

Creation Revelation



God is in the details

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Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one
of thy righteous judgments endureth forever.

Psalm 119:160

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Letters to Seven Churches - Part 1

The Letters to the Churches

The book of Revelation opens with letters addressed to seven churches. The churches were early churches of the first century located in what is now modern Turkey.

The Greek word for “church” is “ekklesia,” which simply means “a group of people that is called together for some special-purpose.”¹ It’s not a building or an organization. It can also “refer to a group of people who meet in one specific location for worship and fellowship.” Today the word “church” is used by many to refer to the building or organization, but its earliest meaning would refer only to the people in the building or organization.²

There is a common format in the letters. Tim LaHaye lists the common format that structures each letter as follows:

Common Format in the Letters⁴

- ◆ **Destination**—this includes not only the city where the church is located but pertinent historical background of the city.
- ◆ **Description of Christ**—in each letter Christ gives a description of Himself which is designed to meet some need existing in that church.
- ◆ **Commendation**—Christ seeks to praise each church for something, but unfortunately no praiseworthy thing can be found about Thyatira, the counterfeit church, or Laodicea, the apostate church.
- ◆ **Rebuke**—the only churches Christ doesn’t have to rebuke for sinful activities are Smyrna,



the suffering church, and Philadelphia, the missionary church.

- ◆ **Exhortation**—Christ councils and encourages each of His churches to add what is needed to make them more godly and to remove anything that hinders their single-hearted devotion to Him.
- ◆ **Promise**—Christ promises fabulous blessings to everyone who “has an ear” and heeds Christ’s advice to the church and the individuals in it.
- ◆ **Prophetic Application**—this is the historical role that each church was to play during the subsequent nineteen centuries.

As we will see, each church represents the condition of the various churches at the time of writing, but still may be applied to the various churches today. Also, many commentators think that each separate church represented a prophecy of a coming age which the individual church most closely represented. In this respect, the individual churches represented the condition of the church during the church age down through of the centuries as follows:

The Church Ages⁵

- ◆ **The Church of Ephesus - The Apostolic Church (33-100 AD)**
- ◆ **The Church of Smyrna - The Persecuted Church (100-312 AD)**
- ◆ **The Church of Pergamos - The Church Merged with the State (312-606 AD)**
- ◆ **The Church of Thyatira - The Counterfeit Church (606-1517 AD)**
- ◆ **The Church of Sardis - The Reformed, But Not Revived Church (1517-1750 AD)**
- ◆ **The Church of Philadelphia - The Missionary Church (1750-1925 AD)**
- ◆ **The Church of Laodicea - The Church of Compromise and Apostasy (1925-The Tribulation)**

These churches may have represented different church ages, but we should keep in mind that each church is also present in each of the ages. It is only that a specific church more closely represents the general characteristics of a particular age. There are slight differences of opinion among Bible commentators regarding the time lines represented by these churches:

The Church Ages Variation⁶

As described in the letters, each church had its own particular character.

Character of the Churches⁷

- ◆ **Two were very good: Smyrna and Philadelphia.**
- ◆ **Two were very bad: Sardis and Laodicea.**
- ◆ **Three were part good, and part bad: Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira.**
- ◆ **The two good churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, were composed of the humbler classes of people, and were facing persecution.**
- ◆ **The two bad churches, Sardis and Laodicea, seem to have included the ruling classes, nominally Christian, but pagan in life.**
- ◆ **Ephesus was orthodox in teaching, but losing its first love.**
- ◆ **Pergamum was heretic, but faithful to the Name of Christ.**
- ◆ **Thyatira was heretic, tolerating Jezebel, but growing in zeal.**

Only three of the original seven churches are still occupied by people, Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Thyatira. The other four are ruins near other cities in Turkey. We will now look at each individual church.

To the Church in Ephesus – Duty Without Love

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

In each letter the Speaker identifies Himself with a partial description of Himself that was previously given in

Periods

Author	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamum	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
Tim LaHaye	AD 30 to AD 100	AD 100 to AD 312	AD 312 to AD 606	AD 606 to Tribulation*	AD 1520 to Tribulation*	AD 1750 to Tribulation*	AD 1900 to Tribulation*
Hal Lindsey	AD 33 to AD 100	AD 100 to AD 312	AD 312 to AD 590	AD 590 to AD 1517	AD 1517 to AD 1750	AD 1750 to AD 1925	AD 1900 to Tribulation
J. Vernon McGee	Pentecost to AD 100	AD 100 to AD 314	AD 314 to AD 590	AD 590 to AD 1000	AD 1517 to AD 1800	AD 1800 to Rapture	Does Not Say
Daymond R. Duck	Pentecost to AD 100	AD 100 to AD 312	AD 312 to AD 590	AD 590 to AD 1517	AD 1517 to AD 1750	AD 1750 to AD 1900	AD 1900 to Mid. Trib.

