

## MESSAGES TO SEVEN CHURCHES: Revelation 1 to 3

- ◆ The true nature of Jesus as the Son of God
- ◆ Christ's holiness report on the seven churches
- ◆ The role of Satan, the fallen angel
- ◆ Warnings, praise and promises from Jesus
- ◆ Cultural pressures of seven sinful cities
- ◆ The need to keep strong in our personal faith

**THIS BOOK** explains the first three chapters of the prophecies from Jesus Christ given to the apostle John in the first century AD. The risen Christ as Son of God sends messages to seven churches at that time with words of encouragement, rebuke, challenge and warning. He gives promises to each believer who remains faithful. This is New Testament teaching for Christians today. It will allow the Holy Spirit to transform your true worship of God, your way of living as a follower of Jesus and bring the 'light of Christ' back into His Church.

MANNA PUBLICATIONS supply Bible teaching commentaries written by Australian missionary Fred Morris. For many years Fred, and his wife Lorna, travelled round the world teaching and preaching. When they retired they settled in the USA and Fred wrote these notes for printing and selling wherever there was a need for basic foundational Christian teaching.

**THIS REVISED UK edition is written in easy-to-read Worldwide English which will add understanding and also speed up translation into other languages. It gives basic teaching for all readers plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.**

THESE BOOKS are to use on your own or to study in a group. They will teach you God's truth. They will help you to know God's Son, Jesus Christ. They will help you to talk about your faith in God. They will stop you from going the wrong way in life. They will help to lead you closer to Christ. They provide food for life.

**WE PRAY** that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you read the Bible and use these commentaries.

# Manna Publications

FOUNDATIONAL BIBLE TEACHING COMMENTARIES

'The secret of God's Kingdom has been given to you' (Mark 4:11)



# MESSAGES TO SEVEN CHURCHES

## Christ's Teaching for Believers Today

A Bible Teaching Commentary in easy-to-read Worldwide English for personal or group study

by Fred Morris



Revelation Part 1

Chapters 1 to 3

## To the reader or leader

These Bible commentaries explain the truth about God's Word in a way that is easy to read and understand. You can use these books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. In a group study, each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.

There is a lot of information in this book. Please study it slowly and thoughtfully. Ask God to help you apply the things you learn to your own life and situation.



**Now Read:** Where you see this, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible passage first before reading the words in this book.



**Talk about:** Where you see this, there are questions that can be asked in a group study. They also help the reader to understand the Bible verses.



**Think About:** Where you see this sign, the question requires more time and meditation.



**Multiple choice questions:** Where you see this, there are questions with three possible answers; some are right answers, some are wrong answers. These questions help you to think carefully about what you are reading. The answers to these questions are given at the back of the book. You can use the questions as a personal test.



**Prayer Time:** Where you see this, it invites you to ask God to help you to understand what you have learned and apply it in your own life or fellowship of believers.



Where you see **ruled boxes**, the information inside is mainly for Bible students, teachers and preachers.

**Additional Bible readings** are there to give you important information. God will use them to speak to you. This is why you should check all readings now or later and use them for study at home. Some readings are from the Old Testament (OT), which we call 'the holy writings'. That is the part of the Bible written before Jesus Christ lived on this earth. Some readings are from the New Testament (NT), the part of the Bible which was written after Jesus Christ lived on this earth.

Manna Bible commentaries give God's truth as a foundation for all believers. The people leading the study should add applications and experiences from their own Christian life and culture.

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for every congregation and every individual believer. And always remember that it is the risen Christ, the One who sits on the throne of Almighty God, who spoke these words to the churches.

The buildings of these seven churches no longer exist today. However, the worldwide Christian Church grew wherever this same word of God was read or preached or taught. It has been copied and printed in every country of the world. Fred Morris, author of Manna Publications, says that this spread of God's Good News just 'goes and grows' by the power of His Spirit.

We invite every reader to listen carefully to the words of Jesus and to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches today before His return. Many people have chosen to worship a variety of gods, old and new, and failed to seek the one true God. They don't understand what He has done for them through His Son. If they refuse to turn to Jesus the Christ, the one and only Saviour, before they die, they will not be given another opportunity after death.

Later generations of believers in the seven churches failed to obey the warnings and advice of Jesus. But we have the benefit of both the Old and New Testament writings which call us to repent, to turn from old and new gods and from immoral living. The work of Jesus is to restore our relationship with God.

We must therefore continue with the work of Jesus: 'He felt deep concern for them. They were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things' (Mark 6:34). We should rejoice that the wonderful teaching of Jesus remains with us today. John wrote in his Gospel: 'These things are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life everlasting because you belong to Him' (John 20:31).



#### **Talk about this:**

1. What are the things that Jesus praised the churches for?
2. What are the wonderful things that Jesus promised to faithful believers?
3. Christ said, 'I will come as a thief in the night...' What did He mean?
4. If Jesus spoke today of Christian health, wealth and happiness, what would He mean?
5. What do you now know about the book of Revelation?
6. Were the warnings of Christ only for the churches of John's day?



**Think about this:** What good things would Jesus say about your church today?



**Prayer time:** Pray for repentance and revival in your life and in your church. Give thanks for what God has done and is doing. Pray to understand why it is true that change in others often begins with change in ourselves.

## **INTRODUCTION**

John was a prisoner of the Romans on the island of Patmos 1900 years ago. He was in trouble for preaching the Good News that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah. He is the Son of God who was born to save the world from sin. His name 'Jesus' or 'Yeshua' means 'Saviour'.

John wrote the book of Revelation nearly 90 years after the birth of Jesus. This was over 50 years after Jesus was crucified and went back to Heaven to be with His Father, the Almighty God and Creator of our Universe. So John was very old when Jesus appeared to him and asked him to write down these wonderful truths.

Revelation is the last book in the Bible. The word 'Revelation' means truth that is received direct from God. It gives messages of encouragement and also warnings of God's future judgement.

The book of Revelation foretells the future but should not be used for suggesting dates for what is called the end-times or last days. Jesus said no-one but Almighty God could know these dates. Instead, it should inspire us to worship and trust in the glorious and victorious Risen Lord Jesus until He returns in glory.

## **IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS**

The Book of Revelation shows that Jesus is at the centre of all history. He existed before all things were made (Colossians 1:17). And He will remain for ever. He is called the 'Alpha and the Omega,' or the 'First and the Last' and the 'Beginning and End' (Revelation 1:8,17). Alpha and Omega are the names of the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet used at the time of John.

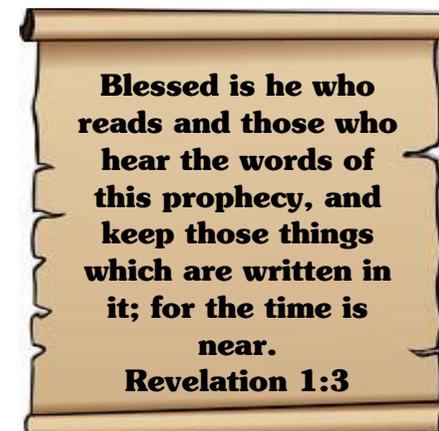
God encourages true believers to obey Jesus, to resist Satan and to help others to do the same. Jesus promised believers the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to do that (John 14:16-17,26; 15:26; Luke 24:49).

The first three chapters of the book of Revelation tell us how Jesus visited John to tell him to write important messages to seven churches. 1900 years ago (see *map*).



#### **Talk about this:**

1. Why is it important to read both the Old and the New Testament today?



2. Explain how and why the whole of the Bible is about Jesus, the Son of God.
3. Why does God allow Satan and his demons to tempt and deceive people?
4. What do you know so far about the Book of Revelation?

 **Think about this:** How can we show Christians how to overcome evil with good? How can we pray for non-believers to be set free from the works of Satan and his demons?

 **Prayer time:** Pray for yourself for wisdom to understand both the truth of God and the deceit of Satan as you read this Bible commentary.

 **First read: Revelation 1:1-7**

## CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO HIS CHURCH THEN AND NOW

God gave John the Revelation of Jesus Christ:

- to praise and comfort persecuted Christians,
- to warn them to overcome evil with good,
- to promise good things for those who persevered against evil,
- to prophesy about things of the future.

