

Welcome.

The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is essentially a prophetic book. It looks towards the very end of time and gives us a 'blow by blow' account of what is going to happen in the last 7 years of the earth's history before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

This book is the culmination of **Jewish** history. It is also the culmination of the history of the nations of the world – many as we will see will not believe, even though the judgements contained in the book are horrendous, as God pours out His righteous indignation on the unbelieving nations and the nation of Israel in particular.

We must always keep in tension the fact that the Bible is a Jewish Book. Jesus is a Jew and Israel is the centre of the World as far as God is concerned – neither London nor New York has any clout, the whole book is about the history of one particular nation – Israel. If you keep that in mind, you will see quite clearly where we as Gentiles fit in. We will include in our study a some insights regarding '*the times of the Gentiles*' and what that means but first I want to lay down a few guidelines or rules of interpretation and cover one or two other points to assist our understanding of the book .

### ***Rules for interpreting the Bible:***

The first things I want us to look at are the rules of interpretation. These are general rules which can be applied to all scripture; they do not just apply to the Book of Revelation, we could find more if we weren't looking specifically at prophecy –

1. The first is **the** 'golden rule' -

*'When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense! Therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal, meaning, unless the immediate context indicates clearly otherwise'.*

Simply put, the plain law of reading scripture is that all passages are to be taken exactly as they read unless there is something in the text that indicates it should be taken other than literally. There will be figures of speech, but even these usually have a literal background. God intended that His word should be understood easily.

The bible does use symbols too, but they are usually explained if you read on. So this first rule is by far the most important. The Bible means what it says without allegory it or making it all picture language! There are symbols in the book of Revelation but we won't resort to guess work – we will look to see where they are mentioned elsewhere; either in a different part of the Book of Revelation or in some other part of the Bible. The Bible is invariably its own commentary, though we may have to dig a little deeper in some instances than others to establish what is being spoken about.

2. The second rule is called the '**law of double reference**' –

This law observes the fact that often a passage or block of scripture contains within it two different persons or two different time frames. In the passage itself they are blended into

one picture, and the time gap between the two persons or two events is not presented by the text itself, the fact that a gap of time exists, is known because of other scriptures or the first event having been fulfilled.

A good example of this law is some of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the First and Second comings of the Messiah. Often these two events are blended into one picture with no indication that there is a time gap. Zechariah 9:9 - 10 is a good one.

<sup>9</sup>*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly, and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>10</sup>I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations. His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'*

Verse nine is speaking of the first advent of Jesus but verse 10, is speaking of the Second Coming.

You will remember that Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 21:2

<sup>2</sup>*Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey, tied and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me.'*

In doing this He fulfilled verse 9 of Zechariah 9.

Verse 10 is yet to come – when He comes a second time His dominion shall be from 'sea to sea and to the ends of the earth'.

Another easy example would be Isaiah 61:1, 2 which speaks of the first advent of the Lord Jesus but halfway through it says '*the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God*'. There is a 2,000 year plus time gap here, because when Jesus came the **favour** of the Lord was released, and will continue until the day of vengeance, which is the Tribulation.

Some of you may be familiar with the parallel passage in Luke 4:18, 19, when Jesus stood in the Temple and declared His mandate for the earth – He stopped halfway through verse 3 of Isaiah 61. Let's look at both of these –

First, **Isaiah 61:1,2** –

<sup>1</sup>*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord...and the day of vengeance of our God;'*

Luke 4:18, 19 –

<sup>18</sup>*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup>to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'*

So there we have two examples of the law of double reference, two things contained in the same verse with a time gap in between the first and second fulfilment of the verse.

I don't want to confuse you but there is another law called the '**law of double fulfilment**' with which I do not personally agree, this says that the same passage can refer to *two different time frames*, near and far and two different people.

For instance that something could have been fulfilled in Isaiah's time and in our time as well. I do not agree with this because if the verse is **prophetic**, there can only be **one** fulfilment of it. An example would be Isaiah 7:14 where Isaiah is having a conversation with Ahaz the king, who has a galloping case of unbelief, he's been told not to fear because God has got everything in hand, but he's still wobbly. Here we find a prophecy relating to the birth of Jesus –

<sup>14</sup>*'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name, Immanuel.'*

The near view would be that it would be a child born in Ahaz's day, to Ahaz; the far view that it was a Messianic prophecy. Clearly in light of history, this was indeed a Messianic prophecy; the Child was born to a virgin. For me the law of double fulfilment muddies the water, is inaccurate, therefore I do not use it.

3. The third law then is the '**law of recurrence**' this is the 'law' of **repetition**. In some passages, maybe Genesis 1 and 2 are classics of this - I always liken it to newspaper headlines - we get the headline first then the detail. The law of recurrence is just this. In Genesis 1:1-2:3 we see the record of the 7 days of creation in chronological order; it ends in verse 3 with the 7<sup>th</sup> day then in Genesis 2:4-25 we see the same thing; it goes back to the sixth day to provide more detail about how Adam and Eve were created etc.

This law is particularly seen in the book of Revelation, and it is a Hebrew way of writing; headline news first, then infill detail, very simple, just the way you would read your newspaper.

In Revelation chapters 6-16 detail the *chronological* sequence of the events of the Tribulation period ending with the battle of Armageddon and the Second Advent. Chapters 17-18 *follow the law of recurrence* – they are infill detail. Chapter 17 gives us more detail about the first half of the Tribulation and chapter 18 about the second half. Not rocket science.

4. The final 'law' is '**a text out of context is a pretext**'! A verse can only mean what it means in its context – we must not take it out of context. When it is taken out of context it is often presented as meaning something that it does not mean. This leads to people saying you can prove anything you want from the Bible, no you can't we must keep the verse firmly in the context of what is being said or we will get into error. A classic of this is the teaching that you can lose your salvation. You cannot, and if you want to know just exactly why, please ask me and I have an explanatory sheet on this. Again, it is taking text out of the textual context.

So there we have the basic, fundamental rules of biblical interpretation. As I said there are more, but they are our foundational boundary lines within which we will stay.

Another thing we need to look at before we start our study is the word dispensation. Sounds boring, but it is very important.

### ***Dispensations:***

Briefly, a dispensation is '*a Divine ordering or management of affairs and events in the world.*' A dispensation is a '**God ordained**' time period relating to a certain people group.

It is a fixed period of time – for instance, **the dispensation of the church** started on the day of Pentecost – Israel's last chance to believe before the Lord turned to the Gentiles - and will end with the catching away or rapture of the church. You will remember at the end of the book of Acts Paul said,

### **Acts 28:28 -**

<sup>28</sup> *"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"*

The **dispensation** of Israel started with Abraham and will end with the Second Coming of Jesus to His people, the Jews, in Jerusalem.

As we will see we are looking at two distinct people groups here, Israel and the church.

