

## Part 3: The Letters to the Churches

### (10) Interpreting the Letters to the Seven Churches

#### (10.1) The Historical View:

These are ONLY letters to the Seven Historical Churches written only for their time.

» Problems with this View:

\* There are other churches in Asia minor, why these seven?

\* The number seven is symbolic and representative of “perfection” – thus these churches are not picked randomly, but on purpose.

#### (10.2) The Figurative/Analogical/Allegorical View:

These churches figuratively (allegorically) represent the Seven Ages of Church History.

<i>The History of the Church in Seven Eras</i>		
Ephesus <i>"beloved, desired"</i>	AD 30-60	<b>The Apostolic Church</b>
Smyrna <i>"myrrh, bitter"</i>	AD 64-312	<b>The Persecuted Church</b>
Pergamum <i>"married"</i>	AD 313-600	<b>The Papal Church</b>
Thyatira <i>"continual sacrifice"</i>	AD 600-1500	<b>The Imperial Church</b>
Sardis <i>"escaping ones"</i>	AD 1517-1750	<b>The Reformation Church</b>
Philadelphia <i>"brotherly love"</i>	AD 1750-1950	<b>The Missionary Church</b>
Laodicea <i>"people ruling"</i>	AD 1950 >	<b>The Apostate Church .</b>

» Problems with this View:

\*Nothing in context leads to a predictive interpretation of these messages. (What if our days are not the end?)

\*No common agreement on partitioning church history on the basis of these messages.

(10.3) **The Typological/Representative View:**

These are letters to Seven Historical Churches representing the “character” of different types of churches throughout the history of The Church.

In each era of church history, it seems that several of these types of churches are present. *Thus, these seven specific congregations are chosen because they represent seven types of ever-present realities.* As we read these letters then, the encouragements, the warnings, the call to repentance, and the promise of victory will all “ring true” not just for the seven churches of the first century but in any church that displays these characteristics in any period of history.

“The “seven churches” refer to seven historical churches in Asia, but the number “seven” could hardly have arisen by chance. This is the favorite number of the Apocalypse, which has been influenced by the OT predilection for the number. In the OT seven was used to denote “fullness,” that is, the time necessary for something to be done effectively, or a general designation of thoroughness or completeness ... The idea of completeness originates from the creation account in Genesis 1, where six days of creation are followed by the consummate seventh day of God’s rest.

Therefore, against this background and in the light of the clear figurative uses of “seven” elsewhere in Revelation, the number here must also be figurative for “fullness”... But what kind of fullness is in mind? The number is an instance of synecdoche, a figure of speech in which the part is put for the whole: **the seven historical churches are viewed as representative of all the churches in Asia Minor and probably, by extension, the church universal...**

That the “seven churches” represent the whole church, at least in Asia Minor, if not the world, is suggested further in that the letters addressed to particular churches in chapters 2–3 are also said at the conclusion of each letter to be addressed to all “the churches.” (Beale, 186-187)

» Why THESE 7 Churches?

“A map shows that Revelation addresses the seven churches in the very sequence that a messenger from John, arriving first in Ephesus near the sea, would travel to each of the cities listed, presumably along the main roads of Asia...” (Keener, 75)

“The second century Muratorian canon observed that both St. Paul and St. John wrote letters to seven churches. Seven churches summarize all churches. Every church is located in a specific place; all churches exist under the conditions of geography, politics, and economics; each church is visible. At the same time, every church gets its identity from Christ and what he does; churches exist only in derivation to Christ; the church is invisible to all who unbelievably close their eyes to the one “like the Son of Man.” Apart from Christ, shown to us in the vision [of chapter 1], we are nothing but a society of pious, or not so pious, souls. Also, while all churches get their identity from Christ, each congregational identity is partial: each church is defined by only a piece of the vision. *No single church exhibits the wholeness of Christ.* It is not possible to look at any one instance of the church and find an entire representation of Christ, although we very certainly can be led to that wholeness as we listen to what “the spirit says to the church” and respond in worship. (Peterson, 47)

**(11) Setting the Context**

At the time of Revelation, no other province in the Roman empire had more than one cult. However, as the following chart demonstrates, Asia minor was on the “cutting edge,” as Friesen says, of emperor worship:

City	Imperial Cult	Imperial Altar	Imperial Priest
Ephesus	√	√	√
Smyrna	√	√	√
Pergamum	√	√	√
Thyatira		√	√
Sardis	√	√	√
Philadelphia	√		√
Laodicea		√	

\*This chart is taken from Ben Witherington, 24.

Pergamum built a temple in 29 BC and Smyrna in 25 BC probably making Asia Minor the first area to institute the imperial cult. The Imperial cult was the way the residents of the cities of the empire created community in the larger context of the Roman imperium. The cult became a way to exhibit faith in the power and provision of the empire. Thus the imperial cult became a type of religious and social “glue” that bound the cities and the provinces of the empire together under the pax romana (Roman Peace). The churches of Asia minor would have constantly faced pressure from this cultural force.

“Part of Christ’s priestly role is to tend the lampstands. The OT priest would trim the lamps, remove the wick and old oil, refill the lamps with fresh oil, and relight those that had gone out. Likewise, Christ tends the ecclesial lampstands by commending, correcting, exhorting, and warning (see chs. 2–3) in order to secure the churches’ fitness for service as lightbearers in a dark world” (Beale, 208–209)

## (12) The Form of the Letters

	Ephesus 2:1-7	Smyrna 2:8-11	Pergamum 2:12-17	Thyatira 2:18-29	Sardis 3:1-6	Philadelphia 3:7-13	Laodicea 3:14-22
1. Introductory formula	1a	8a	12a	18a	1a	7a	14a
2. Identification of Christ	1b	8b	12b	18b	1b	7b	14b
3. Praise	2-3	9	13	19	(4)	8	*
4. Rebuke	4	*	14-15	20-23	1c	*	15-17
5. Call to repent	5-6	*(10)	16	24-25	2-3	(11)	18-19
6. “He who has an ear”	7a	11	17	29	6	13	22
7. Promise	7b	10-11	17	26-28	5	9-10, 12	20-21

## (13) The Larger Structure of the Letters

“... the condition of the churches is presented in the literary form of a chiasm: a b c c b’ a’. The significance of this is that the Christian church as a whole is perceived as being in poor condition, since not only are the healthy churches in a minority but the literary pattern

points to this emphasis because the churches in the worst condition form the literary boundaries of the letters and the churches with serious problems form the very core of the presentation. This is highlighted as we recognize that at the center of the middle letter stands a general statement that “all the churches will know” that Christ is the omniscient judge of his unfaithful followers (2:23). This statement is conspicuous as the only thing said in the letters about all “churches” other than at the conclusion of each letter. (Beale, 226–227.)