Christians of the early church took great comfort from this book. Today, Christians can do the same. The risen Christ gave these words for believers living at that time and for others to read today.

This book of Revelation is not John's prophecy. It is the word of God through the testimony of Jesus (1:2). It is about the deceit of Satan and God's final victory over him and over all evil. Revelation shows the future of Christ's work for His Church and for mankind.

John tells us that the believers who read and understand and obey these writings will be blessed (1:3). In particular, Christ's messages in the first three chapters are a warning and encouragement to all believers. Chapters 2 and 3 contain messages from Jesus to the seven main churches in the Roman Province of Asia (Western Turkey) at that time (1:4). They needed to be serious about what was written down, before it was too late. So must we.

John asks for grace and peace for his readers from God and from the 'seven spirits' who are in front of His throne (1:4). Seven is a 'perfect number' in Bible writings.

## SOME OF CHRIST'S SPECIAL NAMES AND TITLES

John next gives various names for Jesus to remind us who He is (1:5). In addition, the names or titles given by Jesus Himself in chapters 2 and 3 tell of His divine nature. He is with His Father in Heaven and He rules over all



## Jesus and Satan

From the beginning, Satan tried to stop God's plan in Jesus Christ for mankind. Satan does not have equal power with God: he is one of the creatures God made. He was once a chief angel in heaven, but he was proud and wanted to be equal with God (Isaiah 14:13-15; 1 Timothy 3:6; Revelation 12:7-9). His pride made him rebel against God.

Pride is sin and God cannot look on sin. God will not have sin in Heaven, so Satan was thrown out. Many angels followed Satan. They were thrown out of Heaven with him. Jesus saw this happen (Luke 10:18). These fallen angels still obey Satan. The angels who follow him are called evil spirits or demons. They are not devils. There is only one devil, Satan.

God allows these wicked spirits to be free to come and go in the world that he made. Satan keeps them busy carrying out his evil plans; they try to deceive the people who want to believe in God's truth. Even Jesus Himself was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus used words from the Old Testament writings to show that Satan was a liar and had no answer to the Word of God. This is why it is important for us to read the Bible, including the book of Revelation, to understand its truth about God and what the Holy Spirit is saying to believers today.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Spirit of God still speaks to us through these seven letters to the seven New Testament churches. May those who read these pages have the grace to stop and listen, and follow the advice of Jesus Christ, God's Son! May His light shine out through them!

The Bible teaches that 'in these last days, God has spoken to us through His Son' (Hebrews 1:2). And the only things that Christ commends in these seven churches are those things which witness and testify of Him personally. He criticises the things which hinder the testimony of the believers in these churches. These are the things that bring no honour to the name of Jesus. He also makes clear the good things He longs to see in each church.

Through these seven New Testament churches, Christ reminds the Christian Church worldwide why she exists in this world. It is not for her own health, wealth and happiness but to testify to Jesus and bring praise to Him. He expects us to be fruitful, bringing many to a knowledge of Himself so that the Holy Spirit can bring them to salvation. The world must see Christ at work among the believers, which is the meaning of the lampstands.

The messages to the seven churches are messages of holiness. Holiness for individual believers will bring holiness to the whole community of believers. A church cannot be holy without holy members. In each letter there are lessons



## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

### Based on Revelation chapters 1 to 3

Please choose the correct answers, a, b or c. There could be one, two or three answers that are correct for each question.

#### *Answers are given at the end*

1. What did Jesus NOT like about the Ephesian Christians —
  - a) their much hard work?
  - b) they had left their first love?
  - c) they had grown weary?
2. Jesus said it would be difficult for the Smyrna Christians because they —
  - a) would be tested;
  - b) were expected to worship Roman gods;
  - c) were poor and persecuted.
3. To the Pergamum church, Jesus said that the sword of Christ —
  - a) was greater than the power of Rome;
  - b) would not be used against the Nicolaitans;
  - c) had the power to destroy evil.
4. The problems for the Christians in Thyatira were that —
  - a) they worshiped the rivers and the trees;
  - b) they were persecuted by the Romans;
  - c) some of them were led into sexual sin.
5. Jesus told the Christians at Sardis that they were to —
  - a) remember the message they had received;
  - b) wake up and know what was happening about them;
  - c) ignore what the enemy was doing.
6. The Philadelphia Christians were told —
  - a) to repent;
  - b) to hold on to what they had;
  - c) that Jesus was coming soon.
7. The Laodicean Christians —
  - a) were spiritually rich.
  - b) were not 'hot' toward God.
  - c) did not need anything.

things from His throne. He has all authority 'in Heaven and on the earth' (Mathew 28:18).

Christians in John's day needed to know Christ's authority and power. The persecuted Church needed to remember that Christ's Kingdom was forever and far greater than the power of Satan or the power of the Roman Empire. 'Give glory... to the One who loves us!' (1:5).

## WE ARE A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

John gave more glory and honour to Jesus in 1:6:

- He has made us members of His royal family.
- He has made us kings and priests to serve His Father God.

Christ is our High Priest but He has made us into priests to serve God under Him (1 Peter 2:5,9). We are also kings who reign over a spiritual kingdom with Christ. This is an amazing privilege! Christians often pass over these great truths without much thought.

Originally, God chose the tribe of Levi to serve Him as priests in the Tabernacle and to guard it. The Levites cared for the holy things and kept unholy things out (Numbers 3:5-10). They stood before God and served him on behalf of the people. A priest is therefore someone who speaks to God on behalf of others.

All Christians are called to serve as a priest in this way. You do not have to belong to any tribe or group; you must belong only to Christ. Then you can offer 'sacrifices' of praise, service and prayer to God our Father – and serve our brothers and sisters 'in Christ'.



### The divine nature of Jesus the Christ, God's Son and our Saviour

This is what John tells us about Jesus in 1:5:

1. He is 'the faithful witness' of God who can be trusted. Many Jews did not recognize the One of whom all the Old Testament writings speak. Jesus told them: 'If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me' (John 5:46). Jesus said, 'I stand with the Father who sent Me. In your own law it is written that the testimony of two men is true... My other witness is the Father, who sent Me' (John 5:37).

2. Jesus Christ is 'the first to rise from the dead'. God's first and only Son was the first person to rise from death on a cross and live for eternity (Colossians 1:15,18). The angel said to the women who came to the tomb to anoint His dead body, 'He is not here. He is risen' (Luke 24:6).

3. He 'rules over the kings of the earth'. He is the King of kings and Lord of the Universe. He loved sinners enough to leave Heaven and come to this wicked earth, to live as we live and to die for our sins. 'He has set us free from our sins by His blood.'

It takes a lot of time and patience to pray to God for our brothers and sisters in the faith. We must also pray for unbelievers to become believers. This is called 'intercession'. Prayer is the powerful way to serve others. We dare not stop doing this. We wait on God to show us the special things He wants us to do (Habakkuk 2:3). He wants true believers to share in extending His Kingdom in many ways.

John then reminds his readers that Jesus Christ will return again one day soon. Many will be troubled because of their sins (1:7).



### **Talk about this:**

1. In one verse John tells us three things about Jesus Christ (1:5). What do they mean?
2. What things does John tell us about the followers of Christ (1:6)? What do they mean?
3. What work did the Levites do? Who replaced the Levites in the New Testament church?
4. What can all Christians do as New Testament priests?



**Think about this:** What do we believe about Jesus and about His followers (1:5-6)?



**Prayer time:** Pray to understand your calling as a priest of God to serve the family of believers.



### **Now read: Revelation 1:8-20**

## **CHRIST, THE ETERNAL SON OF GOD, VISITS JOHN**

John next tells his readers about the everlasting nature of Jesus Christ: 'the Alpha and the Omega, who is here now, and who was at the beginning, and is to come, the Mighty One' (1:8).

John writes to us in 1:9 as a brother in Christ who:

- suffers with us in serving God,
- who shows the patience and endurance that is possible 'in Christ',
- who was punished and rejected because of his faithful preaching of the word of God and his witness to Jesus.

