

# Seven Letters

The words of Jesus do not end in the Gospels, in fact, the most detailed prophecies regarding the age in which we live are found elsewhere. Are we nearing the end of this age? If so, how close are we? The time has come to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

One of my biggest missteps in reading the Bible is assuming the obvious and leaving it at that. God has written His Word to appeal to various IQs from the simple child to the physicist; providing answers to both. Sometimes I would read a scripture, conclude the obvious literal view and go on to the next, not realizing there is something more to be found underneath if only I would dig. So it is with the words of Jesus. He speaks, and it is obvious what He means. But stop and analyze it, and all of a sudden patterns are seen, Old Testament types are confirmed, parallels are drawn and the depth of all scripture is but touched.

So it is with the seven letters to the seven churches found in Revelation two and three. Upon first reading we would say, "Oh, these are just seven letters written to seven churches in Asia". Then we read, "He that has an ear, let him hear." and we realize that it is deeper than that, it is a parallel to our lives as Christians and that we can take on the traits of these churches. Upon the next reading, you see a pattern from one to seven, and how your own church, fellowship or Christian band has gradually been moving through these seven patterns of ministerial decomposition. We dig down further and we strike a well of parables culminating from Matthew 13.

Each of these "kingdom" parables parallels perfectly with the seven letters and amplify their meaning. Upon learning that the phrase, "the kingdom of heaven" is a direct terminology regarding life in Christ on this earth, you then get the clue that the seven letters to seven churches may actually represent seven periods of church history—pay dirt!

## **The Outline**

Before I begin any large writing assignment, I usually start with an outline. My bold heading like the one above usually reflects what my outline consisted of. Jesus did the same (albeit brief) regarding His book, Revelation. In chapter 1 verse 19 He dictates to John,

"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

John did as he was told, he wrote of the things that he had seen, that is Revelation 1:10 to 18; the things that are, i.e. the church ages seen in Rev. 1 and 2; and the things that will take place after that period as seen in Rev. 3 to 22. In this study, I wish only to focus on the things that are, that is, the church from the day of Pentecost to the church of today. How does Jesus feel toward them that use His name? Is there hope in their future, or disaster?

## **Ephesus (33 — 63 A.D.)**

Jesus writes His first letter to a city called Ephesus, which is the Greek of *Ephesos* or "desirable", it is an affectionate word of longing like "maiden of love" or "darling".

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'" - Rev. 1:1-7

We begin by recognizing in what capacity Jesus is speaking to this church. He identifies Himself to an earlier verse as one who not only is in the midst of the church, but holds it in his right hand as well. Nothing escapes His notice nor does anything touch it beyond His permission.

Jesus recognizes the works of the early apostolic church and commends them for their work within the body as chronicled in the book of Acts. But later, the apostolic members began to bicker and posture one another within the church. Agendas were brought forth and sin was tolerated in the name of compassionate liberalism. These were some of the reasons for the writings of Paul within the New Testament. Jesus encapsulated the entire attitude as "leaving their first love", that is, Jesus. Rather, they turned to love of position, of doctrine or of the Law. Each of which could cause the light of their witness and testimony to be removed; and for some, it did.

But even through all this, there was one thing they did right; they did not tolerate "the deeds of the Nicolaitans". The Nicolaitans were extremist who believed that because the body was inherently evil, they could indulge in any form of deviant behavior without any consequence to their spirit. These are the "deeds of the Nicolaitans and were violently rejected by the early apostles."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus then points the finger at the reader and admonishes them to learn from the church of Ephesus. What pleased Jesus? What displeased Him? Then examine yourself and those with whom you spend your time. I will only mention this exhortation once because it is not the focus on this study. But when we get to the final letter, you will realize just how close to the end of this age we really are. Your main concern at that point, is to make sure that your soul is prepared for that day.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:13, 1 Corinthians 6:13-18, 1 Thessalonians 4:3

These seven letters also parallel the seven kingdom parables found in Matthew 13. The first of these parables speak of a sower.

"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

It is clear that this kingdom parable is a picture of the early apostolic church as seen in the book of acts and documented in the epistles. The emphasis is on evangelism with fruit of all types.<sup>2</sup>

### **Smyrna (64 — 311 A.D.)**

The next letter to be dictated by Jesus is addressed to a city called *Smyrna*. The name Smyrna is derived from the perfume "Myrrh". Myrrh is harvested from a plant that is called the "Rock Rose" because of its ability to appear out of the cracks of boulders. The plant is stripped, beaten and pierced until the liquid gum comes forth as fragrant oil. This oil is then used as perfume, medicine and as a burial preparation. Myrrh becomes a picture of persecution and how God receives it as a sweet smelling perfume.