In danger of losing their identity...		Ephesus
	Proved themselves to be faithful ...	Smyrna
	A mixture of faithfulness and compromise	Pergamum
		Thyatira
		Sardis
	Proved themselves to be faithful ...	Philadelphia
In danger of losing their identity...		Laodicea

## 2 Letters to the Seven Churches (2-3)

### 2.1 Jesus addresses Ephesus (2:1-7)

**Revelation 2:1** “To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who has a firm grasp on the seven stars in his right hand —the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2:2 ‘I know your works as well as your labor and steadfast endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have even put to the test those who refer to themselves as apostles (but are not), and have discovered that they are false. 2:3 I am also aware that you have persisted steadfastly, endured much for the sake of my name, and

have not grown weary.

2:4 But I have this against you: You have departed from your first love!

2:5 Therefore, remember from what high state you have fallen and repent! Do the deeds you did at the first; if not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place—that is, if you do not repent.

2:6 But you do have this going for you: You hate what the Nicolaitans practice —practices I also hate.

2:7 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will permit him to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.’

- Context:
  - » A commercial and religious center of the Empire with a population of 250,000
  - » Named by Domitian to be the “guardian of the imperial cult.”
  - » Held the Temple of Artemis (Acts 19:23-40), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient world. It was the largest building of that time and made completely from marble.
  - » Was known for the practice of magic (Acts 19:13-19).
  - » Held one of the largest Jewish communities in the area (Acts 19:8-9)
  - » Only a few years before Revelation written, it hosted the Olympic Games in honor of Domitian.

## Issues to Consider:

- Who or what is the “angel” of the church(es)?
- “This is the solemn pronouncement...”  
“These things says the LORD Almighty...”

The Greek of this statement parallels language in the Hebrew Prophets which introduces messages from the LORD. *Beale makes the case that because of this these “letters” function more like prophetic statements.*

- False Apostles

“In the early church “apostle” was used two ways: in a particular sense to describe the leaders chosen by God for the church (the Twelve, Paul, and a few others like Barnabas [Acts 14:14] or James [Gal. 1:19]), and in a general way to describe church “representatives” who traveled from place to place with complete authority from the sending church (e.g., 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25)” (Osborne, 114)

- What is “departing from your first love”?

“It is clear that the Ephesians loved truth more than they loved God or one another. This does not mean that they were not believers or that they had no love at all, for the commendations of verses 2–3 would be impossible in that case. Rather, their early love had grown cold and been replaced with a harsh zeal for orthodoxy. ( Osborne, 116)

- Removing the Lampstand...

“For as long as Jesus insists on calling sinners and not the

righteous to repentance - and there is no indication as yet that he has changed his policy in this regard - churches are going to be an embarrassment of the fastidious and an affront to the upright. St. John sees them simply as *lampstands*: they are places, locations, where the light of Christ is shown. *They are not themselves the light*. There is nothing particularly glamorous about churches, nor, on the other hand, is there anything particularly shameful about them. They simply are. (Peterson, 54)

- Who are the Nicolaitans?

Paul had already warned the first generation of this church about the false teachers: (see Acts 20:28–32; 1 Timothy 1:3–11; 4:1–8; 6:2–7, 20–21; 2 Timothy 3:1–17).

“... their teaching, like that of Balaam, viewed with approval the eating of food sacrificed to idols and the practice of immorality — misconduct which (in verse 20), in connection with the church in Thyatira, is also associated with Jezebel. Thus this permissive teaching appears to have found its way into three of the seven churches of Asia, and there is a probability that the three designations, ‘Nicolaitans’, ‘Balaam’, and ‘Jezebel’, refer to the same cult, whose libertarianism was in conflict with the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:29),” (Hughes, *Revelation*, p. 37).

### **Idolatry > Ignorance > Immorality**

- “The one who has an ear had better hear...

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#### **IN THE BACKGROUND 08: *Isaiah and Jesus***

**Isaiah 6:9–10**      And He [God] replied [to Isaiah]:  
 Go! Say to these people:  
 Keep listening, but do not understand;  
 keep looking, but do not perceive.  
 6:10    Dull the minds of these people;  
           deafen their ears and blind their eyes;

otherwise they might see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears,  
understand with their minds,  
turn back, and be healed.

**Matthew 13:9–17**

[Jesus said,] Anyone who has ears should listen!”

13:10 Then the disciples came up and asked Him, “Why do You speak to them [the crowds] in parables?”

13:11 He answered them, “Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them. 13:12 For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

13:13 For this reason I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. 13:14 Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:

You will listen and listen,  
yet never understand;  
and you will look and look,  
yet never perceive.

13:15 For this people’s heart has grown callous;  
their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes;  
otherwise they might see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn back—  
and I would cure them.

13:16 “**But your eyes are blessed because they do see, and your ears because they do hear!** 13:17 For I assure you: Many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see yet didn’t see them; to hear the things you hear yet didn’t hear them.

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- what the Spirit says to the churches.”