For a comprehensive study of these issues you need to get the paper or the CD's entitled '*The truth about Israel*' which was part of our first study on the book of Revelation, together with '*Will the church go through the Tribulation?*' which was also part of that first study.

### ***Two people, two destinies - Israel and the Church:***

When we are looking at end time prophecy, we are looking at *two distinct people groups*, Israel, and the Church.

Israel is the '**wife**' of Jehovah; the Church is the '**Bride**' of Christ.

If we do not separate correctly the destinies of these two, we will find ourselves muddled and confused about what the Bible is actually saying, and will apply scriptures which are meant for Israel to the church and vice versa, which leads to error regarding God's purposes for the nation of Israel, as well as us, the church.

The Old Testament never spoke of the '**Church**'; it was a 'mystery', hidden until Jesus revealed His intentions to Peter, in Matthew 16:18 '*on this rock (of truth) I will build my church.*' Peter here receives the revelation that Jesus is indeed the long awaited Messiah and on this rock of revelation Jesus will build something called His church. This was all 'Greek' to Peter, he had never heard about this before, and you will remember he had to be put in a trance like state to recognize that God was now including people and things he considered to be unclean, in His Kingdom rule. Bit of a shock no doubt – some slight mindset change there! (Acts 10:13)

If we are to comprehend what is happening with the 'catching away' or 'rapture' of the church we need to understand the position of Israel in God's purposes -

### ***Israel, the wife of Jehovah:***

In the Old Testament, God consistently referred to Israel as being 'married' to Him in covenantal relationship. When they worshipped other gods, he called this 'adultery'. The Old Testament prophets always viewed this covenant relationship as a **marriage contract**, but, adultery was committed.

Israel's marriage contract, or covenant, is the whole book of Deuteronomy. It is in the format of both an ancient treaty and an ancient marriage contract. **Deuteronomy 5:1-3** -

*'<sup>1</sup>And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgements which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. <sup>2</sup>The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. <sup>3</sup>The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive. <sup>4</sup>The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. <sup>5</sup> I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain.'*

He goes on then to detail the commandments of the covenant; this passage declares God entered into a covenant with His people at Mt Sinai. Jeremiah has the unenviable task of calling the wayward wife back to her husband and in Jeremiah 3:1 -5 we see him saying -

### ***Jeremiah 3: 1 – 5***

*'<sup>1</sup>They say, 'If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again? Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me,' says the Lord. <sup>2</sup>Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness, and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness. <sup>3</sup> Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; you refuse to be ashamed. <sup>4</sup> Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth? <sup>5</sup>Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?' Behold you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able.'*

and poignantly v20.

<sup>20</sup> *"Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the Lord.'*

Because of this adultery, God's heart was broken and the original marriage contract was annulled. Jeremiah shows that the problem was not with the Husband, but the wife, who persisted in going after other gods and so became guilty of the great adultery. Then comes the divorce, and finally the chosen people, under the 5<sup>th</sup> cycle of discipline, are carried away into captivity from their own land; and when Jesus comes they reject their Messiah, and are dispersed into all nations. For a full

understanding of the way God dealt with Israel in her apostasy, you need to either read or listen to the teaching on the five cycles of discipline.

As a result of the rejection of their Messiah, Israel's history is on 'hold' during the **dispensation** of the church, though some Jewish people are born again and become part of the church, the major evangelistic thrust will be after the church has been bodily removed, when they **will** recognize their Messiah.

So there is yet a 7 year period of their history which remains and this is known as the time of '**Great Tribulation**', or '**the time of Jacob's trouble**' or **Daniel's 70th week**.

#### **Jeremiah 30:5**

*'This is what the Sovereign Lord says "Cries of fear are heard – terror, not peace. Ask and see: can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour, every face turned deathly pale?" verse 7 'How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a **time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it**'.*

This is the scripture which foreshadows the time of the end and the time of Great Trouble for Israel, but they will be saved out of it by the Second Coming of Jesus.

**The Church – His Bride** is, as yet in the betrothal stage. Radically different to Israel.

#### **2 Corinthians 11:2 –**

*'For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.'*

Espoused and being prepared – this is why stuff has to be dealt with and go out of our lives, we are being prepared and adorned for our marriage – it's called sanctification!

Unlike Israel when the union comes between Christ and the church the church will be presented as a pure virgin. What's the process?

#### **Ephesians 5:25 – 27 –**

*<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.'*

Continual '**washing of the water of the word**, beloved we cannot neglect the word it is our mirror.

So having seen that the Tribulation is the time of **Jacob's trouble**, is there any other reason why we should be so certain that the Great Tribulation period isn't for us?

#### **Grace before Judgement:**

Here we need to look at how God deals with the righteous and the unrighteous, when He brings judgement. Does He actually lump us all together and say, 'well you're part of this and so you have to go through judgement.'

God is a God of principles and the principle is, there is **always** grace before judgement. God **never** sends judgement, or discipline, of any kind without first giving grace and that grace is in the form of increasingly severe warnings to the people concerned.

Another principle is that He never judges believers and unbelievers together, the righteous and the wicked. That is one of the reasons why I absolutely know that we as believers will be removed before the end time judgement of this earth begins - God's character is at stake in all of this. Does He change? No, of course He doesn't, He is immutable. Jesus took our judgement on the cross, there is henceforth no condemnation for us, and we are in Him.

That aside, let's look at what happened in the past. On two occasions in Genesis God removed the righteous **before** He brought judgment on the wicked –

- The *universal flood* and righteous Noah - his family are removed **before** judgement comes
- Sodom and Gomorrah and righteous Lot his wife and his daughters are led away by angels **before** judgement comes.

We would appear to have established a **principle** that God removes the righteous, separates them from the unrighteous, before He brings judgement. So, whether you are mature or not, getting it right (whatever that may be) or not, you are made **righteous** by the blood of Jesus, you are not made righteous by anything but **His precious Blood**, so that makes you a candidate for being removed **before** universal judgement of the earth takes place for the second time.

Having looked at the Old Testament principle, let's look at some New Testament scriptures and see what we find - is there consistency? We need to see that God is exactly the same in His dealings with mankind in the New Testament as He was in the Old.

Let's look what Jesus said in Matthew 25 -

**Matthew 25: 31-33,46** this is the **Second Advent**, at the end of the Tribulation, and Jesus is talking to the **Jews** :

<sup>31</sup>*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.'* Verse 46 *'And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'*

So at the end of the age, He will do exactly the same thing again – unrighteous will be on His left hand side and believers or the righteous, on His right and the next thing Messiah will do will be to **remove** all the unbelievers from the earth and leave only believers on it, to go into the Millennial Kingdom and repopulate the earth.

The point is there is always a **separation** going on before the final judgement at the Great White Throne, begins.

So we now have a New Testament principle, and we have established that God is exactly the same in the New Testament as in the Old, which does away with the '*God is a God of wrath in the Old Testament and a God of love in the New*' belief system – no way! He **never** changes, what has happened is that we do not understand His ways with mankind.