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, `These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

'I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'"

Jesus immediately relates Himself as one who was persecuted to the death, but that it does not end there. He is also the Resurrection and the Life<sup>3</sup>, thereby comforting the persecuted regarding their plight.

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<sup>2</sup> An interesting note, there are seven churches addressed in the New Testament (Ephesians, Philippians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Thessalonians and Colossians) and seven individuals (Titus, Peter, Jude, Timothy, James, John and Philemon). Each of these epistles parallels both the "angel" the letter is addressed to and the "church" to which it refers. In the case of this letter to Ephesus, the book of Titus is the "angel" and, of course, the epistle to the Ephesians would parallel the "church" is is addressed.

<sup>3</sup> John 11:25

Jesus recognizes the pain they had to endure, but though they were in poverty because of their persecutors, they were rich in what mattered most—faith! To God faith is much more precious than gold because it is an eternal commodity.<sup>4</sup> Who are some of these persecutors? Jesus says they are a people "who call themselves Jews but are not". As a lover of the Jewish people, I need to make a point of clarification. The title *Jew* is a contraction of the word *Judah* meaning "praise". These people, to whom Jesus is referring, may have a Jewish mother, but because they spend their time trying to destroy what Messiah has nurtured, they reveal themselves as the congregation of Satan<sup>5</sup> and not Jewish in heart. Many of these Jews were high in the priesthood hierarchy including one of notable infamy, Saul of Tarsus.

Jesus continues to reveal what is to happen in this period of history and notes that it will last a period of "ten days". The phrase *ten days* in Greek is *deca-hemera* or "ten periods of time". The Roman persecution was divided into 10 periods based on the ruler in power<sup>6</sup> over a span of 247 years.

Jesus ends His letter with words of hope, that death has no dominion over the Christian<sup>7</sup> and that in the end they shall receive a crown of reward<sup>8</sup> and will not be touched by the second death seen in Revelation 21:8.<sup>9</sup>

The second of the kingdom parables re-enforces the idea of this persecuted church.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

If you read the epistles during the days of the persecution, you will notice the mention of those who put on the appearance of being Christian, but are really nothing more than fruitless weeds.<sup>10</sup> Jesus exhorts us to be patient in persecution and to beware of those who appear to be Christian but do not show it in their fruit.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 1:7

<sup>5</sup> John 8:42-45

<sup>6</sup> The ten rulers from 64 - 311 AD were Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Septimus Severus, Maximus the Thracian, Decius, Valerian and Diocletian Galerius.

<sup>7</sup> John 11:25-26, I Corinthians 15:55

<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 4:8

<sup>9</sup> As noted in footnote#2, for Smyrna the book of Peter is the "angel" and the epistle to the Philippians would parallel the "church" is addressed. Read these two for more insight regarding this foreseen era of church history.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 16:17, Galatians 1:8-9, 1 John 2:19, 2 Peter 2:1, Galatians 2:4

## **Pergamos (312 — 1054 A.D.)**

The third letter is to the city of Pergamos. The name Pergamos means "of much marriage", or more precisely, "second marriage". Which ever is closest, it is understood that the name was to denote its all-encompassing diversity of idol worship, but paints the beginning of a historic religion that would mix both pagan ritual and Christianity.

"...to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, `These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

The first object that Jesus points to is the two-edged sword which is an object representing the Word of God.<sup>11</sup> The Bible is going to be center of attention at this point in history. The canon of scripture is complete, while at the same time it was being hidden from view from the ordinary man.

In 312 AD, the emperor Constantine ended the mass persecution of Christians. But instead of opening the Bible for all to study and absorb, he called for the first ecumenical council at Nicene and created the Nicene Creed. Those who departed from its dictates were regarded as heretics. In the west, Rome was being established as the throne of the Christian church. The ensuing power struggle with the Byzantine Empire in the east required more converts in order to receive more influence, power and income. To win scores of converts amongst the idol-worshipping Roman world, the Greek deities were replaced by images of saints and apostles, and the sprinkling of water over crowds of people became the accepted mode of mass baptism.

The infusion of idol worship within a monotheistic society is how Balaam taught Balak to cause the children of Israel to stumble; by placing the people of God in the middle of the Acacia groves where idols were carved and worshipped.<sup>12</sup> Balaam also was a "profit for hire"<sup>13</sup> which seems to point to the use of "indulgences" or "paying for the remission of sins" used to increase the coffers of the Holy Roman Empire.

