

## Book of Revelation

The name of the book comes from the first word in it, *Apokalypsis* in Greek, the transliteration of which gives us the English word *Apocalypse*. The word refers to the revealing of something hidden, or making a mystery known. The Apostle Paul speaks many times of the “mystery of the Gospel” which was revealed to him (eg. Ephesians 3:3-7). Revealed in this book is the mystery of Christ’s return and the end of the age. It is also contains the “revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5).

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### Approaches to interpreting the Book.

**Futurist-** Most of Revelation is about “end times.”

**Preterist-** Revelation is about events that already happened around the 1st Century.

**Historicist-** Revelation covers events that occur throughout history, from 1st Century to the end.

**Idealist-** Revelation is almost entirely symbolic and may be applied at any time period.

Pastor D believes Revelation is highly symbolic (Idealist), applies to the entirety of church history, and describes what will happen at the end. Thus, the only approach that is useless is Preterist.

### Type of Literature

Revelation belongs to a literary genre known as “apocalyptic.” This is a highly symbolic and visual style dealing with eschatology.

“Two primary patterns of eschatological thought are found in the Bible, both centered in the conviction that God will act in the near future to save his people and to punish those who oppress them. In prophetic eschatology, the dominant form in the OT, God is expected to act within history to restore man and nature to the perfect condition which existed prior to man’s fall. Apocalyptic eschatology, on the other hand, expects God to destroy the old imperfect order before restoring the world to paradise.”

(Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible)

As we observed, the Greek word *apokalypsis* (found in Rev. 1:1) means “revelation.” This style of literature is found both in the OT and among non-canonical books dating between 200BC - 100AD. Typically an angel reveals future events via imagery and symbolism to the seer who writes this down. Both Ezekiel and Daniel contain apocalyptic passages. Outside the Bible the books of Baruch, 4 Ezra, and books of Enoch are also of this type.

### Reason for Revelation-

Christ conquered sin, death and Satan when He died on the cross and rose from the dead. He promised to return and reign. Yet he hasn’t come back and evil remains in the world. He promised to return and reign. Yet he hasn’t come back and evil remains in the world. Why, and what will God do about this? So, Revelation answers the age old question of theodicy. If God is great and God is good, then why all this evil. Answer: God will destroy evil and install His Son as the King who brings justice and righteousness In the 1st through early 4th centuries Christians were persecuted and

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martyred. Throughout history God's people have suffered evil and injustice, being oppressed and opposed. Revelation is assurance that God's judgment is coming upon the wicked, salvation is secure for the saints, and Christ will return to inaugurate a new world. We can endure injustice and evil, knowing God will eventually make all things right.

**Theme of the Book:** "Through Christ God will judge the unrighteous, conquer evil, and bring about a new world."

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### Millennial Positions

Revelation 20 tells us Satan will be bound and Christ will reign for 1,000 years. How does this relate to Jesus' promised return to earth? The position you take will guide how you interpret the Book of Revelation.

**Historical Premillennial-** Historicist, Futurist

Christ's 1,000 year reign will happen on earth following His return.

**Postmillennial-** Preterist, Historicist

Christ's return follows a 1,000 period during which the church reigns on earth as His viceroy/representative.

**Amillennial-** Idealist, Postmillennial.

The millennium is a symbolic period during which Christ reigns from heaven. He will return to earth after this period.

**Dispensational Premillennial-** Futurist

Christ's 1,000 year reign on earth will occur after He returns. The return will occur at the end of the church age, preceded immediately by a seven year period of tribulation.

Pastor D sees some validity in each position, except the purely Postmillennial, but aligns more closely with the Historical Premillennial.

Pastor D's earliest interest in the Bible was the result of a pamphlet that interpreted to the Book of Revelation with current institutions and events. It was the first book in the Bible he read in its entirety.

## Chapter 1

***"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep [follow] the things which are written in it; for the time is near" (1:1-3).***

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The first word *Revelation*—*apokalypsis* in Greek—gives us the name and nature of the book. It is an apocalypse, a revelation from Jesus Christ. “The word means the uncovering of something hidden, the making known of what we could not find out for ourselves... It is a setting forth of what God has made known.” (Leon Morris, Tyndale NT Commentary)

The Book of Revelation comes from Jesus. He is the lamb who was slain and so is worthy to open the scroll containing the destiny of the world (Revelation 5:9). Thus, Revelation belongs to Him as well. It is ultimately the testimony concerning Jesus, which is the source of all true prophecy. “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

The revelation is communicated to John by angelic messengers.

“In this case there would be four stages in the transmission: God to Christ, Christ to his angel, the angel to John, and John to his servants.” (Robert Mounce, NICNT)

Since Revelation is for Christ’s servants or followers (genuine Christians), it is for believers. It is for us at such a time as this.

***“the things which must soon take place.... for the time is near”*** (1:1, 3).

Revelation had urgent application to 1st century Christians who were undergoing persecution and martyrdom. If we fail to see its original application, we will also fail to interpret it correctly then apply it properly in the present time. This is a key point of hermeneutics (the art and science of Bible interpretation): We must learn what the text meant to the original audience in order to understand what it means for us today.

On the surface “the things which must soon take place” would seem to support the preterist approach to Revelation. It could also present a problem when we see that many of the events discussed did not (and still have not) taken place. What does it mean to say “the time is near” already in the 1st century? Similarly, both John the Baptist and Jesus stated that the Kingdom of God was at hand for their hearers (Matt. 3:1, 4:17). This indicates the commencement of God’s plan, not the conclusion of it. Revelation begins with urgent messages to the 7 churches in Asia Minor. It provides hope to those who will undergo persecution, some to the point of martyrdom. Further, it describes events that began in the 1st century and will continue until the end of the present era. Jesus referred to these events as, “The beginning of birth pains” (Matt. 24:8). The Kingdom of God was established through the church in the 1st century, and it was immediately assaulted (Matt. 11:12), persecution from God’s enemies has been persistent throughout church history. When will God arise and His enemies be scattered (Psalm 68:1)? Judgment Day is coming, then the birth of a new age. This may be upon us today!

**“and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John”**

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*Communicated* is literally *signified* in Greek. The word used (*semaino*) is a verb and a cognate with the noun *signs* (*semaion*) used in John's Gospel to refer to the miracles of Jesus which signified that He is the Christ, the Son of God. "Thus it is admirable suited to the symbolic character of the book. This should warn the reader not to expect a literal presentation of future history, but a symbolic portrayal of that which must yet take place." (Mounce, NICNT)

"He is said to have signified it; that is, He made it known by signs or symbols. It is important to bear this in mind. This book is a book of symbols." (Ironside, Lectures on the Book of Revelation)

Therefore, the visions in Revelation, like the signs in John's Gospel, point beyond themselves. We must always ask ourselves, and the Lord: What does this signify? Ironside believes "every symbol used in Revelation is explained or alluded to somewhere else in the Bible." Therefore, these are not obscure or novel symbols.

Although Jesus Himself gives the initial messages to John for the seven churches, angelic mediators will do the rest (beginning in chapter 4). The Greek word *angelos* means messenger, and may be used to refer to any person God designates to communicate His message.

John, the beloved disciple, who wrote the eponymous Gospel is the writer for the Book of Revelation.

***'who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw.'***

Testified or "bore witness to," so this is not the writer's own words, opinion, or interpretation. He doesn't even claim to be a prophet. The vision is mediated through John. He is not interpreting or editorializing. He is relaying a message, a revelation from God and Christ. In this respect John is like an old school newscaster, objectively narrating what he sees and hears.

*word of God + testimony of Jesus Christ* may be parallelism, the latter reinforces the fact that Jesus' testimony IS the word of God.

***"Blessed is the one who reads, and those who ear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it"*** (1:3).

The Reformers uniformly rejected Revelation (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin). Many Christians today avoid the book because it is difficult to understand. H.A. Ironside wrote: "It is certainly cause for deep regret that to so many Christians the Book of Revelation seems to be what God never intended it to be—a sealed book." Believe it or not, it is possible to understand Revelation. This study seeks to help you do just that. Even so, some will avoid the Revelation because they don't want to be upset when confronted with the harsh realities surrounding the end of the world. Yet here it is promised that we are BLESSED to hear this prophecy, IF we pay attention and adjust our lives as the result.

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### The Seven Churches

***“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him...”*** (1:4).

Revelation begins with a letter that contains short messages from Christ through John to 7 churches in the region of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), which the Apostle oversaw. The churches are: Ephesus (probably the most important), Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. Christ gives a message to John for each church. Each message is written directly to the pastor of that church, who is responsible to share it with his congregation. These messages are found in Revelation chapters two and three.

Next we see the Trinity presented.

***“from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come”*** (1:4)

God the Father, seen here as eternal. This description is used two more times in Revelation (1:8, 4:8). God alone is immortal and eternal (1 Timothy 6:16). In the OT the Name of God contains this idea. “I am who I am (or I will be who I will be). Tell them I am has sent you” (Exodus 3:14). YHWH is related to the Hebrew word for being or existence. God is the eternal, self-existent Being.