*Tim LaHaye believes these 4 church periods all end with the Tribulation Period.

Revelation chapter one. There is no doubt that the description refers to Jesus Christ.

The first letter was addressed to Ephesus. Ephesus was considered the finest and largest church of the first century. Ephesus means "desired one." It was characterized by fervent evangelism. The Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey founded the church at Ephesus. The founding of this church is described in Acts 18-20.

And **he came to Ephesus**, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. Acts 18:19-21 KJV

And **this continued by the space of two years [at Ephesus]**; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Acts 19:10 KJV

For **Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus**, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hastened, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. **And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.** And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 20:16-21 KJV

Ephesus was a depraved city dedicated to the worship of the goddess Diana.⁸ The temple of Artemis (Latin - "Diana") was the largest Greek temple in antiquity and was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.⁹

Diana was the many breasted twin sister of Apollo, the sun-god. She is the moon-goddess. In Israel she is known as Ashtoreth. Diana was considered the mother of the gods. She wore a turreted crown, reminiscent of the Tower of Babel. In legend, she has been identified with Nimrod's wife, Semiramis of Babylon. She is therefore identified as the "goddess of fortifications."¹¹ She was an offspring of the Babylonian mystery religion. Notice in Daniel this statement about a "god of forces" that the Antichrist will honor:

But in his estate shall he honour **the God of forces**: and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things. Daniel 11:38 KJV

Diana of Ephesus¹⁰



Diana of Ephesus.*

Notice that the New King James and New International Versions render this verse to specify "a god of fortresses."

But in their place he shall honor **a god of fortresses**; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. Daniel 11:38 NKJV

Instead of them, he will honor **a god of fortresses**; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. Daniel 11:38 NIV

The Hebrew word translated "forces" or "fortresses" is a word that means "force, fort(tress), rock, strength, or strong(hold)."¹²

Ephesus was originally a Greek trading colony situated near the entrance of the Cayster River and the Aegean Sea. It was a large commercial center situated on a major road for traveling to the east.¹³ Ephesus had a

population of approximately 250,000, and at the time of Paul was the largest and most important city of the Roman province of Asia. Paul ministered there about three years. Others who ministered at Ephesus included Apollos, Priscilla, Aquila, and Timothy, as well as John.¹⁴

Due to the cult of Diana, much trade was carried out by the silversmiths making souvenirs of silver shrines and images. It was to this trade the book of Acts referred.¹⁵

So he [Paul] sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a **silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana**, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that **not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.** And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Acts 19:22-28

So it seems that Christianity was bad for trade. In the end it wasn't Christianity, but silting of the river, that may have contributed to the demise of Ephesus as a commercial center.

In prophecy, Ephesus represents the Apostolic Period, 33 to 100 AD. It represented "circumspect conduct, and zealous labor for the Lord, but waywardness in heart attitudes." The Ephesian church began to serve more from a sense of duty and works, opening the door to legalism.¹⁶

In Revelation 2:1, "seven stars" represent seven angels or messengers to the churches, while the "seven golden candlesticks" represent the churches whose purpose is to spread the light of the Gospel as indicated by Matthew.¹⁷

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. **Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.** Matthew 5:14-16 KJV

Christ walking among the candlesticks indicates his intimate relationship with the churches.¹⁸ We are to abide in him and he in us.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. John 15:4-8 KJV

Continuing in the letter to the church at Ephesus we see that Christ addresses their specific works.

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Revelation 2:2-3 KJV

Paul warned the church at Ephesus that wolves would appear among them to draw away disciples after them. As the "end-time" approaches we see more and more cults on our doorstep. Aberrant doctrines are espoused over our television screens. Mainline churches are turning from sound biblical doctrine, embracing politically correct social agendas, doctrines, and smooth things (see Isaiah 30:9-11). Only "feel good" messages are delivered from the pulpits of many modern churches. Wolves are literally at our heels and in our faces.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, **that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch,** and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. Acts 20:28-31 KJV

Christ describes the works of the church. The church was a steadfast church, which was responsible for the spread of the gospel. Even so, they had left their "first love."

