

## The Revelation to John 3-4: Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea and the Throne Room

7 cities: form the circular route of a letter carrier: Ephesus to Smyrna to Pergamum to Thyatira to Sardis to Philadelphia to Laodicea (W.M. Ramsay); Daniel 7.9-14; Daniel 10.1-9

### 2.1-7: A Message to the Church in Ephesus

4 BUT -- you have left your first love

- Matthew 24.12-14: 'Most peoples' love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.'

6 Nicolaitans (from *nikos* ['to conquer/subdue] and *laos* [people]) - likely named for Nicolas of Antioch (Acts 6.5). Some early Christian sources say that Nicolas was a convert from paganism who taught of Christian compromise with paganism

### 8-11: A Message to the Church in Smyrna

Roman persecution -- Acts 16.23-40; 2 Cor. 11.23; 'unto death' especially under Domitian (81-96 A.D.); Martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, in 156 by burning

Be faithful and 'receive the victor's crown' -- 2 Timothy 4.8; 1 Peter 5.4; James 1.12

'the second death' -- eternal judgment; On overcoming temptation to compromise see Matthew 10.28, Luke 12.4-5: 'I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!'

### 12-17: A Message to the Church in Pergamum

- Commended for their loyalty to Christ in face of persecution
- 'throne of Satan' -- possibly role of city as a center for Roman government and pagan religion; there was a conical hill behind Pergamum which was the site of many temples, including a throne-like altar to Zeus

14 BUT the Church is complicit in compromising and is challenged to discipline apostate members

Balaam and Israel -- Numbers 22.5-25.3; 31.8, 16; Israel was led into idolatry and immorality through deceitful counsel of Balaam. Balaam, a pagan prophet hired by Balak, the King of Moab, to curse the invading Israelites, was prevented by God. However, Balaam schemed to undermine the faithfulness of the Israelites through the temptations of Moabite women. The Israelites 'defected from the LORD (31.16) through fornication and idolatry (worshipping pagan gods). God punished the Israelites and commanded Moses to execute the (Numbers 25.1-9)

What's the big deal? Leviticus 18:1-5

### 18-29: A Message to the Church in Thyatira

Jezebel and Ahab -- 1 Kings 16-22; 2 Kings 9

Jezebel was a foreign woman who introduced the worship of Baal into Israel, which was at the heart of many evils, notably idolatry and fornication.

19 For what is the Church in Thyatira commended?

20 For what is the Church rebuked? Rationalization for cultural accommodation? Deut. 32.15-22; 1 Corinthians 8-10

### 3.1-6: A Message to the Church in Sardis

- Located 50 miles east of Ephesus
- Ancient capital of Lydia
- Croesus in 6C B.C. – myth of Midas

What is the issue in Sardis? *Nekros!*

‘like a thief’ – Mathew 24.43f; Luke 12.39f; 1 Thess. 5.2

Also, Sardis was surprised by attacks from Cyrus in 549 B.C. and Antiochus in 218 B.C.

A few ‘have not stained their clothing’ – Sardis was a leading manufacturer of woolen goods

They ‘will walk’ – Genesis 5.22 (Enoch) and 6.9 (Noah); Ephesians 4.1

5 Three promises:

- a. Overcomer clothed in white robes: purity, white togas were worn by Roman citizens at a triumph; Zechariah 3.5-6 – exchanging filthy garments for a clean robe symbolizes the ‘removal of iniquities’
- b. Not erased from the ‘book of life’(13.8; 17.8; 20.12-15; 21.27) – Exodus 32.32-33; Psalm 69.28; Daniel 12.1
- c. Christ will confess the believers by name to the Father. Matt 10.32 and Luke 12.8

### 3.7-13: A Message to the Church in Philadelphia

28 miles SE of Sardis, Philadelphia was in an earthquake-prone region

Distinctive Messianic titles - Isaiah 22.22: *I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.* (Rev. 6.10; Mark 1.24; Luke 4.34; Rev. 1.18)

Eliakim – faithful steward/governor/finance minister of the house of King Hezekiah in Judah in 700 B.C.

