

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the word of God

2020

FEBRUARY

Revelation- Victory Book Chapters 1-11

Introducing
First love in Revelation 1-2

From Study Groups
The Lord and his churches—Part 1
(Revelation 2)

Comment
Outward witness of the O.T. lampstands

Question & Answer
'Jezebel' in Revelation 2:20



Revelation 4:3

FIRST LOVE IN REVELATION 1-2

I am indebted to brother Andy McIlree for the following point which I heard him make some decades ago, I think at a conference at Kingston-upon-Thames.

The point contrasts Revelation 2:2 with 1 Thessalonians 1:3. In the First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes to that church of 'remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father.' But to Laodicea in Revelation 2 (RV) the Lord says, 'I know thy works and thy toil and patience.'

But where were the works of faith, where was the toil or labour of love, where was the patience of hope in Him? 1 Corinthians 13, in a very familiar verse (13) gives us another reference point: 'But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'

Here in Revelation the Saviour poignantly seems to echo that, focusing on the supreme importance of love. In all instances it is the *agapē* love which is in view, the distinctly Christian transcendent love that depends upon relationship with Him.

P.D.

From Study Groups . . .

THE LORD AND HIS CHURCHES IN EPHESUS, SMYRNA, PERGAMUM, & THYATIRA (Revelation 2)

From Aberdeen: It is quite challenging to realise that saints in churches of God can be in need of repentance. The various rebukes from the risen Lord to those early churches are heart-searching. Some obvious sins and some subtler sins were both rebuked by the Son of God, whose eyes are 'like a flame of fire' (Rev. 2:18 RV).

As the Son of God walked amidst the churches He saw how saints in Ephesus had left their first love. They had lost their initial warmth of love for the Lord. When the Lord highlighted to the Ephesian disciples their fallen condition of heart they wouldn't necessarily find it an easy thing to repent. Why? Because of the strength of the believer's old nature, which requires overcoming. Writing to the

Galatian churches, Paul pointed out how real the matter of this conflict is within the believer, how the flesh and the Spirit 'are contrary the one to the other' (Gal. 5:17). Time and again the Lord impresses on the disciples of the seven churches in Asia that they need to overcome. The exhortation is relevant to disciples right on until today: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. Him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God' (Rev. 2:7).

The Lord's abrupt rebukes were directed to each church. Nevertheless, the admonition was for the ears of all seven churches, and it also reaches down to present-day churches of God. It is appropriate to consider the concluding words that the Lord sends to the churches, and thereby to understand His purpose in giving such stern rebukes: It is because 'As many as I love I rebuke and chasten' (Rev. 3:19).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: It is postulated that John was numbered with Ephesus when he was banished to the Isle of Patmos by the cruel Emperor Domitian (1:9). Only the Lord can give each assembly an 'x-ray' of its condition, but He intended for *all* the churches to read and benefit from them. Nothing escapes Him. To all the churches He says 'I know'. Each 'message' begins with a different aspect of the Lord which links back to the vision seen by John in 1:12-16.

To Ephesus The Lord's diagnosis noted three commendations. Then, sandwiched between further praises was the accusation (2:4)—they had abandoned their first love. They had 'heart trouble'.

They displayed 'works ... labour ... and patience' but these qualities were not motivated by love for Christ. They had, however, stood firm against the Nicolaitans (2:6). Who they were we are not told. Many theories exist, but it is sufficient to understand that they were rejected by the Ephesians as false teachers, apparently infiltrating the church with idolatry and immorality. Three words describe the remedy: Remember, Repent, and Repeat (2:5). The reward for the overcomer is to eat again from the Tree of Life with unfettered fellowship with God (Rev. 22:2).

To Smyrna the diagnosis begins with the marvellous declaration of the unity of Christ's deity and humanity He is the eternal transcendent one who was dead and is now alive for evermore. The saints were experiencing persecution from both the Romans and the Jews; they were poor, yet commended for their richness in faith. Despite not having any accusation they were to pass through greater tribulation, which would make them spiritually even richer. The crown of life would be theirs if they would remain faithful (see also James 1:12-16).

