

Session 4 The Seven Churches: Called to Overcome (Rev. 2-3)
Additional Study Materials

ANSWERS TO THE FILL-IN THE BLANKS FOR THIS SESSION

The book of Revelation is called the **REVELATION OF JESUS** because it reveals the majesty of His heart and leadership in His plan to transition the earth to the age to come.

In Revelation 1-3, John shared a vision highlighting **30 DESCRIPTIONS** of Jesus' majesty, ministry, and personality, and **18 ETERNAL REWARDS**.

We must understand Jesus' message to the seven churches. It is His instruction on what the **OVERCOMING CHURCH** looks like.

Individually: the letters were written to inspire **WHOLEHEARTEDNESS** in individuals.

Eschatologically: to **PREPARE THE END-TIME CHURCH** for the events seen in Revelation 6-19.

Jesus highlighted **SIX TEMPTATIONS**.

He warned them the most about **FEAR** (of persecution and rejection).

Here Jesus mentioned 18 rewards that equip His people to persevere by being anchored in eternity with confidence that our **CHOICES MATTER** to such a degree that they will be rewarded.

“The angel to the church” refers to the **APOSTOLIC LEADER** over each church.

The church of Ephesus was affirmed for their diligent work and perseverance in standing for truth, but corrected for **LACKING LOVE FOR JESUS** in their labors.

He exhorted them to **REMEMBER, REPENT, AND ACT** in the ways that they did in their former days (v. 5).

The church of Smyrna was called to continue to walk in the grace of **FEARLESSNESS AND FAITHFULNESS** in persecution.

He corrected their compromise in **TOLERATING IMMORALITY AND IDOLATRY** (v. 14). (Pergamos)

Jesus releases either the *fire of grace* or the *fire of judgment*, depending on **HOW HIS PEOPLE RESPOND** to His leadership.

Jesus gave them no affirmation, but corrected their **SPIRITUAL PASSIVITY** and lukewarmness (v. 1). (Sardis)

The church of Laodicea was promised **DEEPER FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD** and authority in His eternal kingdom *if* they zealously repented of their lukewarmness.

Session 4 The Seven Churches: Called to Overcome (Rev. 2-3)

I. HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR

- A. The exhortation that Jesus repeated the most in His earthly ministry was the call to have *ears to hear* what the Spirit is saying. This is written sixteen times (eight times in the gospels and eight times in Revelation: Mt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mk. 4:9, 23; 7:16; Lk. 8:8; 14:35; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9).

⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 2:7)

- B. Jesus was the only One in the NT to give this exhortation. He echoed Moses, who called Israel to “hear,” meaning to “have ears to hear” (Deut. 6:4-5), and He echoed the Father (Ps. 45:10).

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deut. 6:4-5)

II. PROMISES TO OVERCOMERS: ETERNAL REWARDS

- A. Jesus taught on eternal rewards more than any other person in the Scripture. He mentioned eighteen rewards that equip us to persevere by being anchored in eternity with confidence that our choices will be rewarded in eternity. When suffering is seen in God’s light, it loses its power to intimidate.
- B. Jesus was speaking to believers who had already received the free gift of salvation. He was calling them to live in a way to receive heavenly rewards. Salvation, or justification, is a free gift given to us. It is based on Jesus’ worthiness (Eph. 2:8-9). Heavenly rewards are given to us according to our works, or our response of gratitude to Jesus for giving us so great a salvation. There will be a vast difference in the measure of glory of each one’s reward (1 Cor. 15:41).
- C. I assume that most of the eighteen rewards consist of receiving a greater measure of the basic blessings that all believers receive in an introductory way. The issue in Revelation 2-3 pertains to what measure of the reward a believer receives. Overcomers receive the *fullest measure* of rewards.
- D. **The eighteen rewards:** To eat from the tree of life in the midst of Paradise (2:7); to receive the crown of life (2:10); not to be hurt by the second death (2:11); to eat hidden manna (2:17); to receive a white stone (2:17); to have power over the nations (2:26); to receive the morning star (2:28); to receive white garments (Rev 3:5); to not have one’s name blotted from the Book of Life (3:5); for Jesus to confess one’s name before the Father and angels (3:5); for one’s persecutors to know that Jesus loves them (3:9); to be made a pillar in God’s temple (3:12); to have God’s name, the New Jerusalem’s name, and Jesus’ new name written on them (3:12); to receive gold to make one rich (3:18); to dine with Jesus (3:20); and to sit on His throne. (3:21).
- E. An overcomer in this context is one who matures in the specific areas of faithfulness that Jesus emphasized in his or her life. Obedience is connected to rewards. Some falsely teach that these rewards are given to all believers in fullness, regardless of how they live. This view takes these

rewards out of their context that requires repentance from certain things and faithfulness to the end. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus was not exhorting them to be born again. He was offering born-again believers rewards as incentives to greater diligence in the face of temptation and pressure.

- F. To the church of Ephesus, overcoming meant to return to their first love for Jesus until the end of their life. To the church in Smyrna, it meant being faithful in persecution even to death. To the churches in Pergamos and Thyatira, overcoming meant to resist immorality and idolatry for the remainder of their life. To the church in Sardis, it was to be watchful or develop a prayer life and to hold fast the things that God entrusted to them from their earlier years. To the church in Philadelphia, overcoming meant to persevere in mature obedience for the remaining years of their life. To the church of Laodicea, overcoming meant to resist lukewarmness.
- G. Overcoming does not mean attaining perfection in one's character, but rather constantly reaching for victory with all our strength. The Lord is very kind in His evaluation of our lives. Our greatest faithfulness is flawed, yet it is consistent in desire to press in and break through.

III. WHO ARE OVERCOMERS? TWO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

- A. First, ***overcoming worldly unbelief***: all believers overcome in this general way by believing in Jesus and refusing heresies, as outlined in John's epistles (1 Jn. 4:1-5; 5:4-5).
- B. Second, ***overcoming unfaithfulness***: in a believer's life, as specifically defined in Revelation 2-3. To overcome means to walk in spiritual maturity, or to be consistent in obedience.
- C. Summary: as unbelievers, we ***overcome unbelief*** on the day we become born again. As believers, we ***overcome unfaithfulness*** only after we endure in obedience until the end.

IV. WHO ARE OVERCOMERS? THREE VIEWS

- A. ***The eternal reward view***: rightly teaches that the rewards in Revelation 2-3 are given in different degrees according to one's faithfulness in loving and obeying Jesus. Rewards are given in addition to the free gift of eternal life. Jesus is speaking to churches. The issue of salvation is already settled; the issue in focus is the particular areas of unfaithfulness that Jesus emphasized in their lives. Not all Christians overcome the specific unfaithfulness Jesus highlights.
- B. ***The "all believers" view***: wrongly teaches that all believers are overcomers because the very act of believing in Jesus is all that is needed to be an overcomer (1 Jn. 5:4-5). Faith ***in*** Jesus rather than faithfulness ***to*** Him is emphasized in this position. In other words, both the spiritually mature and immature believers are equally overcomers. All the rewards in Revelation 2-3 are automatically and fully given to all believers as being synonymous with the gift of eternal life. According to this view, the thief on the cross will receive the same reward as Paul and John the Baptist.

- C. **The loss of salvation view:** wrongly teaches that believers in Revelation 2-3 are being exhorted to faithfulness in order to avoid losing their salvation. In this view, failing to overcome is synonymous with losing one's salvation. This view implies that we must overcome all spiritual immaturity to avoid losing our salvation and that only mature believers are saved. For example, the diligent workers in Ephesus who lacked fresh love for Jesus would have lost their salvation if they had died before renewing their first love (Rev. 2:2-7).

V. EPHESUS: RETURNING TO OUR FIRST LOVE (REV. 2:1-7)

¹To 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: ²I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Remember 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. ⁶But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'" (Rev. 2:1-7)

- A. Paul's final word to Ephesus was that they love Jesus. Jesus came later and addressed their negligence to grow in love for Jesus. Ephesus was the mightiest church in Asia. They left Paul (2 Tim. 1:15) by breaking off their relationship with him, and later they left their love for Jesus.

²⁴Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen. (Eph. 6:24)

¹⁵This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. (2 Tim. 1:15)

- B. The primary message: this church was affirmed for their diligent work and perseverance in standing for truth, but was corrected for lacking love for Jesus in the midst of their labors.
- C. The city of Ephesus: the financial center and capital city of a Roman province of Asia Minor and its largest city (population of 250,000). This seaport on the Mediterranean Sea was known for immorality and was a center for idol worship in Asia. The central place of worship in the city was the temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (425 feet long, 220 feet wide, 60 feet high held up by 127 marble pillars). Her worship combined religion and sexual immorality. The silversmiths prospered because of the demand for silver and bronze idols of Diana (Acts 19:25).
1. It was a revival center for Asia (Acts 19:26), being the third most influential church in the book of Acts (after Jerusalem and Antioch). It is commonly agreed that John received the book of Revelation around AD 90. At that time, the church of Ephesus was the largest and most influential church (since the church of Jerusalem was scattered in AD 70).

2. Paul came to Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth on his second missionary trip in AD 52 (Acts 18:19-21). He preached there briefly, and then left. Priscilla and Aquila stayed to train Apollos and the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 18:24-28). He returned to establish a church on his third missionary journey, staying three years (Acts 20:31).
 3. The people responded so fervently to the gospel that the market for purchasing idols was dramatically reduced. The once fervent worshipers of Diana had become red hot in their devotion to Jesus. The revival resulted in many coming to Jesus with such devotion that they voluntarily burned magic books worth 50,000 silver coins or drachmas (Acts 19:13-20). A drachma was an average day's wage (\$100/day would have been \$5,000,000).
 4. After Paul left, Timothy became its apostolic leader (I Tim. 1:1-3). In approximately AD 65, John probably became its primary apostolic leader until his imprisonment on the island of Patmos about sixty miles from Ephesus. At this time, Jesus' mother Mary also lived there. John probably wrote Revelation about forty years after Paul established the church in Ephesus. The church of Ephesus was the recipient of eight NT books (the Gospel of John, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation). Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus.
- D. Jesus' revelation of Himself: He holds the seven stars and walks in the midst of His people.

¹These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands... (Rev. 2:1)

1. Jesus emphasized specific aspects of His glory as seen in Rev. 1:12-20. The word *angel* is *angelos* in Greek. It is used in Scripture to speak of human messengers (Lk. 9:52) or of angelic beings (Luke 1:11), both good angels (Heb. 1:13-14) and evil spirits (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). The word speaks of a messenger sent to carry a message. The seven *angeloi* refer to human messengers with responsibility in the churches.
¹³In the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man...¹⁶He had in His right hand seven stars...²⁰The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels [literally messengers] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. (Rev. 1:13, 16-20)
2. *Jesus holds the seven stars in His right hand:* He holds, supports, directs, protects, and anoints His servants. This emphasizes Jesus' tender care and commitment to help His messengers or angels, which I see as the apostolic leaders over the churches. Jesus anoints His servants as bright stars who reflect light to equip the church as a lampstand touching the region.
³Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. (Dan. 12:3)
3. In the Psalms, David demonstrated an unusual measure of revelation concerning God's right hand. He wrote of it as expressing God's kindness protecting him when he was attacked (Ps. 17:7), God's delight (Ps. 16:11), God's blessing (Ps. 18:35), God's power (Ps. 20:6), and the place of honor (Heb. 1:3).

⁷Show Your marvelous loving kindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them. (Ps. 17:7)

E. Jesus' revelation of Himself: He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

1. He is deeply involved with His churches, protecting those who walk with Him as Adam walked with God in the garden of Eden.

¹⁴For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you. (Deut. 23:14)

2. When God's servants feel inadequate for the task the Lord has assigned them or when they need help in repenting, they can confess that Jesus holds them in His right hand and walks with them as He did Adam.

