

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

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PREFACE

Many years ago an eminent American theologian, **Benjamin Warfield** (1851-1921), not only noted that the Book of the Revelation was “full of sevens” but was structured by “seven sevens”. Benjamin Warfield was strongly convinced that the sacred Scriptures were “inerrant” and it seems that his outline of the Revelation is just another strong evidence that God intended the Revelation to have such a structure of ‘perfection’.

THE FIRST SEVEN	THE SEVEN CHURCHES	1:1 - 3:22
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ephesus 2. Smyrna 3. Pergamum 4. Thyatira 5. Sardis 6. Philadelphia 7. Laodicea 	
THE SECOND SEVEN	THE SEVEN SEALS	4:1 - 8:1
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. White horse 2. Red horse 3. Black horse 4. Pale horse 5. The cry of the martyrs in heaven. 6. Cosmic Catastrophe 7. Silence in heaven 	
THE THIRD SEVEN	THE SEVEN TRUMPETS	8:2 - 11:19
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hail and fire 2. The blazing mountain 3. The poisonous star 4. The sky darkens 5. The bottomless pit 6. The destroying angels 7. The kingdom proclaimed 	
THE FOURTH SEVEN	THE SEVEN KEY FIGURES	12:1 - 14:20
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The figure of a woman 2. A huge red dragon 3. A man child 4. The devil – Satan 5. An animal with seven heads and ten horns 6. Another animal with like a lamb with a dragon’s voice 7. The Lamb 	
THE FIFTH SEVEN	THE SEVEN VIALS	15:1 – 16:21
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ulcers 2. Death in the sea 3. Water becomes blood 4. Scorching heat 5. The plague of darkness 6. The great river dried up 7. Devastation from the air 	
THE SIXTH SEVEN	THE SEVEN-FOLD JUDGEMENT	17:1 – 19:10
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Upon the great harlot 2. Upon the animal with seven heads and ten horns – five dethroned 3. Two more destroyed 4. Ten kings conquered 5. Babylon falls 6. Kings of the earth dispossessed 7. Merchants of the earth bankrupted 	
THE SEVENTH SEVEN	THE SEVEN-FOLD CONCLUSION	20:1 – 22:5
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Satan bound and finally destroyed 2. The first resurrection 3. The final judgement 4. A new heaven and a new earth 5. A new Jerusalem 6. The Lord and the Lamb are its temple 7. A river of life 	

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

Reading: **Revelation 1:1-3** [Based on J.B.Phillips translation]

This is a Revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him so that he might show his servants what must very soon take place. He made it known by sending his angels to his servant John, who is the witness of all that he saw – the message of God and the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Happy is the one who reads this prophecy, and happy are those who pay attention to its message – for the time is near.

The Book of the Revelation is the final book in our Bible.
It is not the Revelation of John – it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.
It is the revealing - or unveiling - of the future by Jesus the Christ himself.
It is called a ‘Revelation’ but to many Christians it is a mystery.
It need not be.

The Book of the Revelation is a fitting climax to the Bible.
The Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is the climax to the New Testament.

1. The New Testament begins with the four GOSPEL accounts of the life of Jesus.
2. The ACTS continues with the story of the risen Jesus - and of the Holy Spirit.
3. The third section is LETTERS written by Christian leaders to the new believers.
4. The fourth section, the REVELATION of Jesus Christ, encourages believers by revealing the future – and giving believers eternal hope. This final book of the Bible looks ahead and depicts – in visions – the conflict between good and evil, the progress of believers and the church, and the final consummation of things. An aged Apostle John, received the messages of Jesus Christ, and from the Island of Patmos where he was exiled, wrote them down for believers everywhere and in all times.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

The **key** to understanding the Book of the Revelation is in Chapter 1 verses 18 and 19:

“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last, the Living One. I am he who was dead, and now you see me alive for timeless ages! I hold in my hand the keys of death and the grave. Therefore, write down what you have seen, the things which are now, and the things which will take place later.”

[J.B.Phillips translation]

In the Greek New Testament, the word *kai* (‘and’) links each part so we may paraphrase it as “*write down what you have seen **and** what we are going through now **and** what is to follow in the future.*” Some translations don’t give this distinction but combine the first and second part (e.g. “*what you have seen and what such signifies*”) which I believe is incorrect. The KJV, NKJV, RSV, NASV, Weymouth and Phillips give it as three parts.

- Write down what you have seen... **Chapter 1**
Revelation Ch 1 **Chapter 1**
- (Write down) the things which are now... **Chapters 2-3**
- (Write down) the things which will take place... **Chapters 4-22**

So Chapter 1 of Revelation speaks of the glorious vision of Jesus Christ John saw, together with any events of the past; **Chapters 2-3** speak of our present church age from John’s time to the return of Jesus Christ; **Chapters 4-22** encompass an extremely violent but comparatively brief global period leading to the ushering in of the reign of Jesus Christ.

There are three interpretations of Chapters 2 and 3. All three can be held at the same time, I believe. One is that the words to each historical church applied to the seven churches in existence at the time of John’s writing to them. Another application is that the characteristics of each of the seven churches can be accepted as words of warning and challenge to any church congregation at any time in history. The third is a prophetic understanding. The churches, in the order mentioned, parallel periods of church history beginning in John’s day and traversing our own day. This prophetic view is given in “The Bible Readers Companion” (Your Guide to Every Chapter of the Bible) by the Halo Press authored by Larry Richards ISBN 0-89693-039-4 on page 911. Ephesus (the Apostolic Age); Smyrna (The post-apostolic era of persecution); Pergamum (The Catholic era, during which the priesthood developed); Thyatira (The Dark Ages; Sardis (The Reformation); Philadelphia (The “true church” of every age; Laodicea (The “lukewarm” church of the twentieth century). Halley’s Bible Handbook, makes the same suggestion as to the seven churches being representative of periods in church history.

<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
SMYRNA	The Persecution Period	95-313
PERGAMUM	The Secular Period	313-732
THYATIRA	The Religious Period	732-1294
SARDIS	The Reformation Period	1295-1517
PHILADELPHIA	The Opportunity Period	1517-1967
LAODICEA	The Compromising Period	1967-

Study 1

EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95	Revelation 2:1-7
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<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
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To the Church in Ephesus

1 "To the angel (messenger) of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. ² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶ But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who are victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

EPHESUS was the largest city in Asia. It is given prominence three times in the New Testament. (1.) Acts of the Apostles 18:18-19:41 (2.) Paul's Letters (3.) Revelation 2;1-7.

After commending the church for its labour, patience and tolerance, the Lord refers to one tragic defect – the Ephesian church had left its first love. "First love is the love of espousal. First love is the abandonment of all for a love that has abandoned all".[G.C-M.]

HISTORICALLY and prophetically, Ephesus represents the Apostolic Age AD 33-95.

The Nicolaitans, founded by an unknown person called Nicolas, were a sect within the church that taught that a Christian's 'spiritual liberty' gave permission to practice idolatry and immorality. The risen Lord Jesus commends the Ephesian church for standing against this heresy.

Our Lord Jesus **commends** the Ephesian Church in six points.

However, he **criticises** the Ephesian church for failing in four areas.

Each one of these ten comments brings a challenge to our own hearts.

1. "I know your deeds, your hard work, your perseverance."
2. "I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men."