\* *It is important to notice that it has been Christ himself address-*

*ing the church, and now it is the Spirit addressing the churches. The voice of Christ IS the voice of the Spirit because, as Paul says, "The Lord is The Spirit" (see 2 Corinthians 3:17 and also Philip-pians 1:19).*

“The basic principle for applying these letters to ourselves and others today thus seems to be: *If the shoe fits, wear it.* To whatever degree our lives or churches reflect symptoms analogous to any of the churches the risen Lord addresses in these letters, we must take heed to “what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Keener, 109)

“The gospel pulls us into community. One of the immediate changes that the gospel makes is grammatical: we instead of I; our instead of my; us instead of me.” (Peterson, 43)

- to the one who conquers ...

Revelation 12:11 And they have conquered him (the Devil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (ESV)

“... the exhortation to overcome is either an encouragement to continue standing strong against compromise or to stop compromising. In this regard, νικάω (*conquer*) in 2:7 and 17 is probably an ironic play on words with Νικολαϊτῶν (“Nicolaïtans”) in 2:6 and 15. Thus the exhortation is to be a true conqueror by overcoming the false conquerors who are attempting to defeat the Christians’ faith by leading them into compromise. Conquering spiritually by not compromising ironically entails being conquered in some material way by persecution, as the letter to Smyrna portrays. This usage may be linked to or a development of a Jewish exegetical tradition that used νικάω (*conquer*) of the Maccabean martyrs, who were said to have conquered because they maintained their faith in God’s law even though they were defeated from the earthly perspective through suffering and death; in this manner they “conquered the tyrant” who was persecuting them (4 Macc. 1:11; 6:10; 7:3; 9:6, 30; 11:20–21; 16:14; 17:12–18). (Beale, 270)

- the Tree of Life in Paradise ...

“Perhaps the OT tree of life was chosen as emblematic of Christian reward because a tree image was long associated either with the goddess Artemis or with Ephesus, where the great Artemis temple flourished. What paganism promised only Christianity as the fulfillment of OT hopes could deliver.” (Beale, 236)

## 2.2 Jesus addresses Smyrna (2:8-11)

**Revelation 2:8** To the angel of the church in Smyrna write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who is the first and the last, the one who was dead, but came to life:

2:9 ‘I know the distress you are suffering and your poverty (but you are rich). I also know the slander against you by those who call themselves Jews and really are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 2:10 Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering [*thlipsis*] for ten days. Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself.

2:11 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will in no way be harmed by the second death.’

- Context:
  - » Like Ephesus, Smyrna was a very prosperous city, second only to Ephesus as an “imperial city.”
  - » It had a very large Jewish population which would have been an added pressure for Christians living in the city.

- » The Guild system, in operation here and in the other cities, would have also caused problems for Christians because of its pagan requirements.

#### Issues to Consider:

- The Synagogue of Satan

**John 8:43–47** [Jesus addressing the Jews who were opposed to Him] Why don't you understand what I say? Because you cannot listen to My word. 8:44 **You are of your father the Devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires.** He was a murderer from the beginning and has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of liars. 8:45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. 8:46 Who among you can convict Me of sin? If I tell the truth, why don't you believe Me? 8:47 The one who is from God listens to God's words. This is why you don't listen, because you are not from God."

**Romans 2:28–29** For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. 2:29 On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. That man's praise is not from men but from God.

"... that oppressive Jews are called a "synagogue of Satan" is paralleled in Qumran, where apostate Jews are called "a congregation of Belial" in contrast to true Jews in the Qumran community who have "leaned on your covenant" (1QH 2.22); similarly 1QH 7.34 contrasts the elect with "the assembly of hypocrites" (cf. CD 11.7–9). (Beale, 241)

- Prison, testing, Faithfulness, Death

At this time, prison was a precursor to sentencing and possibly death. Here, as in other places, the Lord uses the work of the Devil to TEST His people, perfecting their righteousness.

"The account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, bishop of the church at Smyrna in the mid-second century, gives us a

glimpse of the kind of threats that may have challenged the faith of that church in earlier years. He was told by the Roman governor that he would be executed if he did not give a public, token acknowledgment to Caesar as Lord. He died for his faith. Some have suggested that Polycarp himself may have been one of the readers of this letter, since he became bishop of Smyrna in A.D. 115, and that he was particularly encouraged by its message before his death. (Beale, 243)

- Ten Days of suffering...

In Daniel 12:1-15, Daniel and his three friends are “tested” for ten days by not eating the Kings food but only vegetables. In Judaism and early Christianity, Daniel and the three friends were often held up as models of the faithful who did not succumb to the temptation to compromise their faithfulness.

Concerning the word *thlipsis* as suffering or persecution see the earlier note on the word *Tribulation/Persecution* at 1:10

- The Crown (*stephanos*) that is life
- Will not be harmed by the Second Death

Here, Jesus is using a figure of speech called **litotes** which is a way of making a positive affirmation by negating the opposite. The presence of litotes is often signaled by obvious understatement. He also uses this figure in 3:5 when Jesus says He will “never blot his (the faithful) name from the Book of Life.”

In Rabbinic teaching, ‘second death’ is a term for the death of the wicked in the next world (Targum Jerusalem on Deuteronomy 33:6 and also the Targumim on Jeremiah 51:39, 57, Isaiah 52:14, 65:6).

In Revelation, this Second Death is identified with **the Lake of Fire** – the place of eternal abandonment and punishment of those unworthy of eternal life (See Revelation 20:6, 13-14; 21:8).

### 2.3 Jesus addresses Pergamum (2:12-17)

**Revelation 2:12** “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who has the sharp double-edged sword:

2:13 ‘I know where you reside, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you continue to cling to my name and you have not denied your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your city where Satan lives.

2:14 But I have a few things against you: You have some people there who follow the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel so they would eat food sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality.

2:15 In the same way, there are also some among you who follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

2:16 Therefore, repent! If not, I will come against you quickly and make war against those people with the sword of my mouth.

2:17 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give him some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on that stone will be written a new name that no one can understand except the one who receives it.’