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<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12

<sup>12</sup> Micah 6:5

<sup>13</sup> Numbers 22:16-17, 2 Peter 2:15

Again we see the Nicolaitans rear their head. But this time it is not the deeds of the Nicolaitans, but their doctrine. A good insight into their belief system is found within their name. The word *nicos* is Greek for "victory" or "conquer" and *laos* meaning "tribe of people", so the name Nicolaitans means "conquering power over the people". This insight illustrates the hold that the Holy Roman Empire held over its converts. Defy it, and you were excommunicated and thus prevented in the partaking of the eucharis, and thereby losing ones salvation.

This power was also exercised by translating the Bible into Latin and keeping it locked behind cathedral gates, thus inaccessible to the average man. Thus the word of the Popes became the word of God with no way of arguing against it via the scripture. This Jesus hates as seen regarding His attitude toward the Scribes and Pharisees who made use of the same practices.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, the powerless people, in want of this relative salvation, became the vanquished masses of this new monstrosity. The third kingdom parable makes this clear with the illustration of a mustard seed.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

Upon first reading this parable, it seems as if it speaks of good things. On the contrary, a mustard plant does indeed grow from a small seed, but only into a thin foxtail-like stalk. The true Christian church has been illustrated as individual strands of fruit-bearing wheat<sup>15</sup>, but this thing has become something against nature. The birds that nest in its branches are not necessarily good as well. Jesus exhorted the disciples to listen closely to the first parable because it contained the key codes to interpret the rest of the parables.<sup>16</sup> We see that "birds" is he that swoops down and steals the "Word of God" away from those desiring salvation;<sup>17</sup> a clear picture of the Holy Roman hierarchy.

To those who chose not bow to these self-appointed masters, Jesus made the promise, "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat." Manna was the bread that came down from heaven in the wilderness, Jesus pointed to Himself as being the Bread of Life.<sup>18</sup> So the reward for those who overcame the "only true church" attitude, He gives His body, which flies in the face of eucharis.

He is also given a white stone with a new name. Stones with names written on them is what is seen on the breastplate of the high priest<sup>19</sup> and seem to say that we are not to answer to "priests", but that we are to become priests as in Revelation 1:6 "...and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father."

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 23:13-41

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 3:12, Matthew 13:25

<sup>16</sup> Mark 4:13

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 13:4 & 19

<sup>18</sup> John 6:31-58

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 39:14

### Thyatira (1200 A.D. — present)

The word *Thyatira* means "odor of affliction" in Greek. This name is a contrast to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which to God is a sweet smelling savor.<sup>20</sup> Of all the doctrines we could get wrong, the sacrifice that Jesus made for our sins is one you do not want to mess with. As we will see, Jesus comes in burning judgment in regard to this error.

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, `These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 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, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come.

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations `He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Jesus immediately identifies Himself as one coming in hot judgment. Brass and fire are both idioms for judgment; they are also the two main elements for the altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle. Again we see the sacrifice of Christ being the center of focus. This may be because of the doctrine that grew out of the Holy Roman Empire; that of transubstantiation of the eucharis.<sup>21</sup> This twisting of Christ's communion table would not be a sweet-smelling savor, but rather an odor of affliction as Thyatira's name denotes.

However, Jesus is not in want of recognizing the good this church age has accomplished in His name. The Catholic Church, born out of the Holy Roman Empire, has had good deeds follow her in the form of hospitals, missions, soup kitchens, schools, monasteries and orphanages.

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<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 5:2

<sup>21</sup> Transubstantiation - The doctrine that the bread and wine of the eucharis are mystically transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Through this act, Christ is crucified anew for the remission of sins. This violates Hebrews 7:27 and Romans 6:10

But, unfortunately, the letter turns toward a woman of infamous background in order to address a doctrine of inordinate affection. Jesus uses the most evil woman in all of scripture to point out corruption within the Catholic Church. We will start with the entirely man-made doctrine regarding the worship of the Virgin Mary. Whatever the rationale given by those in the Catholic Church, there is no scripture that remotely upholds it. On the contrary, when a disciple even suggested the adoration of Mary, Jesus refocused emphasis on the Word of God.<sup>22</sup> For Mary, blessed and highly favored as she was, was still just a mortal creation, but the Word is eternal.<sup>23</sup>

There have been 410 visions and apparitions of Mary this past century, 7 of which have been approved by the Vatican. Several of these visitations have confirmed the need for the "faithful" to pray to her directly. Paul warns,

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.  
Galatians 1:7-9

The Catholic church' veneration of Mary to the position of the "Queen of Heaven"<sup>24</sup> is a by-product of mixing the doctrines of Christ with the pagan mysticism of Mithraism with their goddess Magna Mater (mother of god) as center of their adoration.