3. *“I know that you have put to the test self-styled ‘apostles’ who are nothing of the sort.”*
4. *“I know that you have persevered and endured hardship for my name.”*
5. *“I notice that you have not grown weary.”*
6. *“But you have forsaken your first love.”*
7. *“Do remember the height from which you have fallen.”*
8. *“Repent – and live as you lived at first.”* - PHILLIPS
9. *“If you do not repent I will come and remove your lampstand from its place.”*
10. *“I say this to your credit – you hate the Nicolaitans – which I myself detest.”*

Whoever has an ear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. *” To the one who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.*

Let us now look at the period 33-95 CE from three perspectives – Christian history, Jewish history and significant World history:

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

“The Church was founded, not as an institution of Authority to force the name and teaching of Christ upon the world, but only as a witness-bearing institution to Christ. To hold him before the people. Jesus Christ himself, not the Church, is the transforming power in human life. But the Church was founded in the Roman Empire and gradually developed a form of government like the political world in which it existed, becoming a vast autocratic organisation ruled from the top.” (Halley’s Bible Handbook p767)

“Throughout its history the Christian Church has been subject to division and heresies, quarrels and wars, and no century has passed without it being troubled by enemies. Countless numbers have suffered torture and been cruelly put to death for their faith in Jesus. Warned that they would be betrayed and brought before governors and kings, they were stirred to great deeds of heroism and paid the ultimate price rather than deny their Lord. Not only did the early Church survive this terrible onslaught, but it increased in strength. By the 4th century was firmly established throughout the Mediterranean world.”

“Although Jesus was put to death by the Romans, it was the Jewish authorities – who rejected the claim that he was the Messiah – that mounted the first attacks upon the Church. Beginning in Jerusalem followers of *the Way* were imprisoned and beaten, while others such as Stephen and James were executed. Paul also relates how he was imprisoned, stoned and exposed to death for the sake of the gospel. As the number of Gentile Christians in the Church greatly increased, however, points of difference between the two religions began to emerge. The Church was no longer a Jewish ethnic group, and the process of separation between synagogue and church was accelerating. Eventually, the Romans classed Christians as atheists as they refused to worship Roman gods.”

“ Each week Christians held ‘secret’ meetings at which they spoke of another kingdom; they partook of a communal meal at which they were said to ‘drink blood and eat flesh’, a practice which led to charges of cannibalism. When they refused to offer incense on an altar to the divine emperor or to address him as ‘lord’, they were regarded as traitors to Rome. Rome declared them *religio illicita* (‘illicit religion’). Christians became outlaws.”

- The Story of the Christian Church by Geoffrey Hanks.

JEWISH HISTORY

The Jewish nation, in many lands away from Jerusalem, continued to suffer under the Romans. But back at home in Galilee the Jews revolted (66 CE). Jerusalem (69) is placed under siege by Vespasian. He

bottles up the Zealot leader John of Giscala. Vespasian leaves the siege under the control of his son Titus. On the 7th September 70 CE Jerusalem falls. The Roman troops sack the city and destroy most of the Third Temple. Only the 'Wailing Wall' is left standing. The Romans abolish the Jewish high priesthood and the Sanhedrin.

During what is now referred to as 'the Great Revolt against Rome' (66-73 CE) a man called Joseph ben Mattathias (born 37CE) served as the commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee. When the Romans triumphed, Joseph was brought before Vespasian. In an unexpected move, Joseph foretold that Vespasian would become a great emperor. When, two years later, the prophecy came true, Joseph was honoured by being released, was given Roman citizenship and entered the patronage of the emperor. We know this man Joseph ben Mattathias today as the Jewish historian Josephus. Under the care and security of the Roman emperor Vespasian, Josephus was able to write histories of both Judaism in his era and also the development of early Christianity. One of the most significant and interesting features of his massive history, law and customs of the Jews is that it contains the only first-century reference to Jesus by a non-Christian writer.

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man...He was Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

WORLD HISTORY

On the 23 June 79CE Vespasian dies, succeeded by his son Titus aged 38.

On the 24 August Mount Vesuvius erupts; ash and mud bury the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. In the year 80 an anthrax epidemic sweeps through the Roman Empire killing thousands of people and animals. Anthrax and an extended drought in eastern Asia move westwards; some 30,000 people and 40,000 horses form a cultural group becoming known as the Huns. In Rome, three months of celebrations mark the opening of the Colosseum in Rome. More than 500 wild animals and many gladiators are killed as part of the entertainment. On the 13 September 81CE Titus dies and is succeeded by his brother Titus (Domitian) aged 29. In the year 95CE a severe form of malaria appears in rural areas around Rome, taking the fertile Campagna out of food production.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. John actually wrote seven sets of letters to the churches so each church could read what was sent to the others. ***“To the angel (messenger) of the church at Ephesus write...”*** Who do you think is the angel messenger?
2. Who ***‘holds the seven stars in his hands and walks among the seven lamp stands’*** and what do the seven stars and lamp stands represent?
3. ***“I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary.”*** This is a string of positive comments. If we are not to tolerate wicked people, what are we to do?
4. How do we know when someone in ministry is claiming to be an ‘apostle’ and how do we determine they are not? In other words, how do we find them to be false? And once we do know that we have a false ‘apostle’ ministering among us what do we do about it?
5. ***“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.”*** Please explain what this means?
6. ***“Consider how far you have fallen.”*** What does this mean? Can we recognise that we have moved back spiritually? How might we know it and address it?
7. ***“If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”*** What is the place of repentance in our Christian understanding today? Do we fail to preach the place of repentance?
8. What do you think it means ‘to remove our lampstand’
9. ***“But you have this in your favour: You hate the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”*** There is a saying: ‘Love the sinner but hate the sin.’ Is this the case here? And how are we to deal with those, like the Nicolaitans, who are deviant?
10. ***“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who are victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is found in the paradise of God.”*** What is the meaning of ‘whoever has ears...’ etc? What does it mean by ‘who are victorious’? And explain the ‘paradise’ of God.

Note:

If the ‘Seven Churches of the Revelation’ have a prophetic application, it is from Smyrna on that we begin to obtain insight of the prophetic nature of these Seven Letters. The first church, Ephesus, was in existence already. Smyrna is next in our series.

Study 2

SMYRNA	The Persecution Period	95-313	Revelation 2:8-11
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<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
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To the Church in Smyrna

8 "To the angel (messenger) of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

11 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Those who are victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

- *I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are [spiritually] rich!*
- *I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not,*
- *But are of the synagogue of Satan.*
- ***Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.***
- ***I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you,***
- ***And you will suffer persecution for ten days.***
- *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last.

Whoever has an ear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

The word **SMYRNA** is related to *myrrh*, which in turn is symbolic of death.

Smyrna's history has been one of successive sackings, fires, and destruction.

The risen Lord declared through John that there would be persecution, prison, and death.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Most scholars say John wrote Revelation about 95AD. From early times persecution raged until 313 when the Emperor Constantine outlawed persecution of Christians. **Historically and prophetically** from AD 95-313 this is what happened.

Prior to AD 95 (Nero 54-68 See pages 635-638 Halley) Christians had been convicted and treated cruelly – but, surprisingly, though it happened in Bible times and is the background to 1 Peter and 2 Timothy, and the persecution that brought Paul to his martyrdom, the Bible makes no mention of Nero’s persecution of Christians. Other emperors followed Nero, including Vespasian (69-79) who destroyed Jerusalem. But under the following emperors persecution against the followers of Jesus Christ was waged on a horrific scale. Ten stand out as extremely cruel. The rest were far behind, mostly too busy keeping themselves safe or attending to fighting in various parts of the empire. Many were assassinated hence their very short terms. The following notes draw heavily on Prof. E.M.Blaiklock’s* Church History in Halley’s Bible Handbook (pp761-2).