- Context:
  - » Pergamum is the capital of the region.
  - » It had an acropolis with temples dedicated to various gods. At the top of the acropolis sat a huge altar to

Zeus, “the savior.” This altar also had images of snakes surrounding it.

- » It also had the famous temple of the god Asklepios, the god of healing and also “savior,” symbolized by a serpent wrapped around a pole.

#### Issues to Consider:

- Satan’s Throne

“... Pergamum was also a center of pagan cults of various deities. For example, the cult of Asclepius, the serpent god of healing, was prominent in Pergamum; the serpent symbol of Asclepius also became one of the emblems of the city and may have facilitated John’s reference to “the throne of Satan” (cf. 12:9; 20:2!). Zeus, Athene, Demeter, and Dionysus were also gods receiving significant cultic attention. The reference to “Satan’s throne” may also have been brought to mind because of the conical hill behind Pergamum which was the site of many temples, prominent among which was the throne-like altar of Zeus, which itself would have been sufficient to arouse the thought of the devil’s throne. **13:2 says that Satan gave the “beast” “his throne and great authority” (cf. 16:10); thus Satan works through the ungodly, earthly political power in Pergamum to persecute God’s people** (see on 13:1ff.). (Beale, 246)

- Antipas, My faithful witness...
- The Teaching of Balaam and Nicolaitans  
(See Numbers 25:1ff. and 31:16)

#### **Idolatry > Ignorance > Immorality**

“The two teachings are identified further by the similarity of the etymology of their names: νικᾶ λαόν [*nika laon*] means “he overcomes the people,” and in rabbinic literature “Balaam” (bil’am) was etymologized to *bl’ m* or *blh’ m*, “he who consumes the people” (e.g., b. Sanhedrin 105a), or it could be

construed as “rule over the people” (b’l’m). Actual participation in idolatrous situations was the problem in Pergamum, and this problem needed to be rectified immediately. (Beale, 251)

- I will make War...
- The Hidden Manna  
\* a contrast to the food sacrificed to idols.
- The White Stone

#### 2.4 Jesus addresses Thyatira (2:18-29)

**Revelation 2:18** “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Son of God, the one who has eyes like a fiery flame and whose feet are like polished bronze:

2:19 ‘I know your deeds: your love, faith, service, and steadfast endurance. In fact, your more recent deeds are greater than your earlier ones.

2:20 But I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 2:21 I have given her time to repent, but she is not willing to repent of her sexual immorality.

2:22 Look! I am throwing her onto a bed of violent illness, and those who commit adultery with her into terrible suffering, unless they repent of her deeds. 2:23 Furthermore, I will strike her

followers (children) with a deadly disease, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds (lit. kidneys) and hearts. I will repay each one of you what your deeds deserve.

2:24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, all who do not hold to this teaching (who have not learned the so-called “deep secrets of Satan”), to you I say: I do not put any additional burden on you. 2:25 However, hold on to what you have until I come.

2:26 And to the one who conquers and who continues in my deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations:

2:27 He will rule (lit. *shepherd*) them with an iron rod

and like clay jars he will break them to pieces,

2:28 just as I have received the right to rule from my Father,

and I will give him the morning star.

2:29 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

- Context:
  - » This is the least impressive and important of the seven cities, but it was filled with trade guilds which would have placed heavy pressure on Christians. **The Bronze workers guild was one of the major guilds in Thyatira.**
  - » The divine guardian of the city was Tyrimnos (linked with the Greek sun-god Apollo) who was also the patron of the guilds, worshiped in the city festivities. The worship of Apollo-Tyrimnos was merged with the worship of the Emperor and **both were honored as “sons of Zeus”** the father of the gods.
  - » Lydia in Acts 16:14 was from Thyatira; she was a “seller of purple goods.”

Issues to Consider:

**IN THE BACKGROUND 09:** *Son of God > Allusion to Psalm 2*

\* This letters begins with an allusion to Psalm 2 and at the end, quotes the Psalm directly.

**Psalms 2:1-12**

1 Why are the nations in an uproar  
And the peoples devising a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth take their stand  
And the rulers take counsel together  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,

3 “Let us tear their fetters apart  
And cast away their cords from us!”

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs,  
The Lord scoffs at them.

5 Then He will speak to them in His anger  
And terrify them in His fury, saying,

6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion,  
My holy mountain.”

7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:  
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.

8 ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,  
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

9 ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron,  
You shall shatter them like earthenware.”

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment;  
Take warning, O judges of the earth.

11 Worship the LORD with reverence  
And rejoice with trembling.

12 Do homage to the Son,  
that He not become angry, and you perish in the way,  
For His wrath may soon be kindled.  
How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (NASB)

“ This is the only place in this book where the “Son of God” title is used (although the unique filial relationship between the Father and the Son is stressed in 1:6; 2:27; 3:5; etc.), and the reason most likely lies in the centrality of Apollo, son of Zeus, in Thyatira. It is Jesus, not Apollo, who is the true Son of God (this also accounts for the quotation of Ps. 2:9 in Rev. 2:27). A frequent title in the Gospel of

John (1:34; 3:18; 5:25; etc.), it connotes majesty and divinity and is an important message to this weak church to center on the true “Son of God.” (Osborne, 153)

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- The fiery eyes

The fiery eyes of Christ represent His ability to penetrate right to the heart with divine insight. Fire is also one of the symbols of God’s holiness. The presence of holiness in the context of Jesus’ divine sight draws to mind the sobering words of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 4:12-13** For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from God, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.

Just as the vision of God in Isaiah 6, so here the fire of God’s holiness should bring an unsettling awareness of His glory, purity and greatness. This then pushes us to the realization of our absolute dependence on Him for purifying.

- The Feet of Bronze ...
- “I know your deeds ...”
- The Prophetess Jezebel  
(See 1 Kings 16:29ff; 2 Kings 9:30ff.)