***“and from the seven spirits who are before His throne”*** (1:4)

NLT translates this “from the sevenfold Spirit.” The Holy Spirit, seen here as perfect and complete in His ministry as: Counselor, Comforter, Helper, Guide, Convicting of sin, righteousness and judgment. This may also be an indication that the the Spirit is omnipresent. It is interesting to notice that the Spirit is in front of the throne, and thus between Almighty God and anyone who would stand before Him. The Holy Spirit intercedes for believers; that is, He stands between us and the Lord (Romans 8:26).

***“and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”*** (1:5)

Jesus is the one who testifies of the truth, so He is the faithful witness who always shares what the Father wills. We see this many times in John’s Gospel (ie. 14:6, 18:37).

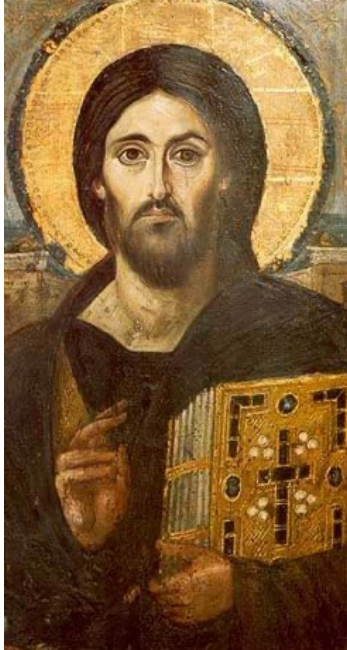
He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25-26), who conquered death for all people (Hebrews 2:14-15). He is the first fruits of all the dead who will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:18).

Jesus is ruler of all, the King of all kings. He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Although most of the rulers on the earth do not recognize this now. One day “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11). One day He will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:8-9, Rev. 12:5, 19:15). There will be no more elections, no deceitful, selfishly ambitious politicians, no more totalitarian despots. When Christ

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reigns on earth it will be a time when righteousness is established and justice is always done (see Isaiah 32:1).

The exalted image of Christ in Revelation inspired the ubiquitous image of Pantocrator found in medieval church art. *Pantocrator* is an English transliteration of the Greek word meaning “Ruler of All.” In the OT God is described as Almighty (El Shaddai), and Lord of Hosts (Sabaoth), and in the LXX this Greek word is used to translate those titles from Hebrew. Thus, the Father expresses His power through the rule of Christ.



The painting is from the 5th C. It is preserved at St. Catherine’s monastery on Mt. Sinai in Egypt.

“The different expressions shown on the right and left sides of Jesus’ face may suggest his double nature as both human and divine.” [aletia.org](http://aletia.org)

Jesus right hand is raised in blessing. He holds three fingers together symbolizing the Trinity, and two fingers are separately extended symbolizing His divine and human natures. He holds the Gospel or Word of God in His left hand.

“In short, the Icon of Christ Sinai reflects the Incarnate Christ by imaging in one person a perfect union of both divine nature and human nature, present simultaneously within eternity and within time and space. As such, the Icon of Christ Sinai preserves our traditional understanding of Christology—pointing toward Christ as the true God and true man.” [catholicexchange.com](http://catholicexchange.com)

**“To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood... to Him be the glory and the dominion forever”**

Jesus is the love of God incarnate, proven and consummated at the cross. Sin is no longer the master for we are under grace (Romans 8:14), which came through Jesus. We must glorify Christ Jesus and agree that He has the right to rule over every person forever.

**“and He made us into a kingdom of priests to His God and Father”**

This is the nature of the Kingdom of God. We are not merely subjects, but we share an important role in the kingdom. We are priests, who teach others the truth of God’s word, who mediate between God and lost people. You and I must bring the grace and peace of Jesus to a fallen and dying world. One day we will reign with Christ over a renewed earth (Rev. 2:25-26, 3:21)!

**“Behold, He is coming with the clouds”**

This is the prophecy regarding Messiah, the Son of Man, is found in Daniel 7:13.

*“I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a son of man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. “And to Him was given dominion, Honor, and a kingdom, So that all the peoples, nations, and populations of all languages Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13–14, NASB 2020)*

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The Apostle Paul also refers to this when he writes:

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, NASB 2020)

When Jesus ascended into heaven a cloud hid Him from the sight of those looking on, but an angel appeared and stated He would return as they had seen Him depart (Acts 1:9-11).

### **“and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him”**

This refers to a prophecy from Zechariah.

*“And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of pleading, so that they will look at Me whom they pierced; and they will mourn for Him, like one mourning for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.”* (Zechariah 12:10, NASB 2020)

Who pierced Jesus? The Jews? The Romans? All of us! He went to the cross bearing your sins and mine! He became our sin on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21).

### **“and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”**

Those who rejected Jesus will mourn when they see Him return to earth in power. “Why, O why, did we turn down the Savior’s offer of mercy?! How could we turn away from such love? What will become of us now?!”

So be it is what *Amen* means, so this is like Hebrew parallelism, wherein the same point is made in two different ways. This could also have been translated: “Yes and amen!”

### **“I am the alpha and the omega”**

This is the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, so the Lord God is the beginning and the end. He who created everything at the beginning (Gen. 1:1) will bring an end to the fallen, sinful world at the end (Rev. 21:1), and create a new world where righteousness dwells. “But according to His promise we are looking forward for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

### **“I, John, your brother and fellow participant in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”** (Revelation 1:9, NASB 2020)

1- John is the seer who receives the vision and one who writes it down.

2- He identifies with his audience. He is not above them. They are all going through the same things and have the same hope.

3- Tribulation is trouble, distress or affliction. In this case, it is the result of persecution from the Roman empire and from unconverted Jews. Christians were arrested, tortured and martyred under the reigns of Nero and Domitian. It is likely that Revelation is written during Domitian’s reign A.D. 81-96.

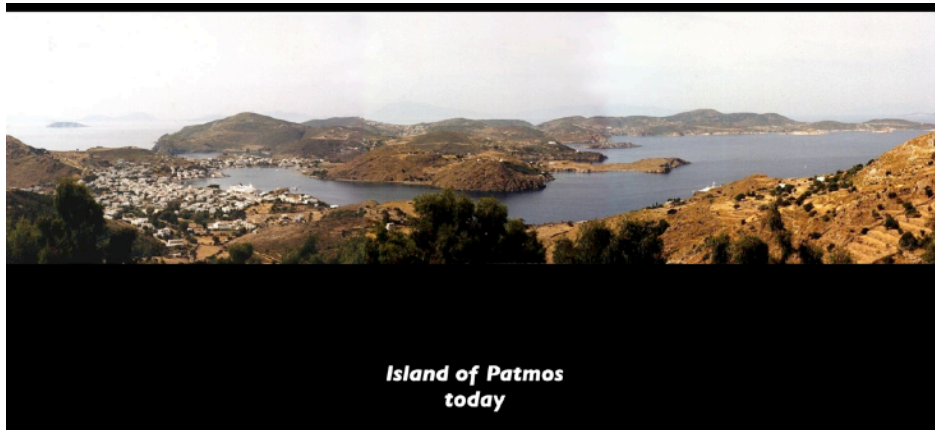
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“Domitian transformed the role of emperor into one of religious and moral leadership.... He deified himself and began referring to himself as Dominus et Deus.”

Christians would never be willing to agree to this and worship the emperor. Their confession was not Caesar is Lord, but Jesus is Lord.

4- Kingdom- The Kingdom of God is not only a future hope, but it was and is a present reality on earth through the church. All that is needed for a kingdom is a King (Jesus), and subjects (Christians). What is missing is a permanent place on earth belonging exclusively to the King, where His subjects live in peace. That is in our future. In Revelation 21 we will see the great city, new Jerusalem, descend from heaven to a renewed earth. Then the kingdom will have its own place.

5- Perseverance- This is what the people of God must have throughout the present era, since there will always be opposition and tribulation so long as the world continues in its



rebellion against God.

6- John was exiled to a remote island called Patmos in an effort to silence his witness, and remove His influence and leadership.

“Patmos, an island in the Aegean belonging to the group of the

Sporades, lies relatively close to the west coast of Asia Minor; at that time it was a day’s journey by ship to Ephesus.” (Roloff)

Eventually John was restored and died an old man in Ephesus, where he had been pastor (according to Irenaeus and Tertullian).

“Tertullian writes that Domitian was much like Nero and attempted persecution; however, he quickly reversed his decision and restored the Christians whom he had banished.” (Lexam Bible Dictionary). According to church tradition, John is the only one of the 12 who was not martyred. He suffered for Christ “you shall drink the cup that I drink,” but he died peacefully.

### “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”

The Lord’s day means the day Jesus rose. This is an early reference to Sunday as the special day, which took primacy over Saturday for the church. Through the centuries Sunday has been the Christian sabbath and day of worship.

John was in the Spirit, or in spirit, meaning he was in a state of complete focus on the Spirit of God. In this state he was enabled to see visions from God. The Apostle Paul speaks of entering this state of consciousness in 2 Corinthians 12, wherein he speaks



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of being “caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words.” (vs. 4). Peter too experienced this when he saw the vision of the sheet with animals roaming about. “he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground” (Acts 10:10b-11).

It is in this extended state of complete spiritual focus that John received our book of Revelation.

### **“Write on a scroll what you see, and send it to the seven churches”**

The Apostle John had authority to oversee the churches in this region. They would be familiar with him and would accept this letter as authoritative.