The third church to be addressed is Pergamum and links with 1:16. Christ has a sharp, two-edged sword. This was possibly a *rhomphia*—a two-handed weapon used by the Romans, and whichever direction it was wielded in it could deliver a fatality. The sword in His mouth symbolises the pronouncement of judgement (cp. Is. 11:4). In Pergamum was Satan's throne, the seat of Roman government, a temple to Aesculapius (god of healing) and an altar of Zeus. The church had stood firm and was thus commended: 'you hold fast my name, and did not deny my faith' (2:13 ESV) even when some of their number had been slain. Some of their number, however, were tempted on key issues such as idolatry and fornication. The teachings of Balaam and those of the Nicolaitans fuelled by selfishness, greed and lust, had crept in.

Compromise became the order of the day. The reward to the overcomer is different—the hidden manna and the white stone upon which a new name is written. The 'white stone' here would indicate Christ's approval and possible appointment to a place of authority.

The church in Thyatira was addressed by the Son of God and this refers us back to Revelation 1:14-15. The city boasted a special temple to Apollo, the 'sun god', which explains why Christ introduced Himself as the Son of God (the only time this title is used in Revelation). It denotes the Lord's authority and sovereignty. He is seen as the Judge. Brass [most recent versions translate bronze—*Eds.*] speaks of judgement, and His feet were burnished brass or bronze. The believers of Thyatira were characterised by faith, love and patience. Not all the church was corrupt, but they had permitted a false prophetess to influence the saints and lead them into compromise. We don't know if her name was Jezebel, [see Cromer paper, under Thyatira/Debits—*Eds.*] but she had characteristics similar to her namesake in 1 Kings 16-19. The church in Thyatira was responsible to deal with this evil woman and her followers (children).

The Lord gave the false prophetess time to repent, yet she refused. Not all in the assembly were unfaithful: some had separated themselves from the false doctrine and evil practices. As a reward they would have authority over the nations, and they would be given the morning star.

Bill Paterson

From Cromer: *Were they real local churches?* Some have seen the division into seven as a purely literary device, while others have taken the churches to stand for periods in history. Neither of these seems likely, since each seems to refer to conditions that we know about in the city named.

Who were the 'angels'? The Greek word *angelos* basically means a messenger. It is most frequently used of an order of created spirit beings higher than man (e.g. Luke 2:15), which can assume human form. In this context, however, reference to

spirit beings seems unlikely. John was told ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea’ (Rev. 1:11 ESV).What John wrote had to be sent to the churches—how could a physical book be sent to spiritual representatives of the churches?

We suggest that the ‘angel’ was the assembly correspondent or whoever received correspondence in those times of the nascent churches.

Summary of the churches’ state

EPHESUS	
Situation	
The greatest city of the province of Asia, situated at the mouth of the river Cayster. A great commercial and religious centre, the chief cult being that of Greek Artemis (Roman Diana)	
Credits	Debits
‘your works, your toil and your patient endurance’ - ‘ you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false’ Hatred of the works of the Nicolaitans – it is the deeds, rather than the persons that are hated.	‘I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first’ This is the overwhelming condemnation of the church. Sound teaching is good and right, but without love it is worthless. Christ will ‘remove the lampstand’, i.e. terminate the existence of a loveless church.
Description of Christ	Promised prize
Present in the very midst of the churches. Each church is a <i>luchnos</i> , a lampstand shining out the light of Christ, who is the light of the world.	Christ calls on the disciples to take note of what He says, to fight and be victorious, and to such He will give bliss in the presence of God Himself.

SMYRNA

Situation

A planned city following destruction in 580 BC. Rebuilt in 290 BC. One of the first cities to engage in worship of the Roman emperor.

Credits

They suffered tribulation (*thlipsis* – serious trouble) with unbounded fortitude, and destitution with joy. Although very poor, they had spiritual riches.

They withstood ‘the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan’. This latter expression means that their assembly for worship does not gather together God’s people but Satan’s.

Debits

No reproof mentioned

Description of Christ

The words are of the first and the last, who died and came to life [Comment 1].

The emphasis is on the resurrection, which is at the core of all Christian teaching.

Promised prize

There is an article with ‘*the* life’. The crown (*stephanos*) was the trophy awarded to the victor at the games, which would be specially appropriate in Smyrna, a city famous for its Games. The believer who remains faithful even when it means death will receive the trophy of victory.