This New Testament “Jezebel” is a false teacher who entices the assembly to compromise its virtue in order to be friends with the World.

- “... a bed of violent illness...” (Redemptive Affliction)  
“bed” is used as a metaphor for serious illness in the OT: See- Exodus 21:18; Psalms 6:6; 41:3.

- “and terrible suffering” > *thlipsis megalaen* {great tribulation}
- “I am the one who searches minds (kidneys) and hearts...

**Jeremiah 17:10**

I, Yahweh, examine the mind (kidneys),  
I test the heart  
to give to each according to his way,  
according to what his actions deserve. (HCSB)

- “I will repay each one of you what your deeds deserve.”

“This is the Roman (and OT) legal principle of *lex talionis* (law of retribution), which means that each person receives judgment on the basis of what each has done. It is at the heart of this book. This is also a critical biblical theme, beginning with the OT (Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Hos. 12:2) and reiterated by Christ (Matt. 16:27), Paul (Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 2 Cor. 11:15; 2 Tim. 4:14), and Peter (1 Pet. 1:17). In the Apocalypse this theme appears in 2:23; 14:13; 18:6; 20:12, 13; 22:12. It is perhaps stated best in 1 Pet. 1:17: we have a Father who does not play favorites but judges each one by his or her works.” (Osborne, 161–162)

- The “deep secrets/things of Satan”

“There are two options: (1) It might be a **sarcastic comment** on Jezebel’s claim to “know the deep things of God” (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10): they are actually “the deep things of Satan” (so Prigent, Hemer, Ford, P. Hughes, Roloff, Beale). Her prophetic utterances come not from God but Satan. (2) **It could be meant literally** (so Beckwith, Farrer, Morris, Johnson, Chilton, Krodel, Talbert). On the basis perhaps of protognostic principles, Jezebel may have taught that Christians should experience “the deep things of Satan” in order to triumph over them.” (Osborne, 162)

- “the one who conquers ...”  
\*See notes at 2:7
- Authority over the Nations—Ruling together with Christ

### 1 Corinthians 6:1–3

When any of you has a legal dispute with another, does he dare go to court before the unrighteous rather than before the saints? 6:2 **Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?** And if the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent to settle trivial suits? 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? Why not ordinary matters!

### Revelation 5:9–10

5:9 They (the 24 elders around the throne)  
were singing a new song:  
“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals  
because you were killed,  
and at the cost of your own blood  
you have purchased for God  
persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation.  
5:10 You have appointed them as a kingdom  
and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth.”

- “He will *shepherd* them ...”  
\* here John’s quotation is in line with the LXX which has “shepherd” whereas the Hebrew Text has “smite” - both options are possible with different vocalizations of the same Hebrew word here.
- The Morning Star?  
This is most likely a multi-faceted reference to Christ and His Messianic Rule “dawning” on the nations.

Christ identifies Himself as the Morning Star later:

**Revelation 22:16**

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.

I am the root and the descendant of David,  
the bright morning star!”

This may also reference Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 10:** *Numbers 24*

**Numbers 24:17**

“I see him, but not now;  
I behold him, but not near;  
A star shall come forth from Jacob,  
A scepter shall rise from Israel,  
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,  
And tear down all the sons of Sheth ...

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“The combination of Ps. 2:7–8 and Num. 24:17 follows the same pattern as 2 Pet. 1:17–19, where the Numbers allusion ... also follows a reference to Ps. 2:6–7. Here ... (“morning”) may highlight the inaugurated aspect of this messianic reign, which has been set in motion by Jesus’ death and resurrection (cf. 22:16).  
(Beale, 268–269)

“This idea [that the Morning Star is symbolic of the “dawning of the Messianic Kingdom”] is enhanced from the fact that the “morning star” (Venus) was a symbol of sovereignty in the ancient world and especially in Rome. Roman emperors claimed to be descended from the goddess Venus, Roman generals built temples dedicated to the star, and it was a sign carried on the standards of the Roman legions. If this is also part of the thought, then the allusion to Numbers has been called forth in order to emphasize that Christ is the true world

sovereign in contrast to the claims of evil world empires like Rome.”  
(Beale, 269)

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2.5 Jesus addresses Sardis (3:1-6)

**Revelation 3:1** “To the angel of the church in Sardis write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

‘I know your deeds, that you have a reputation that you are alive, but in reality you are dead. 3:2 Wake up then, and strengthen what remains that was about to die, because I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3:3 Therefore, remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come against you.

3:4 But you have a few individuals in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes, and they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy. 3:5 The one who conquers will be dressed like them in white clothing, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will declare his name before my Father and before his angels.

3:6 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

- Context:
  - » “The town was living basically on past historical prestige, having been the location where the famous King Croesus had lived.” (Witherington, 105)

- » Herodotus reveals that although Sardis had never been conquered through normal warfare, twice it had been captured because the defenders of the city failed to be vigilant on their watch!!! (Herodotus 147.91)
- » City was destroyed (along with Philadelphia) by an earthquake in AD 17 and was still indebted to Rome for the rebuilding.
- » The city produced fine clothing products and dyed garments, even claiming to have invented many of these processes.

#### Issues to Consider:

- The Seven Spirits of God and Seven Stars
- A Reputation: Alive, but Dead - The Sleeping Church

“Just outside their city was a famous necropolis, or cemetery, with the graves of long-dead kings. The assembly at Sardis represented that cemetery more than a living church. If they wanted to live, they had to turn from their false deeds to the life-giving Spirit.” (Osborne, 174)

\*G.B. Caird calls Sardis “the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity” (*A Commentary on the Revelation*, 48).

- Deeds not complete...
- Coming “like a thief in the night.”  
(See Luke 12:39-40; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-8; 2 Peter 3:10)
- The white, unsoiled garments

In Revelation 7:14 we see “...the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white by

the blood of the Lamb.”