⁶Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (Phil. 1:6)

F. Affirmation for faithfulness: perseverance in labor and truth

²I know your works, your labor, your patience [perseverance], and that you cannot bear those who are evil. You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary...⁶This you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev. 2:2-3, 6)

1. *I know your works*: Jesus knew they were a hard-working church. Patience speaks of perseverance. They were steady and faithful under pressure for decades.

¹²The signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. (2 Cor. 12:12)

2. *You labored for My name's sake and have not become weary* (v. 3): they were zealous to establish a true biblical message and to maintain diligent outreach to others. Jesus remembers all our efforts in serving others because of love for Him.

¹⁰God is not unjust to forget your...labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints... (Heb. 6:10)

3. *I know that you cannot bear those who are evil*: they would not tolerate false ministries who promoted impurity (doctrinally and morally). They exposed false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13). The church is to confront sin (Mt. 18:15-18; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20; Tit. 3:10-11).

¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him... (2 Jn. 10)

4. You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars: they tested the visiting ministries and required them to hold to biblical standards. We must test the message and lifestyle of ministries. Paul prophesied to the Ephesians elders, warning them of false teachers coming after he left them (Acts 20:29-30).

²⁹***I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*** ³⁰***Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things...***
(Acts 20:29-30)

5. You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate: this possibly refers to followers of Nicolas, the Jerusalem deacon who fell away from the faith (Acts 6:5). This was the common view among the early church fathers. For example, Irenaeus in the second century taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality. This is antinomianism, which teaches grace in a way that allows people to continue in sin without repenting. This distortion of *liberty in grace* that allows for compromise with a sinful culture is prevalent in the church today. This view best represents what Jesus was saying in this passage.

⁴***Certain men have crept in unnoticed...who turn the grace of God into lewdness.*** (Jude 4)

6. Another view of the Nicolaitans is that it is a transliteration of two Greek words, *nico* (to rule) and *laos* (the people) thus, “one who rules the laity.” This view refers to the teaching or church system that exalts the clergy over the laity in an inappropriate way.

G. Correction for compromise: neglect in cultivating love for Jesus

⁴***Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*** (Rev. 2:4)

1. You have left your first love: they left or neglected their original heart of devotion for Jesus that was seen in the great revival in which the church was started in Acts 19. Service and doctrinal purity are very important, but they can never replace our love for Jesus. It takes time to cultivate deep, consistent love for Jesus. It requires developing a heart focus that connects with Him.
2. I have this against you: Jesus loves us enough to speak against us in redemptive rebukes. Jesus knew that this error would cause them to perpetuate the impartation of wrong foundations to others as well as hindering the Ephesians from receiving His full blessing in the age-to-come.

¹⁹***As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*** ***Therefore be zealous and repent.*** (Rev. 3:19)

3. Their ministry grew very large until it reached into all Asia. They labored in ministry before cultivating a heart of love for Jesus. The first commandment is to love God with all our heart. This empowers us to love people more deeply and with consistency.

³⁷***“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*** ³⁸***This is the first and great commandment.*** (Mt. 22:37-38)

4. They were corrected for lacking love for Jesus in the midst of their diligent ministry labors. They saw increasing their work in the ministry as more important than increasing their love for Jesus.
 5. Loving God with all of our heart is the ***first commandment*** (not the “first option”) because it is God’s first priority. God sees this as the highest lifestyle for anyone. We need insight into the supremacy of the first commandment to God.
 6. Loving God with all of our heart is the ***great commandment*** because it is greatest in impact. Loving God ***always*** has a great impact on our heart that leads us to love ourselves and others (believers and unbelievers).
 7. The Spirit is restoring the first commandment to first place in the Church worldwide.
 8. Service without the foundation of intimacy with Jesus leads to burnout, disappointment, and wounding. Thus, the service *cannot be sustained* over decades. I have seen many seek to serve others in ministry that continues for three to five years, but then is not sustained after that because of burnout.
 9. The anointing to love God includes the supernatural ability to feel God’s love and then give love back to God. This overflows in love to others. The reward of a lover is found in having the power to love. God’s primary goal or assignment in our life is to grow in love, meekness, and revelation. If our *ministry* assignment is our first priority, then we easily get burned out and bitter.
- H. Exhortation to respond (with a warning): Jesus called them to remember, repent, and act. He gave this church a three-step process to restore their love: remember, repent, and act.

⁵Remember 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. (Rev. 2:5)

1. *Remember from where you have fallen*: they were to remember how they used to feel about Jesus. We think on God’s past goodness to us and our past love and devotion for Jesus. They left their love for Jesus, but not their hatred for evil.
2. *Repent and do the first works*: they were to repent of their negligence, then act in ways that would fan the flame of their affection for Him. To repent is to “change our mind and life vision” so as to agree with wholehearted devotion for Jesus.
3. The first works include the devotion they originally embraced in their walk with Jesus.
4. *I will remove your lampstand from its place*: Ephesus was a bright light in all of Asia. They were a “lampstand ministry” which speaks of being a ministry with a far-reaching influence to other places. To have their lampstand removed meant to lose their spiritual influence.
5. A lamp in Scripture often speaks of one’s ministry as it brings God’s light to others (Mt. 5:15-16; Rev. 1:20; 2:5; 11:3-6; cf. Zech. 4:2; Is. 62:1; Jn. 5:35). The ministry that loses its tender love of Jesus will soon lose its light of ministry, even if it is diligent in service and sound in doctrine.

6. *I will come to you quickly*: a reference to Jesus coming to them in judgment to discipline them, to correct them of the things that He highlighted in His letter to them. This is not a reference to His second coming.
7. The church of Ephesus no longer existed after the fourth century.

I. Promise for overcomers: one promise

⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. (Rev. 2:7)

1. *I will give to him to eat from the tree of life*: Adam walked with God in the garden of Eden.

⁹The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden (of Eden) ... (Gen. 2:9)

2. *In the midst of the Paradise of God*: there are different measures of this blessing for those in Ephesian church who returned to their first love.

²In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits...The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations...

¹⁴Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life... (Rev. 22:2-14)

- a. All believers will eat of the fruit from the tree of life that grows in the New Jerusalem. This reward seems to be a special blessing of eating of the fruit tree the midst or the center of the New Jerusalem.
 - b. The fruit on the tree apparently has different measures of God's glory in what it imparts to those who eat it and possibly be related to the geographic place in proximity to the center of the city where the throne is. This reward is not synonymous with salvation, but is something promised to believers who overcome and return to their first love.
- J. The time period prophetically spoken of by the church of Ephesus: may represent the time of the New Testament church (about AD 30-100) with its zeal to work and its doctrinal purity.

VI. GOD'S FIRST PRIORITY IS TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART

- A. Satan's first priority against the Church is to lead us astray from cultivating the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love and extravagant devotion. If Satan leads us astray from purity of devotion to Jesus, then our service and love for others will eventually fail.

³I am afraid, lest as the serpent [Satan] deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:3, NAS)

- B. The end-time saints will marvel at Jesus and be "victorious in love" over the Antichrist.

²I saw...those who have the victory over the beast [Antichrist]...standing on the sea of glass...

³They sing...saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works..." (Rev. 15:2-3)

⁷*For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)*

- C. Cultivating a responsive heart of extravagant devotion to Jesus takes time and effort. It is something that we must do deliberately. Love does not automatically grow. Rather, it automatically diminishes unless we intentionally cultivate a responsive heart.
- D. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Holy Spirit will help that freshness return to us.
- E. People seeking to be truly devoted to Jesus ask, “What is the most that God will empower me to give to Him?” We are not content with the minimum requirement of salvation.
- F. Mary chose the good part. ***We must choose it.*** No one can choose it for us. This good way was sustained throughout her life. God honors the value we put on the relationship by giving us more according to our spiritual hunger, but He does not love us more.

⁴²*Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. (Lk. 10:42)*

- G. We must have a sustained vision to go deep in God. We must set our heart to grow deep in love. It takes focus and effort to go deep in God. We must set our heart like Mary of Bethany did. Sustaining a fresh walk with God through decades is the definition of living radically before God. We are not radical because we do something unusual for a few weeks or months.
- H. David sustained his passion for God for decades that he referred to “all” the days of his life.

⁴*One thing... I seek...all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord... (Ps. 27:4)*

- I. Daniel sustained his prayer life with passion for decades (from about age 15 to over age 80).

¹⁰*Daniel...knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. (605-539 BC or for 66 years) (Dan. 6:10)*

VII. SMYRNA: FAITHFULNESS IN SUFFERING (REV. 2:8-11)

⁸*To the angel of the church in Smyrna write, “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹*‘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.* ¹⁰*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.* ¹¹*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.” (Rev. 2:8-11)**

- A. The primary message: the church of Smyrna was a persecuted church. Jesus called them to walk in grace of fearlessness and faithfulness that would require some of them to die for their faith.
 - 1. He honored them for their enduring persecution. He told them that more persecution was coming and promised them the crown of life. The rewards far outweigh the sacrifice.

2. The command to be faithful and fearless contains in it the promise of the enabling to obey. They were not super saints, only weak and broken people whom the spirit of glory strengthened.

¹⁴If you are reproached...blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory...rests on you. (1 Pet. 4:14)

B. The city of Smyrna: Smyrna was a large harbor city on the Aegean Sea (the west coast of modern Turkey) with over 100,000 residents. It continues today as the city of Izmir with a population of about 200,000.

1. Smyrna was one of the most beautiful cities in Asia, referred to in the ancient world as “the Crown of Asia” or “the Flower of Asia.” It was a prosperous harbor with many roads connecting it to the major cities of Asia.
2. Emperor worship was a unifying factor in the Roman Empire. It was an issue of military security for all the citizens to know that each one was loyal to Rome. There were many military invasions in the ancient world. Therefore, everyone who lived in Smyrna was required by law to worship at a pagan temple. The most prominent temples were those dedicated to Zeus and the goddess Cybele.
3. Once a year, everyone was required to burn incense on an altar for Caesar. Christians who refused to participate in this were considered criminals of the state. They were burned at the stake or killed by wild beasts.

C. Jesus’ revelation of Himself: the source and assurance of blessing

⁸These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life... (Rev. 2:8)

1. *The First and the Last*: Jesus is the source of all blessing and sees the end of all things. This description reveals aspects of Jesus’ personality and ministry. It emphasizes His tender care for our lives and His commitment to intervene to help those being persecuted.
 - a. Scripture speaks of Jesus as the “First” or the source of all blessing. He is the uncreated God who was before all things and is the source of all goodness. He is the One who originally gave the believers in Smyrna the things they then lost in the persecution. In other words, Jesus could easily restore those blessings to them again and again.

¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above... (Jas 1:17)

- b. Jesus is the “Last.” He sees the end of all things. Therefore He can assure us that all His promises will come to pass. The end of His plan for our life is in His hands. Jesus sees the end of the story and assures us that there is something bigger going on.
2. *Jesus who was dead and came to life*: to a suffering church He revealed that He understands their suffering. He revealed Himself as a man who was dead—who suffered through the painful processes involved in being killed in a cruel way. He understood what they were going through. He came to life and so showed His power over death. He knows the way to victory. He experienced the worst that men can do to us, and He triumphed over it.

3. Jesus as the First and Last is from Rev. 1:17-18 and is mentioned seven times: in Isaiah three times (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12) and Revelation four times (Rev. 1:8, 17; 2:8; 22:13).

D. Affirmation for faithfulness: loyal love and perseverance in the face persecution.

⁹I 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. (Rev. 2:9)

1. *I know*: intimacy with God grows by knowing what He feels and by understanding that He knows what we are feeling and going through.
2. *I know your works, tribulation and poverty*: Jesus saw their work, how hard they worked, and what they accomplished. He saw their tribulation and how much pressure they walked through. He saw their poverty and how much they lost.
3. *I know your poverty*: the persecution caused them to lose business opportunities as well as their property, leaving many of them in financial poverty.