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Revelation 2:4 KJV

Their "first love," or original commitment to Christ, as was typical of churches of the late apostolic period, was beginning to cool.¹⁹ Their original zeal had slackened. They were like people today who attend church on Sunday, but do not hunger and thirst after the kingdom.

(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But **seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.** Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Matthew 6:32-34 KJV

You might ask yourself, "What is that kingdom of God that we are to seek?"

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Romans 14:17 KJV

With every fiber of our body, soul, and spirit while we live we are to first seek the kingdom of God. When we fully understand this principle, and apply it to our lives, we then enter into God's kingdom. Can we say that we are seeking the kingdom first, or have we lost our first love and are concerned more about the cares of this world, rather than the next? Like Martha, some become so occupied with religious work that they neglect the "one thing needed."

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named **Martha received him into her house.** And she had a sister called **Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.** But **Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.** And **Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.** Luke 10:38-42 KJV

The Ephesian church represented duty without love. We show up as Christians on Sunday, but does our Christianity show up the rest of the week? We must continue in that which we are called to do.

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.

Revelation 2:5 KJV

The Ephesians, as well as today's church, were exhorted to return and renew their commitment to Jesus Christ, otherwise their light would no longer shine. Many people continued to assemble as the church at Ephesus for many years, but eventually even the large prosperous city of Ephesus became a ruin and the candlestick was removed.²⁰ Today those ruins lay near Efes, Turkey.

One of the problems facing the church at Ephesus was false teachers.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. Revelation 2:6 KJV

Nicolaitanes were false teachers. No one knows who they were exactly, but it has been speculated that they may have been followers of the early deacon, Nicolas of Antioch, who later became heretical in his beliefs.²¹ We see Nicolas mentioned in the book of Acts.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and **Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:** Acts 6:5 KJV

We are strongly warned about the dangers of false teachers and their doctrines throughout the New Testament.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for **Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.** Therefore **it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness;** whose end shall be according to their works. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 KJV

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Matthew 7:15 KJV

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. Matthew 24:5 KJV

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Matthew 24:24 KJV

Later, a Gnostic group became known as the Nicolaitanes probably because they opposed the writings of John.²² In any event, the Nicolaitanes attempted to infiltrate the Ephesian church but were exposed by the leaders of the church.

The name "Nicolaitanes" comes from the Greek "nikao" (overcome) and "laos" (people), meaning "those who conquered people." They were deceivers.²³

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. **Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.** He

that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. **If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:** 2 John 1:7-10 KJV

These dangers are, even more so, still with us today. The Nicolaitanes held two heretical views. First, they practiced sensuality by separating the spiritual and physical natures. This gave them a license to sin. Secondly, the Nicolaitanes tried to set up an ecclesiastical order. The second heresy known as "Nicolaitanism" would eventually culminate in the establishment of a hierarchical system of bishops, archbishop's, cardinals, and popes. This system results in the enslavement of the local church to one man, or group of men, whose personal spiritual life sets the tone for the spiritual success or failure of the church they oversee.²⁴

Finally, Christ encourages all churches to overcome the problems associated with the various churches. We need to fix ourselves on our "first love."

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Revelation 2:7 KJV

The message to the Ephesian church is still valid for us today. We are to "overcome," then we can have access to the "tree of life" that was first mentioned in Genesis.

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; **the tree of life also in the midst of the garden,** and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:9 KJV

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of **the tree of life,** and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of **the tree of life.** Genesis 3:22-24 KJV

First, there will be a new creation. Then, the "tree of life" will be made available to those that have "overcome."

And I saw **a new heaven and a new earth:** for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven,** prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:1-2 KJV

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and

of the Lamb. **In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.** And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. Revelation 22:1-4 KJV

To the Church in Smyrna – Poor and Persecuted, but Rich

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

Today, the city of Smyrna is the modern Turkish city of Izmir located at the foot of Mt. Pagros, at the mouth of the Melas River on the South Shore of the Gulf of Izmir. It was one of the most ancient of the Greek settlements in Asia Minor. It was established in the 10th century BC and remained a Greek community until the destruction of the Greek population by the Turkish government in 1923. It was considered one of Rome's most important provincial cities, being one of the four centers of provincial assembly. The other cities were Ephesus, Sardis, and Pergamum. By the beginning of the 13th century AD it stood alone as the greatest city in the Aegean.²⁵ Christ had this to say about Smyrna.