John also confirms that he is a prisoner on the island of Patmos – between Turkey and Greece (1:9). He was there because of his preaching from the Old Testament writings about the promised birth, death and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah. He was there because of his personal witness about Jesus whom he believed was the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God who is Saviour of the world.

John kept his faith whilst he was a prisoner. One day, he was praying 'in the

'To those who overcome, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne' (3:21).

## **MONEY GIVES POWER ONLY FOR A SEASON**

Money is powerful and money can help overcome a lot of hardships. Money can bring a certain level of comfort. However, it can become very difficult not to trust in money for every need. But to the one who overcomes this temptation and puts his trust in Yahweh, the Almighty God, Christ will give the right to sit with Him on His Father's throne.

Jesus sits on the Father's throne. He is the Christ, the Great Amen and the Faithful Witness to God. He is the Ruler of God's Creation and the Alpha and Omega. He is God Himself, the Almighty One. He gives divine counsel and also divine judgment. For the seventh time we hear the urgent call, 'Those who have ears should listen to what the Holy Spirit says to the churches' (3:22).

'Those who have ears...' means everyone! These things are meant for you! Christ's message was not local or temporary. This message is eternal and for all.



### **Talk about this:**

1. Did Jesus say anything good about the church at Laodicea? What was their big mistake?
2. Are you over-confident in your own ability? What makes Christians feel truly secure?
3. How would you describe Christians who are neither hot nor cold? What did Jesus say about them (3:16)?
4. How does Jesus see you? Poor? Blind? Naked? Why does God call the wealthy 'poor'?



**Think about this:** Has the truth of God set you and your church free to welcome Jesus personally? Picture Jesus standing at the door of your heart and at the door of your church. What needs to change to let Him in?



**Prayer time:** Pray again to see your church as God sees it. Pray to hear what His Spirit is saying that needs to change in your own life which will make a difference to your community of believers. Pray together for the work, witness and worship of your church.

God says that if we wear the clothes of His Son we can sit down at His banqueting table (Song of Solomon 2:4; Matthew 22:11). Christ will clothe us with His own robes. He also promised a divine ointment, not the kind they made in Laodicea. If you apply His heavenly ointment, the scales will fall off your eyes, and you will see with your spiritual eyes. 'Buy from Me, and I will give you sight. I will open your eyes.' They probably failed to see the true nature of Jesus. They probably failed to develop the gifts of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

The prophet Isaiah was told that the people would see and hear but never understand (Isaiah 6:9-10). He also saw the day coming when 'those who can't hear will hear what is read from the scroll. Those who are blind will... see' (Isaiah 29:18).

It was important for Jesus to tell the church at Laodicea, 'I correct and train those I love. So be sincere and turn away from your sins' (Rev. 3:19). He rebukes and disciplines us and we must be eager and joyful to respond and be ready to repent.

Christ criticised this congregation but it did not mean that He had finished working among them. He said, 'Those whom I love, I rebuke' (see Hebrews 12:6). Christ loved them enough to correct them. This is absolute proof of His unchanging love towards all believers. Praise God!

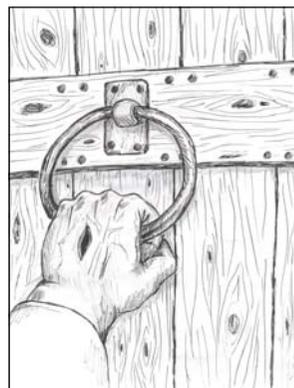
### CHRIST STANDS AT THE DOOR

Jesus then said, 'I stand at the door and knock.' This is the door of our hearts. 'If any of you hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in and eat with you. And you will eat with Me' (3:20).

Christ reveals His deep longing for His people. He says to us, 'I am so near and I am ready to come in at the very moment you open your hearts. I want to eat with you. I want to listen to you, I want to talk with you and I want to have fellowship with you. I want to live in your hearts. I will continue to knock. I have not gone away.'

The risen Christ longed for the church at Laodicea to let Him in. Do we ever stop and ask, 'Lord, what are Your plans for our lives and this community of believers? He is looking for a full commitment from the congregation and from each individual.

In the Lord's words to the church at Laodicea there is great encouragement for the individual, for the person who longs for a deep personal relationship with the One who truly loves us. He wants us to be what He intended us to be – eager to let Him reign in our lives and eager to do His work.



power of the Holy Spirit', when he heard a voice behind him like a loud trumpet (1:10). The voice that John heard said to him, 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches of Asia' (1:11). These churches were the largest at that time in the Roman Province of Asia in Western Turkey (see Map).

Much persecution and suffering had come to these seven churches. Christ's messages to them were full of hope and comfort, but also included warnings about their failings. These churches no longer exist today but we all have much to learn from these messages.

### JOHN SEES JESUS, OUR RISEN SAVIOUR

When John turned to see where the voice came from, he saw seven golden lampstands. In the centre of this vision John saw Jesus the Christ –

'someone like the Son of Man' (1:13). This was a name Jesus used for Himself which the Old Testament writers had also used. Jesus, Son of God, became Son of Man when He came to earth. Jesus died and rose again and is now seated with the Father on His own throne of God in Heaven. He called Himself 'Son of Man' but now He is risen and is alive forever as 'Son of God'.

The vision that John saw of the risen Christ was awesome. It reminded him of the eternal nature and power of Christ as well as His victory over death as our Saviour.



### What John Saw in his Vision of Christ

The seven **golden lampstands** (Revelation 1:12,20) are a picture of the light of Christ dwelling among the seven churches listed in verse 11.

The victorious Christ walked amongst these churches as the light of the world. Everywhere that Christians meet together in His name, Jesus says, 'I am there with them' (Matthew 18:20).



*Seven lampstands and seven stars*

- Jesus walks among the churches:
- to bring unity, discipline and love;
- to encourage them, comfort them, empower them;
- to cleanse and purify His own people;
- to convict them of sin and to call them to repentance;
- to be with His Church always, even to the end of time (Matthew 28:20).

The vision of Christ, the Son of God, is described by John as '**like a Son of Man**' (Rev. 1:13). He is the great prophet of God mentioned in the Old Testament writings (Psalm 8:4-5; 80:17; Isaiah 56:2 and over 90 times in the books of Ezekiel and Daniel). He wore a long robe with gold across His chest.

The vision of Christ included the **seven stars** held in His right hand. This means He holds the seven churches in His right hand which is the hand of power. Also a **sharp double-edged sword** came out of His mouth. This is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17) which shows His power both to protect and to convict the righteous of sin (Rev. 1:14-16). It cuts deep inside us to separate God's truth from man's ideas. John also describes the **face** of Christ shining like the sun. His **eyes** were blazing with fire. His **hair** was like snow and His **feet** like bronze in a furnace.

need today. This fire comes directly from Jesus, not from ourselves. John the Baptist said of Jesus, 'He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Matthew 3:11).

Today, if we do not see people healed and set free, the church lacks the power and the authority that Jesus promised. We replace His power with our own strength. That is what happened in the church in Laodicea. They had confidence in their wealth and their own work for the Lord. They had lost their dependence on the Lord and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the work they did gained approval from men instead of approval from God (John 12:43). They tried to serve two masters but failed.

### ARE YOU RICH TOWARD GOD?

'You say, I am rich... and do not need a thing, but, you do not see that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked' (Rev. 3:17). They may have had expensive rings on every finger, but Jesus said they were spiritually poor. The church members thought they were rich, and they were – with worldly riches! They were proud of their city. They boasted about their medical schools, their banking system, their famous woollen cloth, their garments and carpet industries but did not give glory to God.

Little is left of this once wealthy city or its church. It left no spiritual legacy, and no influence on the world. Jesus once talked about a very rich and foolish farmer. He built big barns to store his produce but God said to him, 'You foolish man! This very night I will take your life away... That is how it will be for anyone who stores things for himself but is not rich in God' (Luke 12:16-21).

- Why does He call the wealthy poor? Because they had little to offer in God's Kingdom.
- Why does He call those who see, blind? Because they were spiritually blind to God's truth.
- Why does He call the well-dressed, naked? Because they have no robe of God's righteousness.