Revelation was written to comfort and strengthen churches which were undergoing various degrees of persecution. The book of Revelation is assurance that God is in control, justice will be done on those who were harming and killing Christians, and Jesus is the ruler of all, including the Roman emperor. So, in spite of the apparent losses these churches were experiencing, Christ has won and will return victorious.

There was a definite audience to whom these visions would be sent. We must bear that in mind when we interpret the book of Revelation. If your interpretation wouldn't apply or speak to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the first century, then it is in error. I'm not advocating a preterist interpretation, but applying good hermeneutics.

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### Description of the Exalted Christ

***“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And after turning I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and wrapped around the chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze when it has been heated to a glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” (Revelation 1:12–18, NASB 2020)***

George Eldon Ladd states that this first vision of the exalted and glorified Jesus “is the background and condition of the entire disclosure of what must soon take place.”

Thus, although John is often called “the Revelator,” it is Christ who deserves that title.

Jurgen Roloff (Continental Commentary) points out similarities between this vision of Christ, and Daniel's vision of an exalted man, presumably an angel (Daniel 10).

### **“seven golden lampstands”**

Rather than the familiar menorah with seven branches, there were seven individual stands each holding one lamp. The lampstand is a symbol of a church, which is given a

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place to shine light in the world. The light comes from God. In Revelation 4:5 we see “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” Thus, the Holy Spirit is the lamp that burns upon the lampstand of each church. Apart from the Spirit, a church is dark and dead; it is a mere form of what should be. God is light; Jesus is the light of the world, and that light comes via the anointing of the Holy Spirit through a called out community of believers, who are also called to be the light of the world, a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14).

### **“and in the middle of the lampstands”**

Christ walks in the midst of the churches. He is the Shepherd and Bishop of souls (1 Peter 2:25), who guards and oversees every congregation. The pastor or overseer of a church on earth is an under shepherd, the flock belongs to Christ. In Revelation the pastor is the messenger to the church. We will see this when Christ sends a message through John to “the angel” of each church. Angelos in Greek means messenger.

### **“Like a son of man”**

Christ appears in his resurrected human form. The Son of God became a man, took on human nature, and He retains that nature, even now in heaven. Jesus will always be the God-man. The Son of Man represents humankind to God and God to humankind.

### **“clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and wrapped around the chest with a golden sash”**

Although in His glorified state, Jesus wore clothing recognizable by 1st century people. The golden sash points to His regal status. This style of dress has become archetypical to us for heavenly beings.

### **“His head and His hair were white like wool, like snow”**

White hair speaks of age, and thus wisdom. Christ is like the Ancient of Days. Although Jesus died and rose at age 33, He is pre-existent and eternal. “A young man’s glory is his strength; an old man’s honor is his gray hair” (Prov. 20:29). This may also speak to Christ’s purity. ““Come now, and let us debate your case,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They shall become as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18, NASB 2020)

### **“His eyes were like a flame of fire”**

This speaks to Christ’s capacity to see through (burn through) falsehood and pretense. To look upon the Lord is to be convicted of any impurity, which His eyes burn away.

### **“His feet like burnished bronze”**

Bronze was known for its strength and ability to endure. Christ has walked through the furnace of affliction for us, and it has only served to make him stronger. Remember, the fourth man walking with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace in Daniel (3:24-25)!

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### **“His voice was like the sound of many waters”**

Imagine standing at the base of a huge waterfall. It is penetrating, overwhelming, thunderous. No other voices can be heard when He speaks. He overwhelmingly drowns out every vocal opinion in the world. No one will be able to shout down the Son of God when He appears!

### **“In His right hand He held seven stars”**

We are informed that the seven stars “are the angels of the seven churches.” Remember, angelos means messenger. As I pointed out, these are not angelic beings, but the pastor/teachers of the seven churches. It is encouraging to know that Jesus holds pastors in his hand! No matter the danger we can be confident, and at peace. However, this also means He may choose to dispose of us as He sees fit if we’re found to be unfit.

### **“Out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword”**

This is the Word of God that He speaks. “And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). “For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit” (Hebrews 4:12). The Lord doesn’t speak an idle word, offer suggestions, or propound human opinion. He speaks the absolute and immutable truth from Almighty God. His word is creative and powerful. It cannot be ignored, nor opposed without severe consequence.

### **“and His face was like the sun shining in its strength”**

Christ is holy. He is the son of the Holy One of Israel. No one can look at His face brazenly. As you cannot look directly at the sun, neither can you stare at Christ in His glory. To look at the glorified Christ will require one to bow to the ground, or turn away in shame.

### **“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.”**

To worship is to prostrate ones self before the majesty on high. Everyone who ever met God fell to the ground in worship. Jesus is God. One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). Bow before Him now for your salvation, or bow before Him after you die to your condemnation.

### **“And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid’”**

Christ strengthens and encourages His servant. He puts the right hand of authority and power upon John, and tells Him not to be afraid. We who are saved have nothing to fear from the judge of the earth. He has died for us. He is our advocate, our strong defense against sin and death. We are inherently unholy and unrighteous, but Jesus became our sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

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**“I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”**

He was first. He was already there at the beginning: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). He is the last. Christ will be there at the end. Indeed He will return and bring about the end.

He is the living one. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of mankind” (John 1:4). The Son is self-existent like the Father. “For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:26).

He truly died for sins, entered hades/sheol and took the keys of death from the devil. “so that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:14b-15).

Tell me, what do you have to fear if You have Jesus? “If God is for us who can stand against us?” (Romans 8:31)

***“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (Revelation 1:19–20, NASB 2020)***

**“write the things which you have seen”**

Revelation is a book of visions, which John the seer will write down.

**“the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things”**

This gives us a breakdown of Revelation.

- 1- The first part of the book will relate to the current situation in the 1st century, and perhaps beyond into what some (Dispensationalists) have called the “church age.”
- 2- The second part of the book relates to what will happen at the end of the age.

**“the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches”**

Since John writes to the “angels” of the seven churches it stands to reason that these are not angelic beings, but the messengers of the churches, which is to say their pastor/teachers. The lampstands are the seven churches. Each local church is a community of believers who are the light of the world, a city set on a hill. We must be a beacon in this dark world.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14–16, NASB 2020)

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We must speak the truth, church. We must point the way.

Next we will read the messages Christ has to each of the seven churches. On a map we can see that these churches form somewhat of a circle. Jesus is pictured standing in the midst of them. He begins with Ephesus and addresses each church moving clockwise around the circle. There is a school of thought that sees each of these congregations as a type or representative of a period in church history. I believe this limits both the application of these important messages to the original congregations and to us now.

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The messages to the seven churches applied to directly to each of those first century communities, and they are messages for churches and individual Christians today. We should read them the same we we read the epistles in the New Testament.

[See the table overview titled: Seven Churches in Revelation]

***“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ‘I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’” (Revelation 2:1–7, NASB 2020)***

**“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:”**

The message from Christ is written by John to the main Pastor/Teacher of each congregation. Ephesus was John’s home, and the closest city to Patmos where he was exiled. It was an important city, religiously, economically and politically. It had the third largest population in the empire, and until A.D. 14 had been the capital of the province of Asia Minor. It contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis. The Apostle Paul established the church there, spending a total of three years in fruitful ministry to the Ephesians (Acts 19:20). During that time the Gospel was carried all over Asia Minor (Acts 19:10), a task made possible by the many roads that intersected in the city.

***The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands***

This signifies that Christ has complete authority over every church. This is pertinent to Ephesus light of the fact that the Lord threatens to remove them from ministry if they fail to repent.

***‘I know your deeds***

The same statement is repeated for Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Ephesus, Thyatira, and Philadelphia are commended for their works. Sardis and Laodicea rebuked. In the cases of Smyrna and Pergamum, mention of persecution replaces recognition for their deeds. In fact, that may well be what inhibits their works.

***“your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and***

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***you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary.”***

During his last address to the elders of Ephesus, Paul warned them that wolves would come in and try to destroy the flock (Acts 20:29-30). These wolves were false teachers. Years later we see that Ephesus tested and rejected them. They had not given in and had not given up.

However, there was a major problem among the people...

**“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”**

Ephesus was orthodox, but they had let their love for Jesus grow cold. They were right, but without love that is meaningless.

“If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

And if I give away all my possessions to charity, and if I surrender my body so that I may glory, but do not have love, it does me no good.” (1 Corinthians 13:2-3, NASB 2020)

What did these people love? Perhaps they loved doctrine and theology, or apologetics. Maybe they just loved being right. Sadly, they were dead right.

It is doubtful that they would have recognized how far they had fallen apart from Christ’s admonition here. In fact, I think they would have said, “We love our Lord!” It is not enough to love the Lord, we must love Him first. All other loves are insignificant in comparison. One of Jesus’ more difficult statements addresses this.

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26-27, NASB 2020)

Jesus is using hyperbole here. His intent is not to get us to hate our families, but to ensure that we love Him far above all else—so much so that any earthly love could be considered hate when compared to the far surpassing love we have for our Lord Jesus. It is only when you love Jesus supremely that all other loves become clean and right. Anything else is idolatry.