*[Edwin Musgrove Blaiklock, deceased, was onetime professor Auckland University NZ, President of Bible College of NZ]

1. **Domitian** (81-96). Domitian instituted a persecution against Christians. It was short, but extremely violent. Many thousands were slain in Rome and Italy, among them Flavius Clemens, a cousin to the Emperor, and his wife, Flavia Domitilla banished. The Apostle John was banished to the Island of Patmos and most likely wrote the Book of the Revelation during the reign of Domitian.
2. **Trajan** (98-117) Trajan felt he should uphold the laws of the Empire; and Christianity was regarded as an illegal religion, because Christians refused to take part in Emperor worship, and the church was regarded as a secret society, which was forbidden. Christians were not sought out but when accused, were punished. Among those who perished in this reign were Simeon, the brother of Jesus, Bishop of Jerusalem, crucified 107, and Ignatius, second bishop of Antioch, who was taken to Rome and thrown to the wild beasts (110). Pliny, who was sent by the Emperor to Asia Minor, where Christians had become so numerous that the heathen temples were almost forsaken, to punish Christians, wrote to the Emperor Trajan: *“They affirmed that the sum of their crime or their error, whichever it was, was this: they used to meet on a stated day before light, and to sing among themselves, in turn, a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, not to any wickedness, but that they would never commit theft, or robbery, nor adultery, that they would never break their word; that they would never deny a trust when called to give it up; and after these performances, their way was to separate, and then meet again to partake of ordinary food.”* In short, the spread of Christianity nearly emptied pagan temples. Christians were punished if they refused to deny their faith. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, escorted under armed guard to Rome – martyred 110 (Halley) or 117 (Collins History).
3. **Hadrian** (117-138) persecuted believers. Telephorus, pastor of the Roman church, and many others suffered martyrdom. However, in this reign, Christianity made marked progress in numbers, wealth, learning and social influence.
4. **Antoninus** (138-161), Hadrian’s adopted son, felt he had to uphold the law. He sought to burn Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna to death and called upon him to recant. Polycarp’s famous reply was: I have served Christ six and eighty years. How can I blaspheme my King – I am a Christian.” The flames did not harm him so he was killed by a dagger and his body then burnt.”
5. **Marcus Aurelius** (161-180). Like Hadrian he regarded the maintenance of state religion a political necessity; but unlike Hadrian, who was moderate at times, he encouraged persecution of Christians. It was cruel and barbarous. Many thousands were beheaded or thrown to wild beasts, among them Justin Martyr 165). Persecution was very ferocious in South Gaul. Tortures of the victims, endured without flinching, almost surpasses belief. Tortured from morning till night, Blandina, a female slave, would only exclaim, “I am a Christian; among us no evil is done.”
6. **Septimus Severus** (193-211). This persecution was very severe but not general. Egypt and North Africa suffered most. Citizens were not permitted to become Christians. In Alexandria “many

martyrs were daily burned, crucified or beheaded,” among them Leonidas, the father of Origen. In Carthage, Perpetua, a noble lady, and her faithful slave, Felicitas, torn to pieces by wild beasts. Emperors Caracalla (218-222) and Elagabalus (218-222) tolerated Christianity. Alexander Severus (222-235) was favourable to Christianity.

7. **Maximinus** (235-238) Attacks on Christians or Jews. In this reign many prominent Christian leaders were put to death. (Three Bishops martyred. Fabian of Rome, Babylas of Antioch, Alexander of Jerusalem. Origen escaped by hiding.) Emperor Phillipus (244-249) was very favourable to Christianity.
8. **Decius** (249-251). Decius was resolutely determined to exterminate Christianity. His persecution was coextensive with the Empire, and very violent. Multitudes perished under the cruelest tortures, in Rome, North Africa, Egypt, Asia Minor. Origen of Caesarea, Xystus Bishop of Rome. Were among those who died. Christians were commanded to sacrifice to gods or be tortured to death. Cyprian said, “The whole world is devastated.”
9. **Valerian** (253-260) Valerian was more severe than Decius. He aimed at the utter destruction of Christianity. Many leaders were executed, among them Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. Edicts in 257 banned Christian meetings under threat of death and a second edict condemned clergy to death. Hundreds burned alive or beheaded. Later Emperors such as Galienus (260-268) favoured Christians. Aurelianus (268-269), Claudius (269-270), Aurelianus (270-275), Tacitus (275-276), Probus (276-282), Aurelius Carus (282-283), and Numerianus (283-284) were either busy warring or had short reigns due to assassination.
10. **Diocletian** (284-305) Under Diocletian was the last Imperial persecution. It was the longest and the most severe. For ten years Christians were hunted in caves and forest; they were burned, thrown to wild beasts, put to death by every torture cruelty could devise. It was a determined, systematic effort to abolish the Christian Name. It was called The Great Persecution. All churches and property to be destroyed, Christian meetings banned, all clergy to be arrested, all Christians compelled to sacrifice to gods and forbidden to profess Christianity. Even though his wife and daughter were Christians, Diocletian initiated the last, largest and most systematic Roman persecution of Christians. Its ten-year duration could also be a final, momentous, fulfilment of a “10 Day persecution”.

Jesus, the risen Lord said: “**You shall suffer persecution ten days.**” **Ten persecuting emperors** were in charge from the time Peter and Paul were martyred until 311 when Galerius in 311 then Constantine in 313 issued edicts of toleration.

The importance of this prediction (‘ten days’ = ‘ten emperors’) is that these ten emperors spanned a period of history beyond the time John the Apostle. If the Ephesus Church depicted a period within John’s lifetime, and the Smyrna Church depicted a period beyond John’s lifetime; one we can easily identify as to the length of time (95-313), then all subsequent Churches reveal further stages in the history of this world culminating in the return of Jesus Christ. Within this certainty, we have two uncertainties. 1. The actual beginning and end dates of each successive period, and 2. The specific time of our Lord’s return.

The key prophecy in this word by Jesus Christ to the Smyrna Church was the ‘ten days’ of persecution by the ten emperors. But there is also another significant prophecy:

I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Jesus seems to be referring specifically to the way the Jews increasingly sided with the Smyrna civic authorities as the Christians continued to multiply in numbers. This was very evident in the reign of Antoninus (138-161). It was in his reign that a leading Christian **Polycarp** was martyred. Polycarp's story is given in the *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (written by John Foxe in the 1500's). Let's have a little look at this man:

Polycarp was born of Christian parents in 70 (70-156) and was a disciple of John the Apostle. He visited Rome and met both leading Christians (Anicetus) and 'heretics' (Marcion). The account of Polycarp's death is given in a letter from the church of Smyrna to the church of Philomelium. It tells how the civil authorities tried to make Bishop Polycarp denounce his faith on the basis that he was now an old man and didn't need to suffer the fate of younger Christians. It is recorded that he replied dramatically:

"I have served Christ eighty-six years and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King? I am a Christian."

The letter goes on to say that, miraculously, the flames did not harm him so he was despatched with a dagger, then burned. His followers later gathered up his bones declaring them to be "more precious than precious stones and finer than gold." They put them in a suitable place where they could celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom. According to the record, the Jews were as keen for him to die as the pagans were.

Only one of Polycarp's letters has been preserved, addressed to the Philippians in response to one from them. It writes about putting the letters of **Ignatius** into one volume. In his letter, Polycarp refers to more than one letter by the Apostle Paul to the Philippians. It also refers to other New Testament books. His letter is evidence that that already certain writings by those who knew Jesus were being accepted as Scripture by Christians.

Ignatius. Ignatius (died c.107) was the chief elder (bishop) of Antioch in Syria. His letters to churches (Philadelphia, Smyrna, Ephesus etc. and to Polycarp) reveal a strong commitment to Jesus Christ and to the physical facts of his birth, death and resurrection. They also reveal the rapid development of the Episcopal structure in the early church of Asia and Syria. In the New Testament the local church was governed by a body of equal officers called elders or bishops. But in the letters of Ignatius there is reference to a single ruling bishop in each city except Rome. He has strong views on certain matters. Christians must worship on the Lord's Day, the day of his resurrection, rather than observing the Jewish Sabbaths. He was the first outside the New Testament writers to speak of the virgin birth. Ignatius emphasised the fact that the apostles touched the body of their risen Lord. He said it was the real suffering of Jesus, and his physical resurrection, that made it possible for him to face martyrdom. [Ignatius died under Emperor Trajan.]