### ***Moving on:***

What I hope to cover over the next three days are some of the things I didn't cover in the last course where the Lord led me to address specific topics. In this course we are endeavouring to work our way through the book, picking up chronologically on the things we didn't address before. So we will be looking at things like –

- The times of the Gentiles what exactly is this?
- The seven churches, in a little more detail.
- Daniel's 'beast'.
- The woman clothed with the sun.
- Mystery Babylon.
- The difference between the battles of Gog and Magog and Armageddon.
- The Great White Throne judgement versus the judgement of believers works.
- The Millennium and what we will be doing.
- If we get that far, the eternal state.

We cannot study the Book of Revelation without drawing in many other portions of scripture. What we find in Revelation is nothing new, *until* we get to the last two chapters.

Revelation has no *direct* quotations from the Old Testament, but it has over 500 references *back* to the Old Testament. The majority of the things found in the first 20 chapters are found in the Old Testament. What happens in Revelation is that these references are brought together.

Revelation brings the Old Testament prophecies and puts them in some sort of order for us so that we can see what the sequence of events is likely to be. It therefore helps us a great deal when studying the Old Testament because we can pinpoint where things mentioned there, fit in. After this study you will probably find you understand a lot more of the Old Testament than you do right now.

When it comes to describing the eternal state, however, this is all completely new to us because the prophets of the Old Testament did not see beyond the Messianic reign of Jesus - the millennium - to the eternal state. So the eternal state mentioned right at the end of the Book is the high point of New Testament prophecy and Revelation 21 and 22 provide new information as they describe what is to come. Brilliant! We are in for a feast.



Firstly then, we will do an overview of the Bible –

Many non-Christians are fearful about the future and so are many Christians. The way to overcome this is to know what the Bible says about tomorrow. God has a timetable for this earth and most people aren't aware of it. So I'm going to take an overview of world history, up to and including now and fast forward to the end of it, so that we might see what we have in the world today and also what we can expect to happen according to the scriptures. So this is just a broad-brush overview, giving you the relevant scriptures – I won't fill in any detail; this is a first press as they call it. If I gave you too much information about the subject at this point, it would just overwhelm you. We are looking at the overall plan of God from Genesis to Revelation which is to have a people for Himself.

World history in the Bible is split into three:

- Genesis 1 – 11 deals with 2,000 years of the history of mankind
- The remainder of the Old Testament covers the next 2,000 up to the time of Jesus
- And then we have the Church age, which we are in now

In Genesis 1 – 11 we have all we need to know about the world's history – it isn't all but it is enough. Picking up now on **Genesis 10: 6 – 12** -

*<sup>6</sup>The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabtechah; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup> Cush begot **Nimrod**; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." <sup>10</sup> And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup> From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, <sup>12</sup> and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).*

Here we see the lineage of the grandchildren of Noah and we find someone called Nimrod. The name Nimrod means rebellion, and any of you who know me know that I have been looking at the background to Christmas, and of course, needless to say, it starts with him! Because it means rebellion he decides he is going to be king of the earth and not God. So in verse 10 he begins to build his kingdom by building a city in the land of Shinar, or **Babylon**. In the Old Testament you will also find it referred to as Chaldea or the land of the Chaldees, where Abram lived in a place called Ur.

Now, if we 'fast forward' to Revelation 17:5 we find 'Mystery Babylon the Mother of Harlots' and the downfall of this system. So we see **Babylon** from Genesis to Revelation. It is important that we understand the beginnings of this system, because at the end of the age it will surface again with great power -

**Genesis 11:1**

***The Tower of Babel***

*<sup>1</sup>Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.'*

At this time these people have *'one language and one speech'*, and this is very important, what it means is that they were of ***one mind and one thought, they were in agreement*** – God actually says, nothing will stop them if I don't call a halt at this point.

### **Genesis 11:5-6**

*<sup>5</sup>But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. <sup>6</sup>The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them."*

God had told them to scatter and repopulate the earth, but they had said 'No Sir!' we're sticking together. So God comes down and says *'I will scatter you.'* So He changed their languages – God interrupts man's plans and scatters them because things were happening far too fast. God has a timetable and it doesn't include their plans.

From this we see a stream of rebellion which began at the tower of Babel - Roger Price describes it like this on his tape on the tower of Babel - *'A little stream which began here at the Tower of Babel and went downhill and as it went down it gained more and more water and in our day it is like a mighty river, but **it is absolutely nothing like it is going to be in the days to come**'*. It will be like a tsunami at the end of the age the wickedness, absolute and utter evil that is going to come upon the earth.

Today this river is largely hidden, it is an attempt by mankind to be totally independent from God – this, you will remember is what Satan tempted Eve with – the right to self-rule or independence from God. At the end of the age it covers every area, politically, commercially and religiously.

It is this system that is called in Revelation 17:5 **Mystery Babylon** – a mystery in the bible remember means something that is hidden, and then suddenly unveiled. So you could say this is hidden Babylon. What began at the tower of Babel, man trying to get together for political, economic and religious union - one nation – will culminate at the end of the age where again the determination for self rule will explode into a global ruler, a global economic system and a global religion - man will have his way, for a short time, three and a half years, the second half of the Great Tribulation, as we will see.

So going back to Genesis, into the midst of this comes the Lord Jesus Himself, as He does, and He scatters the people of Babylon and at the end of Genesis 11, verse 26 onwards we see Him calling out one man from the Babylonian system, who would father His beloved people, the man from whom the nation of Israel would come. This nation was going to be God's missionary base to the world and most of the Old Testament from then on deals with the call of Abram and the setting apart of the nation, who God chose to be His very own. The rest of the Old Testament then, is the history of this nation, and in Matthew 10: 5 – 7 we see Jesus sending out His 12 disciples with a specific command -

### **Matthew 10:5 – 7**

## ***Sending Out the Twelve***

*<sup>45</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”*

Jesus having come as the long awaited King of the nation of **Israel**, sends his disciples to the lost sheep of Israel.

He is rejected by them and, as a result of this and according to God’s eternal plan, He raises up a new people for Himself and begins to speak about something He calls ‘the church’. On the day of Pentecost the church is born, and today we are God’s missionary base for preaching the gospel to the world.

So, now on the earth we have three major people groups:

- The church
- The unbelievers
- The nation of Israel.

The church is made up of Jew and gentile. God still has a future for Israel and He is most definitely not finished with them yet. Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week has yet to come be fulfilled.