What you love above all else is what you worship. You can desire or become obsessed with just about anything or anyone. At which point your desire replaces Christ as your greatest love. One danger in studying the Book of Revelation is that you become obsessed with Bible Prophecy and miss the point of the prophecy, which is Christ Himself. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

So, what or who is your first love? If it is not Jesus, then a radical reorientation of priorities is in order.

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**Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.**

**Remember** where you fell away. When was the last time you felt and lived heartfelt love for Jesus?

**Repent** and return to that place in your heart and mind. Cry out to the Lord for revival!

**Renew** your commitment to Jesus.

**Receive** Jesus' love for you! Perhaps you've fallen away from believing that He loves you personally.

**Restore** your life to a place of consistent obedience to Christ's command to love. Love is a choice, a commitment. Love results in action.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." (John 15:12).

OR

**Be Removed.** Our church's ministry can be taken away, friends. Your privilege of ministering can be removed. Maybe you're weary, burned out, doubting, but I assure you when the Lord removes your right to serve, you will also fall away from faith into a pit of despair.

**But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

This heretical group is also mentioned in reference to the church at Pergamum, which had members who followed their teaching. No one knows for sure what the nature of the Nicolaitan heresy was. Sufficient is the knowledge that it represents false teaching. We must always avoid teachers and movements that reject what the Bible reveals as true.

**"The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God."**

***"The one who has an ear, let him hear"***

Jesus said this many times during His earthly ministry. It means, "If you can hear me, listen! Pay attention to what I'm telling you." Listen while you still have the ability. The more of God's word you hear, but fail to heed, the less you'll be able to hear in the future. In the end spiritual leakage will leave you without any faith or truth. "So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him" (Luke 8:18). In contrast to this is the one who pays attention and grows in faith. The Lord will reveal more of His truth and Himself to you when you do.

**"let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

Even though I've been making individual/personal application here, the Holy Spirit is speaking to local churches, not scattered individuals. You and I are called out and called together to be the church. The Holy Spirit is speaking to Lifewell Church today. If you are part of us, then He is speaking to you. Pay attention.

***To the one who overcomes,***



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This is repeated at the conclusion of each message to the seven churches. We must overcome the world (the flesh and the devil) in order to receive what Christ promises. It is those who endure to the end who will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

*“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised” (Hebrews 10:35-36).*

Christ has made overcoming the world possible by winning the ultimate victory over sin and death and the devil. “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer (overcome) through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). We don’t overcome alone. It is by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that you will be encouraged and equipped to overcome the world. “Greater is He who is in you than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

### ***I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.***

Eternal life is the ultimate gift. Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden primarily to deny access to the Tree of Life. Now access to paradise and eternal life is restored through Christ.

***“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the slander by those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’”***  
(Revelation 2:8–11, NASB 2020)

Smyrna was a wealthy seaport city 35 miles north of Ephesus. It competed with Ephesus for greatest importance in the province of Asia Minor. Smyrna was a center for emperor worship (like Pergamum), having erected a temple honoring Tiberius in 26 BC. A large community of Jews lived in Smyrna, and they had influence with the city’s leadership. The Jews in Smyrna were hostile to Christianity and encouraged city officials to persecute believers in Jesus.

Sometime later, Polycarp became Bishop of Smyrna and was martyred there at the behest of the Jews in A.D. 156. He is reputed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John. The Jews in Smyrna assisted Roman officials in trying to burn the old Bishop alive. Legend has it that the flames did not burn him, so he was stabbed instead. Further these Jews prevented Christians from gaining possession of Polycarp’s body. [Reference: Martyrdom of Polycarp, contained in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1]

“

### ***The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life”***

Nothing is going to take the Lord by surprise. He was already there at the beginning, and He will be at the end. This is a comfort to all who endure affliction. Christ has not been caught off guard. He will bring it to a favorable end. As for those who are

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threatened with martyrdom, their Lord was raised from the dead and they can expect the same. Death is not a threat to those who possess the gift of eternal life!

**“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich),”**

Tribulation or affliction translates the Greek word *thlipsis*, which literally means to be pressed or squeezed. These Christians were under great pressure from non-believers. It is likely that the property of Christians in Smyrna was being confiscated and their ability to earn a livelihood was severely challenged by the ruling class. It is also likely that they were being robbed without recourse to stop it or regain their property. They are rich where it matters, however, because they have stored up treasure in heaven where no man can take it (Matt. 6:19-20).

This is not merely an early church phenomenon. Christians are enduring persecution at the hand of radical Islam (in Nigeria most recently), Hindu fundamentalists in India, and Marxists in China and N. Korea.

Over 50,000 Christians murdered in Nigeria by extremists since 2009

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-04/over-50000-christians-killed-in-nigeria-by-islamist-extremists.html>

3 million people displaced in India from 2014-2021- No jobs, no homes

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/july/christian-persecution-internally-displaced-persons-india.html>

In China Christians are detained and imprisoned, and churches demolished if they are not found in agreement with the CCP

<https://aleteia.org/2023/02/23/report-highlights-increased-levels-of-christian-persecution-in-china/>

All of those who are being pressured and persecuted because of Christian faith and values can receive comfort from what Jesus says to the people of Smyrna. Don't hide your faith just to avoid the stress of contending with opponents of the Bible, and certainly don't give in to an anti-christ culture. Don't give up; don't shrink back to destruction (Hebrews 10:38-39). Fight the good fight of faith and hold on to the eternal life to which you have been called (1 Timothy 6:12)! Weeping may last through the night, but joy will come in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

**“and the slander by those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”**

*Devil means Slanderer* and he uses human beings to do the slander.

Slander against Bible believing Christians is common today. If you do not hold to the values of an anti-Christ culture, labels like “hate speech,” “homophobe,” “transphobe,” and “racist” are used without basis. Believers are marginalized, “cancelled,” even threatened with violence because of their faith in Christ and the values He teaches.

The devil often uses religious people to slander God's chosen ones. Jesus identified the religious leaders and influencers in Jerusalem as children of the devil. They didn't follow God, but the father of lies, even to the point of murder.

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*“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.”* (John 8:44, NASB 2020)

Today there are professing Christians—indeed whole churches and denominations—that deserve the name “Synagogue of Satan.” These groups actively oppose the clear teaching of the Bible, promoting false teaching and demonic values.

[At the present moment it is the LGBT movement that has gained a significant following among alleged Christians. Speak the truth in love, and stand with all Bible believing Christians for sexual purity, and the reality that there are only two sexes with two corresponding genders. Someone cannot “transition” to the opposite sex, no matter how many drugs or surgeries.]

Those who advocate false doctrine and/or theological heresy must be opposed. Jesus Christ is God’s only begotten Son, who died on the cross and rose on the third day. He will return to earth to judge the living and the dead, as this book of Revelation will make clear by the end. Any church or religious group that fails or refuses to teach this must be opposed, gently but firmly and persistently.

**Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days.**

Things would get worse before they got better. Not only did they have their property taken, but soon some would also lose their freedom when they were thrown in jail by their persecutors. This is a test of faith.

Would you go to jail for your faith in Christ? Would you even be arrested? Is there enough evidence that you believe? If faith is real, then it will endure opposition. Feelings will fade or fail. Church affiliation or nominal Christian identity will be rejected when the pressure increases. True faith is purified by tribulation.

*“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”* (1 Peter 1:6–7, NASB 2020)

[There are notable examples of persecution occurring in our nation and in Canada today. Pastors have been jailed for preaching the Gospel. Churches have been fined for meeting during COVID lockdowns. In Canada, 17 year old Josh Alexander was expelled from his Catholic high school, and has been jailed multiple times. His crime? He is a Christian who dares to openly declare and actively promote the truth that there are only two genders.]

The Lord says, “Do not fear!” Persecution is not a reason to back down. In fact, suffering for Christ in a world opposed to Him is the norm. The Apostle Paul affirmed:

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“through many tribulations (*thlipsis*) we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). “Indeed all who seek to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). The Lord promised that the Smyrneans would only have to endure tribulation for 10 days. This is not a literal 10 calendar days, but a way of saying that the affliction would not last very long. This is an example of the way numbers are used symbolically in Revelation. We err if we with anachronism if we impose our literal, scientific way of understanding numbers upon a type of literature that is inherently symbolic. Let us first apply this to being jailed. Some Christians in Smyrna would be incarcerated briefly—days rather than months or years. It doesn’t mean that persecution would vanish altogether after a short time. The 10 day promise relates to the intensity of persecution, not the persistence of it. As mentioned earlier, Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna mid 2nd century, which was 50- 60 years after Revelation was written. Persecution of the church was intermittent in various parts of the empire until Constantine declared it a legal religion with the Edict of Milan in AD 313

[Example of Pastor D enduring intense dizziness from the onset of sudden sensory neural hearing loss for 10 days, but hearing loss and tinnitus persists 23 years later—as of this writing.]

### **“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

For some the 10 days of persecution will end in martyrdom, which will release them from pain and suffering into the eternal pleasures at Christ’s right hand (Psalm 16:11, 36:8-9, Luke 23:43). This crown of life is a metaphor for eternal life. It is not a ruling crown (*diadem*), but the crown given to the winners in athletic competition (*stephanos*, see 1 Cor. 9:25). The reward for persevering in faith, even to the point of death, is eternal life with God. James also promises the crown of life to those who persevere under testing (James 1:12). The Christian’s reward is not found on earth, but in heaven.