³²You endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated...³⁴and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. (Heb. 10:32-34)

4. The end-time persecution will greatly affect the finances of many.

¹⁶He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, ¹⁷and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (Rev. 13:16-17)

5. Jesus will show forth His ownership over gold in the end times as He transfers wealth.

***⁷“I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations [Jesus]...
⁸The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,” says the LORD of hosts. (Hag. 2:7-8)***

6. *But you are rich*: Jesus wanted them to receive the revelation that they were spiritually rich in God at that time and would later have treasure in heaven. Jesus taught on the foolishness of neglecting to acquire riches in God and lay up treasure in heaven.

²¹He who lays up treasure for himself...is not rich toward God. (Lk. 12:21)

¹⁸I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich... (Rev. 3:18)

²¹Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven... (Mt. 19:21)

7. The church at Smyrna was the opposite condition of the Laodicean church who boasted of financial wealth, yet were spiritually poor (Rev. 3:17). Smyrna was a poor-yet-rich church, whereas Laodicea was a rich-yet-poor church.

8. Poverty is not a sign of spirituality. However, often the poor are more eager to follow, while the rich continue to find it harder to enter the kingdom initially as well as in the deeper aspects of it (Mt. 19:23-24).

⁵Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith...? (Jas 2:5)

²³Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

²⁴Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. (Mt. 19:23-24)

9. Virtue is not found in poverty, but in giving or risking financial loss because of godly convictions.
10. The church in Smyrna was poor because of persecution. Paul was poor because of his lifestyle of giving, not because of laziness, aimless, or lack of faith and vision.

¹⁰As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things. (2 Cor. 6:10)

11. I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not: Jesus was aware of the large, influential Jewish population who claimed to be God's chosen people who were in covenant with Him and honored His Word (Torah), but in reality served Satan and persecuted the church. The apostle Paul was like one of these Jews who received mercy (1 Tim. 1:13).
12. *The synagogue of Satan*: they denied Jesus' divinity and resurrection, and they considered His miracles as being done by Satan. Jesus referred to this as blasphemy of the Spirit (Mt. 12:24-32). A synagogue of Satan is one that actively persecutes worshippers of Jesus. Some were Jews from the seed of Abraham physically, but were spiritually of Satan.

⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. (Jn. 8:44)

³²Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him... (Mt. 12:32)

- E. Correction for compromise: there were no corrections given to this local church. Jesus gave no rebuke to this church because under pressure they remained faithful. The churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia were the only ones in Revelation 2-3 that received no correction and were also the only ones afflicted by those described as a "synagogue of Satan." The pressure of a demonically energized attack against these believers created opportunity for these churches to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

- F. Exhortation to respond: not to yield to fear, but to continue to be faithful in their love for Jesus.

¹⁰Do 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... (Rev. 2:10)

- G. *The devil is about to throw some of you into prison:* Jesus wanted them to know that some would face prison and even death. Jesus said it would happen to prepare them. They were imprisoned for refusing to worship the Emperor as God. History tells us that Jews reported Christians to the Roman authorities as being criminals of Rome.
1. Jesus told the disciples of coming persecution when they felt close to Him so that when it happened, they would not conclude that He had overlooked them or lacked power to deliver them. The book of Revelation is Jesus telling us in advance what is coming so we can interpret through the lens of love instead of fear.
¹These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. ²They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service...⁴These things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them... (Jn. 16:1-4)
 2. Scripture teaches us to expect persecution as (Jn. 16:33; Acts 14:22).
¹²All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Tim. 3:12)
¹²Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴If you are reproached for...Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1 Pet. 4:12-14)
 3. *The devil is about to throw some of you into prison:* the Lord allowed “some” of them be imprisoned and killed. He delivered “some” from prison like Peter (Acts 5:19; 12:7-11), yet allowed “some” to die in prison like James and John the Baptist (Mk. 6:27; Acts 12:2). He leads “some” like Paul to be imprisoned, delivered them, then they were imprisoned again (Acts 16:24-27; 22:4; 26:10; 2 Cor. 11:23).
 4. *The devil is about to throw some of you into prison:* This persecution was the work of Satan. Satan inspired evil men to imprison some of them to tempt them to draw back from their faithfulness to Jesus. Satan worked behind the scenes with these apostate Jews to imprison Christians. God allowed Satan to test Job (Job 1). John the Baptist was put into prison by men inspired by Satan.
 5. *That you may be tested:* testing shows the depth of one’s love for Jesus and openly proves the worthiness of Jesus to them. This causes others to long to know the Jesus who is worth suffering for. The apostles counted it a privilege to suffer.
⁴¹Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41)
 6. Even when only a few are thrown into prison, it tests the whole body. The pain of knowing that loved ones are suffering “tests” others, as does the possibility that they too may be imprisoned. Persecution brings purity to the saints and an increase of people who receive the gospel sincerely.

7. Testing increases our opportunity to receive eternal rewards.
⁶Now for a little while...you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith...though it is tested by fire, may be found [openly manifest] to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (1 Pet. 1:6-7)
 8. *Be faithful until death*: we are not to draw back in fear or compromise. He gives His people grace to walk in fearlessness and faithfulness in persecution.
 9. There will be many with the grace of martyrdom in the end times. The Church must be established in the NT theology of martyrdom. Satan overcomes many saints physically in martyrdom, yet in martyrdom they overcome him spiritually by victorious love for Jesus.
⁷It was granted to him [Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them [physically through martyrdom]. Authority was given him over every...nation. (Rev. 13:7)
¹¹They [martyred end-time saints] overcame him [Antichrist] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)
²I saw... those who have the victory over the Beast [Antichrist]... having harps. (Rev. 15:2)
 10. *You will have tribulation ten days*: this can be taken both literally and prophetically.
 - a. Some point to the literal ten-day period of the gladiatorial contests in which Christians were thrown to the wild beasts. There is nothing in the text that leads us to interpret the number ten in a symbolic way.
 - b. Some see this as prophetically speaking of the ten periods of persecutions under the Roman Emperors (from Nero to Diocletian) in which Christians suffered great persecution. The length of their trial was ten days, or periods. In other words, it was short in comparison with *eternal* blessings.
 11. *Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer*: they did not need to fear death because they would live forever (Mt. 10:28). We walk in peace instead of fear as we encounter Jesus as the “First and the Last, who was dead and came to life” (Rev. 2:8).
²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Mt. 10:28)
- H. Promise for overcomers: two promises
- ¹⁰Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. (Rev. 2:10-11)***
1. *I will give you the crown of life*: this is not the same as the gift of eternal life that all born-again believers receive by faith. This is a special reward specifically for enduring persecution.
¹¹Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Rev. 3:11)

2. In our resurrected body, we all will have different spiritual capacities and abilities (1 Cor. 15:41-42). Each believer experiences a varying measure of God's life (manifest presence), even in the age to come. The crown of life refers to experiencing fuller dimensions of God's life or glory. It seems like the crown of life parallels the tree of life (Rev. 2:7).
⁴¹There is one glory of the sun...another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. ⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:41-42)
3. The crown of life is a special reward specifically for enduring persecution that results in enabling one to experience more of God's glory (2 Cor. 4:16-18).
¹⁶Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory... (2 Cor. 4:16-17)
4. We must see the relationship of being challenged by our hardships to receiving eternal rewards.
¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Rom. 8:18)
⁶You have been grieved by trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith... though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)
5. God will only give the crown of life to believers who are approved as worthy of it. This crown is not related to salvation, but to our place of function in His millennial kingdom.
¹²Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved [found consistent], he will receive the crown of life...promised to those who love Him. (Jas 1:12)
6. There are nine NT references to crowns that a believer may receive from the Lord. Twice the crown is referred to with the descriptive title the "crown of life" (Jas 1:12, Rev 2:10); once the "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8); and once the "crown of glory" (1 Pet. 5:4). The different titles probably refer to different nuances of the same reward (1 Cor. 9:5, Rev 3:11, 4:8).
7. This eternal reward included the increased capacity to experience and impart God's life (Gr. *zoe*), glory, or the anointing of the Spirit. The authority to impart God's life or anointing in our ministry to others in the age-to-come is an aspect of the crown of life. There will be great joy in having the grace to participate in ministry assignments that are especially near and dear to Jesus.
8. There are two Greek words describing two different types of crowns in the New Testament. One is the crown of a ruler (Gr. *diadem*); the other is the crown of a victor (Gr. *stephanos*) who won a race in the Greek athletic games. The Greek word *stephanos* is used in Jas 1:12. Crowns of authority are only given to those who endure in resisting temptation until the end.

¹⁰Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev. 2:10)

International House of Prayer of Kansas City ihopkc.org

Free Teaching Library mikebickle.org

¹¹***Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Rev. 3:11)***

9. *He shall not be hurt by the second death:* the second death is eternal separation from God. The second death is mentioned four times (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). The first death is the death of our physical body. The spirit of the unbeliever goes to Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek).

¹²***I saw the dead...standing before God, and books were opened...the dead were judged according to their works...¹⁴Cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:12-14)***

10. The saints in Smyrna were hurt relationally, financially, and physically by staying faithful to Jesus. He assured them that, although the first death “hurt” them briefly, the second death would not hurt them at all! On the most terrifying day when the second death is administered, all will see that those whose works were done in faithful love for Jesus are safe. This is when the persecutors of the Church will see the fullness of what they lost. The second death will show forth the “great reversal” in history when righteousness is seen as wise and sin is seen as terrible. Jesus assures those being persecuted that they were not in jeopardy of suffering any permanent loss.
- I. The time period prophetically spoken of by the church of Smyrna: it may speak of the period of the martyrs under the Roman emperors (AD 100-313) until Constantine declared Christianity to be the official state religion of the Roman Empire in AD 313. The ten periods of persecutions in this period: Nero (AD 54-68); Domitian (AD 81-96); Trajan (AD 98-117); Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180); Septimus Severus (AD 202-211); Maximinus (AD 235-238); Decius (AD 249-253); Valerian (AD 257-260); Aurelian (AD 270-275); Diocletian (AD 303-313).

VIII. PERGAMOS: A CHURCH WITH COMPROMISE (REV. 2:12-17)

¹²***And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³“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. ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷He 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.” (Rev. 2:12-17)***

- A. The primary message: this church was encouraged for their faithfulness in not yielding to fear in the midst of persecution and refusing to yield to sin in the midst of a perverse culture.
1. They were called to stand up against false teaching that tolerated compromise with idolatrous feasts that were like “parties filled with immorality.”

2. There were three groups that Jesus addressed in this church: those who compromised (Balaamites, Nicolaitans, and their followers), those who tolerated the compromisers, and the faithful who held fast to Jesus' Name. The Lord called those who tolerated the compromisers to repent along with the compromisers.
- B. The city of Pergamos: a wealthy city that was a center for idol worship. It was about 20 miles from the Aegean Sea. (This city is spelled alternatively Pergamum, Pergamus or Pergamon.) It had a large university with a famous library of 200,000 volumes. Today the village of Bergama is on the ancient site.
1. It was the first city in Asia to build a temple to worship the Emperor. In 29 BC, the temple for Augustus was completed, making it the religious capital in the East as Rome was in the West.
 2. The city hosted a multitude of major altars of worship to the four most prominent Greek gods: Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius (Esculapius), along with being the center of Emperor worship for Asia. Each had its own priesthood with temple prostitution. When the cult of the Magians was driven out of Babylon, it relocated to Pergamos.
- C. Jesus' revelation of Himself: He has a sharp sword.