The point: Jesus Christ holds the power of salvation and judgment

9 as in 2.13; some in the Jewish community were persecuting the Church; at/before your feet (Isa. 45.14; 49.23; 60.14)

10 *peirasmos* – trial/testing/tribulation

To which testing might John/the LORD be referring?

‘those dwelling on the earth’ – term used in Revelation to refer to unbelieving idolaters (6.10; 8.13; 11.10; 12.12; 13.8)

12 God’s promise to Philadelphia; Isaiah 62.2; 65.15

On the Temple – Revelation 21.22 – 22.5; ‘The Lord God Almighty is its (the New Jerusalem’s) Temple, and the Lamb’

### 3.14-22: A Message to the Church in Laodicea

11 miles west of Colossae, 6 miles south of Hierapolis overseeing the Lycus Valley

An immensely wealthy community in an earthquake-prone region known for its soft, raven-black wool

Without a water supply, Laodicea received water from Danizli, six miles south, via aqueduct

Condemned for an ineffective witness and a deplorable spiritual condition.

Exhorted to persevere by becoming faithful witnesses and renewing their fellowship with Christ

Isaiah 65.15-16

Jesus is the Amen, the faithful and true witness

For what are the Laodiceans rebuked?

Hierapolis had hot water from the hot springs. Colossae had cold water. The piped-in water in Laodicea was lukewarm.

Nakedness – symbol of judgment and shame (Isa. 20.1-4; Ezek. 16.36; 23.10)

### **4:1-11: God on His Throne**

**Ezekiel 1.4-38; Isaiah 6.1-4; Daniel 7.9-10; 2.28-29ff**

Summoned to the throne room; in antiquity the throne is a symbol of the sovereign majesty of a king

YHWH on the throne – 4.2-3, 9-10; 5.1, 7,13; 6.16; 7.10, 15; 19.4; 20.11; 21.5

‘in the Spirit’ – a Holy Spirit-sent visionary experience in which God reveals Himself

3 Stones (also Revelation 21):

- a. jasper – an opaque jewel, red, green, brown, blue, yellow, or white; It makes up the wall in the city of God (21.18) and heads the list of the foundation stones (21.19-20); Associated with the glory of God (21.11)
- b. *sardio* – carnelian; fiery red stone very popular in the ancient world
- c. *ipis* - rainbow/halo – like the radiant light surrounding the throne in Ezekiel 1.28; ‘like’ emerald
- d. Perhaps they signify majesty/holiness, wrath/judgment, grace/mercy
- e. These stones are also named in Ezekiel 28.13 (King of Tyre) and in Exodus 28.17-21 (high priest’s breastplate) representing tribes of Benjamin, Reuben, and Judah, respectively

4 Heavenly Council: Twenty-four elders (*presbyteroi*): concentric circles with elders, living creatures, and songs, then elders surrounding the Throne of God. ‘Clothed in white garments’ with ‘crowns of gold’. Could be: 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles; or 24 great saints; or the Church built on twenty-four orders of priesthood described in 1 Chronicles 24.4-5; or the victorious, redeemed, faithful Church. Or the 24 elders could be angelic figures; or might represent the prophetic revelation of the 24 OT books).

Throughout Revelation, the *presbyteroi* worship (5.14; 11.16; 19.4) and praise (4.11; 5.9-10; 11.17-18; 14.3; 19.4) and serve as intermediaries and interpreters (5.5; 7.13-17)

5 ‘lightning, storm, and thunder’, lamps, and a sea of glass – 4.5; 8.5; 11.19; 16.18; Ezekiel 1.4-28. The coming storm - symbols of both the divine majesty and the judgment of the Apocalypse.

‘seven spirits of God’ – (1.4), the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3.11), Zechariah 4.1-10

4.6-8 Four Living Beings (Ezekiel 1.18: ‘eyes all around’); Ezekiel 1.5-6, 10-11 (Gospels, Zodiak, other?)