“... behind the image of receiving “white robes” in 3:4b–5a, as well as elsewhere throughout Revelation, stands the idea of a purity that has resulted from the fidelity of the faithful being tested by a refining fire.” (Beale, 277)

- Never erasing the Name from The Book of Life

In the OT, the Book of Life refers to the book of “earthly life” (see Exodus 32:32; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3). *Here, however, this is probably a reference to the Book of Eternal Life - the Lamb’s Book of Life referred to in 21:27:*

**Revelation 21:27** ...but nothing ritually unclean will ever enter into it (The New Jerusalem), nor anyone who does what is detestable or practices falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

This book is also referred to in 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27

\* Why state this “positive promise” as a negative?

Here, as in 2:11, Jesus is using a figure of speech called **litotes** which is a way of making a positive affirmation by negating the opposite.

“Another reason this should not be understood as referring to a possible loss of authentic salvation is that in John’s scheme throughout the names of those who ultimately prove themselves unbelievers are never at any point associated positively with the “book of life,” but only the “books” of judgment (though their names are, of course, mentioned as “not having been written in the book of life” [13:8; 17:8]). Therefore, in the writer’s thinking it would be impossible to conceive of them being erased from the “book of life,” since their names were never written there in the first place (as 13:8 and 17:8 clearly show).” (Beale, 280)

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 11:** *Daniel 12***Daniel 12:1–3**

“At that time Michael, the great prince who watches over your people, will arise.

There will be a time of distress unlike any other from the nation’s beginning up to that time. But at that time your own people, all those **whose names are found written in the book**, will escape.

12:2 Many of those who sleep in the dusty ground will awake—some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting abhorrence.

12:3 But the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavenly expanse. And those bringing many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.

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- “... will declare his name ...”

**Matthew 10:31–33** [Jesus said,] “Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. 10:33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father in heaven.

**Mark 8:38** For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

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2.6 Jesus addresses Philadelphia (3:7-13)

**Revelation 3:7** “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Holy One, the True One, who holds the key of David, who opens doors no one can shut, and shuts doors no one can open:

3:8 ‘I know your deeds. (Look! I have put in front of you an open door that no one can shut.) I know that you have little strength, but you have obeyed [kept] my word and have not denied my name.

3:9 Listen! I am going to make those people from the synagogue of Satan—who say they are Jews yet are not, but are lying—Look, I will make them come and bow down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

3:10 Because you have kept my admonition to endure steadfastly, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one can take away your crown.

3:12 The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never depart from it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God (the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from my God), and my new name as well.

3:13 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

- Context:
  - » The city was also destroyed by the earthquake of A.D. 17 but the lingering effects were more devastating than in Smyrna. Many of the buildings remained cracked and unstable for years afterward.
  - » The city's name was changed to NeoCaesarea for a short time after the earthquake to honor the Emperor who exempted them from paying tributes for five years so they could rebuild. In the 80's Flavia was added to the name in honor of the Imperial dynasty's name.
  - » This city had so many temples it was referred to as "Little Athens."
  - » In its prime, this city was a "missionary city" of the Empire, extending Greco-Roman culture to the annexed provinces of Lydia and Phrygia
  - » Being in the center of a vineyard district, Dionysus/Bacchus was the city's favored god.
  - » The city also had one of the largest and most significant Jewish communities of the area.

#### Issues to Consider:

- The Holy One, The True One ...
- The Keys of David

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#### IN THE BACKGROUND 12: *Isaiah 22:22*

Isaiah 22:22 contains an oracle against Shebna, Hezekiah's failed steward who is replaced by Eliakim (whose name means "God establishes"): "I will place **the key to the house of David** on his shoulder. When he opens the door, no one can close it; when he closes the door, no one can open it."

In the context, Eliakim would serve a kind of “Secretary of State,” administering the Kingdom of Judah. Given the mention of a “synagogue of Satan” in this letter, the emphasis on Jesus as the Holy and True heir to David’s house establishes the fact that His Kingdom is the One, True Kingdom contrary to the beliefs of the Jews who had rejected Him as their Messiah.

“... the Targumic paraphrase of Isa. 22:22 rendered the quotation even more appropriately to the situation of the church: “I will place the key of the *sanctuary* and the authority of the house of David in his hand.” **Ethnic Israel, which was claiming to be the divine agent wielding the power of salvation and judgment, no longer held this position.** Christ’s followers could be assured that the doors to the true synagogue were open to them, whereas the doors remained closed to those who rejected Christ. (Beale, 284)

- 
- I know your deeds... that you have little strength...

This “little strength” probably refers to the reality that this church was small in number and was insignificant in the context of the other more “powerful” Roman and Jewish people groups in the city. **In spite of heavy pressure, they have remained faithful.**

- The Open Door

? Opportunity for ministry, particularly missionary work (See 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3)

? A doorway into the Eternal City

It is known that Christians were excluded from participating in the Synagogues of this time. Therefore, the mention of “open doors” highlights the fact that Jesus holds open the only “door” that matters and it is *He* who will make the final

exclusions from His Eternal Kingdom.

“... the most common view today... is to see this as the “door” to the kingdom. While the church has been excommunicated from the synagogue, Christ has the “keys” to the kingdom. He has opened the “door,” and “no one could shut it.” This is certainly more in keeping with 3:7.” (Osborne, 188–189)

- The Synagogue of Satan, the Jews who are lying...

*\*See notes on “Synagogue of Satan” at 2:9*

“Philadelphia and Smyrna are the only two churches with no rebuke, and it is interesting that both were under severe threat from a powerful Jewish presence in the city. Therefore, the names of Christ chosen here reflect that situation and reassure the beleaguered Philadelphia Christians that the Messiah is indeed on their side, not on the side of the “synagogue of Satan” (3:9).” (Osborne, 186.)

- “I will make them come and bow down...”