¹²***These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword... (Rev. 2:12)***

1. Scripture speaks of Jesus as having a sword in His hand and mouth. This emphasizes zeal in His personality and intervention in His ministry against the evil government of the Roman Empire and sin in the church. He showed Himself zealous and decisive in His intervention against His enemies.
2. Jesus often restrains His zeal, but a time comes when He openly shows His zeal.
3. Five times the book of Revelation refers to the sword of Jesus (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). Four of the five times specifically refer to the sword of Jesus' mouth. When Jesus speaks, the Holy Spirit releases the sword of judgment on His enemies.

¹⁵***Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike nations...*** ²¹***The rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him... (Rev. 19:15, 21)***

4. Jesus uses the sword of His mouth to withstand the threats of evil governments such as He did against ancient Rome and as He will do against the Antichrist government at the end-of-the-age. He also uses the sword of His mouth to war against sin and darkness anywhere that it persists, even in His Church.
- D. Affirmation for faithfulness: faithfulness in not yielding to fear in the midst of persecution
- ¹³***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. (Rev. 2:13)***

1. *I know you dwell where Satan's throne is and where Satan dwells:* The throne of Satan refers to the combination of three things. First, there were many altars of false worship (Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, Asclepius, Emperor worship, and the Magians) in Pergamos. Second, demonic spirits were released in context to the sinful activities that occurred at the idolatrous feasts and in the city, especially in the murderous injustice of martyrdom. Third, the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans were promoted in that city.
2. Satan's throne speaks of a place where there is an unusual measure of his manifest power and activity.
²*The dragon [Satan] gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. (Rev. 13:2)*
¹⁰*The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast [Antichrist]... (Rev. 16:10)*
¹²*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age... (Eph. 6:12)*
²¹*Far above all principality and power and might and dominion... (Eph. 1:21)*
¹⁶*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. (Col. 1:16)*
3. *I know your works:* Jesus understood the dynamics in which they had to minister.
4. *You hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith:* Jesus knew that many held fast to His name in the midst of so much satanic activity. To hold fast to Jesus' name refers to doctrinal purity and faithfulness even in the face of death.
5. Jesus will give us power to be faithful in the midst of hostile and sinful cultures. God's people hold fast to Jesus' name in the end times by refusing the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:13-17) and by standing on the authority of God's Word by confessing or speaking it.
¹¹*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)*
⁴*He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* ⁵*Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶and said, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down..."* ⁷*Jesus said, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" (Mt. 4:4-7)*
6. *Antipas was My faithful martyr:* tradition says that Antipas was the bishop in Pergamos and that he was placed in a copper vessel shaped like a bull, used by pagan priests to offer sacrifices. It was heated by fire, and Antipas was cooked to death.
7. The word *martyr* in Greek means *witness*. Jesus is called the faithful witness (Rev 1:5), and He referred to Antipas as a faithful witness.

E. Correction for compromise: idolatry and immorality

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. (Rev. 2:14-15)

1. *I have a few things against you:* Jesus is for us as people even while He may be against an area of compromise in our lives or ministries. His correction is not rejection.
2. The two groups, the Balaamites and Nicolaitans, were similar yet distinct. They both taught a perversion of liberty in grace. They taught it was okay to participate in the idolatrous feasts that emphasized drunkenness and immorality. It was the “fraternity party” of that day. Some leaders in the church promoted attending the pagan feasts under the pretense of Christian liberty.

⁴Certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness... (Jude 4)

3. Antinomianism is the belief that the Gospel frees us from obedience to specific moral standards since we believe that salvation is given as a gift by faith, therefore, we need not repent. [Greek: *anti-nomos* (law)]
4. Those who hold the doctrine of Balaam: Balaam taught Balak to put a stumbling block before Israel, by enticing them to eat food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. Balaam was paid by King Balak to curse Israelites, but when he tried, he received only prophetic blessings for them. Balaam told Balak that he could not curse Israel; however, if they could get Israel to sin, then God would judge them. Balaam advised Balak to get the Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men to participate in feasts engaged in idolatry and immorality (Num. 25) so that God would have to judge Israel.
5. Idolatry expressed in covetousness and/or sorcery (Col 3:5; Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 10:20-22). Covetousness is idolatry because it is pursuit of money (because of confidence in it) that directly opposes Jesus’ leadership over our life. It is pursuing money without reference to Jesus’ leadership. Most idolatry throughout history and especially at the end-of-the-age is economically driven, to secure financial gain, rather than being mostly spiritual as an end in itself to give glory to a false god.

²¹Select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds... (Ex. 18:21)

6. Mammon is a god that, if served, makes it impossible to serve God (Mt. 6:24-30).

²⁴"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

²⁵"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. (Mt. 6:24-30)

7. God has declared war on sin. To walk in sin is to make one an enemy of God so that God must act against them.
⁴Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (Jas. 4:4)
8. Due to Balaam's instructions, the Israelites came under God's judgment, and 24,000 people died. The false teachers in Pergamos had the same impact on some of the saints as Balaam's teaching did on the children of Israel, seducing them to compromise.
9. A stumbling block is a trap that, when triggered, shuts on its prey. A spiritual stumbling block refers to anything that causes a person to fall into sin.
10. *You have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans*: this may refer to followers of Nicolas, the Jerusalem deacon who fell into error (Acts 6:5). This was the common view among the early church Fathers. Irenaeus in the second century taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality.
11. The church in Ephesus rejected those who promoted this doctrine. Twice Jesus mentions His hatred of the Nicolaitans. What were *deeds* in Ephesus were *doctrines* in Pergamos.

⁶But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev. 2:6)

- F. Exhortation to respond (with a warning): to repent of immorality and idolatry. (v. 16).

¹⁶Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. (Rev. 2:16)

1. *Repent*: we must turn away from personal compromise and tolerance of it in the Church.
2. *I will come to you quickly*: Jesus comes to His Church to evaluate it at specific seasons. This is not a reference to His second coming but a "coming" of His discipline related to this church's failure to repent.

¹¹Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Ecc. 8:11)

3. Many misinterpret God's kindness as His approval of their sin instead of as His patience with them (Rom. 2:4).

⁴Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)

4. *I will fight against them with the sword of My mouth*: Jesus fights for us by fighting against those things in our life that are in agreement with darkness. Jesus will cleanse His Church.

¹⁷For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God... (1 Pet. 4:17)

5. Balaam eventually was killed by the sword (Num. 22:23, 31; 25:5; 31:8). In mercy, God had allowed Balaam's donkey to see the angel with a drawn sword who was about to strike Balaam (Num. 22:22-25).
6. Phinehas, filled with God's zeal, stood up against the sin that Balaam helped facilitate. He is an excellent example of standing up against the teaching of Balaam.

¹¹Phinehas...has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.

¹²Therefore say, "Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; ¹³and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel." (Num. 25:11-12)

G. Promise for overcomers: three promises

¹⁷He 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. (Rev. 2:17-17)

1. *I will give some of the **hidden manna** to eat:* the manna was hidden only after it was put in the golden pot in the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies (Ex. 16:32-36; Heb. 9:1-5). Only the high priest could see this hidden manna once a year, on the Day of Atonement, as he entered the holies of holies.
 - a. God sustained His people in the Old Testament with manna that was also called *angel's food* (Ps. 78:19-25).
 - b. Jesus is the true bread or manna from heaven that sustains us (Jn. 6:48-51). The overcomer is promised full enjoyment of something of which he already has a foretaste.
 - c. Hidden manna speaks of having an increased capacity to be fed by the revelation of the Word in this age and in the age-to-come. This hidden manna is given to us in fullness in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.
 - d. In the Great Tribulation, some of God's people may receive natural *manna* in the wilderness (Rev. 12:6, 14).
2. *I will give him a **white stone**:* the white stones are precious stones given to the faithful as awards. In the ancient world they were given to honor those who offered valiant service to the community or in battle. Those receiving these stones were also given special privileges. This is like receiving the gold medal. The stones that will be given to the saints are gems like those in Rev. 21 and those on the high priest breastplate and in God's presence (Ezek. 28). A white stone with one's name on it gave them admission to special events, including the games and feasts hosted by the government of the Roman Empire.

¹⁷"They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." (Mal 3:17)

- a. This may apply to various degrees of honor and privileges in the marriage supper of the Lamb or the Messianic feast of Revelation 3:20 and 19:9. It may affect one's status at Jesus' great banquet. Jesus will exalt the overcomer to positions of authority in the Millennial Kingdom. This was given to motivate greater faithfulness to Jesus.
 - b. There is some uncertainty as to what the white stones exactly means because there is no specific Scripture that tells us clearly what it is. Since there is no need of spiritual protection for born-again believers in eternity and because these rewards are to those who already have salvation, this white stone does not seem to speak of acquittal from guilt as some suggest.
 - c. The stone (Gk. *pshfos*) referred to a precious stone (diamond). White (Gk. *leukos*) refers to "shining or glistening" (Mt. 17:2; Rev. 3:4, 5; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14).
3. *On the stone a **new name** written which no one knows except him who receives it:* a special name will be given to indicate one's faithfulness, character and role in the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 62:2; 65:15; Rev. 19:11-16; Rev. 14:1; Song 1:3; Acts 15:17).
- a. The new name will be written on the white stone. I think of this like receiving a gold medal in the Olympics. As parents may give a child a name of endearment, so Jesus gives His faithful names that reveal how He feels toward them.
 - b. The new name reflects one's individual or unique relationship with Jesus. The new name may denote the overcomer's status in the age-to-come. It also reveals one's personality (Gen. 32:28; Isa. 62:2; 65:15). This is an aspect of our intimacy with God.
 - c. They held fast Jesus' name (2:13). In return, they will get a new name.
 - d. Simon was renamed Peter to speak of his character and position as the rock. Abram's name was changed to Abraham to indicate that he was to be the father of a multitude (Gen. 17:5-15). God changed Sarah's name. Jacob's name was changed to Israel to show that he was a prince with God (Gen. 32)
 - e. The overcomer receives a new name to indicate his place in government.
4. To overcome in this context means to refuse to participate in idolatry or immorality and to stand against false teachings on grace that emboldened people to live in compromise.
- H. The time period prophetically spoken of by Church of Pergamos: the period may refer to the time when the church and state functioned closely together (AD 313-606)

IX. THYATIRA: COMMITTED, YET TOLERATING IMMORALITY (REV. 2:18-29)

¹⁸To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, "These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ¹⁹I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. ²⁰Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow [tolerate] that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality... ²¹I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²²I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent... ²³I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know

that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. I will give to each one of you according to your works...²⁶He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—²⁷He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels—as I have received from My Father;²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.” (Rev. 2:18-28)

- A. The primary message: Jesus commended them for their love and ministry to others, while He warned them not to tolerate immorality and idolatry. This church was affirmed for their increase of outreach ministries with love and for their endurance in persecution. However, they lacked zeal for moral purity.
- B. The city of Thyatira: about 30 miles inland in Turkey, surrounded by rivers. The modern city of Akhisar now exists on the site of Thyatira. It was a wealthy center for trade guilds—labor unions—for garments, pottery, bronze workings, weavers, leather workers, linen makers, etc. All the employees in the trade guilds were required to attend worship feasts for Apollo the sun-god. They gave thanks to Apollo as their patron god by going to idolatrous feasts that included great drunkenness and immorality. Refusal to participate would lead to the loss of their job.
- C. Jesus' revelation of Himself: the Son of God with eyes of fire and feet like brass
¹⁸Says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass... (Rev. 2:18)
1. *Son of God*: emphasizes Jesus' deity and power to withstand Jezebel. Jesus showed His humanity as the Son of Man (Rev. 1:13)
 2. *Who has eyes like a flame of fire*: His eyes speak of His attentiveness to His people and to what they do. Fire symbolizes the impartation of holy love and the release of judgment. He releases either the “fire of grace” or the “fire of judgment,” depending on how we respond to Him. In our war against the spirit of Jezebel, Jesus will impart His fiery passion to us (Lk. 24:32; Acts 2:3).
 3. *His feet are like fine brass*: Brass is a symbol of judgment against sin. Jesus' feet of bronze speak of His commitment as a mighty warrior to confront and triumph over persistent immorality with judgment. Jesus promises to tread down all that is identified with Jezebel for it is His enemy.
- D. Affirmation for faithfulness: diligence in ministry, love, service, faith and perseverance
¹⁹I know your works [ministry outreaches], love, service, faith, and your patience [endurance in persecution]; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. (Rev. 2:19)
1. *I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience*: this church was affirmed for their ministry and endurance in persecution. It is the only church in Revelation commended for both love and service. Ephesus and Thyatira were affirmed and rebuked (Rev. 2:2).
 2. *As for your works, the last are more than the first*: they increased in their work of ministry. Their deeds were greater in number and quality than in their earlier days of ministry.
- E. Correction for compromise: for tolerating the spirit of idolatry and immorality

²⁰Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols...²⁴To you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan... (Rev. 2:20, 24)

1. *I have a few things against you:* Jesus' correction is not rejection. He corrected three churches in the seven letters. Those in Ephesus left their first love (Rev 2:4). Believers in Pergamos held the doctrine of Balaam (Rev 2:14), and those in Thyatira allowed Jezebel to teach (Rev 2:20).
2. *To teach to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols:* She taught "liberty in grace," saying that attending idol feasts involving immorality was acceptable. Immorality is at the top of almost every list of sins in the NT and is emphasized in Revelation as one of Satan's primary strategies in the end times (Rev. 9:21; 14:8; 17:1-4; 18:2-4, 9-10; 19:2; 21:8).
3. People involved in idolatry are actually worshiping demons.