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 ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Revelation 2:9-10 KJV

Characteristics of this church include tribulation, poverty, and affliction. This church was severely persecuted. They knew poverty. Smyrna was a city of guilds (unions), which regulated trade. Because Christians were hated, their trade or shops were boycotted, resulting in financial hardship. They were materially poor, but rich in their relationship to Jesus Christ.²⁶ The church at Smyrna was like that described in the following verse:

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. 2 Corinthians 6:10 KJV

The prophetic era represented by this church, 100 to 312 AD, was a time of the most severe persecutions of Christians.

During this time there were those who said that they were "Jews, and are not." They were described as "the synagogue of Satan." This refers to false teachers and to

churches that teach false doctrine. There were two basic heresies extant during this period of church history before the end of the second century. The first heresy questioned the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His bodily resurrection, His physical ascension into heaven, and His promise to return. The second added works as essential to salvation, in addition to grace through faith.²⁷

The church at Smyrna was successful in withstanding these false teachers and teachings. Today these same teachings are with us in one form or another in cults such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, and even in many of the mainline denomination's seminaries producing the church leaders of today.

There were ten periods of persecution under Roman emperors, beginning with Nero in 54 AD and ending with Diocletian in 305 AD. Diocletian was considered the worst. He tried to destroy the Bible by burning. Christians were fed to lions and dogs. They were crucified, covered with tar and set afire to serve as torches. During the second and third centuries five million Christians were martyred for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Many were boiled in oil and others were burned at the stake like Polycarp at Smyrna in 156 AD.²⁸ The "ten days" may refer to these ten periods.

Some believe that the "ten days" refer to the last ten years of the age (303 to 312 AD) when the most severe persecutions occurred under Diocletian.²⁹ Whatever these "ten days" represented, the message then as now is to be faithful, even if it costs you your life. Then you will receive your eternal "Crown of Life."

The church reached its greatest numbers in proportion to world population during this era of Rome 100 to 312 AD. Thirst for God's Word was evidenced by the many hand-copied manuscripts and translation of the Scriptures into many languages. The church became such a dominant factor in the Roman Empire that Constantine made it the state church in 312 AD.

Continuing in the letter we read that Christ admonishes us not to waver in our faith, but to persevere through trials and hardships so that we will not be condemned.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. Revelation 2:11 KJV

The tribute to this church is that Christ does not condemn it. We are exhorted to be overcomers. We then have His promise that we will not see the "second death" as described in Revelation chapter 20.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and **the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.** And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man

according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15 KJV

To the Church in Pergamum – Compromise with the World-System

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; Revelation 2:12 KJV

Pergamos means "married to power."³⁰ Pergamum was the provincial capital of Asia. It had the second largest library in the world (200,000 volumes). Only the library at Alexandria, Egypt was larger.³¹ Pergamum today is near the modern Turkish city Bergama.³² Christ commends them for holding to their faith.

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

Revelation 2:13 KJV

Pergamum was the first to erect temples to Caesar Augustus, to Zeus, and to the serpent-god Asclepius (the god of healing). "Satan's seat" may refer to the seat of Roman authority in Asia, or to the religious practices taking place there. However, the great altar of Zeus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was located here. It was the world's largest altar. This was the center of the Babylonian religious system. Pergamum inherited the religious mantle of ancient Babylon when Babylon fell in the days of Belshazzar. The Babylonian priests migrated to Pergamum at that time. "Satan's seat, or throne" is thus a literal description of the invisible principalities and power centered at Pergamum.³³

The prophetic age represented by Pergamum was 312 to 606 AD. Many unscriptural practices crept into the church during this age.³⁴

Unscriptural Practices³⁵

- ◆ 300 AD - Prayers for the dead
- ◆ 300 AD - Making the sign of the cross
- ◆ 375 AD - Worship of saints and angels
- ◆ 394 AD - Mass first instituted
- ◆ 431 AD - Worship of Mary begun
- ◆ 500 AD - Priests began dressing differently than laymen
- ◆ 526 AD - Extreme unction (Sacrament for the dying)
- ◆ 593 AD - Doctrine of purgatory introduced
- ◆ 600 AD - Worship services conducted in Latin
- ◆ 600 AD - Prayers directed to Mary