### THE WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR

'Here is My advice...!' (Rev 3:18). This church was in trouble and needed help from the Heavenly Counsellor. The prophet Isaiah told us that Christ, the Wonderful Counsellor, would one day come to carry out His reign on earth (Isaiah 9:6). Like a doctor, a counsellor is of little value if we do not receive and apply his wise counsel!

What was this Heavenly advice? 'Buy from Me.' Jesus said, 'gold made pure by fire. Then you will become truly rich. Buy from me white clothes to wear. Then you will be able to cover your shameful nakedness. Buy from me healing ointment to put on your eyes. Then you will be able to see' (3:18).

## STIR UP THE FLAME THAT IS WITHIN YOU

Then Jesus said, 'I know what you are doing. I know you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other' (3:15). His words describe a spiritual condition called complacency or apathy. They did not want to change.

There was no Jezebel in this church and no mention of evil practices. Compromise with heathen gods did not seem to be a problem. Nor did there appear to be any persecution at that time or pressure to worship the Roman Emperor.

The problem was that they had no real trust in God. The life of their church during a time of peace was not giving glory to God. Their love and faith were warm but not hot.

In the original Greek language, cold means 'very cold' and hot means 'very hot'. How do we get to the boiling point? And, how do we stay there? 'So' said the risen Christ, 'because you are neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of My mouth' (3:16)

This is the same mouth that spoke love, compassion, forgiveness and encouragement, with clear, commands to His people. Both judgment and the loving nature of Almighty God come from the mouth of Jesus the Christ. From His mouth comes the two-edged sword that John saw in his vision (2:12). This is the Word of God with power to (1) destroy what is sinful and (2) encourage what is good. 'It judges the thoughts and purposes of the heart' (Hebrews 4:12).

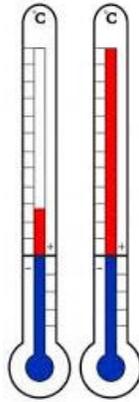
This is what the risen Christ had against the church at Laodicea: there was no real life of Christ among them. They did not give a good witness of Almighty God to non-believers outside the church; nor were there any miracles happening in their congregation in the name of Jesus.

How can we be the kind of people God can use? Paul gives a long list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12 and Galatians 5. We have the Spirit of God within us and through Him comes the guidance and power for good works. But we cannot be and do what He wants unless we are prodded and 'stirred up' within. This happens only when we spend time in His presence, asking for more of Him (Luke 11:13).

## SERVING GOD, NOT MAN

Christ is really saying to this congregation, 'I am a jealous God; you belong to Me. I will not have you trying to serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). I don't want your service for Me to be just warm. It makes Me feel sick.' Jesus Christ demands full commitment to please and serve Him. If not, He will throw out what we do.

The idea of being 'on fire for Christ' may make some people think this is too emotional. However, a strong desire or passion for Christian service is what we



John fell at Christ's feet as though dead. But Jesus put his right hand on John and said to him, 'Do not be afraid!' (1:17). The message John then received was given for all followers of Christ. He was told to share it. Jesus said to him, 'Write ... what you have seen, what is happening now and what will take place later' (1:19).

John recovered and obeyed Jesus. His writings survived and were copied and passed to the churches of the world at that time and up to this day. John is the faithful witness of Jesus – who He is and what He said.

### **Talk about this:**

1. Where was John when he received this message (1:9)? Why?
2. What did the Holy Spirit do when John prayed (1:10)?
3. What do the lampstands mean? Is the light of Jesus seen in your church?
4. What does John tell us about Jesus Christ?

 **Think about this:** Are you worthy to be brothers and sisters of John (1:9)? Are you prepared to have Holy Spirit power at work in your life (1:10)?

 **Prayer time:** Pray that God will open your eyes to the true spiritual condition of these seven churches. Ask God what changes are necessary in your life to work in the love and power of the Holy Spirit.

## INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 AND 3

John wrote down what Jesus wanted to say to the seven churches in Revelation 2:1 to Revelation 3:22. The messages of Jesus to the seven churches reminded them what had happened in the past and described what was true at that time. The messages also warned them what was going to happen in the future. It was important for believers to fully understand the truth about themselves. It was important for them to understand what was right and what had gone wrong.

Few of the churches actually survived for long. This is a warning for us today to obey these words of Jesus and to teach others to do the same. However, Christ's messages survived and have been read and studied by millions of believers around the world ever since. We, too, must fully understand their truth so that we will know and do what is right. We will then grow in our faith, understanding, witness and ministry.

These two chapters of Revelation encourage Christians to remain faithful to the end. They show individuals and groups of believers the importance of understanding where the Christian church has come from, where it is at the present time and where it is going in future. This is important in order to continue to fulfil the purposes of God in Christ. 'He who endures to the end shall be saved' (Matthew 10:22).

The lampstands show the presence of Christ in the churches. A chief purpose of the church is to be a light and witness for Jesus Christ. This is done through showing others the love of God and telling them about Jesus and the Good News of God's salvation plan for sinners (Acts 1:8). Also, we learn that each gathering of Christian believers has a star or an angel who watches over its welfare and witness (Revelation 1:20 and 2:1). The nature and quality of this star or angel is seen by others outside the church.

All the letters to the seven churches are put together in the same way and follow the same pattern of divine teaching. Most of the seven letters have six parts:

1. A greeting which includes a dramatic description of who Jesus, the author, is.
2. All the churches, except Laodicea, are praised for their witness or faith or work for the Kingdom of God.



### How Jesus described Himself to John

At the beginning of each message to the seven churches, Jesus explained something about Himself:

**2:1.** Jesus said that in Heaven He holds each church (**star**) in His hand. He holds them in His right hand, which is the sign of power and authority. He also walks among the community of believers on earth (the **lampstands**).

**2:8.** Jesus said He is like His Father because He is at the beginning and end of everything (the First and the Last or the **Alpha and the Omega**). He is also the promised Messiah who died and came to life again because He has victory over Satan and over death.

**2:12.** Jesus has the power of God's Word to give eternal life or eternal death. His **sharp sword or knife with two edges** means the Word of God protects and also convicts believers; and it penetrates deep into their lives.

**2:18.** Jesus described Himself as 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God'. These are two titles of Jesus which explain that He is both human and divine. His **eyes of fire** see deep into our souls and His **feet of bronze** metal stand firm in a sinful world.

**3:1.** Jesus rules over the spiritual gifts and the **angels** given to each church (the Spirit of God for each church star).

**3:7.** Jesus is 'holy and true'. He is the promised descendant of King David and has the authority (**key**) to allow people of faith into the Kingdom of God, which lasts forever. He also has the authority to keep others out.

**3:14.** Jesus said that He is the '**Amen**' which means His words are 'true and will remain so for ever'. When we say 'Amen' we mean: 'We agree this is true'. Jesus is the faithful example (witness) of the truth of God because He IS the truth of God. He is also the ruler of God's creation.

Compare this with the way John describes Jesus in Revelation 1:4-6,12-16.

refused aid from Rome. Its people rebuilt the entire city without help. They had confidence in themselves.

Living in the midst of this wealth and prosperity, the Christians were tempted to think there was little need to look to God for their daily bread. They were deceived into feeling that security comes with wealth. Many are deceived in this way today.

Laodicea was a great clothing centre. The sheep surrounding the city were famous for their violet-black glossy wool. The people who lived in Laodicea were proud of their woollen garments.

Laodicea was also a great cultural centre. And their medical centre was famous for two special medicines – ointment for the ears, and ointment for the eyes. Their doctors were famous, and skilled in using the ointments.

The Christians possibly thought they could go through life without trusting in the Lord personally. They did not suspect or realize how much they needed 'spiritual ointment' for their 'spiritual eyes and ears'. They knew and believed the truth of God in Christ but their eyes were blind regarding their need of the living Christ in their lives (3:18).

Paul taught that it was wrong for Christians to believe that knowledge about God was all they needed for their salvation. At the close of his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul added these words, 'After this letter has been read to you, send it on to others. Be sure that it is also read to the church in Laodicea' (Colossians 4:16-17).