PERGAMUM

Situation

Significant for its great library, and an important religious centre

Credits

Even though the city was a centre of idolatry to the extent that Antipas had been martyred, they held fast their faith

Debits

Some tolerated the eating of food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality, and also some held the teaching of the Nicolaitans. They were therefore told to repent, and if not, Christ would come and war against them with the sword of His mouth.

Description of Christ

Christ He that has the sharp two-edged sword, which may be used for judgement (v.16).

Promised prize

The faithful believer receives spiritual food not available to the world, and we suggest that the new name is a new character, a secret between the believer and his God [Comment 2].

THYATIRA

Situation

A large number of trade guilds – Lydia (Acts 16:14) came from there)

Credits

Commended for Christian virtues of good works, love, faith and service

Debits

Some tolerated the evil woman called Jezebel – surely a symbolic name, as no Jew would have used it. Even she was to be given time to repent. Her error lay in teaching that it was permissible to accept the standards of contemporary society: an error current today,

Description of Christ

Only here in this book described as the Son of God. The description emphasises the majesty of His Person. His eyes see everything and His feet pursue His enemies everywhere.

Promised prize

To ‘the rest’, who eschew ‘the deep things of Satan’ and keep Christ’s words, will be given authority over the nations, and ‘the morning star’ - perhaps the presence of the Lord [Comment 3].

Peter Hickling

From Eket: Credits and Difficulties

Ephesus the loveless church (2:1-7) had many admirable qualities and one tragic flaw. The church known for having laboured hard, and not fainted, and for having separated themselves from the wicked was admonished for having forsaken its first love. Christ commended them for their good works, for their perseverance and for their church discipline that guarded against false teaching (2:2-3). Verse 4 identifies where they went wrong. ‘Nevertheless I have this against you that you have left your first love’ (NKJV). Their love for Christ was no longer fervent.

Smyrna the suffering church (2:8-11) was commended for its spiritual richness amid tribulation and poverty, and was foretold it would suffer persecution (2:10). Christ encouraged them to be faithful (v.10). The church in Smyrna had no flaws, yet suffered persecution, tribulation and poverty. ‘Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer’ (v. 10).

Pergamum the compromising church (Rev. 2:12-17) was where Satan’s throne was; they needed to repent of accepting false teachers (2:16). Christ commended them for keeping the faith of Christ: ‘And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr...’ (v.13). The difficulty faced was that they tolerated immorality, idolatry and heresies. They had yoked the Gospel with paganism, drawing Christ’s stern rebuke to repent. ‘... because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam ... to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans ...’ (v.14-15).

Thyatira the corrupt church (Rev. 2:18-29). was commendable for its love, service and patience, and as for their works the last was more than the first (v.19). But with 'eyes like a flame of fire' (v.18) the Lord recognized their deficit. It only took one person—a self-proclaimed 'prophetess', to corrupt the church: 'that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess to teach and seduce My servant to commit immorality...' (v. 20).

Remedying debits in the churches The church in Ephesus had left their first love (v.4): they were instructed to remember, repent and repeat—remember where they had fallen, repent and do the first work. The church in Smyrna was encouraged to be fearless and be faithful. 'Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer ... Be faithful until death ...' (v.10). To the church in Pergamos [Comment 4], they were to repent from holding to the doctrine of Balaam, immorality and idolatry. 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly' (v.16). The church in Thyatira had a problem with the woman Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess teaching and seducing Christ's servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols (v.20). She was given an opportunity to repent (v.21). When the prophetess refused this opportunity, Christ warned of His judgment: 'Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death ...' (Rev. 2:22-23). Hebrews 10:31 states 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

Inyeneobong Ekot

From Greenock: Much has been written attempting to match the seven churches to different stages of the history of the church down the centuries. Since time marches on the current history must be remapped for Laodicea. An atlas shows that the order is a logical physical route for a messenger to take starting from the port of Ephesus having made the crossing from Patmos.

To each of the seven churches there is a very specific statement which fits in with the locality. For Ephesus it is '*Therefore remember from where you have fallen*'. In the temple of Artemis (Diana) was a stone image, which was either carved from or erected on a stone meteorite.