8 The fourth kingdom parable re-enforces the corrupt nature of this doctrine.

"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

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<sup>22</sup> Luke 11:27-28

<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 1:25

<sup>24</sup> Prayer of Consecration of Mary begins, "O Mary, Virgin most powerful and Mother of mercy, *Queen of Heaven* and Refuge of sinners..." The intercessor also recites, "Thou art the *Queen of heaven*, the mistress of the universe; in short, thou art the Mother of God.

Leaven is a type of hypocritical sin,<sup>25</sup> and this woman is covertly kneading it into three measures of meal. Three measures of meal symbolize a fellowship offering toward the trinity. We see this take place in Genesis 18 when Abraham speaks with an epiphany of Jesus. Sarah prepares three measures of meal for this time of fellowship.

The worship of the "Queen of Heaven" is condemned in Jeremiah, and the parallel with the fourth kingdom parable is overwhelming.

"Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and *the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven*; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger..." - Jeremiah 7:17-18<sup>26</sup>

But let us examine the life of Jezebel more closely. She was a Canaanite who brought idol worship back into Israel. Could this be in pointing to the idolatry found within the Catholic Church even today?

She falsely accused Naboth and condemned him to death in order to steal his vineyard for her husband. Could this be pointing to the inquisitions that falsely accused and murdered hundreds then seizing their land?

She murdered the prophets who spoke against her rule in Judea. Could this point to those the Catholic Church burned at the stake those who tried to appose her rule?

In His letter, Jesus recognized that not all who are in the Catholic Church would hold to its corrupted doctrine. To them he said, "I will put on you no other burden." which, in a way is sad, for the burden of Jesus is learning of Him and finding rest. For Jesus said,

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."  
-Matthew 11:28-30

There are those within the Catholic religion who have not been corrupted by the dictates of the Popes or the priests. To these Jesus says to hold your ground till He comes. Almost as if to needle the Papal hierarch, Jesus promises to reward the "undefiled" Catholic with power and authority to rule over the nations in the latter days.

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<sup>25</sup> Luke 12:1

<sup>26</sup> See also Jeremiah 44:17-25

## End Times Churches

I'm stopping at midpoint to bring up an important observation. The letter to the church at Thyatira is different from the first three letters in that it contains language that speaks of the latter days. The phrases "I will cast her...into *great tribulation*", "...hold fast what you have *till I come*." and "...he who overcomes, and keeps My works *until the end*" all have "last days" connotations. It is apparent by the language that the Catholic Church will be around during the end times, which is very evident today. As we delve into the last three letters, we will see that they too will be around in the days of Jesus' return.

### Sardis (1290 A.D.— present)

The name *Sardis* means "red stone" and its gem namesake was used in the creation of signet rings. These rings were very valuable, more by what they represented than by what material they were manufactured, that is, a signet representing authority, reputation and property. We also see within the church of Sardis the use of names. In kind, these names could be Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Anglican, Reformed, Presbyterian and Anabaptist. Here is what Jesus proclaims

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, `These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:

"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Jesus mentions the word "name" four times. Now replace the word *name* with its synonym *denomination*. We can now clearly see the age of the Protestant church and its myriad of factions— "I know your works, that you have a *denomination* that you are alive, but you are dead; You have a few *denominations* even in Sardis; I will not blot out his *denomination* from the Book of Life; I will confess his *denomination* before My Father."

How well have these denominations performed as representatives of Jesus' name? I believe Jesus takes exception to churches using His name on the outside, but inside there is no spirit of repentance, joy in worship or conviction toward salvation. Anti-semitism via Martin Luther tainted the roots of the Reformation; German liberal theologians that denigrated the Word of God to mere philosophy fodder; Later, political correctness and the need to increase its dwindling number led to watering down of the scriptures to ease conviction of the conscience.

But Jesus reminds the Protestant church, that He has the signet of the churches on His hand in the form of the seven stars. Nothing escapes his eyes, not even those denominations that do things for love of the gospel and not for the offering plate tallies. These church congregations shall be clothed in the righteousness of Christ and not the righteousness of their doctrinal hypothesis or textual criticisms.