Justin Martyr (100-165) He was called 'Martyr' because that is what happened to him. He was born of Greek parents near the modern city of Nablus, on the West Bank 48ks north of Jerusalem. However, his education was in Greek philosophy. Although impressed by the death of Christian martyrs, he was, as he said, converted by a humble old Christian. He taught Christian philosophy in Ephesus until 135. He then went to Rome where he taught and wrote until martyred 30 years later under Marcus Aurelius.

JEWISH HISTORY

As we have seen, there is a wee glimpse of Jewish history in a second key prophecy by Jesus to the Church at Smyrna.

I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Some Jews, who have become Jewish Christians, try to impose the Mosaic Law on those Greeks who convert to Christianity. On the other hand, some Gentile Christians, in their reaction against Jews and response to the new faith of Jesus, don't see God's laws in the Hebrew Scriptures. Both are in error. God's morals, ethics, and righteousness is everlasting. The old law describes the new, and finds its fulfilment in Jesus.

Among the Jews, Rabbi Johanan, had previously set up an academy after the temple's destruction in AD 70. He organised an authority body, the Bet Din, to take over the duties of the Sanhedrin. The Bet Din establishes the complete canon of Old Covenant Scripture. It is identical to the Hebrew Scriptures of today, containing the same books grouped as the Law, Prophets and Writings. It has the same books as Protestant Old Testament.

In 313 Constantine, together with the last emperor Licinius, proclaims the edict of Milan ending the persecution of Christians. Now Christianity and Judaism become officially recognised religions. However, two years later, he forbids conversion to Judaism and decrees death by burning for any Jew who proselytises Christians. Later, after Constantine has defeated the last of his rivals, and the Church is ruled by one who favours it, Christianity begins to swell its ranks dramatically. With this come heresies.

Study 3

PERGAMUM The Secular Period 313-732 Revelation 2:12-17

<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
SMYRNA	The Persecution Period	95-313
PERGAMUM	The Secular Period	313-732
THYATIRA	The Religious Period	732-1294
SARDIS	The Reformation Period	1295-1517
PHILADELPHIA	The Opportunity Period	1517-1967
LAODICEA	The Compromising Period	1967-

To the Church in Pergamum

¹² "To the angel (messenger) of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who are victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give each of them a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

PERGAMUM was the city of temples – including the great temple of Zeus, the sun god. It was famous for its medical schools and Asclepius, god of health was worshipped there. It was the worship centre and scholastic centre of the Empire. Pergamum was the oldest city of the province and the seat of the Roman Government.

The risen Lord Jesus Christ commends the Pergamum Christians for remaining true to the name of Jesus even though they are residing in the centre where Satan has his throne. The term **Satan’s throne** may refer to a 20 meter (62 foot) high altar to Zeus or to the fact that Pergamum was the centre of emperor worship. In addition, the city was the centre of worship of Aesciepius, the god of healing, whose symbol was a serpent, which to Christians symbolizes Satan. Or the term ‘Satan’s throne’ might include all of these.

Antipas was evidently the first Christian in Asia to be martyred for his faith. The Apostle Paul spent three years in Ephesus (54-57 Acts 19:10), which was not far from Pergamum to the north (100m or 160k) and he could have evangelised it when at Ephesus. The seven churches were in a little cluster not far from each other and I cannot imagine Paul not seeing them as an object of evangelism. At the very least, Pergamum was on the road he took after he left Ephesus for Macedonia (Acts 20:1). We do know that there was a church there by the time the Apostle John came to Ephesus and took over Paul’s ministry.

Antipas might have been the local Elder-in-charge of Pergamum and thus targeted for martyrdom. The way our Lord commends them using the words *'even in the days of my faithful witness Antipas'* etc. seems to point back to an earlier time in the church's life.

Balaam in the Old Testament (Numbers Chs. 22-23,31) was a man through whom God spoke but who allowed himself to indulge in evil. The risen Jesus quotes Balaam to describe what was happening to Pergamum believers. The sin of Balaam was in failing to listen to, and act on, the pure directions from God. That was a compromising activity. The Pergamum Christians were allowing compromising truths to infiltrate their pure doctrine so the Lord rebukes them for that and notes some sins specifically:

- Eating food sacrificed to idols (and)
- Committing sexual impurity

The primary meaning of the first would be that food sacrificed to idols was a travesty of food sacrificed to the Most High God. Even though the Passover sacrifice had passed with the destruction of Jerusalem, the meaning was clear. We offer ourselves and direct our worship only to the One true God. This giving of food to a false God seems to be neutralised and reversed by our Lord saying in verse 17 *"to him who overcomes I will give hidden (spiritual) manna"*. We are not to face idols and give food to them – we are to overcome those deviant actions and receive from the hands of our Lord his food.

The primary meaning of the second is clear. All sexual sins – in their unwholesome variety – are to be avoided like the plague. Perhaps the answer to this is a 'pure white stone' (v17) being given to us to represent the 'pure cornerstone' with our name attached

Nicolaitans. Scholars have little to go on in explaining who the Nicolaitans were (See Wikipedia article 'Nicolaitism') The risen Lord was strong in his condemnation of them. According to Revelation 2, vv.6 and 15 they were known in the cities of Ephesus and Pergamos/Pergamum. Around AD 99. The church of Ephesus is commended for "hating the deeds" and Pergamos is blamed for having those who hold their 'doctrines'. Irenaeus (died 175) who wrote against heresies says that a certain Nicolas was founder and that "they lead lives of unrestrained indulgence". Others disagree. One thing – we do know what they are not for Revelation 2:15 expressly distinguishes them from Balaamism.

HISTORICALLY and prophetically the whole church began to slowly succumb to secularisation through the reign of Constantine (306-337) - and over the next 400 years. Emperor Constantine discontinued State sacrifices to the gods and he gave the church a favoured position. All citizens had the right to choose their own religion. Crucifixion of slaves was abolished. Gladiatorial shows were prohibited. Unwanted babies were no longer put to death. Sexual immorality was severely punished. ['The Story of the Christian Church' - 70 Great Christians - by Geoffrey Hanks pp33-34. ISBN 1 871 676 80 0]

Much of this was admirable and amazing for the era. Nevertheless, the Pergamum period church could not handle the changes. There is an ancient proverb that says: ***"You may have the boat in the sea – but not the sea in the boat."*** When the Christian church is the boat – and the world is the sea – we need to heed this advice.

"Because of this preferential treatment of the church, Christianity became fashionable. Many pagans started to attend church and became nominal members, perhaps to enjoy some of the benefits Christians had gained. Correct doctrine became more important than right behaviour, and there was a lowering of moral standards." [Geoffrey Hanks]

This was the age the Christian church ratified the books we have in our New Testament, agreed upon the vital doctrines of our faith summarising them in the Creeds and made the first Bible translation (Latin).

However, formalism, pomp, ceremony, wealth, education and political power began to rapidly rise. The boat in the sea began to let the sea in the boat. This increasing saturation by worldliness continued over four hundred years.

Thus there were two co-existing movements within the church over this period. The first was good - the second was not good. The first involved the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in overseeing (a) the selection of those Christian documents that would eventually make up our Christian Scriptures and (b) the clarification of essential beliefs and doctrines of the church. The second was the increasing immoral worldliness of believers.

So we come to a very important question: Did the risen Lord identify this particular church age in his message to the church at Pergamos? Note the underlinings.

To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

- *I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name.*
- *You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness,*
- *who was put to death in your city where Satan lives.*
Nevertheless, I have a few things against you:
- *You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual impurity.*
- *Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*
- *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will come soon to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Whoever has an ear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Let us look at these statements as applying prophetically to the Pergamum Period. Yes, some of these characteristics may be found in other church eras, but all of these sets of characteristics are found in the Pergamum Period and not all in other periods:

1. WHERE SATAN HAS HIS THRONE

Historically, Satan's throne basically meant the worship of false gods – whether idols or the Roman emperor. Was this a feature of the Pergamum Period?