You need not fear death if you possess the gift of eternal life through Christ. In fact, we must be willing to die for our faith or the enemy will be able to get us to deny the Lord Jesus. In Revelation 12:11 Christians overcome Satan, “by the blood of the lamb, and the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

### **The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

Jesus repeats this statement to each of the seven churches. Pay attention to what the Holy Spirit is saying. There is application today for the church and for you as an individual.

### **“The one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”**

At the end of Revelation (20:14) we will see that the second death is the lake of fire (or hell), where souls are eternally destroyed. Physical death is the destruction of the earthly body, but that is not final. The end only comes after each soul is raised and judged (Rev. 20:12-15). If you overcome, if your faith in Christ continues to the end, then you have no need to fear judgment or hell any more than you should fear death (John 5:24). If you have called on Jesus to be your Lord (Rom. 10:13), if you have

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received Christ (John 1:12), you have been born again from above (John 3:3, 5), and your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Hell is not your fate. If you reject Christ, hell awaits.

"If anyone's name was not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

Don't fear death and hell, friend. Fear God and you need fear nothing else.

*"And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Matthew 10:28, NASB 2020)

***"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold firmly to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 'But I have a few things against you, because you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. So you too, have some who in the same way hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will wage war against them with the sword of My mouth. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it.'"***  
(Revelation 2:12–17, NASB 2020)

Pergamum was important as a political and religious center 45 miles north of Smyrna (80 mi. n. of Ephesus). It had been the capital city of the Asian province early on, and was the first city to support the cult of emperor worship. It had a temple dedicated to the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma. Those who refused to worship the emperor were considered to be guilty of treason. There were also temples to a number of other gods in Pergamum: Zeus, Athena, Asclepius (serpent god of healing).

### **"The One who has the sharp two-edged sword"**

This is the Word of God. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17b). "The word of God, which is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). Thus, the truth of Christ will penetrate and expose the lies of Satan, and cut away false doctrine and erroneous theology. This may also allude to the sword of judgment against alleged Christians who would compromise by worshiping idols, and following false doctrine.

### **I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is;**

Christ is not saying that Pergamum is the literal geographic location of Satan's throne on earth. However, the Lord is indicating that this is a center from which Satan exercises power to rule over people. Since Pergamum was well known in Asia Minor as a center for emperor worship, it stands to reason that Christ calls it the place where Satan's throne is. Christians were martyred throughout the Roman empire for centuries

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because they refused to say, "Caesar is Lord," or to worship by offering incense to the emperor. The Christian confession is, "Jesus is Lord." For a genuine Christian there is no other lord and no greater loyalty. Satan seeks worshipers (Matt. 4:9). Since he was the power behind the Roman emperor, and he found he could enforce worship under the guise of patriotism.

There is a lesson to be learned here. Where is your greatest allegiance, Christ or your country's flag? If your patriotism is so great that you raise the flag above the cross, then you are an idolater who worships your nation above Christ. If you love your country more than you love Jesus, then your patriotism can be used by those in power to motivate injustice and evil. Eg. "My country right or wrong!"

### **"you hold firmly to My name, and did not deny My faith"**

In spite of the pressure to conform, the Christians at Pergamum held fast to their confession of faith that Christ is Lord.

**"You did not deny my faith.** The tense of the verb points to some definite situation in the recent past when members of the church were faced with the challenge of denying their faith in Christ. Whether there had been an outbreak of persecution because of alleged disloyalty to Rome" (Eldon Ladd, Commentary on the Revelation of John).

### ***"even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."***

We do not know who this martyr was, nor how his death came about. He may have been one of the first Christians executed at the hand of Roman government officials because of his refusal to worship the emperor. This is supposition based on the text regarding "Satan's throne," and "where Satan dwells."

We only know for certain what is reported here: He was murdered because of his faith in Christ, and He is honored by the Lord, who recognizes him as, "Antipas, My witness, My faithful one." The word for *witness* in Greek is the basis for our word *martyr*. Antipas belongs to Jesus. He remained faithful unto death.

Christian friend, no higher honor could be paid to you, and no greater privilege accorded than to be considered Christ's own, a faithful witness, even to the point of death. I pray that this would be the case for me should the test come.

In the meantime, you and I need to be aware that God's enemy is also ours. Satan is behind the martyrdom of Christians. It matters not if the killing is carried out by religious zealots screaming Allahu Akhbar, or Communists participating in a cultural revolution. It is Satanic evil. We need to fight the good fight of faith, and we need to realize that we don't battle against flesh and blood, but against Satanic principalities and powers in the spiritual realm.

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*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12, ESV)*

### **“But I have a few things against you”**

In spite of successfully enduring persecution without giving up their faith, there were problems in this church. Members were paying attention to false teachers who were leading them to compromise with the surrounding pagan culture, which is why I call Pergamum, Compromising Church.

“At Pergamum, where Satan sat enthroned, some within the church had decided that accomodation was the wisest policy. They taught the way of compromise.”  
(Robert H. Mounce, NICNT)

The problem in Pergamum is relevant to churches in the USA today. The more culturally relevant a church seeks to be, the more likely its leaders and people hold cultural values that are at odds with biblical values. You can't have the best of both worlds; you can't have it both ways. You cannot be loyal to two masters (Matt. 6:24). When you are a devoted follower of Christ you will be hated by those who despise your Lord and His truth (John 15:18-25). If that bothers you, then you will compromise your faith in order to be liked by people.

### **“because you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.”**

Let's briefly review the story of Balak and Balaam as found in Numbers 22-24, 25:1-3, and informed by Numbers 31:16.

Balaam was a highly respected prophet of the LORD. So much so that a pagan king named Balak of Moab tried to hire him to curse the children of Israel. This was at the end of Israel's wilderness wandering, shortly before they entered the Promised Land to take as their own. Moab is on the east side of the Jordan river, and Israel was camped on a plain there. Balak feared they would fight and defeat him as they recently had the nearby Amorites (Numbers 22:2-3). The king's solution was to curse them from their own God. Balaam knows that he has no power to curse Israel, no matter how much money he is offered. “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God.... Am I really able to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that only shall I speak” (Numbers 22:18, 38). Much to the consternation of King Balak, the prophet Balaam blesses the children of Israel three times (Numbers 24:10).

All of this would lead us to believe Balaam was a good prophet, a man of God. However, he was duplicitous, a money hungry hypocrite. Although the prophet knew he possessed no power to pronounce a curse, he could still collect a large reward by offering cunning advice to King Balak to ensnare the children of Israel and set God against them. The Moabites worshiped the fertility god Baal, which was also the case

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for other nations in the land of Canaan. The method or means of worship enjoined participants to have sex with cult prostitutes. Intercourse occurred out the open in front of the idol of Baal. So Balak sent Moabite women into Israel's camp, who enticed the people to worship and even to covenant with the Baal of Peor.

*“While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to commit infidelity with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel became followers of Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry with Israel.”* (Numbers 25:1–3, NASB 2020)

Israel was been disciplined for this evil and those who worshiped Baal executed (Numbers 25:9, . Later, when Israel goes to war against the Midianites in the area, we discover Balaam was behind it all (Numbers 31:16). The corrupt prophet was killed along with Midianite kings (Numbers 31:8).

Balaam's treachery is an important lesson that was used to teach the early church not to compromise with the pagan culture around them, nor join their idolatrous neighbors in anything that could be construed as worshiping false gods. Balaam's story is referred to by Peter (2 Peter 2:15), Jude (11), and probably Paul (1 Corinthians 10:8). Now the Lord Jesus Himself warns the church at Pergamum using the same reference.

**“So you too, have some who in the same way hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”**

We've already encountered the Nicolaitans in Jesus' message to the Ephesian church, where He commended them for rejecting their false teaching (2:6). As I mentioned there, we are not sure what all the Nicolaitans taught. However, it would seem they were libertines who encouraged Christians to eat meat sacrificed to idols, and conform with the lax sexual practices in Greco-Roman culture. "...it follows that the Nicolaitans are essentially the same group as the Balaamites. Both describe an antinomian group that had accommodated itself to the religious and social requirements of the pagan society in which they lived.

In other words: compromise, blend in.

[Case Studies in Compromise:

Pope Francis announces that priests may now bless homosexual unions.

Alistair Begg encourages grandma to attend her grandson's gay wedding, including buying a gift for the couple.

Andy Stanley holds a conference for parents of LGBT Kids, where openly gay leaders speak.]

The Apostle Paul addressed the practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols in Romans 14 and 1st Corinthians 10. The Apostle affirms, what the Nicolaitans may have been using as the basis for their argument: namely, food offered to idols is nothing, and idols are fake. However, that truth is not shared by those who offer meat in an idol's temple. They believe the idol is a real god, and the meat offered is sacred because of it. To this Paul affirms that these idolaters are really offering their sacrifice to demons (1 Cor. 10:20)! Therefore, if a Christian knowingly eats meat that has been offered to an idol with an idol worshiper present, even though it is "just meat," the believer ends up in communion



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with evil. The result is the compromising Christian becomes a stumbling block to their unbelieving neighbor, and perhaps to a newer believe as well.