Note the warning of Jesus: "Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." This is an allusion to the rapture of the church. (A teaching of the Bible rejected by many Protestant denominations.) This shows that the Protestant church will be around when the tribulation begins, just as the Catholic Church will as well. The Protestants are urged to "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent" They received, via the Reformation, access to the newly printed common language King James and Gutenberg Bible. They received by revelation of the Word of God freedom from the bondage of man's tradition and regulations.

If we, as a church body, return to the Word of God, we become a treasure in the midst of the world. The same world that Jesus gave all that He had including His life and blood to purchase. Just as the fifth kingdom parable illustrates.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Which brings to remembrance of the words of Paul to the church elders in Asia saying, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."<sup>27</sup> Be watchful and ready church of Sardis, for your Lord comes quickly.

### **Philadelphia (1940 A.D.— present)**

Now comes the church that enters like a breath of fresh air. The name *Philadelphia* means "brotherly love" and as one who has experienced the Catholic church for five years and the Protestant church for six, I can tell you in truth that there is a vast difference when you find a body of believers who love each other unconditionally. I was born again in the height of the "Jesus People" movement; and though we had our squabbles and disagreements, I would never trade those days.

It is hard to put a label on the church of Philadelphia, because this church age is not a denomination, but rather a movement of people peppered throughout the nations. You will recognize them when they are seen praying for each other, singing praise songs on a guitar, leading Bible studies in drug rehabs and prisons, or just sitting on the beach leaning against his surfboard and reading the Gospel of John. To these, Jesus writes the following letter.

"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

"These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens. I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie--indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Jesus identifies Himself as "He who has the key of David". The key of David is the key to the royal front door, so to speak. There is great authority connected to it, for both here and in Isaiah 22:22, the key of David and open a door or close a door permanently. But in the case of the church of Philadelphia, this door is open. Many have speculated what this door represents; some say it is an open door for evangelism. If this is so, why is no door mentioned in the first two letters where the greatest evangelism took place?

The key is in the keys. The door to evangelism is open via the "keys of the kingdom" such as those given to Peter<sup>28</sup> and utilized in Acts. The "kingdom" speaks of the church age, just as the seven kingdom parables in Matthew 13 represent the seven dispensations of the church body.

The key of David is different in that it is connected to the name of a king, so it has royal implications. It is very clear that this key is mated with the door mentioned later, "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it". The question is, where does it lead? If we jump ahead to Revelation 4:1 we will find our answer; it is the heavenly realm. Now it is clear that the key of David is the front door key to the very throne room of God. This open door is what is called the rapture<sup>29</sup> of the church.

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew 16:19

<sup>29</sup> Gr. *Harpazo* or "caught up" see 1 Thess. 4-5, 2 Thess. 2, Isaiah 26:19-21, 1 Cor. 15:53

Again we see the term "synagogue of Satan" used to describe a group of people who "say they are Jews" but are not Jews. It could be referring to secular Jews who do not believe in God or the Torah. However, the timing of this rebuke corresponds with a twisted doctrine that states that because the Jews rejected Messiah Yeshua, they have been disqualified to receive God's promises; and that the church is now "Spiritual Israel". One need only read Romans 11 to see this anti-Semitic doctrine for what it is, a blatant twisting of the truth. The church has been given a dispensation of time to repent and receive the good news. But God has not cast aside the Jews, Israel or Jerusalem. There is a master plan, and we are almost to the climax of history.

Again we see an emphasis on the "latter days" when Jesus states that He will "keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world" If the trial is upon the whole world, how will we be kept from it? This is a confirmation regarding the translation through the "door" of the rapture. We are admonished to hold on so we will not lose the crown given to us in Revelation 4:4. It will be a glorious homecoming, and we shall become an integral part of the new Jerusalem and the new temple.

Our translation from one realm into another is seen in the sixth kingdom parable.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

We, like the pearl, will be snatched away from our realm below, taken high and into the outer world only to have our being sold to the One who paid the highest price of all. It is interesting to note, that pearls start out as a worthless grain of sand that becomes an irritant in its new domicile. Is not the Philadelphia church that way today with its peaceful protests against abortion clinics, its lobbying against pornographic exploitation, its radical views on prayer and the Bible in schools and its painful call for accountability in the media? The response of the irritated is to gloss-over all that we say and do until the pain of our actions is felt no more. So is the case today. It is not that we are ineffective; we are now a pearl ready for harvesting. Get ready Philadelphia; the diver is on His way!