Knowledge of the truth of God gained from spoken and written words is good, but it must always lead believers to seek a personal relationship with Him. This had not happened in the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:20).

## THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

The risen Christ said to John: 'Here is what I command you to write to the church in Laodicea. Here are the words of the One who is the Amen [Jesus Himself]. What He gives witness to is faithful and true. He rules over God's creation' (3:14).

We live in a world where we face dishonesty at every level of society. Perfect truth and reality are found in Christ alone. Congregations and church leaders may fail, but Christ, the True Witness will never fail.

The word 'Amen' comes from the Hebrew word for truth. It literally means, 'This is true'. When the people said, 'Amen,' they were actually saying, 'What He says is true and it is true for ever!'

At the beginning of the creation Christ was there and will be there in the future at the end of time. Christ was there from before the world was made, waiting to bring about your salvation and mine and to call us into fellowship with Him forever!

Jesus then promised, 'I will write the name of my God on them. I will write the name of the city of my God on them, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of Heaven from my God' (3:12).

His Name is already upon us. We have been adopted into the family and given His Name (Ephesians 3:13-15). But the promise of a new name is connected with a new city. It is His promise to the faithful believers. John wrote later that, 'the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. God's servants will serve Him. They will see His face. His name will be on their foreheads' (22:3,4). Praise the Lord!

If you have asked Jesus to take your sins away, your name is written down in glory. No-one can erase it if you keep the faith. 'Those who have ears should listen to what the Holy Spirit says to the churches' (3:13).



#### **Talk about this:**

1. What power and authority does Jesus Christ have to help those who believe in Him (3:7)?
2. What was Christ's opening message to the church in Philadelphia (3:8)?
3. Was the church in Philadelphia weak or strong? Good or bad? What was their reward?
4. Why did Christ say, 'no-one will take away your crown' (3:11)?
5. What is the meaning of Christ's final message to the church in Philadelphia (3:12)?

 **Think about this:** Knowing that Jesus holds the key to open or to close doors, how should we pray for the witness of our church in times of trouble – and in times of peace?

 **Prayer time:** Pray to have the eyes and ears of a child of God and to see the doors that are 'open in Christ' – in your life and in your church.

 **Now read: Revelation 3:14-22**

### THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

Laodicea is the only church among these seven churches, about which the risen Christ had nothing good to say!

Laodicea was a great banking and financial centre. It was one of the wealthiest cities in the world. When a devastating earthquake struck, Laodicea

3. This is followed by complaints from Jesus to five of the churches.
4. Jesus then speaks words that encourage or challenge the believers and warns those who need to repent.
5. A warning 'to hear what the Spirit is saying'.
6. A promise is given to those who persevere and overcome troubles and temptations.

These messages to seven churches can be studied personally. However, there is great benefit if they are studied by groups of believers in close and honest fellowship with each other and the Lord. Personal changes can bring the light of Christ to the whole community of God's people and even to worldwide ministry (Matthew 5:14-16).



A seven-branched candlestick or Menorah familiar to Jewish Christians.

 **Now read: Revelation 2:1-7**

### LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

The words of Jesus in this first letter are to remind everyone that He is the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand. He is the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands. This means that Jesus holds each group of believers in His right hand. His right hand is the arm of strength, authority and favour. He is our security. God says to His people, 'Don't be afraid; I am here to help you' (Isaiah 41:13).

These words also mean that the churches, or the lampstands, give out light; that is their purpose. Jesus wants to walk in the churches as that light. His people are connected to His power. Christ gives His people power and calls on them to be a 'light to the world' with their witness (Matthew 5:14; Philippians

#### **The praise, criticism, advice and promises of Jesus**

**How Jesus praised six of the seven churches:**

Revelation 2:2-3,6; 2:9; 2:13; 2:19,24; 3:4; 3:8-10.

**How Jesus criticised five of the seven churches:**

Revelation 2:4; 2:14-15; 2:20-23; 3:1-2; 3:15-17.

**How Jesus advised and warned the seven churches:**

Revelation 2:5; 2:10; 2:16; 2:25; 3:3; 3:11; 3:18-91.

**How Jesus made promises to the seven churches:**

Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-28; 3:5; 3:12; 3:20-21.

2:15). This 'light' is seen in the lives of those who make daily contact with Jesus and the source of His power – the Holy Spirit.

Jesus then told John some good things about the church in Ephesus.

'I know what you are doing. You work long and hard. I know you can't put up with those who are evil' (2:2). Jesus knew that the believers hated the idolatry, the crime, the immorality, and the wickedness in Ephesus.

Ephesus was a large city, a wealthy city and the main port for the rest of Turkey and beyond. John wrote down these words from Jesus: 'You have tested those who claim to be apostles (2:2). I know you have found out that they are liars.' The leaders had warned the true believers to stay away from false teachers. They had searched the Old Testament writings for correct doctrine and sound advice and followed the Apostle's New Testament teaching.

The Christians in Ephesus were widely praised in the early Church. Jesus knew 'their good deeds, their hard work and their perseverance' (2:2). He knew what they did and how long and how hard they worked (2:3). But they were considered outlaws by the Romans.

At that time, no nation on earth had been able to fight against the might and power of Rome. Towards the end of the first century AD, Roman temples were being built everywhere for the worship of the Roman Emperor or King. Christians were given the choice: give glory to Christ or to Caesar! (Caesar was the Roman Emperor.) Persecution and hardship – that is what it was like for these early Christians who refused to worship Caesar.

So Jesus knew all about their sufferings. He praised them for their hard work. He also praised them because they had not grown weary (2:3).

### **'REMEMBER YOUR FIRST LOVE'**

Jesus knew this church had not failed or compromised in their worship of God. However, Jesus had something to say against them.

Jesus said to the church in Ephesus, 'You have left your first love' (2:4). In other words: 'You no longer love to come into My presence to worship me.' Nor were they eagerly looking forward to the return of the Christ. Perhaps they enjoyed doing good works more than worshipping with other believers.

Jesus said, 'Remember the time of your first love, and how different things are now. Repent! Turn back to Me. You must light again that fire within you or your light will go out. If not, the Spirit of the Lord will depart.'

### **'YOU HAVE ONE THING IN YOUR FAVOUR'**

'However,' said their Lord, 'you have this in your favour... you hate the wrong ways of the Nicolaitans. I also hate their wrong ways' (2:6). The Nicolaitans were a group of believers whose moral behaviour was unholy. They misunderstood the meaning of Christian liberty. Their love of religious

had only a little strength at a time of great idol worship and immorality in the city.

The church in Philadelphia was not involved with the city's cult of Dionysus. The Christians had successfully separated themselves from such evil. The risen Christ made no mention of any compromise with this heathen worship.

The real enemy in the midst of the city of Philadelphia were those of the 'synagogue of Satan' who claimed to be Jews though they were not. Jesus said, 'I will make them come and fall down at your feet. I will make them know how much I love you' (3:9).

These are amazing words of encouragement for believers who have little power!

### **PROMISES AND A WARNING**

In all the previous letters, Jesus warns each congregation to repent (2:2; 2:14; 2:22; 3:3). He does not warn the church at Philadelphia to repent.

He gives instead a promise of divine deliverance and help. 'I will keep you from the time of suffering that will come to the whole world. It will test those who live on the earth' (3:10). Jesus does not say that trials and troubles will cease. He means He will save them from Satan. This is another wonderful promise for faithful believers!

However, for all the churches, Jesus warns them that He will come suddenly, quickly and in judgment. For the church in Philadelphia, He uses these words of warning: 'I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have. Then no-one will take away your crown' (3:11). This is a key verse for all true believers which Jesus also gives in 2:10 and 2:25. Believers must remain strong under persecution and strong under temptation.

The troubles had left this little group of true believers weak in their faith. Whatever hurt them, Christ encouraged them with this further promise: 'Then no-one will take your crown.' But they must hold on to the faith they have in God. We must do the same.

### **THE HOPE OF EVERY BELIEVER**

Jesus also promised that 'those who overcome will be pillars in the temple of My God. They will never leave it again' (3:12).