Postmillennialism was introduced during this period, which caused the fervor of the first 300 years to abate. Postmillennialism replaced the doctrine of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, which had caused the Christians to continue looking for the soon return of Jesus. I believe we are intended to continue to expect His return at any moment. Two thousand years is imminent in God's eternity.³⁶

Postmillennialism came about when Constantine made Christianity the state religion.³⁷ It said everything was getting better and better and that Christ's kingdom was now, and that He would come at the end of a thousand years. This doctrine required a redefining of Israel. It was said that Israel was cast off forever and that the promises of Israel now applied to the church. It would take another one thousand four hundred years to return to the doctrine of "imminent return" which would excite evangelistic fervor once more. Whenever a church has a strong emphasis on the "Second Coming," a strong missionary evangelistic fervor is present.³⁸

At the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, the church successfully defended the Deity of Christ against the heresy of Arius. Today's cults, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, persist in this heresy, denying the Deity of Jesus Christ,³⁹ even though it can be shown that this was the constant belief of the early church as evidenced by the New Testament and the writings of the early Church Fathers.

The word "martyr" and "witness" are translated from the same Greek word. Antipas, mentioned as a martyr in Revelation 2:13, was a faithful witness who was slain. It seems that Antipas was a real person who was martyred at Pergamum, although nowhere else in scripture do we find him. His name can mean "against all" suggesting he also represents any believer willing to stand to the death for his faith in the name of Jesus Christ against all opposition.⁴⁰

Even though Christ commended them for holding their faith, He had this against them:

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. Revelation 2:14 KJV

Even though this church held fast Jesus' name, and didn't deny His faith, pagan practices were allowed to creep into the church during the age represented by this church, 312-606 AD. For more than one thousand years the church upheld the Deity of Christ, until rationalism produced 19th and 20th-century Modernism. There is a high percentage of liberal pastors, churches, and seminaries today that deny the virgin birth and Deity of Jesus Christ.⁴¹ The theological doctrines of this church were correct, but their practical doctrines were evil.

In the book of Numbers chapters 22 to 31, Balak, the king of Moab had fear of Israel passing through his land. He hired the prophet Balaam to prophesy against Israel. Whenever Balaam attempted to do so, a blessing instead of a curse came from his mouth. Balaam then encouraged Balak to put a stumbling block in Israel's path through an unholy alliance. Israel accepted the bait, intermarried with Moabites

and was polluted socially and spiritually. As with Balaam's suggestion of an unholy alliance, paganism began to dominate the church of Pergamos. We need to avoid alliances with the world. When we start down a path of compromise with the world's system we become guilty of the sin of Balaam.⁴² We next see that they had a problem with the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.

So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Revelation 2:15 KJV

As in the church at Ephesus, some held false teaching. Nicolaitanism is the doctrine of a strong ecclesiastical authority ruling over the laity, such as we find in the Catholic Church. The laity thus blindly follows the decrees of the clergy.⁴³ This is spiritual slavery. For their offenses, Christ asks them to repent.

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:16 KJV

Those who hold false doctrine and adhere to the spiritual slavery of the ecclesiastical system will be opposed by the soon return of Jesus Christ. Christ again encourages the churches to overcome their failings.

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

Revelation 2:17 KJV

The "hidden manna" is the spiritual food provided by God in His Word. Just as the Israelites had to individually gather the "manna" of their sustenance provided by God in the wilderness, the individual Christian is responsible to gather the "hidden manna" from God's Word and have faith in His providence for his spiritual sustenance.⁴⁴

"White" in the Bible refers to the righteousness of God. A "white stone" meant acquittal. In ancient courts, jurors signified acquittal by laying down a white stone. In this respect it stands for eternal acquittal.⁴⁵ Today, at Sonoma, California, the *Jesus Seminar* scholars use white and black stones or balls to determine whether Jesus said what the Bible reports Him as saying. In the Masonic Lodge a white or black ball is used to determine the wishes of the members. A candidate for Masonic membership must receive a majority of white balls or he is denied membership, "blackballed."

To the Church in Thyatira – The Great Counterfeit

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine

brass; Revelation 2:18 KJV

It is said that Thyatira means, “to be ruled by a woman.”⁴⁶ It comes from two words meaning “sacrificed” and “continual.”⁴⁷ Thyatira is today modern Akhisar in Turkey. It was an important center of the wool trade. Trades associated with the wool industry would include dyers and fullers.⁴⁸

Lydia, a woman from Thyatira, “a seller of purple,” visited Philippi while Paul was there, as described in Acts 16.