The issue of avoiding sexual immorality was important in the Christian church. Jesus called His followers to purity, not the common sexual perversions in the culture around them.

“Background for this is the fact that sexual laxity was not considered a serious sin by the Greeks and Romans.... Not far from Antioch where the first gentile church arose was a beautiful spot called Daphne, adorned with fair edifices, and containing a temple dedicated to Apollo and Diana. The temple was surrounded by a thick grove of cypresses and bay trees, and was beautified with numerous lovely fountains. It became a favorite retreat for the wealthy citizens of Antioch, and even Roman governors frequented the place. Daphne was famous for her corps of temple prostitutes; and the phrase Daphnici mores became synonymous for immoral practices. Against this pagan background, it is entirely credible that a party arose in Pergamum which advocated a lax attitude toward pagan customs, including both temple feasts and sexual immorality.” (George Eldon Ladd)

The Apostle Paul was dealing with the same issue as he addressed the Corinthian church. It is likely they were exposed to the same kind of teaching promoted by the Nicolaitans. “The stomach is for food and food for the stomach.” AND “The body is for sex and sex is for the body.” Paul contradicted this erroneous teaching with the following.

*“Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, however God will do away with both of them. But the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.”*

(1 Corinthians 6:13, NASB 2020)

*“Do you not know that your bodies are parts of Christ? Shall I then take away the parts of Christ and make them parts of a prostitute? Far from it! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, “The two shall become one flesh.” But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”*

(1 Corinthians 6:15–20, NASB 2020)

The application for us is the same as it was for the church at Pergamum because we are living in the midst of a culture that promotes every kind of sexual immorality and perversion, and many churches and even whole denominations are either compromising or outright supporting, promoting and celebrating what the Lord Jesus clearly opposes.

Even among leaders who vocally oppose sexual immorality, there is often hypocrisy. In case after case, Christian pastors and denominational leaders are found to be involved in adultery and other forms of sexual sin. Sadly, many of these men gloss over their sin

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instead of genuinely repenting, by rejecting any extended period away from leadership. This is not the time or place to report all of these cases, but there are many.

[Sample of Sexually Immoral Christian Leaders:

**Judge Paul Pressler-** One of the two architects of the Inerrantist takeover of the SBC in the 70s-80s. A young man who Pressler sexually abused for decades came forward. “Gene Besen, a lawyer for the SBC, called Pressler a monster and a dangerous predator who leveraged his power and false piety to sexually abuse young men even as he was building his reputation.

**Mike Bickle-** Founder of Int’l House of Prayer, pastor and speaker. Removed from leadership due to “a pattern of alleged clergy sexual misconduct.

**Bill Hybels-** Founding pastor of Willow Creek Church in Chicago was accused of sexual harassment of women over many years.

**Ted Haggard-** Pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs and President of the National Association of Evangelicals in early 2000’s.

In 2006 a male prostitute accused Haggard of paying him for sex over a three year period, and reported that Haggard also purchased methamphetamine from him.

A male member of Haggards church also came forward in 2009 and confessed to having a sexual affair with him.

**Jimmy Swaggart-** Hired a prostitute, was discovered. Issued a tearful, and heart wrenching public apology on his TV show, then was caught 6 months later with another prostitute.

Both of Pastor D’s formative youth ministers were caught having adulterous affairs.

But by the grace of God, there go you and I.]

Most concerning, however, is the acceptance of sexual immorality as normal. It is no longer expected by many/most that a Christian must be celibate until married to an opposite sex partner. “The body is for sex and sex for the body” continues to be the belief today. Or we hear, “Love is love.” This really means whatever a person’s sexual attraction or desire is is an acceptable form of love. In reality, “Sex is not love.” God is love. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are responsible to remain sexually pure, in heart and mind. We must reject the teaching of today’s Nicolaitans even as Jesus commanded Pergamum.

*“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no one violate the rights and take advantage of his brother or sister in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you previously and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in sanctification. Therefore, the one who rejects this is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3–8, NASB 2020)*

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**“Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will wage war against them with the sword of My mouth.”**

Here “the sword of my mouth” is judgment. Jesus will judge the entire church, for even though some hold to the false teaching, the church tolerated their presence and activity. It is the Lord who will speak the truth, judge, and discipline His people. He will cut off those who fail or refuse to change their ways.

Abide in Christ; obey His teaching. Reject the world, the anti-Christ culture, and refuse to compromise. If there are things that must be removed in your life, Jesus can cut them away with the two-edged sword of His word.

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”* (John 15:1–2, NASB 2020)

*“For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

(Hebrews 4:12, NASB 2020)

If you refuse to let go, if you identify with perversion, then Christ will cut you off and consign you to the fire with the unbelieving.

*“If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”*

(John 15:6, NASB 2020)

*“But for the cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and sexually immoral persons, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”*

(Revelation 21:8, NASB 2020)

**“The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

The Lord is speaking to you today. Are you paying attention to the Holy Spirit?

**“To the one who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna,”**

Manna was the bread from heaven that sustained the children of Israel in the wilderness. Jesus is the bread of life (John 6) who sustains the believer in the wilderness of this godless world of sin and death. Jesus said, “I have food to eat that you know not of” (John 4:32).

The hidden idea may have reminded 1st century Christians of a story told about a sample of manna kept in the temple prior to its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

*“There may be an allusion to the Jewish idea that when the temple was destroyed the prophet Jeremiah hid the pot with the manna that was in the Holy of Holies, and that when the Messiah came it would reappear.”* (Leon Morris TCNT)

One way or the other, God will supply the believer’s every need from His hidden reserves. When you are burned out, tired, and emotionally depleted, rest in Him and He will sustain you. *“Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never*

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*allow the righteous to be shaken.*" (Psalm 55:22, NASB 2020). You may feel dead, but Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25-26)!

**"and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it."**

In ancient times a white stone meant acquittal by a jury, while a black stone was cast to condemn the accused. "There is therefore not condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "If God is for us, who is against us" (Romans 8:31)? Not only does the white stone represent Christ's vote that we are no longer guilty of sin, it is also personalized for each recipient. The Lord has a new name for you, and no one knows it. But you will.

A white stone was also used as an admission ticket to a festival. Believers are promised admission to the greatest party in heaven, and the ticket is inscribed with your special name. Hallelujah!

***"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze, says this: 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith, and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with plague, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold firmly until I come. The one who overcomes, and the one who keeps My deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are shattered, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.'"***

**(Revelation 2:18–28, NASB 2020)**

"The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important, and least remarkable of the cities." (Robert Mounce quoting Hemer, NICNT)

Economically Thyatira was a city not unlike Garland, Tx. Thyatira was a center for manufacturing and marketing. A large number of trade guilds were represented there: wool, linen and leather workers, dyers and tanners, potters, bakers, and bronze smiths (appropriate for Jesus identifying himself as having feet of burnished bronze).

There were not many Jews in the city. The patron god was Tyrimnos. This pagan deity would have been considered the patron of trade guilds and honored in their

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celebrations. This would pose a problem for any Christian seeking to earn a living through one of the trades.

“Since the trade guilds were inseparably intertwined with local religious observances, they posed a special problem for the economic well-being of Christians.” (Mounce, NICNT)

The most important citizen of Thyatira from a New Testament perspective is a dealer in purple cloth named Lydia, who the Apostle Paul met in Philippi. She responded to the gospel, became a disciple of Jesus (Acts 16:4). She opened her home to Paul and his companions (Acts 16:15).

***The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze,***

Both of these identifying marks would seem to speak of judgment. Christ is the judge. Burnished bronze like the great bronze altar that stood before the temple entrance, upon which the sacrifices of Israel were offered. Christ is the judge who was sacrificed for our sins. He has been through the greatest judgment and trial that anyone can imagine. Thus, His judgment upon God’s people is guided by grace and mercy.

***‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith, and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first***

Thyatira was a growing church. Growth from God’s standard is not increased attendance, but improved character. Unlike Ephesus, their love was glowing and growing. Their faith was increased. They had persevered, which may refer to endurance of persecution, but certainly trial. And they were serving in a greater way. All of this had improved and increased since the church had started. Thus, I’ve called this, “the growing church.” May Lifewell see this kind of growth!

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

Women were recognized as having the gift of prophecy in the OT (Miriam Exodus 15:20, Huldah 2 Kings 22:14), and in the NT within the church (Anna Luke 2:36, Philip’s four daughters Acts 21:9). In the Greco-Roman world we have the examples of the Sibylline Oracles,

It is unlikely that this self-proclaimed prophetess was actually named Jezebel. Rather, this is an allusion to the wife of Ahab in the Old Testament, which characterizes the nature of her activity.

Under the guise of being a spokesperson for God this woman is leading people away from Christ to sexual immorality, and the compromise of eating at the temple of idols. We’ve already seen that the Nicolaitans taught that it was acceptable to engage in these activities. This Jezebel persuades people through her prophecies. Did she claim to have visions or dreams from God? Or did she simply preach and teach persuasively? We don’t know. But she was able to lead people astray with her own charm, charisma and self-appointed authority.

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### Who was Jezebel?