A pillar represents something strong and permanent. To be a pillar is a position of great honour. God has used many faithful saints down through the ages, and we often call them 'pillars of the faith'.

Are you a pillar? God is still in the business of raising up pillars, who will support the plan and purpose of His Church. They are the ones who hold up the truth of His word. God has called His Church to this extraordinary purpose and position of trust.

make it a living force in the community. Pray for Almighty God to send His Holy Spirit in power! Prepare everyone to watch for the return of our Lord Jesus in these evil days.

 **Talk about this:**

1. What happens when we fall asleep in our Christian witness (3:2)? Are we like Sardis? What do we need to do to keep awake?
2. What deeds are acceptable in the sight of God (3:2)?
3. What do we need to remember? What gifts have been lost? Why do we need to repent when we fail to remember (3:3)?
4. How does God use a remnant of believers? Are you part of a remnant? Do you know who is?

 **Think about this:** What is it that your church does well in serving God and His Kingdom? How can you continue faithfully in what you are doing with renewed purpose and strength?

 **Prayer time:** Pray for personal revival before it is too late and to hear what the Spirit is saying (3:6). Pray that the remnant of true believers will bring revival in your fellowship and to the wider church.

 **Now read: Revelation 3:7-13**

### MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

History tells us that Philadelphia became a stronghold of Christianity. Its name means 'city of brotherly love'. They were a faithful church.

Christ presented Himself to the church there as the One 'who is holy and true. He holds the key of David' (3:7). To hold the key of King David means to have absolute authority.

Many teach and believe that this church had a 'door of opportunity to witness'. It is a door that Christ has the key to open and close.

In this letter no criticism is given. To these believers in Philadelphia, Christ said, 'I know what you do. Look – I have put an open door before you that no-one can shut. I know that you have little strength but you have obeyed My word and not denied My name' (3:8). That was a difficult thing for them to do in the early years of the Roman empire.

This was a promise of a rich reward given to a faithful church, even though it

**'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.'**  
**Revelation 3:8**

freedom was more important to them than the holiness of God in their lives. God hates compromise and He knew that most Ephesian believers hated compromise, so there was hope.

We, too, must stand against false teaching and unholy ways. If we believe God's Word, we cannot stand aside and allow others to speak false teaching. The risen Christ was looking for those who wept because of the crime and immorality in Ephesus. He found them in His church there.

Twenty centuries later God is still looking for those who grieve over the sin and corruption in our cities and in our world. Many world leaders allow freedom to be immoral and, at the same time, go to church on Sunday mornings! Countries groan under their leadership. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that we can live our own sinful way and still please God. God's standard for His people is holiness (1 Peter 1:15).

### GOOD ADVICE WITH A PROMISE

It was not too late to renew their first, true love. Repent! 'Turn away from your sin!' (2:5). They must let the Spirit of the Lord move in their lives as He did when they first believed.

There is a promise to everyone who overcomes the temptation to sin, to everyone who is victorious: 'I will allow those who overcome to eat fruit from the tree of life' (2:7). What does this mean?

One day we will be able to feast forever from the Tree of Life. The 'tree' John saw in a later vision was Christ (22:1-2). We will see His face, and we will reign with Him forever in Heaven (22:4-5). I believe that we can experience the presence of God in our lives, giving us an abundant life (John 10:10) here now and forever.

 **Talk about this:**

1. Who walks amongst the lampstands (2:1)? What should this mean to us when we meet with other believers?
2. How can we test what we hear, to be sure it is the truth?
3. Jesus spoke of hardships and persecutions. What caused this (2:3)? Are you suffering because of staying true to your faith?
4. What did Jesus say about their love for Him (2:4)? What were they told to do? Are there ways in which we have lost our first love for our Lord?
5. How did Jesus comfort these persecuted believers (2:7)?

 **Think about this:** What good things would Jesus say about your church today? What bad things would He say about your church today?

 **Prayer time:** Pray for Jesus to walk in your church and be seen by others. Pray to remain faithful in times of suffering and persecution, giving glory to Jesus and encouraging other believers.



**Now read: Revelation 2:8-11**

## MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

Smyrna, 45 km north of Ephesus, was another prosperous city in the Province of Asia. It was so beautiful they called it 'the pride of Asia'. Like Ephesus, it had a harbour, which made it good for trade.

Unlike the Christians in Ephesus, the Christians in Smyrna had not lost their first love. They were not too stubborn to listen to God's voice. Also, they were prepared to suffer for Christ.

The people of Smyrna had the reputation of being very patriotic and loyal to the rule and religion of the Roman Empire. But those who followed Christ could not compromise with Rome, which was hostile to Christians. Christians were given a choice – Christ or Caesar. It was therefore dangerous to be a Christian under Roman rule.

Compromise was an issue every Christian had to face in Smyrna. Should Christians sprinkle incense on the altar before the Emperor's statue? No! That would be idolatry. Should Christians bow the knee to Caesar? No! 'Jesus is Lord'. There can be no other.

The leaders of the Roman Empire were against Christ. The unbelieving Jewish leaders were also determined to stop the believers preaching the Good News about Jesus Christ. For true believers, freedom and employment were limited. This is the same as persecution from other religions or unbelievers today. There is little 'freedom' for Christians in many countries – neither freedom to worship or preach, nor to meet with other believers.

## JESUS CHRIST – THE FIRST AND THE LAST

This message to the church at Smyrna describes Jesus as 'the One who is the First and the Last' (2:8). Christ therefore described Himself as equal with God His Father who is 'the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End' (1:8). Then He added these joyful words: 'Don't be afraid.' There is no need for you to fear, even if your life is threatened.

If our faith is in Christ, we too can experience His peace and confidence in times of trial.

Again, Jesus reminds his readers more about who He really is: 'He is the One who died and came to life again...' (2:8). He is the living One who was crucified in God's plan of love for sinners. He was raised up from death so that all who believe in Him will have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Jesus then told John to write down: 'I know that you suffer and are poor. But you are rich!' (2:9). History records the looting and the burning of the properties belonging to Christians in Smyrna. It happens today in many countries of the world. But Christians are rich in the knowledge of the Almighty

Judgement was coming for this congregation at Sardis. It will be the same for every congregation that refuses to live as saved people ought to live. Everyone will be judged.

When Jesus said, 'I will come to you', this does not mean the Second Coming of Christ. He spoke about removing the light of His lampstand. This depended on whether the church at Sardis chose to respond, or refused to respond, to the voice of Jesus.

## THE FAITHFUL REMNANT

In spite of all the problems in this church there were a faithful few believers who have kept their clothes clean. They will walk with Me, dressed in white, because they are worthy' (3:4).

To the faithful who have walked in holiness and kept themselves pure, the Lord Jesus Christ promises a heavenly robe. White robes are a symbol of purity.

God's faithful people are often called a remnant. 'Remnant' here means a small number. Israel was the smallest nation of all the peoples of the world (Deuteronomy 7:7). And those in Israel who truly obeyed Almighty God were a remnant of the total population (Isaiah 10:20).

Today, all over the world people come to Jesus Christ and receive Him as their Saviour. They usually come in small numbers, even one by one. There will be a time when these faithful saints will put on their robes of pure white, and gather round the throne of God in their millions. 'For they are worthy' (Rev. 3:4).

As for those who overcome 'I will never remove their names from the Book of Life. I will speak of them by name to My Father and His angels' (3:5). To 'overcome' means victory in this life and the next, receiving God's righteousness and joy in our salvation. However, there will be difficulties, persecutions, trials, troubles and temptations on the way.

Their names might be cursed or scorned in this life but the names of those who overcome shall never be removed from the Lamb's Book of Life. This is God's promise because Jesus, the Lamb of God, will give their names to God His Father in Heaven. He will witness to Him of their faithfulness.

To those who are spiritually asleep, the call is to wake up and strengthen what you have before you lose it – before you are spiritually dead.

A faithful remnant in any congregation can strengthen the whole assembly. Who are the spiritually alive people in your congregation? It is those who give themselves to love, encourage, pray for and minister to the congregation and to those outside the church.