²⁰The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons...and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. (1 Cor. 10:20-21)

4. Most idolatry is motivated by covetousness (Col 3:5; Eph. 5:5), to secure financial gain from demons, being driven by desire for material blessing. Covetousness is an expression of idolatry because people put their confidence in money instead of Jesus.

⁵Put to death...fornication, uncleanness...and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Col 3:5)

⁵No...covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom. (Eph 5:5)

5. There is a spirit behind the love of money. No one can serve money and Jesus.

²⁴No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Mt. 6:24)

6. You allow [tolerate] Jezebel to teach and seduce My servants—They tolerated Jezebel by allowing her to continue instead of rebuking her error and stopping her ministry.
7. Paul required the leaders under him to confront immorality in the church.

¹It is reported that there is sexual immorality among you...²You are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you...⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together...⁵deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord...⁹I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world...since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹Now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral...or a drunkard...not even to eat with such a person. (1 Cor. 5:1-11)

8. Eli the high priest loved God, but he tolerated immorality in his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were leaders under him. He failed to replace them when they refused to repent. As a result of his neglect to confront immorality in leadership, Eli lost God's blessing (1 Sam 2:12-31).

²²Eli...heard everything his sons did...and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting...³⁰The LORD God of Israel says: "I said indeed that your house...would walk before Me forever." But now the LORD says: "Far be it from Me...³¹I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house..." (1 Sam. 2:22-31)

9. ***Jezebel***: Two women in the Bible were named Jezebel: one in the OT and one in the NT.
- The OT Jezebel was married to King Ahab (1 Kgs. 16:31). She financially supported 850 false prophets, *killed God's true prophets*, and sought to kill Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:13, 19; 19:1-2). Her harlotries and occult practices were well known (2 Kgs. 9:22). Her name lived on as a byword for immorality with occult influence.
 - The NT Jezebel acted like the OT Jezebel. She may have deliberately taken this name in her brazen boldness to live in sin. She was a recognized leader in the church who claimed to be a prophetess. Apparently she had a reputation for accurate prophetic revelation. Those accepting her teachings prided themselves on their enlightened liberalism in grace.
 - Those described as having the spirit of Jezebel are those who promote immorality and/or sorcery. Immorality stimulates one's body outside of God's will. Sorcery stimulates one's spirit outside of God's will. The spirit behind making, selling, and buying pornography or partaking of any expression of immorality is the spirit of Jezebel. As the OT Jezebel killed the prophets physically, so the spirit of Jezebel today kills the prophets spiritually with immorality—it kills the prophetic spirit.
10. ***Depths of Satan***: John referred to Jezebel's doctrine as the deep things of Satan. In other words, her false teaching on grace that promoted immorality and idolatry without any fear of God's judgment is one expression of the depths of satanic deception.

- F. Jesus' exhortation to the Church of Thyatira—to repent of immorality

²¹I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²²Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. I will give to each one of you according to your works. ²⁴Now to... the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵Hold fast what you have till I come. (Rev. 2:21-25)

- Cast into a sickbed and great tribulation***: sometimes believers become sick and may even die under God's judgment. His discipline includes permitting Satan to make the unrepentant sick (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 11:30-32). Being cast into great tribulation speaks of great pressure coming on the believers who refused to resist Jezebel's ways.

³⁰*For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [died].*

³¹*If we...judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened [disciplined] by the Lord, that we may not be condemned [go to hell] with the world. (1 Cor. 11:30-32)*

¹*It is reported that there is sexual immorality among you...⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord... (1 Cor. 5:1-5)*

2. *I will kill her children*: Jesus warned of killing her children, that is, those who followed her teaching.
3. *The churches shall know*: Jesus wants His people to know that He is zealous to free His people from immorality. He said they all shall know when He casts unrepentant believers on a sick bed.
4. *Hold fast what you have till I come*: it takes diligence for a leadership team to hold fast in proclaiming and insisting on purity among those involved in their ministry.

G. Promise for overcomers: authority over the nations and greater intimacy with God (v. 26-28).

²⁶*He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—²⁷*“He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels”*—*as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸and I will give him the morning star. (Rev. 2:26-28)**

1. *He who overcomes*: we must maintain our obedience in this until the end of our life.
2. *Power over the nations*: the reward for resisting immorality is to reign in Jesus’ millennial kingdom (Lk. 19:11-27; Rev. 3:21). Each believer has a different measure of eternal rewards.
3. *I will give him the morning star*: Jesus is the morning star (Rev. 22:16). This promise speaks of increased revelation of Jesus and deeper relationship with Him. The morning star is the brightest star (planet Venus), seen just before the dawning of a new day.

¹⁶*I, Jesus...am the bright and morning star. (Rev 22:16)*

X. SARDIS: REPUTATION WITHOUT SPIRITUAL SUBSTANCE (REV. 3:1-6)

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

- A. The primary message: to repent of spiritual passivity and not to trust in their reputation of being spiritually alive; to repent by remembering how God touched them in their early days.
- B. The city of Sardis: a wealthy city that boasted of being impregnable because of its topography suited for a strong military defense.
 - 1. Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele.
 - 2. The church at Sardis had no external enemies who persecuted them, nor did they have internal enemies of false teachers who promoted immorality like Pergamos and Thyatira. Their problems (like Laodicea’s) were self-caused; they failed to remember the past. They forgot how Jesus had touched them and how they responded in radical devotion. In other words, how alive one can be in God.
 - 3. This church had been known for its lively devotion to Jesus that was well established about forty years earlier (AD 52-55) in the great Ephesians revival that swept through all Asia (Acts 19-20). They were deeply touched in this revival and became well known in it. However, over time they became spiritually dead. They lived on their past reputation established from the seasons of past revivals.

⁹Paul...reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. ¹⁰And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord... (Acts 19:9-10)

²⁸Take heed to yourselves...²⁹I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you...³⁰From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)

- C. Jesus’ revelation of Himself: He has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

¹These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars... (Rev. 3:1)

- 1. *Jesus has the seven Spirits of God:* to release the diverse ministries of the Spirit to them
²The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:2)
- 2. *Jesus has the seven stars:* Jesus holds His people in His hands to make them bright like a star. To hold the seven stars means for Him to be deeply involved in the life and heart of the leadership. Jesus wants to make our hearts bright like a star in His hand.

²⁰The seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches... (Rev. 1:20)

- D. Affirmation for faithfulness: None
- E. Correction for compromise: spiritual passivity and lukewarmness

¹I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead... ² I have not found your works perfect before God. (Rev. 3:1-2)

1. *You have a name that you are alive:* they had a reputation of being spiritually alive because of their history of commitment following the great Asian revival.
2. *But you are dead:* they were born again, but they lacked a sense of the Holy Spirit's presence and inspiration in their daily life.
3. *I have not found your works perfect before God:* their obedience was not mature or complete. We are called to be perfect (Mt. 5:48). This is a call to seek to walk in "all" we know to be in God's will in each season of our life or in all the light the Spirit has given us in each season.

⁴⁸Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Mt. 5:48)

- F. Exhortation to respond (with a warning)—to be watchful and to remember

²Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...³Remember 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. (Rev. 3:2-3)

1. The Lord compares His coming as *coming like a thief* to individuals and churches. He is not a thief, but His coming to us is "like a thief." This is a proverbial expression that indicates Jesus comes to us at an unexpected time and in a way that we will ***suffer the loss that we could have avoided*** if we would have been watching. Jesus never called Himself a thief, but calls the devil one (Jn. 10:10). We can *stop a thief from robbing us simply by watching*. The lack of watching is what allows a thief to bring loss to one's life.
2. Jesus comes in three ways. First, His eschatological second coming to rapture the Church. Second, He comes for us at the time of physical death. Third, He comes to us during our life at "strategic times" either to promote us or to discipline and sometimes demote us.
3. ***Principle:*** Jesus comes to us at "strategic times" either to promote us (by releasing a season of increase in the grace of God) or to demote us (by bringing us under a season of divine discipline). When He comes, He requires a response of faithfulness. If we are not found faithful, then we are responsible for "suffering the loss."
4. *Be watchful:* to cultivate a lifestyle of prayer, fasting, and obedience or sustain a lifestyle of encountering Jesus. This is the primary exhortation Jesus gave the Church in preparing them in the end times (Mt. 24:42-43; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-38; Lk 21:36; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). Paul also exhorted the church to "watch" (Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thes. 5:2-4, 6).

³³Watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is...³⁵ Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming...³⁷I say to all: Watch! (Mk. 13:33-37)

- G. *Strengthen the things that remain*: the things are ready to die, make them strong.
1. Say it regularly: leaders are to speak the vision and values consistently.
 2. Model it consistently: leader are to walk out in their lifestyle the values that they speak.
 3. Establish it organizationally: leaders are only to set other leaders into place after they have embraced the values that are to be strengthened.
- H. *Remember how you have received and heard*: remember how Jesus touched them and their dedication years ago in the great Asian revival (Acts 19-20).
- I. *Hold fast*: embrace the dedication of our former days and to “watch” before God. To hold fast implies the resistance and the need for perseverance.
- J. *Repent*: embrace a life vision bigger than seeking God to gain more comfort and honor in this life. Establish your life vision in the laying hold of the eternal promises given to the overcomers.
- K. *Watch*: we are to watch and pray. This is said ten times related to preparing for the end times (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 21:36; 1 Thes. 5:6; Rev. 16:15). To watch is to cultivate faith and understanding that agree with what the Word and the Spirit says about Jesus’ return.

³⁵***Watch...for you do not know when the master of the house is coming--in the evening, at midnight...in the morning...37 What I say to you, I say to all: Watch! (Mk. 13:35-37)***

1. We are to watch what the Spirit is saying in Scripture and in our life and be alert to the Spirit’s stirring and challenges in our personal life.
 2. We are to keep alert to our communion with God so as to be always in a disposition to agree with the Spirit.
- L. Promise for overcomers: two promises

⁴***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. ⁵He 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. ⁶He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 3:4-6)***

Jesus promised three rewards to this Church for those who would overcome spiritual deadness by sustaining a life of watching. These two rewards include one’s clothing and one’s name not being blotted out, but being presented to God reflecting what we have accomplished in our obedience in this life.