So now we are up to date and we need to see what is to come and there is a scripture which will show us what is the next thing on God’s timetable for the Jewish nation – Jesus here speaking to His disciples about the **sequence of events to come**, in response to their question – and the first thing He does is that He predicts the destruction of their Temple -

## ***Matthew 24***

### ***Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple***

*<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”*

### ***The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age***

*<sup>3</sup>Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” <sup>4</sup>And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of sorrows. <sup>9</sup> “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. <sup>10</sup> And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. <sup>11</sup> Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will abound, the love of*

many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But he who endures to the end shall be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

### **The Great Tribulation**

<sup>15</sup>“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), <sup>16</sup> “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>17</sup> Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. <sup>18</sup> And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. <sup>19</sup> But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! <sup>20</sup> And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. <sup>21</sup> For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened. <sup>23</sup> “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. <sup>24</sup> For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. <sup>25</sup> See, I have told you beforehand. <sup>26</sup> “Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. <sup>27</sup> For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>28</sup> For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

### **The Coming of the Son of Man**

<sup>29</sup>“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.’

As we study the events of the book of the Revelation we will see these sequential, or chronological, prophecies unfold before our eyes. But Jesus here speaking to His disciples in the Olivet discourse and He tells them first about the destruction of their temple, which took place in AD 70, by which time all but John had probably died, and then He goes on to outline events right up until His Second Coming and ends by saying - ‘Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days....the Son of Man will appear’.

What is the tribulation of those days? Trouble is what tribulation means, verse 21 shows us that this is a period of trouble the like of which the world has never seen described here as ‘**Great**’ tribulation, as opposed to the tribulation of every day life. Verse 29 shows us what’s coming, verse 30 after the tribulation of that time we have the **Second Advent of Jesus**. Jesus comes back to the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and this is what follows these troublous times.

### **Matthew 25:31-33, 46**

<sup>31</sup>When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from

*another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.’ Verse 46 ‘And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’*

This is the Second Advent and first there is the battle of **Armageddon**, then **judgement** and King Jesus separates the believers from the unbelievers, and the unbelievers are removed from the earth to await the Great White Throne judgement verse 46.

After this separation of sheep and goats, righteous and unrighteous, **the Kingdom** is set up on earth for 1,000 years, **the millennium**. Believers start living on the renewed earth and children are born to them and the earth is repopulated. So we have the kingdom on earth for a thousand years and during this time, **Satan is locked up**.

At the end of the 1000 years Satan is released for a short time and at the end of history you see the apostasy of the nations, Satan is let loose and the majority of the nations follow him and we have the last great battle, **the Gog and Magog rebellion**, right at the end.

What we are going to see as we study the book of Revelation is the consummation of the ages, which is fast coming upon us.

All we are ever told to do as believers is to, watch, wait and look up, for our redemption draws near. So in studying this book, our eyes are turned heavenward to look for the King of Glory, who will shortly return to catch away His bride in order that she may be with Him eternally.

That is a general sweep of history - the rebellion of mankind against God, which started in Genesis, is there, right to the end of the book of Revelation and the final judgement.

### ***The Times of the Gentiles:***

Having set the scene with that overview, let’s look at what the Bible means when it speaks of the **‘times of the Gentiles’**. The scripture reference we want for this is **Luke 21:24** –

*‘And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’.*

Surprisingly, the **‘times of the Gentiles’** do not refer just to the church age, but to the period of time from the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian Empire and the carrying away to captivity, to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, during which time the Gentile nations have **dominance** over Jerusalem by way of occupation.

In saying this, I am not ruling out the temporary Jewish control of the city, but all such Jewish control will be only temporary until the Second Coming.

Even though the Jews are currently back in the land, their control is only partial of the city of Jerusalem itself. This time of the Gentile rule will end only as Jesus feet ascend the Mount of Olives, at that time the Gentile rule will be over. There will be no gradual phasing out; it is a sudden and complete end.

Now, I want to introduce you to four empires which will feature highly in our study, these are:

1. The Babylonian Empire – under Nebuchadnezzar
2. The Medo-Persian Empire – under Darius the Mede and Cyrus
3. The Greek or Hellenistic Empire – beginning with Alexander the Great
4. The fourth Empire – which was and is to come again - we will look at this in more detail when we study Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the book of Daniel,

**All of these are Gentile empires.**

The *'times of the gentiles'* is a fascinating study on its own, but it is sufficient for us now to know that the *'times of the Gentiles'* is that long period of time from the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, until Jesus' return at the Second Coming when He will set up the Messianic Kingdom and reign and rule in Jerusalem for 1,000 years.

Now let's start to break it down a little -

**REVELATION 1:1-3**

*'The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John; who bore witness of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.'*

So here we have right at the beginning of the Book, the angelic presence – if you came to the teaching in October about angels you will know all about how many times they appear in the scriptures. We shall see a lot of them during our time in Revelation.

Angels were frequently used in the revelation of prophecy, so it is not unusual to find them involved in revealing events in this book. They will play a prominent role not only in revealing prophecy to John, but also in carrying out the judgements, as they did in the Old Testament, as we will see.

Just to clear up one point the phrase *'even the things which must **shortly** come to pass:'* has been somewhat misunderstood. What is being said here in using the word **'shortly'** is **not** that the prophecies were to be fulfilled soon after they were given, but once they do start, once the day of fulfilment comes, there will be no delay and it will all unfold quickly and in this order.

There is a wonderful promise in verse 3 that anyone reading, hearing and studying this book will be blessed. *'Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear...'* There is a unique blessing, therefore, for reading and studying this book. The believers who *'love His appearing'* too are promised a special crown.

There is also a blessing to those who *'keep the things which are written therein'*. The word 'keep' also means 'watch'. The believer, therefore, who after reading and listening to what the Book is

teaching, should also be **watching** for these things to come to pass and be on the alert for the fulfilment of the prophecies.

#### **Revelation 1:4-8:**

*‘<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loves us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he comes with the clouds and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’*

There are a few interesting little bits here. Firstly verse 4 tells us **to whom** the book is being written, the seven churches that are in Asia.

Much has been written about who is meant by these 7 churches. John uses the definite article, *‘the’* and Arnold Fructenbaum in his book, *‘The footsteps of the Messiah’* makes the point that in using the Greek definite article John is indicating *totality*. In other words 7 is the number of completion or perfection. Throughout the scriptures, the number seven signifies completeness, the point here being that this is a message to the whole church. When John speaks to the seven churches of Asia, he is signifying that all believers are to learn from what will be written to the seven churches of Asia.

Incidentally just keep an eye open for the number of times the number 7 is mentioned in this book – it is the number of totality, and it crops up time after time, it signifies that this is the end folks. Man’s rebellion is totally complete and judgement must come.

Three people are mentioned *‘from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne and from Jesus Christ’*. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The originator was God the Father, in verse one, and here described as the One who is and who was and who is to come, mentioned next is the Holy Spirit, described as the seven Spirits that are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness. The triune God.

John turns from this to glorify Jesus who *‘loves us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.’* He loosed us, made us a kingdom, and priests to God the Father.

Glory to His name John says. Then in verse 7 he gives the theme of the Book – *‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’* Thus the main theme of the Book is the ***Second Coming of the Messiah***.