Local tradition was that the image 'fell from heaven' (Acts 19:35 NIV). This gave the 'supernatural' background to what was otherwise a local tourist attraction and money spinner. The temple was based on the worship of a fertility goddess. As always, the attacks of the adversary parallel Bible truth. Jesus came down from heaven—so did Diana, they presumed. The love of money rears its ugly head when personal income is threatened. The silver trinkets were a good source of wealth for the city.

The lax morals of the world today were far worse in 1st century AD Asia Minor.

Greek and Roman culture had fertility gods. In both Corinth and Ephesus temple worship was linked to prostitution with the priestesses. This was to be avoided at all cost. The Ephesus church had left their first love—that vibrant grateful love that the new convert has for the Saviour. Yet even that love is a pale imitation of the sacrificial love that has left our Saviour scarred for eternity, that we might be made righteous in Him.

‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof: neither present your members unto sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God’ (Rom. 6:12-13 RV).

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: *The seven churches* The Lord instructed John to write in a book the things he saw and send it to ‘the seven churches’ (Rev. 1:11). These churches were ‘in Asia’ (v.4), which is, in the Authorized Version, repeated in v.11; but ‘This is wanting in the principal MSS’ (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown). Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea were each in Asia Minor, Ephesus being by far the greatest. Other churches of God in Asia Minor included Troas (Acts 20:5-7), Colossae and Hierapolis (Col. 1:2; 4:13). As John Miller correctly points out, however, the apostle was to write, not to seven churches, but to ‘the seven churches’, which indicates that the other churches in Asia were no longer in existence, or no longer acknowledged by the Lord (*Notes on the New Testament Scriptures*, p.639) [Comment 5].

I know thy works’ Concerning the works of each church it is said, ‘I know’ (Rev. 2:2, 9,13,19; 3:1,8,15, KJV), where the Greek word *eido* properly means ‘to see’ and by implication means ‘to know’ (Strong)—thus expressing the Lord’s omniscience. To the Ephesians, who laboured patiently for His name’s sake and had not fainted, but who had left their first love, the Lord revealed Himself as the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. As the first and the last, who died and is alive, He warned the church in Smyrna of coming tribulation. To the church at Pergamum, He who had the sharp two-edged sword gave warning of the teaching of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans, and called them to repentance. Thyatira, commended by the Son of God for its love, faith, service and patience, is rebuked for toleration of the woman Jezebel (cp. 2 Kin. 9:1-10:36) and was then charged to hold fast till He comes (Rev. 2:25).

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): *Ephesus* is credited with hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans and for devotion to the things of God, but not to evil things; how they

had relentlessly laboured and even tested or examined to know whether those among them were of God and in God. They could not, however, keep and maintain their first love (Rev. 2:2-4).

Smyrna endured tribulation and poverty, and blasphemy of people from the synagogue of Satan. Their external difficulties were being faced with the blasphemy of the people from that satanic source.

Pergamum held fast the name of Jesus Christ and did not deny the faith even in the face of the martyrdom of Antipas, although she dwelt where 'Satan's seat is'. They were also faced with people who held the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans, i.e. covetousness and fornication, as well as the eating of things sacrificed to idols.

Thyatira had charity, service to God, faith, patience and works. They were always to see that their last work was more than the first, yet they were faced with Jezebel, when she was allowed to lead the saints into fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. In all these however – their strengths and weaknesses, God did not pamper them but told them the whole gospel truth, to repent and amend their sinful ways. So the warning comes to us today, too, and we have no excuse.

There are lots of deficits (possibly more than rewards) in chapters 2-3, and the remedies include

- (i) repentance
- (ii) standing firm
- (iii) unity among the brethren in church judgment
- (iv) going back to the source (Jesus Christ)
- (v) doing the first work
- (vi) not joining a multitude to do evil
- (vii) praying fervently, and
- (viii) reading and believing the word of God

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: Why write to just seven churches with no mention of others, given that the context of the book is clearly global? Do 'the *seven* churches' symbolize *all* the churches, depicting different generic issues or different epochs? But seven are *named*, and John also saw only seven lampstands and stars (1:12,16,20). The most obvious initial application is to seven churches.

