriers are removed. Every sin that separates us from Christ is a barrier that must be removed. There is really a series of doors reaching into the inner chamber of the heart and life. It is there that Christ desires to dwell. It is not enough to let Him into the outer chambers of the heart temple or the outer courts of the church temple.

Many Laodiceans have doubtless opened the door into the corridor, but Jesus will never be satisfied till He has full possession of the whole temple, including the "holy of holies." When the rubbish piled up at the door of the heart is removed by the power of the Holy Spirit, then the door can be opened and the heavenly Guest welcomed in. His entrance will bring back the brotherly love experience of the Philadelphia period, and fervent devotion will supplant the sickening, nauseating half-warmness.

"If any man hear My voice" indicates that Jesus not only knocks, He also calls. He knocks and calls to awaken the sleeping church. In the days when Christ was on earth, doors were not opened till the inmate recognized the voice of the person seeking entrance. Rhoda went to the door in answer to Peter's knocking, and refused to open the door till she recognized his voice. (Acts 12:13, 14.) What is Christ saying to Laodicea as He knocks at the door seeking admission? His plea is the Laodicean message. While all can hear His voice, only those who love Him and are His own will recognize it and let Him in. Jesus said, "My sheep know My voice." Those who are sincere Christians in Laodicea will recognize the Laodicean message as the voice of Christ and will welcome the Savior in.

### **Secret of Victory**

Jesus said that He was helpless and could do nothing of Himself. The secret of His success was His union with the Father. He said that He dwelt in the Father and the Father in Him. (John 5:19, 20, 30; 8:28, 29; 14:10, 11.) Jesus also declared that His followers are just as helpless without Him as He was without the Father. (John 14:4, 5; 17:21-23.) "God manifest in the flesh" through the indwelling Christ is "the mystery of godliness" and "the hope of glory." This alone can produce victory and perfection.

A writer thus speaks of this experience: "When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ, becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies, is impregnable to the assaults of Satan." - WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, Page 323, 324. Is it any wonder that the Laodiceans are without this glorious experience when Christ is outside the door?

"I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" indicates the desire of Christ for

reconciliation. Supping together is the sign of communion and fellowship. It represents friendship and brotherly love. But Jesus here offers to be both the Guest and the Host. He is doubtless the host, because He furnishes the spiritual food that constitutes the meal. He is "the Bread of life" and therefore provides the wedding banquet, just as He as the Bridegroom furnishes the wedding garment.

Return unto Me and I will return unto you is Christ's message to Laodicea. In Joel 2:12-14 we are told that the Lord will return to those who accept the alarm message to Zion, and will leave a blessing. The awakening Laodicean message is also pictured in Isaiah 52:14. "When Jehovah returns to Zion." (RV) "When the Lord shall convert Sion." (Douay.) "They see the Eternal face to face as He returns to Zion." (Moffatt.) Acceptance of the Laodicean message brings Christ into the heart and renews His presence with His people. It restores communion through reconciliation, and brings the refreshing showers of the latter rain. The divine rebuke will then be removed, and the Lord will fill His church temple with His glory.

The proposal of Christ to Laodicea involves a complete union of the human with the divine as the only hope of victory. "I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me." I will enter into all his joys and sorrows, difficulties and hopes, enterprises and experiences, and make them mine, guiding, correcting, and sharing as love knows how. I will drink his cup-and he shall drink mine. He shall enter into, and as far as he can, make his own all my enterprises and experiences, hopes and difficulties, joys and sorrows, pouring in his own supply of energy and love. The power to share is just equal to the power of love. The words supply a picture not only of union but of communion." ERSKINE, HILL, *Apocalyptic Problems*, Page 193. The plea of Christ is for union, communion, and reconciliation.

### **The Reward of Victory**

To the worst of the seven churches Christ makes the most glorious promise. The crowning promise is that those who overcome the Laodicean condition will be crowned. The crowns are to the conquerors. Conflict and victory are the road to sovereignty. This promise is the climax of all the seven. The first was the promise of restoration to the tree of life and the Paradise that was lost through the transgression of the first Adam, and the last is the promise of the restoration of the throne and kingdom of Adam and David through the victory of the second Adam.