- The emperor following Constantine was Julian 361-363. Sought to restore paganism. Temples were reopened. Christians were removed from office. Heathenism revived.
- Heresy of Apollinarius, Bishop of Laodicea (?-c.390) Denied the true humanity of Jesus. Jesus had a human body but no spirit. He was not fully God and fully human.

2. YET YOU REMAIN TRUE TO MY NAME

This was the period of establishing truth. When the leaders of the Christian community gathered to discuss and declare, under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, true doctrine.

- AD 200 The Apostles Creed, the earliest, formulated 150-175. Fine-tuned by 500.
- AD 325 Nicaea. Condemned Arianism. Nicene Creed formulated.
- AD 381 Constantinople. Called to settle Apollinarianism. Nicene Creed fine-tuned.
- AD 431 Ephesus. Called to settle the Nestorian Controversy. Pre-Athanasian Creed?
- AD 451 Chalcedon. Called to settle the Eutychian Controversy. Nicene Creed adopted.

- AD 553 Constantinople. To settle Monophysites Controversy. Athanasian Creed?
- AD 680 Constantinople. Doctrine of the two Wills in Christ.

3. YOU DID NOT RENOUNCE YOUR FAITH IN ME

Judging from the above councils, representing the extensive and growing Christian body, the faith side of believers was very strong. When it is put to the test, as in the examples below, Christians stand firm. Thus Jesus commends them for not renouncing their faith.

4. EVEN IN THE DAYS OF ANTIPAS MY FAITHFUL WITNESS

Antipas represents those who die as martyrs for Jesus' sake. The following is a sampling from this era. There have been martyrdoms down the ages. Here is the Pergamum Period:

- **Procopius** (349) When commanded to sacrifice to the gods he said he knew of only One to whom it was proper to sacrifice. He was beheaded.
- **Timotheus**. (352) After severe torture, he was condemned to die by a slow fire.
- **Theodosia**. (359) She was a godly Christian girl of 17. For saluting some prisoners condemned to die she was cruelly tortured, with cuts to the bone, then drowned.

5. YOU HAVE PEOPLE WHO HOLD TO THE TEACHING OF BALAAM

The Balaam sin was compromising truth. This was not widespread in the Pergamum Period but deviations from the truth had been established. Remnants remained:

- **Ebionites**. Sect of Jewish Christians, rejected Paul's letters and accepted Matthew.
- **Gnosticism**. Religious movement based on pagan philosophy. Rejected Old Testament.
- **Montanism**. Ascetic practices such as celibacy, fastings, abstinence from meat.
- **Arianism**. (300+) Followers of Arius. Denied divinity of Christ. Jesus not eternal, but created by the Father as an instrument of creation of the world. Inferior to Father.

6. REPENT THEREFORE

This is a call that our Lord gives in any age. When we are doing wrong, either by following wrong doctrine or doing wrong morally, we need to repent. As John the Apostle says in his 1st letter Chapter 1 verse 9:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

THYATIRA	The Religious Era	732-1290	Revelation 2:18-29
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<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
SMYRNA	The Persecution Period	95-313
PERGAMUM	The Secular Period	313-732
THYATIRA	The Religious Period	732-1294
SARDIS	The Reformation Period	1295-1517
PHILADELPHIA	The Opportunity Period	1517-1967
LAODICEA	The Compromising Period	1967-

To the Church in Thyatira

18 "To the angel (messenger) of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, 25 except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

26 To those who are victorious and do my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— 27 they 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery' [Psalm 2:9] —just as I have received authority from my Father. 28 I will also give them the morning star. 29 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THYATIRA was the smallest of the seven cities. It had allowed a false prophetess to give instruction, leading members into practices of immorality and idolatry. This is the central issue the risen Jesus addresses and it must have a wider spiritual application.

[Following commentary based on Charles E. McCracken's article 'Hold Fast' in 'Israel My Glory' July/August 2006 issue.]

In the letter to the congregation at Thyatira, Jesus Christ the Son of God exposes a cell within the church – a kind of terrorist cell. It is religious, but its motives are not pure. It seems harmless, but it is actually a threat to the wholesome life in Jesus of the Church.

To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze:

Eyes of fire from the risen Lord Jesus are piercing and search the works of the church. The church is accountable to him alone. He has feet of brass ready to crush all that is impure and contrary to his Word.

I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you:

The church of Thyatira demonstrated much that was praiseworthy. Nevertheless, it had a problem with flagrant apostasy:

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

Jesus Christ refers to a literal woman in the church. Whether or not her name was actually ‘Jezebel’ is unimportant. He referred to this woman by the name of the seducing queen of Israel who introduced the worst era of idolatry and apostasy in the nation’s history. Thyatira’s Jezebel, like her Old Testament counterpart. The ‘sexual immorality’ spawned by the Jezebel of Thyatira could refer to physical or spiritual – or even both. For when a person does not have godly thoughts and actions of the purest kind, restraints and inhibitions go out the window and lust takes over.

Thyatira’s Jezebel, like her Old Testament counterpart, was not merely a sincere but misguided individual. She was adept at distorting the truth to condone and encourage immorality and idolatry. A self-proclaimed prophetess, she may have insisted she possessed a higher level of spirituality. But the living Christ exposed her as a fraud.

Many have speculated about her identity, some even suggesting she was the pastor-leader’s wife. Regardless, the church had failed to deal decisively with her and her erroneous teaching. A woman, Lydia (Acts 16:14 and 40) was instrumental in founding the work at Thyatira. It was unusual in those times, to allow a woman to teach and exercise authority over male believers (1 Timothy 2:12). Perhaps Thyatira did not know of this instruction by Paul to Timothy at Lystra (200m or 320k away). They certainly knew that this was the Hebrew synagogue practice upon which the early church assemblies were modelled. So it seems that the church at Thyatira chose to ignore the practice. It is possible that Lydia, who founded the church and was held in such high esteem, may even have been the leader in its beginnings (c.60). It may well be that Lydia, so highly regarded, became a precedent for a later woman to achieve prominence.

I have given her time to repent of her immorality but she is unwilling (says the Lord).

The church leadership did not espouse this woman’s teaching but over time simply allowed her activities to go unchecked. This error in judgment compromised the integrity of the church’s testimony. Because it failed to eradicate her heresy, Jesus Christ took it on himself to deal with her, promising:

So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.

Not only would she and her followers be punished, the second generation of those who dabbled in the supposed deep secrets that she taught would be as well. Her converts; her spiritual offspring would receive the Lord’s word as per:

I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

To those who did not embrace “Jezebel’s” false teachings, the Lord gave a single charge:

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come.

Interestingly, the Lord did not counsel people to leave the church but rather to hold fast to those qualities for which he had already commended them; namely, their love of him, their service to him, and their patience before him. Those who heeded the challenge could look forward to the fulfilment of two promises:

*To the one who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. That person will rule them with an iron sceptre and will dash them to pieces like potter. Just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that person the morning star. **Whoever has an ear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.***

Overcomers can look forward to a place of authority in the Messianic Kingdom: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." (2 Timothy 2:12).

PROPHETICALLY of a historical church period there are at least two possible interpretations for a 'Jezebel' of Church history. And both might qualify as 'Jezebel'.

The first interpretation: Let's examine a key characteristic of each church so far.

In the EPHEBUS age (33-95)	the State loomed over a small Church
In the SMYRNA age (95-313)	the State controlled the Church.
In the PERGAMUM era (313-732)	the State and Church co-existed together.
In the THYATIRA era (732-1290)	the Church controlled the State.

In this fourth period the Christian Church with Roman roots assumes both political and religious control of the remaining Roman Empire to become a world political leader.

The THYATIRA era is commonly referred to as the 'Dark Ages' and in which the apostate church sits in high places. Thus 'Jezebel' is the powerful apostate Church itself.