Had the other churches in Asia and elsewhere ceased? Colossae, Hierapolis, Miletus(?) and Troas are not included, though testimony there is indicated elsewhere. Paul earlier wrote to the church in Ephesus and six other places. Long

after John wrote, Christian numbers continued to grow in a wide geographic dispersion; individual faith in Christ was strong to the point of martyrdom. Varying spiritual problems, however, beset John's neighbouring churches, not only doctrinal error that Paul foresaw (Acts 20:29), but lack of love. So, does 2:5 imply withdrawal of divine recognition in earthly collective testimony? Removal of a lampstand from 'its place' might have other implications if the vision is heavenly and primarily associated with the sanctuary. Notwithstanding Revelation 11:4 where the witnesses are lampstands, in the tabernacle and temple they were not related to outward earthly testimony but Godward divine service. We are not told where the lampstand would be moved to, but the word does not imply destruction. Perhaps loss of a place of nearness and privilege is meant? [Comment 6]

Did John write to living people, but with a primary application to future people? There is precedent in the Lord's teaching (Mat. 24-25). He speaks to the apostles as though they themselves would be in the events of e.g. Matthew 24:15,33-34. We would say His 'you' applies to future people, not merely witnesses of Jerusalem's AD 70 destruction. His coming to the air, the Rapture, is not introduced and they are addressed as though they would be part of post-Rapture events that signal His coming to earth (see *Finger of Prophecy*, ch. 8 and J. Miller, *Notes on Rev.11*). In the same way, John's words may foresee things after the Rapture. Those seeking to be faithful to Christ then will most need to know the signs of His coming *to the earth*, and will read as directly relevant to them *in* the Apocalypse (and Mat. 24,25, and Daniel's 70th week). For them, the visions of Revelation 1:19 commence with *their* present experience, from opening events John saw in the future Lord's day (if that term in 1:10 is not restricted to the first day of the week) to things happening thereafter [Comment 7]. John does not exclude those in the seven churches from predicted events in chapter 4 onward, but rather provides a context for them to overcome in them (e.g. note the fulfillment of 3:4 in 7:13-14, and see alignment of 2:10 with 12:11, and 2:26 and 3:21 with 20:4, and the overview of 22:6-21) [Comment 8]. This could potentially help us avoid conjecture about Antipas, Nicolaitans and Jezebel, who do not align to known people in church history, and explain why *only* an 'overcomer' (post-Rapture) may receive the assurance that *all believers* have now (e.g. not being hurt by the second death, 2:11; not being blotted from the book of life 3:5, etc.) [Comment 9]. An alternative would be that John knew many he wrote to were simply not believers, and hence not overcomers.

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: The churches to whom these letters are addressed were historical churches which were actually established in Asia at the time John wrote (about 95-96 AD). These seven were typical of the strengths, problems and

weaknesses of not only all of the early churches, but also of churches today.

Ephesus (2:1-7) was the largest city in Asia Minor and it was the capital of the province. Paul started the church here [Comment 10]. It was the Christian capital of Asia. There is so much good in this church that we are surprised to discover they had left that first love. But no amount of separation, sacrifice or service can make up for our lack of love towards the Lord. Jesus described this first love in His summary of the Law in Matthew 22:37—love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. To this church which was in danger of losing its life as a church, Christ came as sustainer of life. He holds the star of this church, its angel, in His hand. He comes to them now as the one ‘walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands’.

Smyrna (2:8-11) The name Smyrna [possibly—*Eds.*] comes from ‘*myrra*’ which is a bitter herb, a suitable name for a church facing persecution. Some 35 miles north of Ephesus lies the port city of Smyrna, which was known as one of the great cities of the region and as a faithful follower of Rome. Paul may have visited this wealthy city when he spent over two years in nearby Ephesus (Acts 19:8,10). To this persecuted church (v.10) Christ here commends their works and their tribulation for His name’s sake. He assures them that they are rich in heavenly rewards although they are financially poor. Since Christ will be the final judge of every man (Mat. 7:21-23; Rom. 14:10-12) His audit of their account is of supreme significance. If we are experiencing a difficult time, we should not turn our ways from God. We have to trust Jesus and remember our heavenly reward (see Rev. 22:12-14). The overcoming one will have immunity from ‘the second death’ (Rev. 20:11-15). The one way to avoid this second and final death is by receiving Christ as Saviour and thus allowing His death to pay our penalty (Rev. 12:11; Acts 16:31). No fault is mentioned regarding this poor but faithful church [Comment 11].