She was a princess. The daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. Sidon was Israel's neighbor to the north. Sidon like most other nations in and around what was once Canaan, now Israel, worshipped the god Baal. When Jezebel married King Ahab she persuaded him to expel the prophets of YHWH and make Baal the god of Israel. This set up the conflict between Elijah the prophet and King Ahab. In the name of YHWH who lives (as opposed to Baal who does not), Elijah pronounced a drought on the land, and it did not rain for three and one half years (1 Kings 17:1, James 5:17).

### Baal

The god Baal was believed to be responsible for bringing rain, which is essential in an agrarian economy. Thus, he and his consort Ashtoreth (Astarte, Ishtar) were fertility gods, worshiped when their followers engaged in sex with temple prostitutes (both male and female). So, we might understand Baal to be the god of wealth, success and sex. He would be a popular god in America today!

### sexual immorality

As we've already observed, the Nicolaitans taught laxity in this area. It is possible that Jezebel was teaching some kind of proto-gnosticism, which would hold that it doesn't matter what you do with the body. It is only the mind or spirit that is important. Sex is just an activity that has no bearing on the spiritual. The Apostle Paul emphatically opposed such lies.

*"Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, however God will do away with both of them. But the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are parts of Christ? Shall I then take away the parts of Christ and make them parts of a prostitute? Far from it! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body."*  
(1 Corinthians 6:13–20, NASB 2020)

### and eat things sacrificed to idols

Eating at the temple of an idol was probably seen as innocuous because Christians knew that the idol didn't really exist. "Therefore, concerning the eating of food sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one." (1 Corinthians 8:4, NASB 2020) However, eating at the idol's temple is a stumbling block, both to those who believe in the idol's existence, and to those who have recently come from the world of idolatry to Christ. Further, Paul clearly states that idolatry is actually the worship of demons. "No, but I say that things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become partners with demons." (1 Corinthians 10:20, NASB 2020)

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One of the main draws to eating at an idol's temple relates to the source of income for most people in Thyatira: the trade guilds. There were celebrations of the god or gods who were the patrons of each guild. Refusal to attend such celebrations would be seen as an affront to the god and reason to be expelled from the guild, which would mean you couldn't buy or sell. These celebrations were both idolatrous and filled with debauchery and sexual immorality.

"It would be nearly impossible for a citizen to participate in trade and industry without membership in the appropriate guild, and the question naturally arose whether a Christian could properly participate in such meals. Many Christians would argue that the alleged gods had no real existence, and therefore participation in such meals involved no compromise of one's Christian witness. The question was complicated by the fact that such social meals would often end in unbridled licentiousness" (Eldon-Ladd).

This would make the false teaching of Jezebel very desirable indeed. The Christian needn't worry about losing his/her livelihood for rejecting idolatrous celebrations. Just go! Eat, drink, be merry! God won't mind!

### ***who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them***

The statement further reveals teaching from this prophetess, which revolved around "deep things," or secret knowledge. Her teaching may have been gnostic, or influenced by the mystery religions that were predominant in Asia Minor. Was Thyatira's Jezebel teaching people that they needed to know how Satan works?

"It is more likely, however, that knowing Satan's "deep secrets" is a reference to the view that in order to appreciate fully the grace of God one must first plumb the depths of evil. Later gnosticism boasted that it was precisely by entering into the stronghold of Satan that believers could learn the limits of his power and emerge victorious.... Jezebel could argue that the Thyatiran Christians ought to take part in the pagan guild-feasts (even if they were connected with the deep secrets of Satan) and thus prove how powerless is evil to alter the nature of grace." (Mounce)

Certainly that is playing with fire. It is the height of arrogance and the depth of stupidity to go marching into Satan's domain. You forfeit God's protection when you walk outside the boundaries He has set up. Jezebel acted on her own authority to encourage believers to do these things. They were on their own. Witness the seven sons of Sceva who tried to cast out a demon apart from faith in Christ, and ended up running out of the house naked and bleeding (Acts 19:13-16).

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This false prophetess may have been teaching her followers that they needed to go out and experience sin? “If you’re going to sin, sin big, so you can experience God’s grace in a greater way.” (Martin Luther paraphrase).

Have you ever been tempted to “just try” something that you know is wrong? Did someone ever urge you to sin by saying, “How do you know if you haven’t tried it?” Maybe you’ve been sheltered; you were raised in a Christian home; you went to church all your life. Now you want to strike out on your own; be your own person; try new things. What will it hurt to smoke weed or meth? Why not have sex however you desire it? Hey you can just ask for God’s forgiveness before you do these things, right? That is anathema for a follower of Christ. What did the Apostle Paul teach (he who was accused of teaching antinomianism)?

*“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? Far from it! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;”* (Romans 6:1–6, NASB 2020)

Thyatira’s Jezebel may not have taught that the “deep things” are from or about Satan. Instead, she was seeking to introduce them to the mysteries of God.

“It is more likely that John wrote ironically; as a prophetess, she claimed to introduce her followers into the deep things of God” (Eldon-Ladd)

However, Christ recognizes that the enemy is the source of such “knowledge.”

What did Satan promise Eve in the Garden? He promised that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would make her wise.

*“Now the serpent was more cunning than any animal of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not die! For God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves waist coverings.”* (Genesis 3:1–7, NASB 2020)



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This is not head knowledge, but intimate experience. Satan deceived the woman into believing that God's command wasn't the truth. Adam and Eve experienced the guilt of disobedience, the fear of facing God, and the shame of being naked. As the devil contradicted God's clear command, Thyatira's Jezebel usurps the plain teaching of Christ with her self-proclaimed prophetic teaching. As Eve was promised experiential knowledge of good and evil, so Jezebel is teaching people that they need to go deeper with God by receiving the secret knowledge she will teach them. All of this comes in the guise of "going deeper," or perhaps experiencing more of God.

Gnostics taught that the Old Testament God was actually evil, and that the serpent was good. They called it Sophia, wisdom personified. The devil's tactics are not new.

### Cybele Mystery Religion

Among the mystery religions of Asia Minor was the cult of Cybele. Sardis had two temples dedicated to a local form of this goddess, known as Sipyrene Mother. Could the worship of Cybele have influenced the Jezebel of Thyatira?

"People were initiated into mystery religions through rituals. The initiate would then receive secret knowledge about the divine and, through various rites, would gain unmediated access to the transcendent realities..."

"One of the most prominent mystery religions in Asia Minor involved the worship of the Great Mother of Anatolia (*Magne Mater*), known as Cybele..."

The cult of Artemis bears similarities to the cult of Cybele. Considering that Cybele is a mother-goddess, the connection likely explains the features of the iconography associated with the Ephesian Artemis, who was depicted as a fertility goddess with bulbous protrusions around her chest. The imagery almost certainly relates to fertility, which likely developed from associations with Cybele." (Lexham Bible Dictionary)

Cybele had a human consort named Attis. The two were worshipped together under the narrative of the Attis myth.

"The myth of Cybele and Attis tells of Attis, a herd boy whom his beloved, the goddess Cybele, made insane because he had been unfaithful to her, and who committed suicide by castrating himself. Deeply disconsolate and in mourning, Cybele seeks everywhere for her lover, until she finds him and after his resurrection is reunited with him." (The New Testament Milieu)

"Her cult had orgiastic traits. The latter were accentuated in the course of time as the god Attis (in some respects comparable with →Adonis) was associated with Cybele. The goddess and her male consort were quite popular in the Hellenistic and Roman world (Turcan 1989)." (Dictionary of Deities and Demons)

The festival celebrating Cybele was in autumn and was accompanied by wild ecstasy, including self whipping and laceration. In the spring the reunion of Cybele and Attis was celebrated with a sacred meal.

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Thus, if this Jezebel was influenced by the Cybele mystery religion, eating things sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, and fascination with secret knowledge would be explained.

### **The Great Mother.**

This goddess, or the yearning for a Mother god, influenced the church when it embraced Mary as Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. This continues down to our day in the Roman Catholic Church.

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### Application.

#### **Deeper With God?**

There are false prophets, movements and churches today. Naive but well intentioned Christians are drawn to them because they want to experience more of God; they want to go deeper. The urge to experience God is commendable. “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God! When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:2) False prophets take advantage of this genuine desire for their own ambition and profit.

**-Beware** any woman, man or movement that leads you to believe personal experience is equal in authority to the Bible. Check what you think God is saying with the authoritative Word of God. Don't believe someone just because they claim, “God told me to tell you...”

**-Beware** self-proclaimed apostles who seek to speak authoritatively to you, who claim to be bringing reformation to the church, who interpret Scripture in novel ways, who call attention to their supposed authority from God, rather than to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has all power and authority.

**-Beware** any woman, man or church that focuses on allegedly prophetic visions and dreams, or angelic visitations, or the interpretation of tongues. The devil can inspire all of these. The test is Jesus. Do these purported prophets admit that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, died on the cross and rose from the grave. The final revelation of God to us is Jesus Christ. We focus on Him! “The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 19:10).

*“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”* (Hebrews 1:1–3, NASB 2020)

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### **Compromise for Capital.**

Do you compromise your faith in Christ when you are at work?

What do you do when other employees are sharing a dirty joke, or gossiping about someone? Do you join in? Do you sit back and receive? Even if you don't participate actively, you are in tacit approval by remaining engaged. Just walk away.

What if you are invited to a company party where you know there will be bad things going on: drunkenness, drugs, pornographic entertainment? Will you say, "No thank you," even if it means you may not be well liked, even if it means you'll get passed over for promotion?