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth is the central theme of the book. In verse eight Jesus describes Himself as the Eternal One, encompassing the beginning and the end. He is the overall sovereign God Who alone is in control of history and will bring to pass the events described in the Revelation.

What John **saw** was the glorified Son of Man, our Man in glory –

### **Revelation 1: 9-11 -**

*<sup>9</sup>I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, what you see, <sup>11</sup>write in a book and send it to the seven churches, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum and unto Thyatira and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.'*

Clearing up a little misunderstanding here about what John meant when he said he was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day' – because we are Gentile believers and Sunday is our day of worship, it has often been represented as though John got this vision on a Sunday.

It doesn't matter very much, but that is not what the text is saying, it is actually saying 'I was under the control of the Holy Spirit in such a way that I lost myself'. The Greek the term translated 'Lord' is not a noun, but an adjective, it is describing how he felt – it was a day in which John was enraptured by prophetic and Divine ecstasy and received Divine revelation. It was a day in which he fell under the control of the Holy Spirit to such an extent that he was carried away in the Spirit, like many prophets before him. For him it was more literally a 'Lordy' day where he saw things and was commissioned to write what he saw to the seven churches.

John was exiled to Patmos by the Roman Emperor Domitian. He was about 96 years old at the time he sees this vision. Here's John then, lifted in the Spirit on this day, to receive Divine revelation -

### **Revelation 1: 12 – 20**

*<sup>12</sup>Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. <sup>13</sup>And in the midst of the seven lampstands One **like** the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girded about the chest with a golden band. <sup>14</sup>His head and His hair were white **like** wool, as white as snow, and His eyes **like** a flame of fire; <sup>15</sup>His feet were **like** fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many water; <sup>16</sup>He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was **like** the sun shining in its strength. <sup>17</sup>And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me saying to me "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. <sup>19</sup>Write the things which you have seen and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. <sup>20</sup> The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches".'*

John hears a voice, he sees the candlesticks - **THEN** he sees Jesus – a Jesus He has never seen before – the Glorified Son of Man, and he falls at His feet, as dead.

**THIS** is King Jesus. **This** is a Jesus we have never yet seen. Our glorious coming King.

What follows is John's description of what he saw, and notice that he uses the word '**like**' all the time, he has never seen anything like this and he, like the prophets before him has to use a likeness in order that we will understand something of the glory he beheld. You see this frequently in Ezekiel when he tried to describe what he saw in the Throne room.



Jesus is Prophet, Priest and king.

- He functioned as Prophet when He first came,
- He functions as High Priest now (Great High Priest Hebrews 5:6, 7:17,21 and 8:1) and
- He will come as undisputed King.

The **primary** purpose of the book of Revelation is to **reveal King Jesus**; it is the revelation of **Him** in all His glorious majesty, supremacy and might.

A King has many roles, one is **judge** and He will judge the world at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming - so a secondary theme of the book is - **judgement**. After the revelation of Jesus, the whole book deals with one judgement of God upon mankind after another.

The fact that Jesus stands amongst the candlesticks, which we see from v 20 are the churches, indicates He is ready to move out in judgement on the churches first.

#### **1 Peter 4:17 -**

*<sup>17</sup>For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

Here Peter asks a rhetorical question, if judgement begins at the house of the Lord what on earth is going to happen to unbelievers? As we study this book we shall see the answer to this. However, for believers this is **not** judgement in terms of eternal fire and loss of salvation, but judgement of their **works** which judgement will take place immediately after the catching away of the church.

Jesus' address to the churches is because He wants to bring them into alignment with His eternal plan for them in order that **they may receive a reward**.

They are not going to receive any reward for things done in the flesh only that which is at the bidding of the Spirit and they therefore they need to hear **what the Spirit is saying to the churches**.

Verse 19 and John receives his instructions, write three things:

- *what you've seen,*
- *the things which are,*
- *and those to come.*

He's **seen** the Glorified Man, Jesus, identifying Himself, Jesus shows Himself as the Eternal One, the First and the Last, 'I was dead, and behold,....I am alive, John has **seen** 7 lampstands, and the 7 stars, which are explained to him as the 7 churches, and the 7 angels which are messengers to the churches and this completes the things which John **saw** and we move on to the things which **are** – the 7 churches. So the first division of the book is completed with verse 20 of chapter 1. Chapters 2 and 3 comprise the second major division of the book.

This division is the **things which are**, it is a description of the **church age** contained in 7 short letters. And now Jesus begins to tell John the state of the churches, and what He wants John to write to them and them to hear - **the things which are**.

This is the VISIBLE church, the local body or local church and it can contain both believers and unbelievers, whereas the *invisible* church is only believers who have gone to be with the Lord already. The visible church includes all professing believers, whether they really believe or not.

The theory that the 7 churches of Revelation 2 – 3 are prophetic, that they represent seven consecutive periods in church history seems to have been suggested around AD 303.

This belief is held today but, at the same, time the 7 churches are also historical and representative of the church as a whole.

Thus we see 7 congregations -

1) historically **existent** at the time John wrote -

2) as **representing** the entire church through the 7 types of local churches which shall exist throughout the dispensation and -

3) as **prefiguring** or representing 7 aspects of the professing church which would rise into prominence before Christ's Second Coming. The 7 periods are generally divided as follows:

1. Ephesus – Apostolic (evangelical) church (AD 30 – 100)
2. Smyrna - Persecuted (Iron curtain) church (AD100 – 313)
3. Pergamum – (Inner City) State church (AD 313 – 600)
4. Thyatira – Papal (suburban) church (AD600 – 1517)
5. Sardis – Reformed (Liberal) church (AD 1517 – 1648)
6. Philadelphia – Missionary church (AD1648 – 1900)
7. Laodicea – Apostate church (AD1900 – present day)

Although most of these phases of church history are now concluded their influence still carries over from stage to stage, and some trends are still in existence even in our own day.

### **Revelation 2:1 – 7**

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>I know your works, your labour, 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; <sup>3</sup>and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary. <sup>4</sup>Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the \*Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>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."*

\*One view has it that there was a strong ecclesiastical hierarchy ruling over the laity – but there are several views.

### Ephesus

Ephesus means desired one – begun by Paul (Acts 18:19 – 20) and located in the wicked city given over to the worship of the goddess Artemis. Paul's effective ministry began seriously to hurt the traffic in magic and images, leading to an uproar in the huge Ephesian amphitheatre.

Religion was a prominent feature of life in Ephesus, the temple of Artemis (or Diana, her Roman name) ranked as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. As the daughter of Zeus, Artemis was variously known as the moon goddess, the goddess of hunting and the patroness of young girls. The Ephesians took pride in their beautiful temple, which was supported by scores of stone columns.