The promised reward to the Laodiceans is on condition of victory over the worst sin that ever afflicted the people of God, that of self-righteousness. The promise is remarkable, not only because it reaches the very zenith, but also because the sin which the victim of deception and hypocrisy must overcome is almost unsurmountable. The reward therefore should be commensurate to the victory gained. When we consider the abject bondage of the Laodiceans in their wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked state, and the fact that they know it not, overcoming power is the more commendable and deserving of a rich recompense of reward. For a man in this condition to open his heart's door and invite the Savior in is akin to stepping out of the miry pit to the throne.

This glorious offer is another evidence that Christ dearly loves the Laodiceans and has not cast them off. The very persons whom Christ had just threatened to spew out of His mouth unless they repented are offered a seat on His throne. Only divine love could be so generous in dealing with such undeserving subjects. The very highest place is made available to the lowest, and the faintest spark of grace may be fanned into a brilliant flame of divine love.

The promised change is like a beggar being asked by a great king to occupy his throne with him. Indeed, that is the illustration given in Isaiah 52:2, which is an Old Testament picture of the Laodicean message: "Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit on thy throne, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bonds of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion." (RV) To every Laodicean who accepts the counsel of the True Witness and opens the door of the heart so that Christ can occupy the throne and rule the life, He offers a place on His throne, with the privilege of helping Him rule over a kingdom that will never end. It would be sheer folly to refuse such a glorious exchange.

In this promise two thrones are mentioned-the throne of Christ, which He offers to share with the victorious Laodiceans, and the throne of the Father, representing the power and glory of divine majesty, on which none may sit except the Father and the Son. The Eastern throne was wide enough for more than one person. There was room for at least two others, one on the right and the other on the left. The mother of James and John requested that her two sons be given such positions when Christ became king. From Hebrews 8:1 we learn that Christ is now at the right hand of His Father on the throne that rules the universe. He is to occupy this position till the conquest of this rebel world is completed. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Thy footstool." Psalm 110:1. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:24, 25.)

When the conflict is over, Jesus will occupy the throne of David, which was the throne of Adam and the throne of this world before it was usurped by Satan, who since then has been “the prince of this world.” (Ezekiel 21:27; Luke 1:31-33; Matthew 25:31; Isaiah 9:6, 7.) This is the throne Christ promises to share with the victors over the Laodicean condition of half-warmness and self-righteousness. The grandest promise is placed at the close of the seven epistles. In fact it is a summary of all seven offers of reward. It is also a connecting link between the first section of the Apocalypse and the second vision where the Lamb is pictured on His Father’s throne as the only One who is able to open the seven-sealed scroll of future events.

The final appeal is made by the Holy Spirit for all who have ears to listen to the message of Christ to the church of the Laodiceans. It indicates that the voice of Christ is also the voice of the Holy Spirit, because they always speak in unison. Through these two great Witnesses the Father speaks His final message to His remnant people. The Laodicean message is the message of the Godhead. It is through the Holy Spirit, His vicegerent and representative, that Christ stands at the door of the heart and of the church temple and knocks and pleads for admission. If we refuse to listen to the knockings and pleadings of Christ through His Spirit, someday He will refuse to hear us when we knock at the closed door of mercy and beg for entrance into heaven. (Luke 13:23-30; Matthew 25:1-12.) May every reader let Him in today!

“In the silent midnight watches, List-thy bosom door!  
How it knocks-knocks-knocks Knocks evermore!  
Say not is thy pulse’s beating. Is thy heart of sin;  
It is thy Savior knocks, and cries, Rise, and let Me in!

“Death comes on with reckless footsteps, To the hall and hut:  
Think you Death will tarry, knocking, Where the door is shut?  
Jesus waits-waits-waits, But the door is fast;  
Grieved, away my Savior goes; Death breaks in at last.

“Then it is time to stand entreating Christ to let thee in:  
At the gate of Heaven beating, Wailing for thy sin.  
Nay! Alas, thou guilty creature! Has thou, then, forgot?  
Jesus waited long to know thee. Now He knows thee not.”

A. C. Cox

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