Thyatira (2:18-29) was a small city in Asia Minor. While we have no certain account of the planting there of the church, it may be that it was an indirect result of the influence of Lydia. We remember how she, the ‘seller of purple of the city of Thyatira’, was one of those at the prayer meeting held on the banks of the river in Philippi. There her heart was opened to receive the truth and obey it, and she and all her household were baptized and received into the church of God. Verse 19 gives us the impression that all is well in the church; but like the saints in Pergamum, the believers in Thyatira tolerated sin in the church: idolatry and immorality usually go together. Not everybody in this church fellowship was guilty of sin, and the Lord did not warn them. Instead, He encouraged them to hold to the truth and be faithful.

B. V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: *Rewards awarded to each of the overcomers*

Ephesus The privilege is of eating the fruits of the tree of Life, which we suppose means the tree that grows on each side of the river of the water of Life in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2; Luke 23:43). God did not allow Adam to eat this fruit in the Garden of Eden, and he was driven away for his disobedience (Gen. 3:22-24). Here this reward is given for hard work and endurance for the sake of God's name.

Smyrna For the crown of life they have to be faithful to the end, even unto death. It was promised to those who love Him and so endure temptation (James 1:12). To those who withstand and are faithful even unto death, the additional reward is that they would not be hurt of the 'second death' (lake of fire Rev. 20:14; everlasting destruction 2 Thes.1:9) [See Comment 9].

Pergamum The hidden manna is Christ Himself (Ex.16:15-16; 33-35; John 6:49-51). The white stone with a new name indicates approval for not renouncing their faith even in the days of persecution in the city. This confirms the right to attend the marriage feast of the Lamb. New names are those given by the Lord, as in Genesis 17:5 to Abraham, and 32:28 to Jacob. Also, the Lord assures His protection by the sharp double-edged sword which is His Word (Heb. 4:12) [Comment 12].

Thyatira The authority to rule over the nations and of the Morning Star (again it is the Lord Christ, Rev. 22:16) is reward for their love, faith, ministry and perseverance for holding fast until the coming of Son of God (Heb. 3:14; Mat. 28:18). The overcomers, even in our day, are united in Christ in persecutions now, and after His coming they will rule with Him.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *The significant description of Christ* It is a refreshingly riveting truth of Scripture, the incarnation of Jesus Christ: 'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh' (1 Tim. 3:16 NKJV). It is the fulcrum on which so many powerful truths of Christianity turn: 'For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15). And: 'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same ...' and what follows (Heb. 2:14-18). The extensive reference to Scripture above is critical as even the Old Testament shows Him in the archetypal role of a kinsman redeemer 'In all their affliction ...' (Is. 63:9).

To the Ephesian church, who seemingly had everything going for them but had forsaken the most essential thing, 'their first love' (v. 4), He presents Himself as the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks in the midst of the seven churches. He is the symbol and essence of perfection: 'for all the promises

of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen' (2 Cor. 1:20). He is the Judge of all the earth who does right, always (Gen.18:25) and to Him God does not give the Spirit by measure (John 3:34). Jesus is also the embodiment of love: 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

To the blameless and persecuted church in Smyrna, He reveals Himself as the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life. His description of Himself covers the spectrum of all that the Smyrna saints would ever experience. In His fullness as the First and the Last He is sufficient to meet all their needs, and as one who was dead and is now alive He is not unmindful of the ultimate sacrifice they might make; yet it shall not be in vain.

To the church in Pergamum in the debilitating grip of spiritual compromise, Christ presents Himself as the one who has the sharp two-edged sword (v.12). Hebrews 4:12-13 is quite instructive: Strict adherence to God's word is the only antidote to compromise: 'Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You' (Ps. 119:11; see also 2 Tim. 3:16).

To the corrupt and sexually deviant Thyatira church, the Lord shows Himself as one who has eyes like flames of fire and feet like fine brass (v.18). The Lord is always pure in His ways and just in His judgement (Ps.18:3; 2 Sam. 22:31; Heb. 4:13).