Wikipedia says of present day Ephesus -

*“The site is large; Ephesus contains the largest collection of Roman ruins East of the Mediterranean. Only an estimated 15% has been excavated. The ruins that are visible give some idea of the city's original splendour, and the names associated with the ruins are evocative of its former life”*

This is the only church where reference is made to apostles. Hence it is called the ‘apostolic’ or early church and it covered the time from Pentecost AD 30 – AD100.

It was the most desirable of all the churches and was characterised by fervent evangelism. There were a large percentage of Jews in the congregation. The letter to the Ephesians can be divided into three sections; it begins with a commendation moves into condemnation and closes with a command.

**Commendation:** ‘I know your deeds...’ He commends them for their hard work literally in the Greek *‘toiling to the point of exhaustion’*; the Ephesian Christians were hard working in their service, determined in their commitment and orthodox in their doctrine. They had resisted the false teaching which was causing corruption in other churches, and they hated the work of the Nicolaitans. Yet in spite of these fine qualities, something was missing – they had forsaken their first love.

**Condemnation:** *‘You have forsaken your first love’* – they had allowed their love for Jesus to cool in the midst of all their activity. They had fallen away, and despite the efficiency of their service, Jesus is not pleased – in His eyes, they were backslidden.

Ephesus had heart trouble. It had forsaken its first love, walked away, left it. *‘I just don’t love Him any more’*. Honeymoon love had eroded into routine married life. The thrilling flush of our new-found conversion experience must be guarded by submission to the Holy Spirit at all times.

Many Christians’ lives consist of a first love experience, which then develops into a routine walk of having forsaken their first love. The Ephesians love had chilled in this way and this describes so many people in churches today, who are caught up in their activity for Jesus and have lost that inner glow of love for Him and have become caught up in works. So He counsels them -

**Counsel:** ‘Remember the height from which you have fallen...repent’ – change your minds, come back to Me. Return to intimacy with Me, your Coming Bridegroom or I will remove your lampstand – I will put your light out. I will remove your witness from this place.

Do not think that ‘Ichabod’ ‘ the glory has departed’ cannot be written over present day churches, because it can. Selwyn Hughes in his book on the letters to the churches says this:

*“I will never forget standing with a group of Christians on the site of what once was the city of Ephesus. Even though it is now in ruins it is still a breathtaking spectacle, yet there is no sign of a Christian church anywhere in the vicinity. Did Christ's warning take effect there? I believe it did. The Ephesus church failed to obey His command and in consequence its light was extinguished. A church has no light without love. It can maintain a building and support a minister, but if there is no love there, there can be no light. The lampstand has been removed.”*

Chilling words.

So their challenge -

**Challenge:** ‘To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God’.

The next church to get Jesus’ attention is the church at Smyrna –

#### **Revelation 2:8-11**

*“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: <sup>9</sup>**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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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”’.*

#### **Smyrna**

This is the persecuted church A D 100 – 313.

**Commendation:** ‘I know your afflictions and your poverty....’

**Condemnation:** None

**Counsel:** ‘Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer’

**Challenge:** ‘He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.’

Jesus starts each church’s message by saying ‘I know’ and in the case of Smyrna, He says, ‘I know your affliction and your poverty (but you are rich)’.

This church period is probably the greatest time of persecution the church of Christ has ever known. The more persecuted they were, the more they overcame the one condemning characteristic of the

apostolic church before them – that of having lost their first love. Dates AD100-312. If love is the first characteristic that Jesus seeks in His church, suffering is the second.

Smyrna means myrrh. This was the persecuted and afflicted church. It wasn't easy to be Christian in Smyrna. The city had acquired a reputation for being loyal to the Roman Empire, and as a result a temple had been erected to the Emperor Tiberius. Citizens were required to sprinkle incense on the fire that burned before his bust and acknowledge him, Caesar, to be Lord. Christians who would not conform were outlawed and persecuted. The pastor was Polycarp, a student of John. Polycarp was hounded and finally burnt at the stake in AD156 for not denying Jesus. He said *"Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"* Apparently the wind became contrary and the flames blew away from him and would not burn him, so a soldier's sword finally ended his life.

Geographically the city lay about 60 miles north of Ephesus. At the time this letter was given, Smyrna was the pride of Asia, and was one of the principal cities vying with Ephesus and Pergamum for first place. It is the only city of all the seven churches which is still thriving and is now called Izmir.

This church experienced persecution and suffering to a degree that none of the other churches did. The church at Smyrna was pulled apart by pressure, poverty and persecution. The believers in Smyrna were an afflicted church, afflicted by false teachers who had claimed to be Jews but really were not. Any church that preaches a gospel other than the gospel of Jesus Christ is a synagogue of Satan regardless of what it is called. The 'second' death is that state when people who have died in unbelief are resurrected and cast alive into an eternal state of separation from God in the lake of fire. This second death need never cause the child of God to fear, for it will have no power over them. The faithful believers at Smyrna are here promised a crown of life, laid up for those who have suffered and given their lives for the sake of the gospel. Their assurance is this: Jesus knows everything and one day He will meet them personally at the doors of eternity to present them with a crown of life.

### **Revelation 2:12-17**

*<sup>12</sup>And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword. <sup>13</sup>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.<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Thus you also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup>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."*

### **Pergamum**

The indulged church A D 313 – 600.

**Commendation:** *'I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name.....'*

**Condemnation :** *‘Nevertheless I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.’*

**Counsel:** *‘Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.’*

**Challenge:** *‘To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.’*

This is where Satan had his throne. The city of Pergamum was deeply entrenched in the worship of the god Asclepius – the god of healing.

This was a church which slid into compromise, the toleration of evil. Worldly standards had crept in. So much of the world is in the church and so many of the church are in the world that there is no difference between the two.

The Pergamum period of history evolved into an era when Christianity was introduced by force by Constantine the ‘Christian’ Emperor. When Diocletian the last persecuting emperor of that period failed to stamp out the church, Constantine came into power. ‘Christianity’, said Constantine, ‘was to be the State religion.’ Regiments of soldiers were baptised at spear point! As the self-styled protector of the Christian faith, Constantine issued an edict of toleration for Christianity and showered many favours on the Christian church.

The government provided money for the operation of the church, and many pagan temples were taken over by Christians. To please the emperor, these leaders adopted customs that were parallel to pagan practices. One compromise invariably leads to another, and what seemed at the start to be a great blessing ended up a great curse.

During the succeeding three centuries of this period many anti-Christian practices of pagan origin were adopted, which robbed the church of its fire and its evangelistic fervour. The influence of paganism on the church increased over the years step by step. The church began to shroud itself in ‘mystery’ and ritualism that had a strong resemblance to Babylonian mysticism.

The Chaldean tau, which was the elevation of a large ‘T’ on the end of a pole, was changed to the sign of a cross. From AD 312 onwards the church became more Roman and less Christian in its practices. The Roman Catholic Church today is hard put to trace its ancestry beyond AD312.