Faithful believers are found in most congregations. They are numbered with the few who will strengthen the work of the leaders. These faithful believers are the ones who can change a congregation. Pray for the remnant of believers. Support them. The Holy Spirit can breathe life into a dead church and

from the Holy Spirit. They professed to be Christians, but the lives and deeds of many of them proved that their faith was shallow. It is possible to have a belief that does not respond faithfully to the Spirit of God. The risen Christ warned them, 'Wake up! Strengthen what is left, or it will die. You have not done all that my God wants you to do' (Rev. 3:2).

## WAKE UP AND REPENT!

Repent from what? Repent from works that lead to spiritual death. Works that are not done with love and care and perseverance. Works that do not bring glory to the name of Christ. Works that are done by human effort without the power of the Holy Spirit, do not please God. He knew the problem and He knew that the remedy was to repent and confess sin. 'If we admit we have sinned, He will forgive us our sins... He will cleanse us and make us pure.' (1 John 1:9.)

Jesus warned them:

- 'You have a name for being alive but you are dead' (3:1).
- 'You must strengthen the remaining gifts that are about to die' (3:2).
- 'The good things you have done are unfinished in the eyes of God' (3:2).
- 'Remember and keep on remembering what you have received and heard and hold on to it' (3:3).

All Christians need to remember what Christ has done for them. That is why Jesus took bread at His last supper, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, 'This is My body given for you, do this in remembrance of Me' (Luke 22:19). All believers need to remember this whenever they eat bread and drink together.

Every time the Jews celebrated Passover, they remembered that God had rescued them through lamb's blood on their wooden doorposts. The blood saved them from the angel of death and from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:13). When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember that God rescued us through the blood of Jesus on the wooden cross (Luke 22:19). This is how Christians witness that the blood of the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) delivers us from the fear of death and from the slavery of sin (Rev. 5:9). Praise God!

## 'I WILL COME LIKE A THIEF'

Jesus warned the church at Sardis to renew and strengthen their remaining gifts. God wasn't asking them to change their ministry but to do it well and for His glory.

Christ continued, 'Turn away from your sins. If you don't wake up, I will come like a thief. You will not know when I will come to you' (3:3). Thieves do not make an appointment, and neither will the Judge of all mankind. A Day of

God of all truth and love who offered His own flesh and blood to forgive sins. As a result, He gives the followers of His Son, Jesus Christ, extraordinary power to overcome troubles in this life and live forever in the next.

Jesus knew that the Smyrna Christians were even persecuted by some of those who called themselves the chosen people of God. But they were not God's people – they did not know God at all!

## JESUS WARNED THAT IT WOULD GET WORSE

Jesus warned that the persecution would continue and get worse. Then He added those familiar words of encouragement: 'Do not be afraid of what you are going to suffer' (2:10; see 2 Timothy 1:12).

From the very beginning, Satan has used deceit and compromise to bring down God's children. If you say, 'Caesar is Lord', but think that on the inside you can be a follower of Jesus, then that is a lie!

'Get behind me Satan', Jesus said (Matthew 16:23). Then He suffered on the cross but was given the right to sit at the side of Father God. His victory over sin and death is our salvation, so 'let us keep looking to Jesus' (Hebrews 12:2).

The church at Smyrna would be fully tested. 'For ten days' means 'fully tested'. 'And I will give you the crown of life' (2:10). The gift of eternal life awaits the faithful Christian who perseveres and overcomes the world and its temptations to sin. This was true for the little fellowship of believers at Smyrna. The risen Christ promised a 'crown of life' as well as eternity with Him.

## BE AN OVERCOMER FOR CHRIST!

'He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.' The second death awaits those whose names are NOT written in 'the Book of Life'. It is called 'the lake of fire' (20:14,15).

The church at Ephesus had overcome those who said they were apostles but were actually liars. The church at Smyrna had overcome the teaching of a false religion in their city and received praise from the risen Christ.

If Christ came into our midst today, would we receive immediate praise? What is the message of this letter to us? 'Fear not little flock. Suffering will come. Persecution will come.' But the risen Christ also said, 'Be faithful, even if it means you must die, and I will give you a crown of life' (2:10). This is sometimes called 'the martyr's crown'.

Those who are faithful until death will live and reign with Christ. Martyrs for Christ are given a special place in heaven (6:9-11).



### Talk about this:

1. How did Christ describe Himself to this church (2:8)?

2. What did He tell the believers at Smyrna to do (2:10)?
3. Were all the people who said they were 'people of God' telling the truth?
4. What is the greatest trick of Satan?
5. Why did Jesus praise the church at Smyrna?

 **Think about this:** How well are you prepared to 'overcome' if you are fully tested 'for ten days'?

 **Prayer time:** Pray together for joy in your salvation and faith in God even if you are persecuted. (6:10).

 **Now read: Revelation 2:12-17**

### THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM

Jesus introduced Himself to the church at Pergamum as 'the One who has the sharp two-edged sword' (2:12). This sword describes the Word of God. The Romans ruled the city by the power of their swords. Jesus reminded the church that His 'sword' was more powerful. By the Word of God, Jesus has the power to destroy evil people and send them to hell. He has the power to protect good people and give them eternal life. God's Word is like a sword because it also penetrates deeply into our souls.

Pergamum was the old capital of the Roman province of Asia for over 100 years. It was a cultural centre and was famous for its library of over 200,000 parchment rolls containing writings from the previous Greek empire.

Pergamum was a city of great splendour. It was also a heathen religious centre. In this letter Jesus refers to Pergamum as the place where Satan lived and had a seat of power (2:13). Something was there that He regarded as a great evil. Bible scholars believe it was the worship of the Greek god Zeus which had controlled the city for over 200 years. At the time of John, Rome ruled Pergamum and the former Greek Empire but the Greek culture and religion survived the invading Romans.

### CHRIST IS OUR SAVIOUR

Some think Pergamum was called the 'seat of Satan' because of the worship of the healing god, Asklepios. People came to Pergamum from everywhere for healing. Thus Asklepios became known as 'the saviour.'

Christians knew that Jesus, and only Jesus, was the true healer and Saviour of mankind, and their testimony proved it. In their witness, they stood firm against the worship of both Zeus and Asklepios.

Jesus knew all about the evil powers that surrounded the believers but the church at Pergamum was faithful. Jesus praised them greatly for refusing to

 **Think about this:** Are there things in your life that Jesus is asking you to repent of whilst there is time (2:21)? How might personal repentance change your community of believers and even the world?

 **Prayer time:** Pray to God for faith and strength and obedience under temptation.

 **Now read: Revelation 3:1-6**

### THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

In the city of Sardis, there was spiritual decline and decay. True spirituality and love of the truth had slowly died out. The city was built 500 metres above sea level on a narrow plateau like a watchtower overlooking the valley below. The city was strong. It was a wealthy city and its citizens believed that they had everything they needed and could not be overpowered by an enemy.

However, around 500 BC, Cyrus, king of Persia, found the city asleep and completely unguarded and Sardis fell to the Persians. History repeated itself in 300 BC. Their confidence led to carelessness and Sardis surrendered to Alexander the Great. Then, about 180 BC, when there was no watchman at the gate of the city, Sardis fell to Antiochus of Syria. Finally the Roman army took the city. Each time, their self-confidence led to carelessness and defeat.

The church in Sardis knew well what Christ meant when He said, 'Wake up! Strengthen what remains which is about to die' (3:2). This church had lost its strength. It was a corpse rather than a living body of Christ.

Four times Sardis had lost their city because they didn't see the need to watch. This attitude was also in the Christian church. When Christians forget to watch out for the deceit of Satan (Ephesians 6:11), they are easily overcome by him. We must all 'Watch and pray' (Luke 21:36).

### ARE CHRISTIANS ASLEEP?

Christians around the world have troubles. Unholy changes are made to moral, religious, social and political systems. We must be awake to see what is happening around us. We must guard against compromise and learn to see the work of the enemy. Our salvation comes from Christ alone.

Peter, James and John were overcome with weariness at a time of great need. When Jesus came to them, He found them asleep. 'Could you not watch with Me one hour?' he asked Peter (Matthew 26:40).