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

Lydia was Paul’s first convert in Europe (Philippi). It is possible that she evangelized Thyatira.⁴⁹ The letter to Thyatira continues as follows:

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. Revelation 2:19 KJV

The prophetic church of Thyatira is the middle church of the seven and thus represents the Middle Ages, 606-1517 AD.⁵⁰ Even though, as we shall see, this church took on the trappings of paganism, their works, love for mankind, ministry (service), faith, and endurance represented by the long survival of this church, was found as something to be commended.⁵¹ Christ, though, had a few harsh words for this church.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. Revelation 2:20 KJV

Jezebel in the Old Testament was a woman who brought Baal worship into Israel and perverted the nation.⁵²

And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that **he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.** And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. 1 Kings 16:31-33 KJV

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon, and lived about 918 BC. She married Israel’s King Ahab and induced him to introduce her native idols, become an idolater himself, and to use his power to establish idol worship in the nation.⁵³

In the new Testament the Jezebel concept of false religion is represented by the woman who mixed leaven (a symbol of the evil) in three measures of meal “till the whole was leavened.”⁵⁴

Another parable spake he unto them; **The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.** Matthew 13:33 KJV

The false religion of Jezebel was twofold. First, “to seduce [and lead into false teaching] my servants to commit fornication,” a symbol of idolatry. Second, “to eat things sacrificed to idols,” a symbol of the union of the church with the world. Rome sought to bring the kingdom of the world under the domination of the pope in Rome.⁵⁵

The church at Thyatira is a counterfeit, a false church. The church at Thyatira is the story of a church merging with paganism.

Thyatira Paganism⁵⁶

The prophetic church of Thyatira was responsible for the following:

- ◆ 607 AD Boniface III made first Pope⁵⁷
- ◆ 709 AD Kissing of Pope’s foot
- ◆ 786 AD Worshipping of images and relics
- ◆ 850 AD Use of “holy water” begun
- ◆ 995 AD Canonization of dead saints
- ◆ 998 AD Fasting on Fridays and during Lent
- ◆ 1079 AD Celibacy of the priesthood
- ◆ 1090 AD Prayer beads
- ◆ 1184 AD The Inquisition
- ◆ 1190 AD Sale of Indulgences⁵⁸
- ◆ 1215 AD Transubstantiation⁵⁹
- ◆ 1220 AD Adoration of the wafer (Host)
- ◆ 1229 AD Bible forbidden to laymen
- ◆ 1414 AD Cup forbidden to people at communion
- ◆ 1439 AD Doctrine of purgatory decreed⁶⁰
- ◆ 1439 AD Doctrine of seven sacraments affirmed
- ◆ 1508 AD The Ave Maria approved

This pattern continued even to modern times as follows:

- ◆ 1534 AD Jesuit Order founded
- ◆ 1545 AD Tradition granted equal authority with the Bible

- ◆ 1546 AD Apocryphal books put into Bible
- ◆ 1854 AD Immaculate Conception of Mary⁶¹
- ◆ 1864 AD Syllabus of Errors proclaimed⁶²
- ◆ 1870 AD Infallibility of Pope declared
- ◆ 1930 AD Public schools condemned
- ◆ 1950 AD Assumption of the Virgin Mary⁶³
- ◆ 1965 AD Mary proclaimed Mother of the Church

Peter describes the actions of false prophets and teachers.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 2 Peter 2:1 KJV

Like Jezebel, it is a church that fabricated a system to bind the people to image-worship, superstition, and priestcraft.⁶⁴ Jezebel caused Israel to worship the mother-goddess Ashtaroth, called “the Queen of Heaven.” The church in the Middle Ages introduced the worship of Mary.⁶⁵ Mary is called the Queen of Heaven by the Catholic Church. Notice what Jeremiah has to say about the “Queen of Heaven.”

But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, **to burn incense unto the queen of heaven**, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off **to burn incense to the queen of heaven**, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when **we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her**, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?.... So **that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed**; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day. **Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the LORD**, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his

testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you, as at this day. Jeremiah 44:17-19, 22, 23 KJV

The Roman Catholic Church, in particular, and other churches with ecclesiastical religious systems are examples of the church at Thyatira.