Until that time the church was an independent collection of local churches, working together whenever possible but not dominated by central authority. The name Pergamum literally means ‘marriage’ or ‘elevation’. As the Church became married to governmental authority and elevated to a place of acceptance, it declined in spiritual blessing and power.

Pergamum was also the church *‘where Satan has his throne’*. In the commendation, they are commended for not denying the faith and Antipas, who was martyred in 92 AD, is singled out as being one of their faithful members. His name means *‘against all’* and it may be that he stood firm against all satanic worship. This church is said to be situated where Satan has his throne and indeed it was in this city that the serpent-son Asclepius was worshipped.

Wikipedia says this under a photograph of a Greek statue of Asclepius who holds a staff with a large serpent coiled around it –

*'The ancient Greek symbol today associated with medicine worldwide: the rod of Asclepius with its encoiled serpent. The World Health Organization, the Royal Society of Medicine, the American Medical and Osteopathic Associations, the British and the Australian Medical Associations are some of the bodies that incorporate it in their insignia'.*

The city lay about 60 miles north of Smyrna and at the time these letters were written it was known to be a strong centre of paganism and idolatry. Two of the main deities honoured there (amongst hundreds of others) were Dionysus and Asclepius the gods of healing. The historian R H Charles describes Pergamum as *'the Lourdes of the province of Asia and the seat of a famous school of medicine'*. One writer says that *'In Pergamum it was not so much Christ who was evident – but antichrist.'*

It would appear that whilst many in the church were holding on to the truth of the gospel, others were drifting and entertaining false teachers. Jesus describes it as *'the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin...'* and *'the teaching of the Nicolaitans'*. It could be that the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans was one and the same. The story of Balaam is recorded in Numbers 22-24. It tells of how Balaam, a prophet of God, was enticed by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the tribes of Israel who were about to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land. However, every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse Israel, God moved him to speak words of blessing. Totally frustrated by this, Balaam suggests to Balak that he should arrange for the Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel by inviting them to take part in immoral and idolatrous feasts – knowing full well that this would bring God's anger against them.

What Balaam was to Israel is what the Nicolaitans were to the church in Pergamum *'We aren't under law, we are under grace'* – this teaches that sin is no longer a problem, *'it's only a problem for the unbeliever, we are free to do what we like because the more we sin the more God can show grace'*. God does not condemn sin in the sinner in order to condone it in the saint! They were teaching a licence instead of liberty and Jesus says *'Repent!'* The source of their error was not merely human, but demonic.

### **Revelation 2:18 – 29 –**

<sup>18</sup>*And to the angel in Thyatira write, these things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass. <sup>19</sup> "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience and as for your works, the last are more than the first. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. <sup>22</sup> Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. <sup>23</sup> And 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. <sup>24</sup> But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan,*

*as they call them, I will put on you no other burden. <sup>25</sup>But hold fast what you have till I come. <sup>26</sup>And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – <sup>27</sup>‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter’s vessels shall be broken to pieces’ – as I have also received from My Father, <sup>28</sup>and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

### Thyatira

Thyatira comes from two words meaning ‘continual’ and ‘sacrifice’. This church AD 600 – 1517 continues where Pergamum left off, and introduces the heresy that Jesus’ work wasn’t finished on the cross - therefore the sacrifice is continual and Jesus is still on the cross.

Jesus comes walking among the candlesticks to this particular church with eyes of flame and feet like fine brass. He always selected a description of Himself that spoke directly to the condition of the church He was addressing. To Thyatira He comes with eyes of blazing fire and feet of brass.

Despite its appearance there was sin in the church at Thyatira. They needed to see Him as the One whose eyes burned with the fire of righteous indignation and whose feet brought judgement. Brass in scripture always denotes judgement; Jesus comes to this church with judgement.

**Commendation:** *‘I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first’.*

**Condemnation:** *‘You tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols’*

**Counsel:** *‘Only hold on to what you have until I come’*

**Challenge:** *‘To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – ‘He will rule them with an iron sceptre he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ – just as I have received authority from my Father, I will also give him the morning star’.*

Beneath the healthy surface was a cesspool. Lounging seductively behind the façade of piety was ‘that woman Jezebel’. Jezebel was the epitome of immorality and idolatry.

The programme of merging paganism with Christianity begun under the church of Pergamum increased, the light that Jesus entrusted to His church all but flickered out during what was called the Dark Ages and was not rekindled until the days of the reformation.

Kissing the Pope’s feet, worshipping images and relics, fasting on Fridays and during Lent, transubstantiation, adoration of the wafer, purgatory, the infallibility of the Pope, Mary declared the mother of the church, were some of the changes and additions made.

Thyatira comes from two words meaning ‘sacrifice’ and ‘continual’; this introduces the central heresy that has produced other false doctrines, that is, ***the Church of Rome denies the finished work of Christ but believes in a continuing sacrifice*** that produces such things as sacraments for the dead and praying for the dead.

All of these were borrowed from mystery Babylon the mother of all pagan customs and idolatry, none of which is taught in the New Testament.



Jesus gave this adulterous woman time to repent, but she refused. Not everyone was involved with her and Jesus gives some marvellous promises to those who hold on to their faith until He returns.

### **Revelation 3:1 – 6**

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

#### **Sardis:**

The reformed liberal church. The dead church. Sardis means ‘those escaping’. Dates AD1517 – 1648. The church in Sardis had gained a reputation throughout the whole of Asia Minor for being a progressive and lively centre of Christian witness. But outward appearances are deceptive and the truth was that the church was nothing more than a spiritual graveyard. It had a name for being alive, but in actual fact it was dead. They had an endless round of spiritual activity but, like the church in Ephesus, in the sight of the Lord they were beggared, bankrupt and broken.

They broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, but they too became state churches and we see the Anglican church in England, the Lutheran church in Germany and the Presbyterian church in Scotland as examples.

What corrupted Pergamum also corrupted Sardis. Jesus describes them as dead. There is no spiritual life because there is no personal faith and relationship with Jesus, so a great part of this type of church is composed of **unbelievers**, they have sound creeds, they honour Him with their lips, but their hearts are indeed far from Him.

Those escaping, however, are the (relatively) few who are born again and have washed their robes and will be clothed in white garments which equal salvation. Mixed bunch these.

**Commendation:** *‘I know your deeds, you have a reputation of being alive....’*

**Condemnation:** *‘but you are dead...I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.’*

**Counsel:** *‘Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, remember, therefore what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent, but if you do not wake up I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you’.*

**Challenge:** *‘He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels’.*

Sardis means escaping ones, or those who come out. This name together with the Lord’s condemnation of this Church, provides a perfect description of the Reformation churches.

The Protestant Reformation developed as the result of the continued emphasis by the Church of Rome on pagan doctrines rather than adherence to scriptural principles. The basic emphasis of the reformation churches originally was Martin Luther's watchword – the righteous will live by faith (Romans 1:17). They had recoiled from trying to make salvation the result of works and sparked a resurgence of interest in studying the scriptures.