The second interpretation: There is a second interpretation. 'Jezebel' was the wife of King Ahab. She was not a Hebrew – but a daughter of the heathen King of Zidon. Thus she was connected to God's people – but not part of them. Likewise, Ishmael was connected, but not part of the true faith. From Ishmael came the Arab races and Islam. In 610 Muhammad claimed a vision. By 635 the Arabs had conquered Syria and Palestine and by 643 Persia. By 700 the whole of North Africa is Islamic In 1095 the Roman Church takes the Holy Land from Islam but loses it in 1291. So - at the same time as Christianity dominates Europe – Islam rules a vast empire between Europe and India. Thus 'Jezebel' might picture Islam.

HISTORICALLY What, historically, happened between 732 and 1290 that may support Thyatira being representative of a period of church history that was a mixture of godly dedication (Revelation 2:19) together with compromising apostasy?

JEWS What happened to the Jews during this period? In his 'Why Israel?' the Rev. William Glashouwer (ISBN 0-9689819-1-7) gives us the following information:

In the years **400-1095** animosity against the Jews grows. In the sixth century and beyond, the Jews find it increasingly difficult to earn a living. They are prohibited from owning land, to farm, and enter trade guilds (eliminating their option to become carpenters or stone masons etc.). Many had to turn to money lending, selling and similar occupations. During 613-694 Jews are forcibly baptised in Spain and their

children taken away from them to prevent them returning to Judaism. In **614** the Persians capture Jerusalem killing many Christians. The Byzantines take it back in **628**. From 622 to 632 Mohammed begins to win against the war-wary and declining Persian and Byzantine empires. Mohammed kills or deports many Jews and Christians from Arabia. By **661** Muslim Caliphs invade Libya, Egypt, Arabia, Armenia and what in our 21st century are Iraq and Iran. They take Jerusalem in 1638. Between 661 and 750 Muslims conquer the rest of Northwest Africa and Spain. In **691** Muslim Caliph Abd al-Malik builds the Dome of the Rock on the Temple mount in Jerusalem. In **1095** Pope Urban 2 issues the call to take the Holy Land back from the Muslims. The 'Crusaders' slaughter over tens of thousands of Jews in Europe taking Antioch and Jerusalem. In 1187 Muslims recapture Jerusalem. **This period 732-1290: 'Christian' warriors killing Jews and fighting with Muslims.**

POPES *The word "Pope" simply means "Father" and was used of the Bishop over a group of churches from fairly early times up until around 500 AD. At that point it became restricted to the 'Bishop' of Rome. The Roman Catholic list of 'Popes' includes the Bishops of Rome – who were not Popes in the post-500 sense of the word. In AD 445 Leo 1st obtained from Emperor Valentinian 3rd Imperial recognition for his claim. However, the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), composed of Bishops from all over the world gave the Patriarch of Constantinople equal prerogatives with the Bishop of Rome. This led to a long struggle between the Popes of Rome and Patriarchs of Constantinople for supremacy. Christendom finally split in **869**. Up until 869 all Ecumenical councils had been held in, or near, Constantinople, and in the Greek language. But now at last the Pope's insistent claim of being Lord of Christendom had become unbearable, and the East separated itself. Innocent 3rd (1198-1216) was the most powerful of the Popes so far. He claimed to be 'Vicar of God' 'Supreme Sovereign over the Church and the World'. The kings of Germany, France, England most of Europe obeyed him. Germany found it hard to submit but finally in **1294 the Pope was supreme.**

* [HALLEYS BIBLE HANDBOOK - 'Church History'.]

In 1294 Boniface VIII (1294-1303) proclaimed: "We declare that it is altogether necessary for salvation that every creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." The Muslims had regained the Holy Land in 1291.

SARDIS	The Reformation 1290-1517	Revelation 3:1-6
<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
SMYRNA	The Persecution Period	95-313
PERGAMUM	The Secular Period	313-732
THYATIRA	The Religious Period	732-1294
SARDIS	The Reformation Period	1295-1517
PHILADELPHIA	The Opportunity Period	1517-1967
LAODICEA	The Compromising Period	1967-

To the Church in Sardis

¹ "To the angel (messenger) of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God (that is, the sevenfold Spirit) and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

⁴ Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ Those who are victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out their names from the book of life, but will acknowledge their names before my Father and his angels.

⁶ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

SARDIS, when John wrote, was a fairly insignificant church. It had been the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia and had been a city of great wealth and fame. Its acropolis was a natural citadel on the northern spur on Mount Tmolus. The city was now in decline. Hence, Jesus said it had 'a reputation of being alive but' now was 'dead'. He continued with '*Strengthen what remains and is about to die.*' – relating it to the church in that city.

Of all the seven churches, Sardis most closely pictures the state of the Church that existed in the period 1295-1517. Never was the Church so unified, so organised, so powerful, so rich – yet so corrupt, so immoral, and so spiritually poor. The period leading up to what has been called 'The Reformation' was a sad decaying of true religion. In this study we will note some deeply disturbing behaviour. Yet we will also note some glimmers of light and hope. Such will become shafts of explosive light in our next study.

Let us note from the proclamation Jesus gave, some key features of the period:

[1] Jesus spoke of himself as holding the sevenfold Spirit. [2] "I know your deeds." (you have a reputation of being alive but you are dead.) [3] "Wake up!" [4] "Strengthen what remains and is about to die," [5] "I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God." [6] "Remember, therefore, [7] what you have received and heard, obey it, [8] and repent. [9] But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. [10] Yet you have a few people in Sardis

who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his or her name from the book of life, but will acknowledge them before my Father and his angels.

There are ten key points in the above. Each of these key points made by Jesus reflects a characteristic of the Pre-Reformation Church. Even though we may note that many of the points could apply to any period of the Church's history, all ten of these apply to the period we are looking at (approximately 1295-1517).

When we look at the following list of ten points, it is important to realise that the first nine are directed to the whole church. (Revelation 3:1-3) The tenth point (Verses 4-6) is addressed to individuals within the church ('you have a few people', 'their names' and 'whoever has ears'). Of all the periods of church history, the Reformation Period was distinctive in producing mighty men and women who changed and refreshed the Church.

1. **The absence of the Holy Spirit.**
2. **The church was spiritually dead.**
3. **The church needed to wake up from its deadness.**
4. **It had the opportunity to strengthen what was about to die.**
5. **Its deeds were far from acceptable to God.**
6. **The word 'Remember' means 'Look back!'**
7. **The Church had received and heard something precious.**
8. **The Church needed to repent.**
9. **It needed to 'wake up' – or Jesus would come and intervene unexpectedly.**
10. **Some, in the Church, will inherit my Kingdom (who are in the Book of Life).**

First, The absence of the Holy Spirit.

In Paul the Apostle's letter to the Galatians, Chapter 5 verses 22-23, Paul lists those 'fruit' that the Holy Spirit produces in those who are earnestly following Jesus. They are: **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**. In earlier verses Paul has described the terrible 'fruit' seen in those who are not under the influence of God's Holy Spirit. Verses 19-21 include such works as: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, contentions, outbursts of wrath, heresies, selfish ambitions, drunkenness, reveries etc. Geoffrey Hanks, in his book on the history of the Christian Church, has this to say about things in the period we are studying:

“By the fourteenth century the medieval Church had sadly fallen into a state of decline, so that political and economic interests had overtaken matters of faith. The Church, seeking to establish its authority, especially over secular rulers, put itself above the laws of God and man; corruption was rife, false religious doctrines and practices increased and Scriptural teachings were disregarded. The wealth of the Church was particularly noticeable in the monasteries, where rich noblemen often made large grants of land to the monks in exchange for pardons and services of mass for the souls of the dead.”

Halley in his Handbook adds: “The avarice of the Avignon Popes knew no bounds. Burdensome taxes were imposed. Every Church Office was sold for money, and many new offices were created to be sold, to fill the coffers of Popes and support the luxurious and immoral court. Petrarch accused the Papal household of rape, adultery, etc. In many parishes men insisted on priests keeping concubines as a protection for their own families.” All of the above are activities that flourish when the Holy Spirit is absent.