1. *They shall walk with Me in white and shall be clothed in white garments*: white garments are not the same as the free gift of the robe of righteousness. Justification is a gift by faith based on Jesus’ worthiness, not ours (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:4-7).
 - a. These garments are an expression of each believer’s dedication, and they differ with each believer according to their life in this age.

⁸***And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Rev. 19:8)***

- b. The priestly garments in OT give us insight into the value that God has on garments and how they speak of spiritual things. God designed them to be beautiful and to show forth His glory. God gave directions for the priests' garments (Ex. 28:1-43). There were distinct parts of these garments (trousers, coat, girdle, robe, ephod, breastplate, tunic, turban hats, sash, and crown).

²*You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty...*
³*Make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest. ⁴And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash...*
⁴⁰*You shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty...*
⁴²*Make for them linen trousers ...they shall reach from the waist to the thighs. (Exod. 28:2-4, 40-42)*

¹¹*Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua...the high priest. (Zech. 6:11)*

- c. The OT priestly garments had different colors (red, blue, purple, white, etc.).
- d. The breastplate was worn over the ephod and had shoulder-pieces with onyx stones. The ephod was worn over the robe that was worn over the coat and girdle.
- e. There are eight references in the Book of Revelation concerning our garments in the age-to-come (Rev. 3:4-5, 18; 16:15; 19:7-8; also see 1 Jn. 2:28; 2 Jn. 7-8).
- f. The word "white" speaks of the brightness of the garments. The brightness of the garments is what is in view here. All will have different degrees of brightness with each different type of clothing with its unique design, fabric, coloring and fragrance. It will depend on our status and stature in the Spirit in the age to come.

⁴¹*There is one glory of the sun...another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. ⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:40-42)*

²*He was transfigured before them...His clothes became as white as the light. (Mt. 17:2)*

²*Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment... (Ps. 104:2)*

⁶*Clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. (Rev. 15:6)*

- g. The New Jerusalem shines like diamonds (Rev 21:11).

¹¹*Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. (Rev 21:11)*

- h. The saints have white robes. The white robes mean they are clean and pure. The bright robe is only an aspect of our garments in the age-to-come.

⁹A great multitude...of all nations...and tongues, standing before the throne...clothed with white robes...¹⁴These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9-14)

- i. Each one of God's people has a distinct history in God and will receive clothing that expresses the distinct quality of their devotion to Jesus while they were on earth.
- j. The colors associated with God and His Throne are jasper, sardius, emerald, and sapphire.

³He who sat there was like a jasper [diamond] and a sardius [red] stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. (Rev 4:3)

²²The likeness of the firmament...was like the color of an awesome crystal...²⁶Above the firmament...was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone. (Ezek. 1:22, 26)

- k. Our garments may be diverse according to different occasions in which we participate. For example, a king and a president wear different clothing depending upon the occasion. They wear certain clothing at home, at official banquets, or at military functions with the heads of state. On one occasion they may wear garments with their medals. At another occasion they may dress casually. The next day they wear a suit and go to a wedding. Every occasion requires different garments.
2. Jesus will not blot out our names, but will confess them before God

⁵He 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. (Rev. 3:5)

- a. *I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life:* not to lose honor associated with their name. The promise not to blot their name from God's Book of Life was not referring to losing their salvation. A person's name and character are one reality to God.
- b. The background to understanding this is seen in the well-known custom in the ancient world. Most cities had a city registrar that included the records of the conduct of its citizens. It included paying taxes, noble accomplishments, crimes committed, etc.
- c. Jesus is promising not to blot out the "record of the remembrance" of their righteous deeds if they would repent from their spiritual deadness and walk in the commitment they had in the past. Jesus will tell the story of our love and dedication to the Father many times throughout eternity.
- d. The books in heaven contain vast information about our lives, including our words and deeds.

¹⁶Those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. (Mal. 3:16)

- M. **Principle:** our good deeds are recorded in heaven, but are blotted out if we turn from them. Ezekiel taught that a righteous man who turns from his righteousness would die. This gives us insight into how God “remembers and forgets.” God “remembers with consequence” the good that we continue in until the end. He “forgets” the good that we turn away from.

²⁰*Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity...his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered... (Ezek. 3:20)*

²⁴*When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity...all the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered... (Ezek. 18:24)*

¹³*I say to the righteous that...trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered...²⁰*I will judge every one according to his ways. (Ezek. 33:13-20)**

¹²*I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. (Rev. 22:12)*

²³*I will give to each one of you according to your works. (Rev. 2:23)*

1. Eternal rewards can be lost and/or the opportunities to gain them can be lost. God “remembers with consequence” the good that we continue in until the end. He forgets the good that we turn away from doing.

¹¹*I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Rev. 3:11)*

¹⁴*If anyone's work...endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵*If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:14-15)**

⁸*Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully (2 Jn. 8; NIV)*

2. *I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels:* this is not a reference to being saved, but to the reward of public recognition for special nobility and faithfulness. Jesus will talk about our exploits and obedience before the Father.

²¹*His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' (Mt. 25:21)*

3. The reformation gloriously emphasized the truth of justification by faith as the way to receive the free gift of righteousness (Rom. 3:21-31; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). This is the only way of acceptance in God’s kingdom and entrance into the New Jerusalem. However, many have misapplied this glorious truth to conclude that all believers receive the same eternal reward regardless of what measure of dedication that we have before God.

4. I want to receive all the garments that God will give me, the reward for the remembrance of all my deeds, and a strong testimony from Jesus before the Father.

N. Jesus will release the activity of the Holy Spirit to help revive us.

¹*These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. (Rev. 3:1)*

²*The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:2)*

1. Again, Jesus holds His people in His hands to make them bright like a star. To hold the seven stars means for Him to be deeply involved in the life and heart of the leadership.
2. The Spirit shall rest on us refers to our personal relationship with the Spirit. He is available to us as a real Person and a real friend, but we must make time for Him.
3. Jesus will give us wisdom so we know how to apply God’s Word in our life.
4. Jesus will give us understanding, so we have a right perspective to interpret what is really happening in God’s dealing with us as well as understanding our past and future.
5. Jesus will give us counsel so we know how to make good decisions in the practical areas of life. He gives counsel for an action plan to go forward in victory. He will counsel us so we can fulfill our assignment in life. The Holy Spirit will teach us all things including how to relate, serve, use our time and finances, be healthy, etc. For example, He will counsel us day by day if we ask what to do with our time, money, what to say “yes” to, who to join our heart to, and what to avoid.

⁶*His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor...Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:6)*

²⁶*He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (Jn. 14:26)*

6. Jesus will give us a spirit of might to keep our spirit strong that we may sustain righteousness, resist sin, be faithful in difficulty, and overcome rejection, pain, and even loneliness.

¹⁶*To be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man... (Eph. 3:16)*

7. Jesus will give us the knowledge of God so we can go deep in God (Isa. 11:9).

¹⁰*God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Cor. 2:10)*

8. Jesus will put the fear of God into our heart so that we tremble before His majesty. It is much easier to obey God when we tremble before His majesty.

⁴⁰*I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. (Jer. 32:40)*

9. Jesus will release all seven aspects of the Spirit’s ministry so we become fully alive in the Holy Spirit. However, He requires that we repent and watch—develop a prayer life.

- O. The time period prophetically spoken of by the church of Sardis: this may speak of the time in Church history that approximately went from AD 1517-1750 or the Reformation. It lacked the life of the Spirit through neglecting to be watchful and remembering the power of the early Church.

XI. PHILADELPHIA: FAITHFULNESS UNTO ETERNAL REWARDS (REV. 3:7-13)

⁷And 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”:
⁸“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹Indeed 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. ¹⁰Because 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. ¹¹Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ¹²He 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. ¹³He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’” (Rev. 3:7-13)

- A. The primary message: faithfulness to Jesus now results in eternal honor later. They faithfully obeyed God’s Word even in much difficulty. Jesus gave this church no rebuke, only affirmation as He did the church at Smyrna.
- B. The city of Philadelphia: the city was on the site of modern-day Alashehir at the junction of trade routes. The imperial route from Rome passed through Philadelphia, giving it the name “the gateway to the East” and making it an important financial city, very prosperous.
- C. Jesus’ revelation of Himself: He who is holy and true and who has the key of David. This description reveals aspects of Jesus’ personality and ministry. This emphasizes His care for our lives and the way He intervenes in His ministry to help those persecuted and in difficulty.

⁷These 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... (Rev. 3:7)

- 1. He who is holy: as fully God, Jesus is holy, transcendent (wholly “other than”), infinitely superior to all. Thus He is worth whatever it costs to love and obey Him. As a man, Jesus was holy or set apart fully to obey the Father. He understands what it means to walk out costly commitments among sinful people on earth. He is a sympathetic high priest.

⁸He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (Heb. 5:8)

¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15)

- 2. He who is true: reliable and genuine in His extravagant promises (Rev. 3:12). That may seem too good to be true. Before He reveals these promises, He declares He is true.

3. *He has the key of David:* being the ultimate King in David's lineage, He has authority through all promises that God gave David and over all the nations in the Millennial Kingdom.
- Revelation 3:7-13 is based on the prophecy Isaiah gave about Shebna (King Hezekiah's chief leader) being removed from his government position to be replaced by Eliakim (Isa 22:15-25). God promised to place on Eliakim's shoulder the "key to the house of David" so he could open and shut the doors of the royal resources to release God's will in the kingdom of Israel.
²²The key of the house of David I will lay on his [Eliakim's] shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open...²⁵In that day...the peg [Eliakim's position] that is fastened in the secure place will be removed... (Isa. 22:22, 25)
 - Jesus has authority over the nations now (Mt. 28:19). Jesus has the keys of the kingdom (Mt. 16:19) and keys over death and Hades (demonic realms).
¹⁸I have the keys of Hades and of Death. (Rev. 1:18)
 - Jesus opens up the door to positions in the eternal kingdom. With the key of David, Jesus chooses who receives which positions of authority in the age to come. He has the keys to open and shut doors of authority now and in the Millennium as He gives people positions of authority. Jesus has the keys of authority over all that God promised about the throne of David continuing and increasing forever over all the nations (Isa. 9:7; Lk. 1:32-33).
 - Jesus invited them to have positions of honor in Jesus' eternal government over the earth related to their obedience in this age. Jesus promised John government in the age-to-come related to his obedience.
***²⁷"We [the apostles] have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"
²⁸Jesus said, "...in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the Throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Mt. 19:27-28)***
4. *He who opens:* here are doors that Jesus opens.
- Jesus opens doors of government to us in the age-to-come.
 - Jesus opens doors of ministry in this age (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:8-9; 2 Cor. 2:12).
³Praying for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak... (Col 4:3)
 - Jesus opens the doors in the spirit that give us access to the revelation of God's heart.
²⁷Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Mt. 11:27)
 - Jesus will open heaven and release angels to ascend and descend. Jesus has the keys to call the New Jerusalem down to the earth because He kept God's Word (Rev. 3:12).

⁵¹*You shall see heaven open and the angels...ascending and descending...(Jn. 1:51)*

- e. Jesus opens prison doors as He did for Peter (Acts 12:7-10) and Paul (Acts 16:27).
 - f. Jesus will open the bottomless pit to shut Satan in prison (Rev. 20:1-3).
5. *He who shuts and no one opens*: enemies seek to open doors of hostility and resistance against us to stop God's will in our life, but they cannot if Jesus shuts those doors.
- a. In His love for us, Jesus shuts doors until their proper time. Paul sought to preach in Asia, but was forbidden by the Spirit (Acts 16:6-7) who shut the doors to Asia, yet opened them in Macedonia.
 - b. Jesus has such great authority, yet He waits for us to open our heart. This is the one door Jesus will not open unless we open it with Him.