What if you witness your boss being abusive to other employees (or yourself); what if he makes sexually explicit comments to you or others? Do you sit back and let this happen for the sake of keeping your job?

Stand up for what's right, friend. Shine the light. Represent Jesus. Don't compromise for capital. God will supply all of your need. Trust Him and do what is right.

### **Today's Jezebel Zeitgeist**

The spirit of our age is the alphabet of sexual immorality and perversion LGBT. It is promoted under the guise of compassion for the feelings of those who have been led astray: some by their own feelings of attraction to the same sex, others by the social contagion of gender confusion. The entire woke project is rooted in a false understanding of compassion. It is empathy divorced from truth and reality. It is a societal expression of toxic femininity.

We have heard much about toxic masculinity, and we see expressions of it in abuse of power, physical violence, rape, abuse, molestation. It is evil. This is men using their strength to benefit themselves, even though it hurts others. It is the bully cop who sticks his knee in the neck of a man until he dies. It is the angry husband who yells and hits his wife and children. It is the corporate tycoon who takes pleasure in destroying other companies. After all, it's only business, right?

However, our culture has now been transformed by toxic femininity. Men are seen as the problem, so women must run things. Men defer rather than show themselves to be men (1 Sam. 2:2). Emotional manipulation is the basis of power for the toxically feminine.

The result? Nanny Morality. We want to watch over everyone and make sure they do what the culture teaches as right. The nanny state establishes and enforces this, and no one is permitted to disagree. We don't want anyone's feelings to be hurt. We don't want anyone to endure any kind of pain or suffering. Even if that is precisely what is needed to teach us to become people of character. Instead we prefer to see only victims deserving of special treatment. Forget free speech. Any words that hurt someone's feelings are considered hate speech. We must accept someone's identity simply because they say, "I identify as..." Humor is unacceptable because it reveals we are taking ourselves too seriously.

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The tragic irony is, this kind of approach to life does not result in less pain and suffering. There is just as much—or more—suicide, depression, fear and confusion, anger and hatred. Women are traumatized by exposure to men’s genitals in their locker rooms. Pubescent girls having their breasts removed, or prepubescent boys being given puberty blockers, or even having their penis and testicles removed, is wrong. These extreme actions are justified by parents and doctors who subscribe to the delusion that it is going to “save the child from committing suicide later on,” or “that is the child’s true gender identity.” This is abuse of compassion. It is fake love without truth. Pity without truth is the problem.

“Jesus said, If you continue in my word, then you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

The Jezebel zeitgeist, the woke mind virus is leading people to destruction. We need to get back to following the biblical Jesus, not compromising with an anti-Christ culture. The younger generations are more lost, confused and depressed than ever. Up to 20% of Gen. Z claims to be LGBT. It’s not enough to say, “you’re wrong.” It is wrong to say, “you’re right.” We need to speak the truth in love. Hold the line. Hug the lost. Show them the love of Jesus in deed and truth. Cast Jezebel out! I am not the judge, nor are you. But the Judge is standing at the door. There are grave consequences for what is going on in our world today.

The flaming eyes of Christ see through Jezebel’s lies and judge the woman and her disciples who refuse to repent.

***I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with plague, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.***

For those of us who will refuse to compromise, who will keep growing in love and faith, there are incredible promises from Christ!

***Nevertheless what you have, hold firmly until I come. The one who overcomes, and the one who keeps My deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are shattered, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.***

We will reign with Jesus!

Remember, the morning star rises just before dawn. It may seem dark right now, but look up. “The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day” (Prov. 4:18). Soon there will be a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

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***“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and yet you are dead. Be constantly alert, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. The one who overcomes will be clothed the same way, in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’” (Revelation 3:1–6, NASB 2020)***

“The glory of **Sardis** lay in the past. In the sixth century b.c, she had been the capital city of the kingdom of Lydia and later a center of Persian government. In New Testament times she had sunk to relative obscurity. Her one claim to prominence was that she provided the meeting place of several major Roman roads, and was an important industrial center....

The main problem is that of a deep spiritual apathy, which may have resulted from the softness and love of luxury which characterized the secular society” (Eldon-Ladd).

Christ identifies Himself as “He who has the seven spirits of God,” which means the Holy Spirit, who is perfect and omnipresent. This church is spiritually dead, devoid of the manifest presence of the Spirit.

Christ also identifies Himself as having the seven stars, which are the messengers of the seven churches. This message comes from Christ directly, not just the “angel,” or pastor of the church, and not from John.

Sardis, and we, need to pay attention to what Jesus is about to say.

**“I know your deeds, that you have a name (reputation) that you are alive, and yet you are dead”**

Sardis was known for its good works. The city was well off financially, since the citizens were known for their love of luxury. Therefore, the church members may have had a good reputation due to their charitable giving. Their reputation for being alive came from outward activity. This reminds me of churches today with many programs and projects, mission trips and benevolence activities. They may be well financed and well attended with large buildings and big crowds. Their worship services may be like rock concerts filled with exuberant participants. But there is no evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. A visitor to one of these churches, who came from a less prosperous country where

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II. If I am not in this place of maintained fellowship, where did I depart therefrom? What word of His have I disobeyed? To that point let me return, whether it be but an hour ago, or years, and there let me absolutely surrender, at whatever cost, and do what He requires, however small, or however irksome it appears to be.

Christianity is not the dominant religion, shared his amazement at how much the church did without the Holy Spirit.

“Here is a picture of nominal Christianity, outwardly prosperous, busy with the externals of religious activity, but devoid of spiritual life and power.” (Eldon-Ladd)

### “Be constantly alert”

Translated “Wake Up!” in most other English Bibles.

This is the problem with our church, and many others in America, and other formerly Christian nations: We need revival. We have fallen into a spiritual stupor or slumber, and we may die if we don’t awaken soon!

The idea of being constantly on the alert reminds me of what Jesus told the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was praying, but they kept falling asleep. Jesus warned them: “Keep watching and praying, so that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). We fall asleep because our faith is weak, Rather than trusting and resting in the Lord, we are overwhelmed by uncertainty and the demands upon our lives. You may be a giver and a worker in your church, but doing all that stuff apart from the anointing and encouragement of the Holy Spirit is exhausting. You need a rest. However, instead of resting in the Lord, you fall asleep, let your guard down, and the devil gains a foothold in your life. Maybe you’re tempted to give up, or maybe you already have but haven’t admitted it or said anything to other members of your church. Jesus has a further word for you.

**“strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.”**

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If you're paying attention right now, if you sense conviction from the Holy Spirit, then You're Not Dead Yet (Monty Python joke). Jesus is telling you to strengthen what you still have. That doesn't mean "DO MORE." It means allow the Holy Spirit to invade your innermost being and give you courage and strength to continue, to improve, to rise from your stupor and slumber. "Cease striving and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

**"So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it and repent"**

Where and when did you start to fall away? Is there something the Lord was convicting and leading you to do that you refused? How long have you been coming to church and getting nothing out of it? Perhaps this advice from G. Campbell Morgan will help you to obey Christ's command to "remember what you have received and heard."

How long has it been since you've been enthused about coming to church? Genuine enthusiasm comes from God. The origin of the English word means "In God." If the answer is never, then you are simply not saved. You don't have the Holy Spirit. Your faith is nominal. You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!

**"Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you."**

Jesus coming as a thief in the night is associated with the Second Coming (1 Thess 5:2), but here it means He will come unexpectedly to discipline those who remain in spiritual stupor. Imagine a thief breaking into your house in the middle of the night, while you are dead asleep. You are not ready. You will lose what you have, maybe even your life. The Lord can take away the gifts He has given you. He can even end your time on earth earlier than you expect. We need to get serious about repentance, my friends.

**"you have a few people who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."**

Apparently it was the intoxicating influence of moral filth that had caused the spiritual deadness in Sardis, but there were those who hadn't given in to those unclean influences, and Jesus promises they will walk with Him in white, recognizing their worthiness. The Lord will not indiscriminately judge a church. He knows who is asleep and who is awake. He recognizes those who are still trying to live right. This reminds me of Lot in the city of Sodom. The whole city was involved in moral filth and evil, and Lot lived right in the middle of it. God sent His angels to save Lot from the destruction He planned. Even then it was hard to get the man to leave, and his wife was turned to a pillar of salt for looking back rather than running ahead. This is a warning to all of us to "flee Babylon," which is the godless culture that lulls and lures God's people into complacency and sin. Judgment is coming. Be saved from this corrupt generation!

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*“Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not perish in her punishment, For this is the Lord’s time of vengeance; He is going to repay to her what she deserves.”* (Jeremiah 51:6, NASB 2020)

*“Go out from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, ‘The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob.’”* (Isaiah 48:20, NASB 2020)

**“and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before my father and before His angels”**

The Lamb’s book of life contains the name of all those who have been saved. Your name is there if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. He will not erase your name, even if you fail and fall, so long as you get back up and don’t turn back to your old life. “Those who endure to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24:13).

Jesus will honor those who continue in faith by confessing them before His Father and the angels. He also promised to do this if we are open about your faith and confess it to other people.

*“Therefore, everyone who confesses Me before people, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before people, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:32–33, NASB 2020)