Secondly, The church was spiritually dead.

It was spiritually dead, but materially alive. Geoffrey Hanks goes on to say: “In England, the monasteries were the country’s greatest land-owners and held over one-third of the land. The Cistercians, for example, raised large flocks of sheep, bringing in immense wealth. Bishops, abbots and monks sank into worldliness, forgetting the purpose of their calling and indulging more and more in secular pursuits. The Papacy was spending huge amounts of money vying with kings and emperors in maintaining a lavish and resplendent court. Church taxes were levied and bishoprics and divorces were ‘sold’ to support the papal patronage of the arts. An extravagant building programme was set up, which later included building the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Further disgrace was brought upon the Papacy when the ‘Great Schism’ (1378-1417) rent the Church with the election of two rival popes, one residing in Avignon and the other in Rome. Discontent grew as a result of a number of teachings and practices that were contrary to Scripture.”

Thirdly, The church needed to wake up from its deadness.

What makes a church ‘dead’? I am sure its leaders have a lot to do with it. The church of the time was led by a succession of popes. Dr. Halley notes:

Over 40 years (1377-1417) there were two popes each claiming to be ‘Vicar of Christ’.

John 23 (1410-1415) violated over 200 virgins and nuns, lived in adultery with his brother’s wife, guilty of sodomy, sold Cardinalates to children of wealthy families.

Nicolas 5 (1447-1455) authorised the King of Portugal to take slaves from Africa.

Calixtus 3 (1455-1458) was a pope of blameless life.

Pius 2 (1458-1464) was the father of many children.

Paul 2 (1464-1471) had many concubines who lived in his house.

Sixtus 4 (1471-1484) sanctioned the Spanish Inquisition, plotted to murder de Medici.

Innocent 8 (1484-1492) had 16 children by various married women.

Alexander 6 (1492-1503) was called the ‘most corrupt’. He had many illegitimate children whom he appointed to high church office. He arranged many murders.

Julius 2 (1503-1513). His riches bought the papal office. Immoral and corrupt.

So much for the moral leadership. Of Church doctrine Geoffrey Hanks writes:

“The doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the bread and wine at the Eucharist became the actual body and blood of Jesus, was accepted by the fourth Lateran Council (1215), which also laid down that every Christian should confess his sins at penance at least once a year. The cult of the Virgin and the teaching of the Immaculate Conception, which declared Mary to have been free from all stain of original sin, were also gaining ground, though not without opposition. Practices such as auricular confession and the sale of indulgences whereby the penalty for sin was remitted by the priest (on behalf of the church) became common, and in 1232 the Courts of Inquisition were set up to deal with heretics. As the sole dispenser of salvation, the Church seemed to be in an impregnable position. Yet the seeds of discontent were already sown. Many Christians were growing restless under its yoke and signs of resistance began to appear.”

[I have to add a personal note here, knowing that my studies may be read by modern-day Catholics with a sincere faith in God and in the doctrines of their church. Having studied the doctrines and historic practices mentioned by Hanks above, I cannot personally accept them as being Scriptural or Godly. But I do have Catholic friends who can. Many Catholics in this day are believers who trust in the Lord Jesus

Christ and seek to live lives honouring God. Today's Catholic Church even acknowledges the good Luther did. The Reformation, whilst creating an upheaval in the Catholic Church, not only restored a biblical basis for godly living but also affected the Catholic Church for the good. BWH]

Fourthly, It had the opportunity to strengthen what was about to die.

Halley tells us that **Martin Luther visited Pope Julius 2** (1503-1513) and was appalled at what he saw. Julius had become the richest Cardinal and used his wealth to buy the Papacy for himself. He claimed that celibacy entitled him to be free to engage in 'other relationships', claimed possession of cities and principalities, maintained an army, issued indulgences for money and traded in buying and selling bishoprics and church estates. The words of Jesus Christ to the Sardis Church, '**Strengthen what remains**' is poised to see fulfilment in this corrupt period of church history. Martin Luther and others in Europe are about to emerge.

Fifthly, Its deeds were far from acceptable to God.

The way the Lord Jesus says, "**Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God**" actually conveys a degree of hope. It is as if the Lord is giving a chance. He uses the term, "is about to die". In the medieval church there were some good influences, even though very much in the minority. We have read some very discouraging information. Let us now look at some positive items.

Marsiglio of Padua (1275-1342) wrote his *Defensor Pacis* in 1324 to defend the Bible as supreme in matters of faith. **William of Ockham** (1285-1347), a Franciscan from Surrey, England also expressed the same thoughts. He was excommunicated by the Pope. **John Wycliffe** (1320-1384) has been called the "Morning Star of the Reformation" because he boldly questioned papal authority, condemned sinful popes, criticised the sale of indulgences, denied the reality of transubstantiation (that bread and wine can be changed into Christ's body and blood), that the Bible was absolutely authoritative above the Church and that it had to be in the common language of the people. He began to translate the Bible from Latin into English. He finished the New Testament in 1380 and the Old in 1382. He died two years later. **Peter Chelcicky** of Bohemia (b.1385) said that the only source of faith is the will of God as made known authoritatively and exhaustively, once for all, through the apostles in the New Testament Scriptures. Christians live in the State, but neither the State Church or the State can govern the believer's understanding of the will of God. Peter Chelcicky said that 'apostasy' began when the relation of church and state changed'. [Newman p587]

Sixthly, The word 'Remember' means 'Look back!'

Yes, there were those like John Wyclif who were looking back through fifteen centuries and remembering that there was a time when the church was asset poor but spiritually rich; when the 'Apostles doctrine' only (Acts 2:42) was preached; when the 'Mass' was a simple but meaningful taking of the bread and wine to remember his body given and blood shed for us; and when believers read the Scriptures for themselves.

Seventhly, You received something precious, obey it.

Something precious had been given to the earliest Christians. What was it? It was the commission of Jesus to his followers to take the gospel to the world, baptising believers in the name of the Father, the

Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). This presupposed receiving for ourselves the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12); being born of God's Holy Spirit (John 3:5); and walking in the light (1 John 1:7).

Eighthly, Most importantly, repent.

As 1 John 1:9 says: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and a God of justice. God will forgive our sins and (furthermore) cleanse us from all sin and unrighteousness." This call to repent certainly applied to the Sardis Church – but applies to all in every age.

Ninthly, You need to 'wake up' – or I will come when you least expect it.

"I will come like a thief, and you will not know when I come..." The word **'thief'** (Greek *kleptes* 3095) is very significant in this passage (Revelation 3:3). It occurs twelve times in the New Testament. Five of these are linked with Jesus. In Matthew 24:43-44 Jesus uses it to warn of his surprise coming. Luke 12:39-40 is the parallel passage. In 1 Thessalonians 5:2 the Lord comes like a thief in the night. In Revelation 15:16 Jesus says he is coming like a thief.

Historically, Jesus didn't visit the ancient Sardis Church of John's day. But we hope the church heeded his message. Likewise, as we apply the words of Jesus to the period leading up to the Reformation we know something happened. There occurred the greatest upheaval in the worldwide Church's history. Godly men and women were used by God's Holy Spirit to bring Jesus back into the Church he died for.

Tenthly, Some will inherit my Kingdom (who are in the Book of Life).