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 13:** *Isaiah 60:14*

“The passage alludes to Isa. 60:14, “The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet” (cf. also Isa. 2:3; 14:2; 45:14; 49:23; Ezek. 36:23; Zech. 8:20–23). The OT taught that the Gentiles would be forced to pay homage to the Jews at the eschaton, and now this promise is turned on its head: Jewish oppressors would be forced to pay homage to Gentile believers. Christ is promising these persecuted Christians that they would be vindicated by God, and this is a theme that will appear again and again in the book (6:9–11; 16:6; 18:20; 19:2). The telling point in favor of this interpretation is that they (the Jews) will bow “at your... feet” and not “at my... feet.” This is submission, not worship,

and parallels 2:26–27, where the faithful saints are promised that they will participate in the judgment of their (and God’s) enemies.” (Osborne, 191)

*\*Here, I would clarify Osborne’s statement in the sense that these “False Jews” would eventually bow before believers/Christ’s people who are both Jew and Gentile.*

- 
- Being *kept* from the hour of testing...

? deliverance *from* or *deliverance* through ...

- The **hour** of testing

Most commentators agree that this “hour of testing” is referring in some way to final terrible events that include the “Great Tribulation/Persecution” spoken of by Jesus that takes place after the rise of the Beast (see Matthew 24:15-22), as well as the judgments of the Trumpets and Bowls described in this book.

“The testing is probably an intensification at some point in the future of the end-time “tribulation,” which has already been set in motion (so θλίψις [*thlipsis*] in 1:9; 2:9). This imminent test may be identified with the imminent tribulation referred to elsewhere in the letters (cf. θλίψις [“tribulation”] also in 2:10, 22). (Beale, 290)

\* Denoting an “**hour**” in Revelation is a common theme:

**Revelation 3:3** Therefore, remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come against you.

**Revelation 3:10** Because you have kept my admonition

to endure steadfastly, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

**Revelation 9:15** Then the four angels who had been prepared for this hour, day, month, and year were set free to kill a third of humanity.

**Revelation 11:13** Just then [lit. “at that hour”] a major earthquake took place and a tenth of the city collapsed; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

**Revelation 14:7** He [an angel] declared in a loud voice: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!”

**Revelation 14:15** Then another angel came out of the temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one seated on the cloud, “Use your sickle and start to reap, because the time [the hour] to reap has come, since the earth’s harvest is ripe!”

**Revelation 17:12** The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive ruling authority as kings with the beast for one hour.

**Revelation 18:10** They will stand a long way off because they are afraid of her torment, and will say, “Woe, woe, O great city, Babylon the powerful city! For in a single hour your doom has come!”

**Revelation 18:17** ...because in a single hour such great wealth has been destroyed!” And every ship’s captain, and all who sail along the coast—seamen, and all who make their living from the sea, stood a long way off 18:19 And they threw dust on their heads and were shouting with weeping and mourning, “Woe, Woe, O great city— in which all those who had ships on the sea got rich from her wealth— because in a single hour she has been destroyed!”

*!! from these references it seems to me that the use of the term*

*“hour” connotes the **specific timing** of the fulfillment of the Lord God’s plans, particularly the coming of His judgment.*

- coming on **the whole world** ...

*\*The phrase “the whole world” is used 2 more times in Revelation in 12:9 and 16:4 and in both cases refers to the World under the deception of Satanic forces.*

“The term “earth-dwellers” (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8) is important in the book and always refers to the unbelievers, the enemies of God who not only worship and follow the beast but also persecute the believers. They are the same group referred to by “the whole world” above.” (Osborne, 193)

- Hold on to what you have.... (Endure, Persevere)

- A Pillar in the Temple ...

“The permanent establishment of the overcomer as a pillar in the temple may also continue the imagery of Isa. 22:22ff., where Eliakim’s relatives achieve glory by “hanging on him as a peg firmly attached to a wall.” Some Greek OT witnesses even refer to Eliakim as being set up as a “pillar” in Isa. 22:23 (Vaticanus, Origen, and Q read στηλω, “I will set up as a pillar” or “I will inscribe on a pillar”).<sup>231</sup> In contrast to Eliakim’s dependents, who eventually lost their glory and position in the palace when he was finally removed (cf. Isa. 22:23–25), the followers of Jesus will never be removed from their position in the temple/palace because Jesus, the “true” Messiah, will never lose his regal position in the presence of his Father .... (Beale, 295)

“In Gal. 2:9 the leading apostles are called “pillars,” and in 1 Tim. 3:15 the church is “a pillar and foundation of the truth.” The idea there and here is **stability** and **permanence**. As Hemer (1986: 166) points out, the stress is on that which stands firm (Jer. 1:18) rather than that which supports (Isa. 22:23). **We must remember that both the city (due to earthquakes and economic disasters) and the church (due**

**to persecution) had never felt security or permanence, so this promise must have been most welcome.**

(Osborne, 196)

**IN THE BACKGROUND 14:** *Solomon's Pillars*

It is interesting to note that in 1 Kings 7:21 and 2 Chronicles 3:15–17 Solomon placed two pillars in the Temple and gave them the names Jachin (“he establishes”) and Boaz (“in him is strength”)

- The Name of My God and of THE City and My Name...

> The Name of **My God** - signifying “Sonship”

>The Name of the **City** - signifying Citizenship in the New Jerusalem

\*We will discuss the importance of the New Jerusalem later. *It is interesting to note that in two other references in the NT (Galatians 4:26 and Hebrews 12:22), the New Jerusalem is as the “true, heavenly Jerusalem” which is contrasted to the “earthly Jerusalem” that is still in rebellion against the Lord. An image that is very appropriate to this letter.*

>The **New Name of Jesus** - signifying Complete Salvation

“Most likely this is a name hidden until the eschaton. **The most amazing thing is not the meaning of the “new name” but the fact that we will share it.**” (Osborne, 199)

“Every small church in a difficult area of ministry will find this letter encouraging. Every Christian uncertain about his or her gifts and place in the church as a whole will be comforted. The basic message

is profound: **God is more interested in faithfulness than success.**  
(Osborne, 199)

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2.7 Jesus addresses Laodicea (3:14-22)

**Revelation 3:14** “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation:

3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! 3:16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth!