## Laodicea (1970 - end)

Now we come to the last church, the church of Laodicea, whose name arrogantly translates, "the rights of the people".

"To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,  
`These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, `I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' --and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-- "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me.

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""

Jesus pulls out the stops in regard to His person; He is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness and the Beginning of the creation of God.<sup>30</sup> These titles are anything but lukewarm and stand in sharp contrast to Laodicea.

There are many churches today that are lukewarm, and perhaps they fall into this category. However, we have been talking church ages, and this final one is more detailed in its description than you may assume on first glance. To reveal this church assemblage, look closely at the repeated imagery regarding the mouth and speaking words, "I will vomit you out of My mouth", "Because you say", "I counsel you", "I rebuke and chasten", "If anyone hears My voice", "eat with him, and he with Me".

In Sardis we saw the repeated imagery of "names and denominations" and Philadelphia we saw repeated imagery of "keys and doors", in Laodicea it is uses of the mouth. Today's church has also found uses for the mouth in way of "positive confession" or "taking dominion" or "name it and claim it". This breed of churches that are so prevalent today, make boast that you have the right to be healthy, the right to be wealthy and the right to take dominion over calamity. Because you have these rights, to be in poverty or sick or affirmed is a lack of faith. Jesus made this attitude clear "you say, `I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" But notice that they *say* they are rich and wealthy. But in reality, they are not, for Jesus replies, "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"

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<sup>30</sup> Don't let this throw you, Jesus is not a "creation of God", the word for "creation" in Greek is *ktisis* or "foundation". So the literal meaning of the above is, the beginning of the building of God, or the foundation. This clarification corresponds perfectly with passages in Isaiah 28:16, 1 Corinthians 3:11 and Eph 2:20.

So what is true wealth? Jesus says that it is gold refined by the fire. Paul confirms this,

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.-1 Corinthians 3:11-13

Here we see Jesus confirmed as the first creation of God, or literally, the laid foundation. We are saved, but our works are judged in the last days. That which is precious is refined by fire, but that which is worthless is burned up.

In contrast to the Laodiceans "worthless riches" is Smyrna's "precious poverty". Jesus said to Smyrna, "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)". The faith of Smyrna was proven to be gold through affliction and was thus purified by its crucible of persecution. Laodicea seeks to *speaks* its faith and gold into existence. One pastor locked himself in a tower and said God would kill him if a pledge of a million dollars did not come into his "ministry" by the end of an appointed time. Another affluent pastor, when asked what is needed for salvation, replied, "Speak positive and do good". Television has provided them a forum, but Jesus says their eyes are infected and they are in need of healing. The only way the healing will come is if Jesus is invited in and allow to fellowship their midst.

Look closely at what Jesus says to Laodicea,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me.

Could this be the door of the rapture that is now closed to Laodicea? Is Jesus giving Laodicea the ability to open the door that is shut? If this is true, Laodicea cannot enter, however, Jesus will come to them. Yet Jesus, with the keys of Death, Hell and David, will not force this one open. Nor will he force His way into the unwilling heart.

The final kingdom parable of Matthew 13 tells us that this church age will go into the final judgment

The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.

"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

So it will be at the close of the church age, those who are clothed in their own righteousness and those who are clothed with the righteousness given by Jesus Christ, as he admonished, "I counsel you to buy from Me...white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed".

In the rapture, Jesus comes and gathers His own<sup>31</sup>, in the parable above, the angels come down and gather both good and evil all at once, just as was detailed by Jesus regarding the parable of the tares and the wheat,

"He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"-Matthew 13:37-42

So Jesus confirms that this church will not make the rapture, but those who choose not to follow its teaching of "dominion theology" or "word of faith", will be saved in the end.

## **Conclusion**

So where do we stand now? Look closely, there are no more letters; there is no eighth letter to an eighth church or an eighth parable. That means that chapter four of Revelation is fast approaching. Will you go through the door? Or will you be locked outside? Will you follow the dictates of the woman Jezebel and the doctrine of Balaam? Or perhaps you prefer the numerous denominations of doom that so cloud the clear water of scripture.

Perhaps you wish to become part of the pearl of great price that so irritates this world. What ever you decide, decide soon and decide for keeps and let he who has an ear let him hear what His Spirit says to the churches,

"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

"...I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

"He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!  
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

- Revelation 22:11,12,16,17,20,21

Rick Schneblin, as a study stimulator, wrote this treatise for the body of Christ.  
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