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Cromer): The expression 'came to life' in relation to the Lord's resurrection is a relatively passive one. Scripture consistently uses the word 'raised' (as in 1 Cor. 15:4, Acts 13:30, etc.). There are two sides to the Lord's resurrection, each of which lays emphasis on the active involvement of both God the Father and God the Son: i.e., the action of God in raising Him, plus the active participation of the Lord Jesus Himself: 'I have power to lay down my life and I have power to take it again' (John 10:17).

J.J.

2. (Cromer): In your tabulation of Pergamum, it is difficult to visualise a new character being given by the Lord to the overcomer, rather than a name; after all we shall have put on the image of the heavenly and be like the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2).

3. (Cromer): Referencing Thyatira, as the Lord Himself is described as 'the morning star' in Revelation 22:16, assuredly it is a statement of the overcoming believer who has 'held fast' (Rev. 2:25) in faithfulness to Him to the very end,

enjoying His personal companionship from time to time in the coming age.

R.B.F.

4. (Eket): First, welcome back, friends in Idua-Eket! ‘Pergamum’ is the English norm, taken from Latin. If we use the Greek form ‘*Pergamos*’ we’d have to use ‘*Ephesos*’ also.

M.A.

5. (Halifax): The presence of the definite article in verses 4, 11 and 20 is highlighting the fact that there were seven distinct churches of God in Asia Minor who would be the direct recipients of the book that was to be circulated among them at that time. It is pointing out the particular object of the exercise rather than that of exclusivity.

R.B.F.

The natural reading of the article in 1:4 seems to me as Halifax paper states—the seven churches that were extant in Asia Minor when John was instructed to write. This then underlies verses 11 and 20. The first sentence from fellow editor is also true, but does not negate the valid sense ‘those seven which are in Asia’. What we cannot deduce, however, is that these were the sole survivors of the entire Fellowship—most unlikely for other reasons.

6. (Mount Forest): It is hard to accept that the lampstand in Tabernacle and Temple had no earthly witness. Balaam’s view of the Tabernacle shows this great Tent, with the order of the people set out around it, was a witness beyond Israel, and the prophet would naturally expect a very special light within upon service rendered to God. The beauties of the house thus illuminated would be described to the people as the priests and Levites returned from their courses of duty and taught from the law—an important part of their function. The Psalms of Zion we studied a few years ago are evidence that the Temple servants overflowed with this theme dear to their hearts.

The lampstand removed from its place is symbolic of the function of a church of God to be part of ‘the pillar and ground of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15 RV), part also of the full gospel that believers were called to stand for and tell out in this dark world (Phil. 2:15-16) on behalf of its true Light. Without adherence to the authority of God’s design in His word the congregation could no longer hold its place as a church of God in the Biblical sense.

M.A.

I think we can safely reject the idea that the seven churches are representative of dispensations or epochs throughout church history. Certainly some features of deep concern meriting the censure of the Lord Jesus, such as tolerating wrong teaching and allowing a place of influence to be taken by divisive immoral characters, are applicable to more than one church, e.g. Pergamum and Thyatira,

with the mention of Balaam and Jezebel.

We simply do not know the circumstances prevailing at that time, or afterwards, of other churches to which you refer in your second paragraph. It is difficult to imagine any other conclusion than termination of the testimony of those churches which fail to act in repentance, thereby benefiting from the present remedy and future rewards offered by the Lord.

R.B.F.

7. (Mount Forest): For reasons why *the Lord's day of Revelation 1:10* was the first day of the week, see January issue, p.197, Comment 7. The paper's argument at this point, however, holds good irrespective of the reference of 'the Lord's day'. John was on the Lord's day shown the Lord in glory, and charged to write the letters of Chh. 2-3. The visions of the far future described in Chh. 4-22 may well have taken more days for him to see and record.