3:17 Because you say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing,” but do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, 3:18 take my advice and buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from me white clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed, and buy eye salve to put on your eyes so you can see!

3:19 All those I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent!

3:20 Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking! If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his home and share a meal with him, and he with me. 3:21 I will grant the one who conquers permission to sit with me on my throne, just as I too conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

3:22 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

- Context:

» “Philadelphia and Laodicea were situated on the only two routes into Phrygia (the eastern province) from the west. This confluence of major trade routes made Laodicea critical for trade and communications in the province. The city itself lay on a southern plateau about a half-mile square and a few hundred feet above the plain in the fertile Lycus Valley. It sat between two streams, the Asopus and the Capsus. The Lycus Valley was at the crossroads between Lydia, Phrygia, and Caria, so the region was politically important as well. Laodicea was the more important member of a tri-city formation with Hierapolis six miles north and Colosse ten miles east; all three cities were part of Phrygia.” (Osborne, 201)

» Strabo (12.8.20) says that this town was well known for its banks; it was also known as the wealthiest city in Phrygia.

“The most striking indication of the city’s wealth is that following the devastating earthquake of AD 60 the city was rebuilt without financial aid from Rome. Tacitus wrote, “Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us” (Ann. xiv.27).” (Mounce, 123)

» The city was also well known for its medical school that was connected to the temple of Men Carou (“*god of the valley,*” *the god of healing*). Laodicea was known for two medicinal ointments: one from spice nard for the ears, the other an eye-salve made from Phrygian powder and oil.

» The major problem at Laodicea was water supply; it had to be ported in from nearby Denizli.

» “It is likely that the three sister churches (Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse) were established at the same time by Epaphras, who founded the Colossian church (Col. 1:7) as well as evangelized Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13) during Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19). Paul had not visited these churches at the time of his first imprisonment (Col. 2:1), though he may have done so subsequently (Philem. 22). Many believe that

the “epistle to Laodicea” (Col. 4:16) may have been Ephesians, which we know to have been a circular letter.” (Osborne, 202).

Issues to Consider:

- The “Amen, the faithful and true witness”

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**IN THE BACKGROUND 15:** *Isaiah 65*

**Isaiah 65:16 -17**

So that he who blesses himself in the land  
 shall bless himself by the God of truth,  
 and he who takes an oath in the land  
 shall swear by the God of truth;  
 because the former troubles are forgotten  
 and are hidden from my eyes.  
 65:17 “For behold, I create new heavens  
 and a new earth,  
 and the former things shall not be remembered  
 or come into mind. (ESV)

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“Fekkes (1994: 139) draws three conclusions from the Isaianic background: (1) this is another example of an OT divine title transferred to Jesus; (2) as linked to “faithful and true witness,” this emphasizes “the authenticity of Christ’s character and testimony”; (3) this could be another authenticity formula building on Jesus’ own use of AMEN to introduce his solemn declarations. In short, Jesus alone can be trusted to keep his word, unlike the Laodiceans. (Osborne, 204)

- “the Originator of God’s creation ...”

This description may be alluding to Paul’s letter to the Colossians which was to be sent to the Laodicean assemblies as well

(Colossians 4:16). In Colossians 1 and 2 the preexistence and preeminence of Christ is expounded in some of the most glorious writing of the New Testament:

**Colossians 1:15-18**

He is the image of the invisible God,  
 the firstborn over all creation,  
 16 for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him  
 - all things, whether visible or invisible,  
 whether thrones or dominions,  
 whether principalities or powers -  
 all things were created through him and for him.  
 17 He himself is before all things  
 and all things are held together in him.  
 18 He is the head of the body, the church,  
 as well as the beginning,  
 the firstborn from among the dead,  
 so that he himself may become first in all things.

- What is “lukewarm”?

“The weakness of the city, however, was its lack of good water supply (Strabo 13.4.14). Six miles away Hieropolis had its hot medicinal springs, and there was also pure water in Colossae. Just across from Laodicea the hot springs went over limestone cliffs and became lukewarm and brackish. Anyone drinking it would spit it out.” (Witherington, 107)

“ the adjectives ‘hot,’ ‘cold,’ and ‘lukewarm’ are not taken to be describing the spiritual fervor (or lack of it) of people. The contrast is between the hot medicinal waters of Hieropolis and the cold, pure waters from Colossae. Thus the church in Laodicea ‘was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick. It was totally ineffective, thus distasteful to the Lord.’” (Mounce, 125)

*\*The idea here is probably that this assembly had become completely self-sufficient and therefore sickeningly and totally useless*

to Christ.

“The exalted Christ is challenging them with a powerful rhetorical question, “Don’t you realize that you make me sick?” (Osborne, 206)

- “I am ...I have... I have ...!” yet ...

“The church was like the city, believing that its material wealth connoted spiritual wealth.

The problem was, the city had no perceived need for help from Rome, and the church had no perceived need for help from God.” (Osborne, 207)

- Wretched and Pitiful AND Poor, Blind, and Naked

- Take my advice and buy...

- Gold, White Clothing, and Eye Salve

\* in Revelation, “white” garments symbolize righteousness (3:4, 5; 6:11; 7:9; 19:14), being washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:13–14), and glory in God’s final kingdom (4:4; 19:14)

- “All those I love, I rebuke and discipline”  
(See Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-6)

- Be earnest and Repent!

- “...I stand at the door and knock...”

“This is an invitation not for the readers to be converted but to renew themselves in a relationship with Christ that has already begun, as is apparent from v 19. (Beale, 308)

- Sharing a meal :: Table Fellowship  
*“To share a meal in the ancient world was to share a life.”*
  
- Permission to sit with Christ on His Throne  
*\*the word “throne” appears 55 times in the NT, 41x in Revelation!*