²⁰*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. (Rev. 3:20)*

D. Affirmation for faithfulness: they were faithful to Jesus the face of persecution and temptation.

⁸*I know your works...for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name...¹⁰*You have kept My command to persevere... (Rev. 3:8, 10)**

- 1. *You have not denied My name and you kept My command to persevere*: faithful in persecution. This is one of the greatest affirmations that any can receive (Jn. 14:21-23).
- 2. *You have a little strength*: they operated in the true power of the Holy Spirit.

E. Correction for compromise: none. It is noteworthy that the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia were the only ones in Revelation 2-3 that received no correction.

F. Exhortation to respond (with a warning): to hold fast or to continue to persevere

¹¹*I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Rev. 3:11)*

- 1. *That no one may take your crown*: Jesus warned them not to allow anyone to influence them so they would end up losing the eternal reward that they potentially could have gained. We let people take our crown by yielding to their unbiblical exhortations about compromise.

¹⁵*If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved... (1 Cor. 3:15)*

⁸*Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully... (2 Jn. 8; NIV)*

- 2. *Hold fast what you have*: we must continue to hold on to the same measure of obedience that we walk in when we are closest to God's heart and most radical in our responses to Him.
- 3. *I am coming quickly*: Jesus comes to His people in three ways. First, He comes to evaluate us in specific prophetic seasons. Second, He comes to us at our physical death. Third, He comes back to earth at His second coming.

G. Promises for overcomers: Seven promises

⁸*See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it...⁹Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan...indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.* ¹⁰*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.* ¹¹*Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* ¹²*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."* (Rev. 3:8-12)

1. The *you* of 3:10 refers to the church of Philadelphia in the first century being protected when persecution broke out on the whole known world of the Roman Empire. Whereas the *he who overcomes* of 3:12 refers to any overcomer throughout history.
2. *The synagogue of Satan*: this was where Satan moved in unusual power. Many physical descendants of Abraham claimed to be Jews, but were not, because in rejecting Jesus, they were of their father the Devil (John 8:41-47). Two references to a *synagogue of Satan* were in context to the two Churches without any correction (Smyrna and Philadelphia). The synagogue of Satan is where the Jews denied Jesus' divinity and resurrection and persecuted those who believed in Him. They considered that His miracles were done by the devil. This was "the blasphemy" of the Spirit.
3. *See, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it*: Jesus set before the saints at Philadelphia the invitation to governmental positions of honor in His eternal government in both the Millennium and the Eternal State. This was related to their obedience in this age. He also offered them open doors of ministry and doors in the spirit that gave them access to the revelation of God's heart. He occasionally opens the heavens to release angels as He opens the scrolls of God's end-time purposes. He will open prison doors for some in persecution. Jesus will open and shut doors to people and churches living in obedience like Philadelphia.
4. **Promise #1**: *I will make them to know that I have loved you*: the Father will reveal to the nations the fact that He loves His people.

²³*I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*
(Jn. 17:23)

- a. These unbelieving Jews will witness Jesus' love towards these people on the last day.
- b. Jesus developed the dynamic promise of John 14:21-23. Jesus promised to manifest Himself to those who obey. This promise will unfold for billion of years.

²¹*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved [God's pleasure in the relationship will be openly displayed] by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him...* ²³*If anyone loves Me, he*

will keep My word; and My Father will love him [love our life choices], and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (Jn. 14:21-23)

5. **Promise #2:** *I will make them come and worship before your feet:* these unbelieving, false Jews along with the unbelieving Gentiles will pay homage before the true believers in the Millennial kingdom (Isa. 45:14; 49:23; 60:14; Zech. 8:20-23). They will bow their knee to Jesus in the presence of the people they persecuted in the first century.
¹⁴*The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at...your feet; and they shall call you The City of the Lord. (Isa. 60:14)*
6. **Promise #3:** *I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more:* to be a pillar is a position of honor and authority in the Millennial Kingdom. Pillars stood for stability and brought beauty. All believers are part of God's spiritual temple (Eph. 2:21-22), but some will be pillars who hold a position of authority, responsibility, and honor in the Millennium. Jesus promised them that they would never be removed from their place of honor. In Isa 22:15-25, Eliakim was fastened like a peg in a firm place (v. 23) to bear the weight of his father's house (v. 24) yet in time his position would come to an end (v. 25). Pillar, *stulos*, is from *stuo* (to stiffen or to stand)
⁹*When James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars... (Gal. 2:9)*
7. **Promise #4:** *I will write on him the name of My God:* to have the name of God on us includes being recipients of His desire, authority, and partnership and revelation of His heart and beauty.
8. **Promise #5:** *I will write on him the name of the City of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God:* this includes having authority in the New Jerusalem and having the ability to comprehend the city of God.
9. **Promise #6:** *I will write on him My new name:* revelation of Jesus' heart and beauty. To receive a new name from God means to receive new aspects of our identity, with new abilities and a new ministry assignment in the age to come.
10. **Promise #7:** *I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth:* Jesus promises to keep us spiritually vibrant and protected from evil in the end times. The hour of trial was a specific period in the first century in which persecution from the Roman Empire increased greatly in the known world as a partial fulfillment of this which prophetically pointed to the Great Tribulation (Dan. 12:1; Mt. 24:21) which will affect "all who dwell on the whole earth."
⁵*Kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:5)*

- H. *Being kept from the hour of trial*: the two main interpretations of being kept are *being preserved in the midst of* or *being removed from the scene*. In other words, a “spiritual keeping” by enabling us to be faithful in our obedience or a “physical keeping” by taking us away from physical danger. John recorded these very words of Jesus in John 17:15. Jesus did not ask that believers be removed from the scene, but be kept in victory in the midst of trouble by being enabled to stand strong before Satan’s attack. Jesus specifically clarified that He did not want His disciples removed from the earthly scene. It refers to the grace not to yield to unfaithfulness.

¹⁵I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (Jn. 17:15)

1. Jesus promised spiritual protection, which often will include physical protection as the Lord supernaturally shields some in the midst of the fire of His judgment or by causing His judgment to pass by a geographic area. The ultimate protection is against their crown of victory being lost (v. 11).

³⁴Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵It will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Watch...and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things...and to stand before the Son of Man. (Lk. 21:34-36)

2. The church will be on earth in these difficult days, experiencing Satan’s rage with persecution. However, the Church will be kept from the hour of trial coming on the unbelieving world, which is Jesus’ judgment. “Those who live on the earth” (Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [2x]; 13:8, 14; 17:8) refers to the Church’s enemies. The hour of trial is directed towards the entire non-Christian world, but the believers will be kept from it, not by the Rapture at this time, but by the spiritual protection against the forces of evil.

¹³Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day...¹⁶taking the shield of faith...able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. (Eph. 6:13-16)

3. Many will experience protection from the plagues sent on Antichrist’s kingdom.

¹He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty...³Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence...⁵You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, ⁶nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. ⁷A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you...⁹Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place, ¹⁰no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; ¹¹for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. ¹²In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. ¹³You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. ¹⁴Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. (Ps. 91:1-14)

4. The pre-tribulation Rapture teaching sees “kept from the hour of trial” as being removed from the earth during the Tribulation by the Rapture. They see this as being kept from a specific “time period” of trouble on earth instead of being kept from yielding to compromise in sin or persecution.
5. The pre-tribulationist sees this as a promise of exemption from “the hour of trial.” However, this overlooks the fact that the apostles walked in trials just as the Church has throughout all church history. It is inconceivable that, when the Church is most purified and glorified in all history, it would be exempt from being proven faithful by enduring Satan’s attack.
6. The Philadelphian church was faithful in a present trial, and thus Jesus will be faithful to them in the time of greater trial. A promise of the Church being raptured before the trouble leaves us the problem of answering why so many saints are martyred during the Great Tribulation. If God’s plan is to allow martyrdom of the saints, then why would the Church be gone in this hour?
7. All the saints in the Tribulation will not be exempt from all physical harm of Satan’s rage as many will be martyred; however, they will be kept from God’s judgments (Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:24; 11:33-35; 12:7, 10; 19:2; Mt. 10:21-22, 28; 24:9; Lk. 12:4-7; 21:16-19; Jn. 15:18-16:4; Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9, 14; 9:21; 11:7; 13:7, 15; 16:5-7; 17:6; 18:24).
8. We are not afraid of physical death because it holds no eternal significance to us. Our great reward is the power to love and be loyal in the midst of persecution and temptation. This promise assures the faithful who had endured persecution that they would receive even greater grace to avoid failure during “the hour of trial.” The greatest joy and desire of the End Times is to be found faithful. They were encouraged to bear their present difficulties knowing it is preparing them for the anointing of God to walk in greater faithfulness in the time of greater difficulty.
 - I. The time period prophetically spoken of by this church: It may prophetically point to the missionary church that approximately covers 1750-1930 as the time of the greatest revivals and missionary movements into foreign lands.

XII. LAODICEA: SPIRITUAL PRIDE AND LUKEWARMNESS (REV. 3:14-22)

¹⁴To 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: ¹⁵I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷Because 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—¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰Behold, 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. ²¹To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²²He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev. 3:14-22)

- A. The primary message: Jesus promised the prestigious, wealthy church of the Laodiceans deep fellowship and a position in His eternal kingdom, along with gold, garments, and revelation. However, to receive this He required that they zealously repent of their lukewarmness in their relationship with Him. Their problem was spiritual blindness, pride, and distraction with finances that led to lukewarmness.
1. They misinterpreted why God gave them financial blessing. The Lord releases financial blessing as part of the covenant that He has made with His people. There is much emphasis on the biblical promise of financial blessing (Deut. 28:1-14). But when our finances grow faster than our heart, then negative dynamics occur.
¹⁸You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers... (Deut. 8:18)
 2. We must not allow financial prosperity to hinder neither our heart prosperity nor our heavenly treasure. The church of Smyrna was poor financially because of persecution, but was rich spiritually. The Laodiceans had the opposite condition.
²I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. (3 Jn. 2)
 3. It is more difficult for one who is rich in money, influence, or honor to enter into or experience the kingdom. Why? It requires much time and energy to manage even God-given increase. In being preoccupied with wealth and responsibilities, it is easy to neglect spiritual life. The Laodiceans had much financial wealth, but did not see their spiritual need. Their financial increase led to loss of spiritual hunger. This does not have to happen, but it usually does, unless one is careful and zealous. The word of the Lord to the church of the Laodiceans is needed in the church across the USA. There are many believers and churches that are rich in money and influence, but are spiritually shallow. They do not even know that they have a serious problem.
²¹If you want to be perfect...sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...²³It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 19:21-23)
- B. The city of Laodicea: it was a wealthy city, being a center of banking, manufacturing (soft wool), and medicine, and was located by three major highways. The city was the judicial seat of the district. A famous school of medicine had developed a treatment to cure eye diseases. Its great weakness was in lacking a water supply. An aqueduct brought them water from neighboring Hierapolis (known for its hot springs) and Colossae (known for its cold springs), but the water arrived at Laodicea tepid and unpleasant to drink.
- C. Jesus' revelation of Himself: the Amen, the Faithful Witness, and the Beginning of creation. This description reveals aspects of Jesus' personality and ministry. It emphasizes His tender care for our lives and His intervention to help us walk closely with Him and to receive His promises.

¹⁴These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God... (Rev. 3:14)

1. *The Amen*: means to “be true or established.” Jesus is the Amen because His promises are certain and sure. Twenty five times John used the word *amen* (Greek *amhn*). It is translated as, “truly, truly, I say to you.” The “God of truth” (Isa. 65:16) is literally “the God of Amen.”
 - a. *Amen* was pronounced when one agreed with the promises and consequences of an oath (Num. 5:22; Deut. 27:15ff.; Neh. 5:13; Jer. 11:5). Being “The Amen,” Jesus lived in perfect agreement with His Father. As the head of the Church, He requires that we agree with Him to release the certainty of His blessings. We have to relate to Jesus on His terms. Jesus is the One who agrees with God, and He requires that we agree with Him to release His promises, conditions, and consequences of violating covenant with Him.
 - b. All of the promises of God are yes and amen. All the promises of God are *yes* because they are true. They are *amen* because we must agree with them. God’s promises for increased blessing are invitations to partnership, not unconditional guarantees.