Sardis looked good on the outside but there were some within who were not awake to God. This church was full of people who had received and heard the word of God. They knew the truth of the Gospel and had received gifts

Jezebel had followers. She still has followers today! What did Jesus say about her and her followers? 'She sinned on a bed so I will make her suffer on a bed. I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer greatly unless they repent. The only way out is to turn away from the things she taught them to do' (2:22). 'The Lord is patient with you. He does not want anyone to perish. Instead, He wants everyone to repent and to turn away from his or her sins' (2 Peter 3:9).

Finally, He warns this church that the followers of Jezebel will die. 'If you do not repent, and this woman does not repent, all the churches will know that I am He who searches deep within your hearts and minds. I will give to each of you whatever you deserve' (Rev. 2:23).

These are the words of Jesus whose eyes are like blazing fire (1:14). 'Nothing God created is hidden from Him. His eyes see everything' (Hebrews 4:13).

## JESUS ENCOURAGES THE FAITHFUL

Not everyone was deceived by Jezebel's false teaching. There were some God-fearing saints who stood firm. To them, Christ promised to give no further burden (Rev. 2:24). He was pleased with them. He said, 'You don't follow the teachings of Jezebel. You haven't learned the deep secrets of Satan. Just hold on to what you have until I come' (2:25).

These important words from Jesus are repeated in 3:11. They must stand firm, and hold on to their faith and everything else they had gained through Christ. Then He would not allow any more temptation or persecution to add to their troubles. What a wonderful promise for faithful believers!

Those who overcome sin and temptation from within and from outside the church do the will of Christ. To these believers, He promises 'authority over the nations' (2:26). This is another amazing promise for faithful believers! They will also rule with Christ, 'the Morning Star' (2:28)! This is the wonderful result of joyful and obedient service to our Lord.



### Talk about this:

1. Where do the invisible forces behind idols and statues of gods come from?
2. Describe all the good things that Jesus said about the church in Thyatira (2:19).
3. In what ways can temptation come from within the church?
4. What things did Jesus promise in this world and the next for those who did not give in to the temptation to sin (2:24-28)?
5. How can believers gain 'authority over the nations' (2:26)?

bow to evil gods and for refusing to trust false saviours. They neither denied the name of Jesus nor their faith in Jesus. Antipas was put to death there because of his faith.

Pergamum was also a centre for Caesar worship. If necessary, the Roman governor had powerful armies to control Christians who would not bow to Rome nor worship their Emperor.

Christ holds the two-edged sword. The power of Rome might have been great, but the power of the risen Christ was even greater. 'The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world' (1 John 4:4).

The risen Christ said to the church at Pergamum, 'I know where you live. I know the difficulties, the trials. I know you did not run away when things got tough. You stayed and faced martyrdom. You live where Satan has his throne, yet you remain true to My name. You did not deny your faith.'

We do not know much about Antipas the martyr, but the risen Christ called Antipas 'my faithful witness' (2:13). That is the same title used of Christ Himself (1:5). The word 'witness' comes from the word 'martyr'. Jesus, our witness and our martyr, is our Saviour. He now sits on the throne of God.

## REPENT FROM ALL THAT IS FALSE AND UNHOLY

After praising them, Jesus said to the believers at Pergamum: 'I have a few things against you. You have people there who follow the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to tempt the Israelites to sin. They ate food sacrificed to the gods. They committed sexual sins. You also have people who follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans' (2:14-15). The church had problems because sexual unholiness was allowed within the church.

The word of the Lord to them is 'REPENT!'

A great battle was being fought for the hearts and minds of this congregation. Persecutions and martyrdom did not stop them from following Christ and His righteousness, so Satan changed his plan! He tempted them with sexual sins and false teaching. Some yielded to the attractions of sin.

The risen Lord Jesus told them: 'Turn away from your sins. If you don't, I will come to you soon. I will fight against those who sin, with the sword that comes out of My mouth' (2:16; Hebrews 4:12).

It appears that the whole church was not guilty, yet the call to repent was to the whole congregation. Why? Because they had tolerated the false teaching and unholy behaviour in their midst. This was God's complaint against the whole church. And the Spirit of Christ would come to punish the false teachers and those who followed them.

The church in Ephesus had lost its first love for the Lord but remained holy. The church in Pergamum had not lost its love for the Lord but had lost its holiness.

Christ then promised His spiritual food – ‘hidden manna from Heaven’ – to those who overcame temptation to sin. This is possible by refusing to sin, pursuing holiness and standing firm in the faith that God has provided through Jesus (1 Peter 5:8-10). Each person who knows the truth and overcomes evil, receives a ‘white stone’ with their new, special name from God written on it (Revelation 2:17).



### **Talk about this:**

1. What was the city of Pergamum famous for in John’s day? Who had a ‘seat’ or throne there?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said ‘I know where you live’ (2:13)?
3. How did Satan tempt the whole Pergamum church (2:14)?
4. What did Jesus promise to those who did not repent (2:16)?
5. What did Jesus promise to those who did repent and grow in faith (2:17)?



**Think about this:** What do you do when you hear false teaching which can affect the whole church?



**Prayer time:** Pray to God for a strong personal desire for holiness which will witness to His truth to others inside and outside the church.



**Now read: Revelation 2:18-29**

## **THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA**

On the road from Pergamum to Sardis was a smaller city called Thyatira, founded in 311 BC. At Thyatira, dyeing cloth red or purple was a major industry.

Each business had its own special god that the workers worshipped to try to gain success. The Christians in Thyatira were expected to do this or risk losing their jobs or business opportunities.

When John sent the words of Christ to the church at Thyatira it was a large, prosperous church. Although the risen Christ spoke warmly of it, holiness is not listed as one of its qualities. It is God’s purpose to make us holy and it is Satan’s purpose to stop us from being holy (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

## **UNHOLY HEATHEN GODS**

The chief god in Thyatira was Apollo. There were others. They were not just pictures or statues or idols but actual demonic powers. By those same powers, they revealed themselves to the various peoples of the day (1 Corinthians 10:20).

In this heathen religion, people disobeyed the first commandment given to Moses. They opposed Yahweh, the one true Almighty God, instead of worshipping Him. ‘They thought they were wise, but they made fools of themselves’ (Romans 1:22).

Satan also deceives people about God in nature, so that they worship rivers, trees, hills, stars and the sun and moon – treating them as gods. These people refuse to worship God the Creator but instead worship what He created (Romans 1:25). Jesus rejects their worship.

However, many people’s hearts inquire and search for answers and for something or someone greater to worship. Because God has not stopped working, He keeps seeking and drawing men and women to worship Him.

Apparently, this church in Thyatira did not yield to the threat from idol worship or the cult of Emperor worship. They refused to worship anyone or anything but God alone.

They received much praise from Jesus but there was a problem of sin from within.

## **AN UNHOLY CHURCH**

Jesus next described himself with the words John used in 1:14-15: He had ‘eyes of fire and shining feet of bronze’ (2:18). He then praised them in this way: ‘I know what you are doing. I know your love and your faith. I know how well you have served. I know you don’t give up easily. In fact, you are doing more now than you did at first. But here is what I have against you’ (2:19-20).

Then Jesus spoke against a woman called Jezebel in the community of believers. She taught them sinful behaviour. And yet she was tolerated, which was wrong. ‘You put up with that woman... She has led my servants into sexual sin’ (2:20).

Jesus warned them about sin from within. He gave them a chance to repent, to turn away from sin. The risen Christ warned them not to allow immorality to spoil the works of God’s grace in their midst. Jezebel also tricked them into eating food offered to gods (2:20). She was a false prophet. She rebelled against the word of God.

## **UNLESS YOU REPENT...**

God hates immorality. Sexual sin is never right. ‘Our bodies were not made for sexual sins. The body is meant for worshipping the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 6:13). Glorify Him in your bodies.

The risen Christ had already given Jezebel the chance to repent (Rev. 2:21). But she didn’t want to repent. She enjoyed the sin she was doing. She refused to obey the Spirit of Christ. She was addicted to her immoral ways.