The tragedy of the reformation churches that earned for them the condemnation by the Lord of being dead was twofold:

- 1) They became state Churches – and had a tendency to please the government rather than God.
- 2) They did not sufficiently change many of the customs and teachings of the Church of Rome.

Infant baptism was continued, in spite of the fact that there is no scriptural verification for it. Sprinkling was also continued.

Ritual and formality characteristic of pagan forms of worship are not conducive to genuine worship for they appeal to sensuous human nature.

If people leave a church with a mysterious feeling of 'worship' but have not been brought face to face with Jesus Christ in a personal way, they have been worshipping in a dead church. This church appeared alive, but was dead.

The Lord is never impressed by the beauty of a well-kept mausoleum, knowing that inside are the bones of a dead man.

Sardis was wealthy but degenerate. Twice the city had been lost because the leadership and citizenry were too lazy to defend themselves from their enemies. Like the city, this church had won a good reputation at one time and the members thought they had arrived; they were content in the beautiful building they had erected on the corner of self-satisfaction and complacency streets.

Cause of death: rested on its laurels. Died from neglect, lax moral standards and a failure to recognise its own spiritual condition – they had a form of godliness but denied the power. 2 Timothy 3:5.

What should we do if we feel we are members of a dead or dying church? Be submissive to the Holy Spirit – if He says stay, stay, if He says go, go. There are lofty promises for those who are called upon to stay where they are. Revelation 3:4,5.

### **Revelation 3: 7-13**

*"And 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': <sup>8</sup>I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup> Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. <sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Philadelphia:

A.D.1648 – 1900. The church Christ loved.

**Commendation:** *‘I KNOW YOUR WORKS. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name’*

**Condemnation:** *None.*

**Counsel:** *‘I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.’*

**Challenge:** *‘Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’*

The name Philadelphia means brotherly love.

Jesus selected that church to describe the kind of church age that was initiated around the year 1650 and will continue to the Tribulation. Just as Sardis came out of Thyatira, so Philadelphia came out of Sardis. Philadelphia was marked by vitality of life.

In this church age God worked in a thrilling way that produced revivals in Europe and the British Isles which in turn produced what is known today as the modern missionary movement. We all want to belong to this one. No condemnation. Right doctrine and right living going hand in hand.

Doctrine without love is legalism where love is present without doctrine it is humanism.

God promised to open doors for this loving church, to give it an opportunity to reach out to a lost world.

It is the Holy Spirit who prepares the hearts of men to receive the good news, not our plans, tracts, crusades or feeble witnessing. Jesus reminds the church at Philadelphia that the doors of opportunity are completely under His control. If He wants them open, no one can shut them. If He wants them shut, no one can open them, He alone has the key.

They were commended because they couldn’t do it ‘they had little strength’! Except for some churches in America the Philadelphia church age is characterized by small congregations which according to human standards are weak. This of course, is real strength. They kept His word. This church not only believed the word of God, but obeyed it.

William Ramsay, in his book, *‘The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia’*, claims that when the city was founded in the second century BC, it was designed to be a strategic centre for the spreading of the Greek language throughout the whole of Asia – *‘It was’*, he says *‘a missionary city from the beginning.’* Whatever the city may have been for Greek culture, it was now to be a springboard for the propagation of the Christian faith.

The reformation churches, past and present, believe the word of God but are not characterized by *obedience* to it. The church of Philadelphia a fitting contrast to this pattern is characterized by obedience to His word.

Promises to the church:

1) **vindication** – He will do it.

2) **preservation** – *‘since you have kept my command to endure I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.’*

The world has never known a universal period of tribulation. This passage is an obvious reference to the Tribulation period of 7 years that we will cover later on. This promise however, is to the church of Philadelphia (brotherly love) she will be raptured, caught up, before that Tribulation begins.

#### **Revelation 3:14 – 22 –**

*<sup>14</sup> And 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: <sup>15</sup> I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> 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 – <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. <sup>21</sup> To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

#### Laodicea:

A.D.1900 – present day.

The apostate or unsaved church, the luke-warm church. The name means people ruling, this church is ruled by men, not God. This church is lead by the people not by the Holy Spirit and as such Jesus says, He will spew them out. Jesus description of Himself is the Faithful and True witness, throwing into relief that the church is neither of these. All of the previous churches had a word of commendation, this church has none. What an indictment! There is nothing commendable about it. Probably mostly all are religious unbelievers, the hot are the truly saved, the cold are those who are not believers and do not claim to be believers. The lukewarm are those who claim to be believers, but are not truly regenerated.

This is the apostate church. Apostasy can be defined as the departure from the truth that one professed to have. It does not mean that the person actually possessed the truth.

In fact apostates seldom do possess the truth, rather it is a departure from a truth they *professed* to have because of an *affiliation* with a particular church. For example, a minister of an Anglican, Baptist or Methodist church is *professing*, by virtue of his position, to believe the doctrines of his or her particular denomination. But the apostate denies these doctrines and has departed from the truth that he professed to have.

This is characteristic of the **visible** church which is not made up (totally) of believers, of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, as predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 –

*<sup>4</sup>Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, we ask you <sup>2</sup> not to be soon shaken in mind, or troubled, either by spirit or by word, or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come; <sup>3</sup> let no one deceive you by any means for that Day will not come unless the falling away come first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition'.*

The term 'falling away' is apostasy.

**Commendation:** *None.*

**Condemnation:** *'So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say 'I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'*

**Counsel:** *'I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see'.*

**Challenge:** *'To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne'.*

The final church mentioned in Revelation is the lukewarm church of Laodicea, the church which will be in existence when Christ returns for His true Bride. These lukewarm 'believers' will be left behind, unless they have '*bought gold refined in the fire, so that they can become rich*', in other words, they repent.

The church which received the last letter from the postman at Patmos was outwardly impressive. It had all the trappings of wealth, but something was missing. Well known theologian John Stott wrote '*The Laodicean church was a half-hearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so wide spread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anaemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion.*'

The Laodicean church today would be at the forefront of the gay rights and feminist movements and be leaders in the ordination of women and the feminizing of the deity. God is female lobby.

The message of Jesus is clear - '*Have nothing to do with them*'.

The challenge of Jesus to Laodicea, like his six other challenges, is to '*overcome*' or to become '*born again believers*'. The challenge is simply a promise to share His throne as He shares the Father's throne. '*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*'.

The message of Jesus to Laodicea indicates that as this age draws to a close, apostasy, deadness and indifference will increase. Sounds like a case of the Emperor has no clothes! No wonder our Lord asked of this age '*However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*' Luke 18:8.

Although most of these phases of church history are now concluded, nevertheless, their influence still carries over from stage to stage, and some trends are still in existence even in our own day.

May we indeed hear and take to heart what the Spirit is saying to the churches in this day.

Tomorrow we will look at what happens from Chapter 4 onwards.

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