²⁰For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen... (2 Cor. 1:20)

2. *The Faithful and True Witness*: what He speaks is reliable and truthful (Rev. 3:7). He was about to tell them the truth, both positive and negative. He revealed such great promises in Rev. 3:18-21, along with negative truths about their spiritual problems in Rev. 3:17-18. He does not ever exaggerate or flatter. Most people only preach and prophesy of positive things.
 3. *The beginning of the creation of God*: He is the beginning or “first” in cause and authority. In other words, power and authority over creation “begin” with Him (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16-17; Rev. 1:8; 21:6). He is the uncreated God, like the Father and the Spirit. There was never a time He did not exist. This truth was meant to arouse the Laodiceans into zealous repentance, instead of being so impressed with their prosperity. The creator and authority of the earth speaks to them.
- D. Affirmation for faithfulness: none
- E. Correction for compromise: lukewarmness and spiritual pride

¹⁵I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

¹⁶So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷Because 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...¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:15-17, 19)

1. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: Jesus promises to discipline all of us so that we may be rich, having gold and garments. Jesus promises to discipline us to bring us out of passivity and self-sufficiency. The Greek word *phileo* love speaks of enjoyment. This word is never used of God loving unbelievers. His agape love extends to unbelievers (Jn. 3:16). It is rare to have someone speak correction with tender love and clear discernment.

2. *You are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were **cold or hot***: the spiritually cold are in a better position to see their great need. At least they know they are in trouble. They are easier to convert. When a person feels the emptiness of a cold heart, he searches for answers. The word *hot* could also be translated fervent.

¹¹*Not lagging in diligence, **fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.** (Rom. 12:11)*

3. *Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth*: this is a statement about Jesus' emotional pain about their loss. It speaks of Jesus' "stomach feeling sick" as in being heartsick with concern over them. Jesus is not repulsed by the people who are lukewarm, but He feels anguish in His love for them. The Greek word to vomit is *emew*. We must not misunderstand this declaration. Jesus does not despise His people. He made it clear that loved them and has not lost interest in them (v. 19). However, He was heartsick (or His stomach hurt) with concern over them and what they were losing in their relationship with Him.

- a. Jesus will vomit lukewarm believers out of His mouth. This does not speak of God casting them away, but of Him feeling sick at heart or grieved over their lives.

³⁰*And do not **grieve the Holy Spirit of God.** (Eph. 4:30)*

¹⁹*Do not **quench the Spirit.** (1 Thes. 5:19)*

- b. Jesus was quoting the warning of judgment from Lev. 18:25-28. The land of Israel was said to "vomit the people out" of the land in divine discipline. Israel was removed from the land in 587 BC when going to Babylon. They were cast out of the place of God's blessing to wake them up.

²⁵*For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.* ²⁶*You shall therefore keep My statutes...* ²⁸*lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.* (Lev. 18:25-28)

4. *Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"*: they claimed they had no real needs because of God's financial blessing. They should have been desperate for more of God. They were intoxicated with their financial blessing and influence.
5. God feels the pain (Isa. 63:9) of those He disciplines and continues to consider them as His dearly beloved (Jer. 12:7).

⁹*In all their affliction **He was afflicted...** in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. (Isa 63:9)*

⁷*I have given the **dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies.** (Jer. 12:7)*

6. Many say, "I need more of Jesus." But the way we spend our time and money is proof of how desperate we really are. Our lifestyle decisions declare how we truly feel about our spiritual condition.

7. We must be confident that God in His love for us will manifest His zeal or jealousy over us. God jealously requires that we live in wholehearted obedience. He zealously insists on putting into our lives that which can deepen our relationship with Him and result in our greatness.

⁵Do you think the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit...in us yearns jealously”? (Jas 4:5)

8. *You do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked:* this is one of the most disturbing things that Jesus can say to a born-again believer. It is very rare to have someone talk to you with such tenderness yet clarity.

- a. *Wretched and miserable:* involves being spiritually calloused, dull, unsatisfied, and to be pitied. They think they are rich and have everything going for them, but they are really to be pitied because they are so out-of-touch with their true spiritual condition.
- b. *Poor:* being spiritually deficient and weak, but not the same as being “poor in spirit” (Mt. 5:3). Those who are “poor in spirit” acknowledge their spiritual condition and look for God to fill them. Many believers actually have nothing in their eternal bank account.
- c. *Blind:* spiritual blindness includes lacking insight into one’s spiritual condition.
- d. *Naked:* in the age-to come, being without garments that express the love one had for Jesus in this age.
- e. When we neglect to confront sin in our heart honestly and thoroughly, *we are not loved less by God*, but we do suffer loss in several ways. We minimize our ability to experience the joy of our salvation, the spirit of revelation, godly fellowship and to receive eternal rewards.

- F. Exhortation to respond: to buy gold and garments and to use eye salve. Jesus gave three exhortations with promises that each carries temporal and eternal applications. He was not speaking to believers about receiving salvation, but about a new quality in their walk with God. Jesus counsels us to live for eternal rewards. Some believers place little value on this advice.

¹⁸I 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. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:18-19)

1. *Buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich:* the gold of godly character makes us rich in this age by tenderizing our heart to feel more of God’s love and enlarging our desire for Him and for righteousness.

⁷...that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold...though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus... (1 Pet. 1:7)

¹²Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you... (1 Pet. 4:12)

2. Acquiring gold and “becoming rich” refers to more than what is in our heart in this age. It also speaks of eternal gold, or treasure, that will be seen in the heavenly mansions, crowns, garments, etc. Gold speaks of our status (royalty or trophy/medal). It expresses sentiment like a diamond ring does in a marriage and will be used in our eternal dwelling and heavenly clothing (Ps. 45), but does not refer to currency in heaven.

¹²If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw... (1 Cor. 3:12)

3. Purified gold does not come easily or without fire. Gold must be excavated and then put in the fire. Gold refined by fire involves a costly and painful process to remove the dross.

²He is like a refiner's fire...³He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons...as gold and silver that they may offer...an offering in righteousness. (Mal. 3:2-3)

4. We buy or acquire gold and oil in the costly way of listening (Isa. 55:1-3) or watching, then responding out of what we hear. Jesus told only the lukewarm saints to buy or to acquire in a costly way (Laodiceans and foolish virgins). On only three occasions did the Lord say in Scripture “to buy” in a spiritual way: to the foolish virgins (Mt. 25:9), to the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:18), and in Isa. 55:1-3.

¹Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price...²Listen carefully to Me...³Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live. (Isa. 55:1-3)

5. To buy gold is to acquire costly and rare godly character. This makes us rich in this age by tenderizing our heart to feel more of God’s presence, and it makes us rich with rewards in the age to come (1 Cor. 3:12).
6. Gold is only one facet of our eternal reward, but it is a real one. This eternal gold is given according to the measure of our love and obedience.
7. *I counsel you to buy white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed:* righteous living results in the reward of eternal garments. Our garments begin with the gift of righteousness that is imputed to us by faith (2 Cor. 5:21). However, here Jesus is speaking of experiential righteousness or acts of righteousness.

⁸To her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Rev. 19:8)

8. To be naked or shamed in eternity is to be devoid of the reward of heavenly garments. All believers have the robe of righteousness, yet Jesus warns us of the shame of nakedness or “lacking the reward of clothing” that reveals one’s commitment to Jesus in this age. Receiving the reward of clothing as a statement of honor is what Joseph received from Pharaoh (Gen 41:42) and Mordecai received from King Ahasuerus (Esth. 6:6-11).

¹⁵***Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. (Rev. 16:15)***

⁴***You have a few...who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments...***
(Rev. 3:4-5)

²⁸***Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (1 Jn. 2:28)***

9. *Anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see:* people put eye medicine (eye salve) on or in their eyes, seeking to be cured of eye disease.
- a. Laodicea's famous medical school exported a "powder" used as an eye salve. This Phrygian powder was applied to the eyes as doughy paste.
 - b. Jesus was saying that we must take action to cure our spiritually sick eyes. Only the Holy Spirit can give us revelation of Jesus and His Word. However, we can take natural steps by taking time to feed on the Word and turning our eyes away from worthless things that dull our spirit.
10. *I counsel you to buy from Me:* Jesus exhorts us to "buy gold" or to engage in the God-ordained process of acquiring a deep relationship with God. In buying gold or garments, we do not earn them but we invest ourselves in a costly way to position ourselves to receive them. "Buy" is from Isa. 55:1-3. We can buy or seek to acquire in a way that is costly to us by listening (Isa. 55:1-2) or being attentive to the Spirit, then responding to what we hear.
- a. We value our relationship with God enough to invest in it in a costly way as David did.
²⁴***The king [David] said to Araunah, "...I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." (2 Sam. 24:24)***
- G. *Therefore be zealous and repent:* be radical in our resolve to make changes. Many wish they were more on fire for Jesus, but they decide to wait until later to make zealous changes. Promise for overcomers: intimacy and authority

²⁰***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. ²¹To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²²He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 3:20-22)***

1. *I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me:* to eat together in covenant intimacy or in deep fellowship as the Spirit tenderizes our heart to feel more of His love by increasing our revelation of Jesus and zeal for righteousness. The eternal application of this refers to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9; cf. Mt. 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:16, 29, 30).

21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him... 23 If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (Jn. 14:21-23)

a. Jesus longs to give us vast wealth and royal clothing that openly express how dear and near His people are to Him. He wants to eat meals with them. He is so desirous of giving this to those who were breaking His heart at that time. He presses them to receive wealth, honor, and love at the banqueting table of love (Song 2:4-5) to make them lovesick

4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love. 5 Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick. (Song 2:4-5)

b. We eat at a table with Him now by feasting on the Word. Imagine the privilege of literally dining with Jesus in the resurrection. We will speak of these occasions to others forever.

3. *I will grant to sit with Me on My throne*: this promise is offered to all Christians in the Millennium (Rev. 5:10; 11:15; 20:4). Jesus promised the apostles that they would eat and drink with Him and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30). Eating with the Messiah and ruling with Him is presented together regularly; thus, we rule with affection.

29 I bestow upon you a kingdom... 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Lk. 22:29-30)

4. *As I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*: this distinguishes between two thrones, Jesus' and the Father's; the Father's throne is in heaven, and Jesus' throne will be on earth as the son of David (Ps. 122:5; Ezek. 43:7; Lk. 1:32).

a. Jesus' earthly throne is turned over to the Father at the end of the Millennium (1 Cor. 15:24-28). We will sit on Jesus' earthly throne after He comes back to earth (Dan. 7:13-14; Mt. 25:31; Heb. 2:5-8).

b. Jesus overcame at the cross (Jn. 16:33; Rev. 5:5, 9). Jesus sat down at the Father's right hand after His resurrection and ascension to heaven (Ps. 110:1; Mt. 22:44; Acts 2:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

5. *I stand at the door and knock*: Jesus continually beckons us to draw near to His heart as He patiently waits for us. Jesus can open all doors (Rev. 3:7-8) except the door of our heart. Jesus will not violate our free will. Much of the Church is content to have His name and do His work without His presence in their midst.

6. *If anyone hears My voice and opens the door*: Jesus invites all individuals who hear, "You have not gone too far. There is still hope and opportunity for you to recover what was lost."

H. The time period prophetically spoken of by the Church of Laodicea: This church may speak of the modern church that is spiritually dulled by materialism and consumerism. The Laodicean period may cover approximately AD 1850-to the end of the age.