As previously noted, “Thyatira” comes from two words meaning “sacrifice” and “continual.” Is it a coincidence that the Roman Catholic Church’s greatest heresy is that it denies the finished work of Jesus Christ, but believes in a continuing sacrifice?⁶⁶ The sacrifice of the Mass is a repeated sacrifice of Jesus’ death daily. Other sacraments continue this concept. The Sacrament of Penance is a works system where man pays a penalty for his sins rather than accepting the atoning sacrifice of Jesus once for all.⁶⁷ Man does not need a works system to repent, but man must repent.

And I gave her space [time] 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. Revelation 2:21-22 KJV

“Bed” is literally “sickbed.” Even though the believing Church has been raptured, the spirit of this church will still have power into the Great Tribulation.⁶⁸ Those who follow the false teachings of this church and are still alive, unrepented, during the end times will suffer the wrath of God during the Great Tribulation.⁶⁹

And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. Revelation 2:23 KJV

The children of the fruit of this church will suffer the “second death.”⁷⁰

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw **the dead, small and great, stand before God**; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and **the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works**. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and **death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them**: and they were judged every man according to their works. And **death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.** Revelation 20:11-15 KJV

Some say that the words “kill her children” represent the horrible plagues, including the Black Death beginning in 1347 AD that decimated the European population during the Middle Ages.⁷¹ Christ assures those in this church that do not

follow the false doctrine that they will not suffer the same fate as the guilty ones.⁷² The believing remnant that holds fast will be delivered at Christ's return.⁷³ Again, Christ assures the faithful that those that overcome to the end will have a position of leadership during the Millennium.⁷⁴ The overcomer is he that believes that Jesus is the Christ.⁷⁵

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Revelation 2:24-26 KJV

John had this to say about overcomers:

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For **whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world:** and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. 1 John 5:1-4 KJV

Notice in the following verses that those who keepeth His works (overcomers) He will give power over the nations, just as He promised to the church at Thyatira. This a clear indication to the Millennial Kingdom.

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 1 Corinthians 6:2 KJV

But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.... And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Daniel 7:18, 27 KJV

The letter continues with a further reference to the Millennial Kingdom ruled by Christ.

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. Revelation 2:27 KJV

Notice the reference to a potter's vessel in the following verse referring to the future Millenium:

I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, **Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.** Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. **Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.** Psalm 2:7-9 KJV

So that you are not confused with the phrase "this day have I begotten thee," remember that five times Christ is called "the first begotten." Another five times He is called "the only begotten." The term "only begotten" refers to His incarnation, while "first begotten (or firstborn)" refers to His resurrection.⁷⁶ It does not refer to His being a created being.

The word for "rule" is actually "tend" or "feed," like a shepherd or pastor. The "rod" is the same word as "sceptre" in Hebrews 1:8.⁷⁷

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Hebrews 1:8 KJV

Notice also that God the Father is referring to the Son, Jesus Christ, as God. Finally, the letter to the church at Thyatira closes with the following:

And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Revelation 2:28-29 KJV

Christ is the "Morning Star." This is the promise of Christ, to abide in the believers that overcome.

REV 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. **I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.** Revelation 22:16 KJV

Conclusion of Part 1

The warnings given to these churches are valid for today. We will see other warnings in Part 2 of this study of the churches. Consider carefully what Christ is saying. We must adhere to sound doctrine, hold fast to our faith that Christ came to save us, was resurrected, and will come back for us. He will also come back in judgment of the wicked.

God wrote letters to the Seven Churches to encourage and guide them because He loves them. Likewise, God loves us so much that he caused His Word to be written down so that we would not be without guidance. We are therefore without excuse. Each of us has an obligation to learn the truth of His Word, accept His gift of salvation freely offered, and to be overcomers to the end.

There is purpose in God's creation. Do you think that life is nothing more than eat, drink, and be merry? If that is all there is, then we are to be pitied. If you think, then whatever or whoever caused you to be, must also think. It is a law, that the First Cause must be greater than all subsequent causes. God created us, He loves us, and He desires us to want Him. That

is our primary purpose, to love God with our whole being. If you never pick up His Holy Word to see for yourself what God wants for you then you may always be locked in a futile attempt to find meaning and true joy in life. Begin today by reading the Gospel of John for yourself. **AΩ**

(Endnotes)

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