8. (Mount Forest): We agree that the events described from Ch. 6 forwards can encourage and challenge the saints of this dispensation, but to take one example, the Church the Body of Christ will have been taken to be with the Lord before the faithful on the earth will reach the blessedness portrayed in Ch. 7. That throng who are given white robes and palm branches will have believed and witnessed during 'the great tribulation' (7:14). The same phrase is used by the Lord of the period that follows the desecration of the newly built Temple (Mat. 24:15,21), and relates to Israel and those who support her. This coheres with Jeremiah's prophecy of 'Jacob's trouble' (30:7-10 NKJV). See also the 'time of trouble' in Daniel 12:1, again related to Israel.

9. (Mount Forest): Those who overcome and will receive the Lord's promises in Chh. 2-3 are surely believers like any others of this dispensation who belong to the Body of Christ, but distinctively earn those blessings through their commitment to the truth. Immunity to 'the second death', however, is common to all believers in Christ, but surely would be specially significant to those who were to be persecuted to the point of physical death in Smyrna (see v.10 ESV, NIV, RV), and to their families. Those of Israel and their supporters who turn to the Lord and trust in Jesus as the Messiah after the Rapture are not yet in view in these chapters.

M.A.

There can be no doubt, surely, that the primary application of the Lord's message to each church, contained in one written volume, was for saints of that day. They also have a relevance to us today, similarly, in the testimony of Churches of God, as to our own responsibilities in divine service. Could there also be some importance of meaning to those in a future day who believe the gospel of the kingdom and are prepared to endure to the end following the rapture of the Church the body of Christ (Mat. 24:13-14)?

One would hope that may be the case.

The rewards outlined for individual overcomers likewise are future. The two that would seem incongruous in terms of what the believer in the Saviour in the present days of grace is assured of, despite the possibility of failure of service, viz. not being hurt of the second death, and not having his/her name blotted out of the book of life (Rev. 2:11 & 3:5) are reassurances of all that awaits us in our eternal home through the vicarious work of the Saviour, of which we can never be deprived, but can appreciate more and more now in our lives as an incentive to holy living.

R.B.F.

10. (Podagatlapalli): *Planting of the church in Ephesus* We pay tribute also to the preparatory work of Aquila and Priscilla, who were with Paul on his first visit, and the testimony of Apollos before he went to Corinth (Acts 18:18-26).

M.A.

11. (Podagatlapalli): Not being hurt of the second death cannot be the same concept as not suffering or experiencing the second death since there is no substance in a promise to overcomers of something which (to our eternal gratitude) is ours by Christ's work anyway. But the world, the flesh and the devil of 1 John 2 can affect adversely the believer's life of service if we do not overcome the evil one destined for the lake of fire.

12. (Ravupalem): There is correlation between the 'name written which no one knows but He Himself' given to the triumphant Lord Jesus subsequent to (but not consequent on) the marriage supper of the Lamb, and the name on the white stone given to overcomers, which likewise only they know. But the white stone for overcomers is not given at the marriage feast as the Catholic Church doctrine holds, for the marriage feast is for the bride of Christ saved by grace alone and is not of reward.

P.D.

Question . . .

From Aberdeen: In Revelation 2:20, how should we understand the reference to 'Jezebel'?

. . . Answer

It is extremely unlikely this was the real name of the person to whom the Lord refers and gives the name Jezebel, with its obvious connotation to the wily, devious, and sheer wickedness, of the wife of Ahab king of Israel. She was a Baal worshipper and would stop at nothing, slaying the Lord's prophets (1 Kin. 18:13) and relentlessly hounding Elijah (19:2). Her evil influence on the throne of Israel was brought to an end by her being thrown from the palace window by some of her courtiers, where her fallen body was trodden by horses and eaten by dogs (1 Kin. 18:13; 21:23; 2 Kin. 9:33-35).

R.B.F.

Cromer paper makes the valid and logical suggestion that the name Jezebel is symbolical, since it is highly unlikely to have been chosen by a Jew. This was a woman who, even when given opportunity to repent, like the adulterous woman of Proverbs 30:20 metaphorically wiped her mouth and said I have done nothing wrong. Upon those who so blatantly reject God's mercy, the fearful words of Hebrews 10 apply: 'For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries' (vv.26-27 ESV).

J.J.



New Testament churches in Asia Minor

Published by and obtainable from
Hayes Press, The Barn, Flaxlands, Royal Wootton Bassett,
Wiltshire, England SN4 8DY