The only commendation made of the Sardis church was **recognition of the few who were faithful**. In the period leading up to the Reformation some tried to maintain truth. Most were helplessly locked into a corrupt religious system. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit resident in multitudes of believers was waiting to be released. So when Martin Luther nailed his 95 discussion points to the church door the Holy Spirit swept through Europe like fire. The sounds of Luther's hammer on the church door seemed to echo the voice of the risen Jesus Christ: **"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die."**

PHILADELPHIA The Opportunity Era 1517-1967 Revelation 3:7-13

<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
SMYRNA	The Persecution Period	95-313
PERGAMUM	The Secular Period	313-732
THYATIRA	The Religious Period	732-1294
SARDIS	The Reformation Period	1295-1517
PHILADELPHIA	The Opportunity Period	1517-1967
LAODICEA	The Compromising Period	1967-

To the Church in Philadelphia

7 "To the angel (messenger) of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Those who are victorious I will make pillars in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.

13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Key points by our Lord Jesus Christ to the Church in Philadelphia:

- ***See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.***
- ***I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, ... **fall down at your feet** and acknowledge that I have loved you.***
- ***I will also keep you from the hour of trial ... Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.***
- ***To the one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God – never to leave it again. I will write the name of my God on that person, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write my new name on that person.***

[Whoever has an ear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.]

PHILADELPHIA did not receive any rebuke from the Lord. Even so, the city was to go through a time of trial. Note that it is ‘trial’ – not ‘tribulation’. And, historically, after John wrote to them, they went through a time of great persecution. This we covered in the section on SMYRNA – the Persecution Age.

HISTORICALLY and prophetically the Philadelphia era was the ‘Opportunity era.’ After the Reformation came a wonderful opportunity for Bible-based believers to spread a Bible-based message to the world. Jesus said to the Philadelphian Christians: *“I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.”*

Of this period of church history, the Lord makes no criticism or condemnation. There is only praise, approval and encouraging advice.

This sixth church period, from 1517 to 1967 A.D. was one of great spiritual renewal. During that time the world exploded with revival preaching, missions and conversions. The powerful preacher and teachers of this era were dedicated to the teaching of truth. Jesus had, indeed, placed before them an open door.

The 1500’s witnessed the greatest upheaval in the Church’s history.

- Martin Luther (1483-1546) of Germany sparked the European Reformation.
- John Calvin (1509-1564) contributed greatly to the Reformation.
- William Tyndale (1494-1536) pioneered translating the Bible into English.
- John Knox (1513-1573) was the key Scottish reformer – among several.
- John Hooper (1550-1555) was a key English reformer. He preached the Word.
- Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) was a key English reformer and an Archbishop.

The 1600’s Witnessed outreach in Europe and into the world.

- John Bunyan (1628-1688) was an imprisoned preacher and author.
- The Pilgrim Fathers (1620) sailed to the New World of the Americas.
- John Eliot (1604-1690) was an ‘Apostle’ to the American Indians.

The 1700’s Witnessed the continuing of the ‘Great Missionary Movement’.

- John Whitfield (1740-1770) was an English evangelist.
- John Wesley (1703-1791) was the founder of the Methodist denomination.
- William Carey (1761-1834) has been called ‘The Father of modern Missions’.

The 1800’s Witnessed further evangelism and effective social reform.

- William Wilberforce (1759-1833) abolished slave trading.
- David Livingstone (1813-1873) went to Africa as a missionary and explorer.
- Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was the founder of the China Inland Mission.
- John Williams (1796-1839) evangelised the South Pacific islands.
- Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) was a prison reformer.
- Catherine and William Booth (1929-1890/1912) founded the Salvation Army.

The 1900’s Witnessed the era of great preachers of the Word.

This was the century of preachers: But it was also a century of suffering.

- Smith Wigglesworth
- Billy Graham.
- Richard Wurmbrand
- Brother Andrew

The names I have read are only representative of an era that saw a liberation of Biblical truth, social reform, evangelists, missionaries – but also saw suffering and martyrs. This mixture of serving and suffering is the setting for our next church age – Laodicea. However, to close off this study of this Philadelphia period by looking briefly at a few key reformers that sparked the Reformation and its ‘Opportunity Era’.

LUTHER, MARTIN (1483-1546) *Father of the German Reformation*

THE EARLY YEARS

Born at Eisleben in Thuringe, Saxony, Luther attended school at Mansfield, at Magdeburg under the Brethren of the common Life, and at Eisleben. He then went to university at Erfurt (1501), where he learned Greek, graduating B.A. in 1502 and M.A. in 1505. He had intended to study law, but due to a narrow escape from death by lightning, he changed his mind and in spite of his father’s objections became an Augustinian monk in 1506. read for the B.D. (1509) and began to teach moral theology, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, and the holy Scriptures. A visit to Rome on Augustinian business (1510-1511) opened his eyes to the corruption prevalent among the higher clergy. Returning to Wittenberg he took the degree of D.Th.

Outwardly Luther was building up a successful monastic and academic career but inwardly he was troubled by a conviction of sin that his diligence in monastery life could not relieve. John Staupitz, his vicar-general, proved to be a good counselor at this period. And Luther also read widely. His biblical reading, especially in preparation for his classes on the Psalms (1513-1515), Romans (1515-1516), and Galatians (1517) proved to be the decisive factor. It was probably during this period, perhaps in 1514, that he had the famous Tower experience when he came to realize that God’s righteousness in Romans I is not the justice that we have to fear but the positive righteousness that God gives believers in Christ— a righteousness they receive by personally trusting in Christ.

THE YEARS OF PROTEST

In 1517, however, Luther was aroused when just across the border from Saxony, John Tetzel preached an indulgence in which crude theology was accompanied by the crassest materialism. In protest Luther rapidly drew up ninety-five these for debate, which he posted on the door of the Castle church on October 31, 1517. When translated and widely circulated, these theses brought an explosion of anti-church feeling that wrecked indulgence. Given practical application in the way, Luther’s theology could no longer go unnoticed, and he came at once under ecclesiastical pressures ranging from attempts at intimidation to promised favors for compliance. This is the beginning of the German Reformation that ultimately spread around the world. What Martin Luther did divided the visible church forever. But Europe and the world was ready for it. [G.Bromley.]

ZWINGLI, HULDRYCH (1484-1531) *Swiss reformer*

Born in the mountainous Toggenburg, Zwingli was the son of the village mayor. He studied at Basel, where he graduated with a B.A. in 1504 and an M.A. in 1506. At Basel he absorbed the teaching of Thomas Wytttenbach on Scripture and justification. He was posted to Einsiedeln in 1516. At Einsiedeln he was able to immerse himself in the Greek New Testament, from which he gained not only a personal understanding of justification but also a strong sense of the supremacy of Scripture over its human interpretation.

The turning point for Zwingli came in 1518, when he was called to Zurich as “people’s priest.” After being at the point of death in a severe outbreak of plague, he started his reforming program by persuading the city council to judge religious issues only by Scripture. Based on Zwingli’s expository preaching on the New Testament, radical changes came rapidly between 1522 and 1525; a translation of the Bible began, the Lenten fast and celibacy of the clergy ended, and the city council broke with the diocese of Constance and adopted Zwingli’s provocative Sixty-seven Articles (1523). Next came the dissolving of the monasteries, the removal of images, the translating and simplifying of the church services, the destruction of the minster organ, and the reorganization of the minster school. The climax was reached in 1525, when a plain Communion, or Thanksgiving, replaced the Latin Mass. Zwingli found in holy scripture not a mere textbook of divine truth, but the powerful work of God that does what God wills and by which the Holy Spirit brings light and life to those who read it with humility and prayer.

Although he worked in the shadow of Luther and his sphere of action was only a small city-state, Zwingli made a contribution to the Reformation that should not be disparaged. He undoubtedly shared many of the deepest concerns of Luther, but he offered an alternative style of reform that was much more radical in both thought and practice. He also succeeded in extending the Reformation in this form to a good part of German-speaking Switzerland, and by way of Bern it was then taken up by Calvin in Geneva, received by a new impress, and thus achieved international status. Zwingli was in fact the pioneer without whom Reformed and Presbyterian theology and order could not have developed in the way they did. [G.Bromley]

KNOX, JOHN (1514-1572) *Scottish reformer; bodyguard to the martyr George Wishart; spent time in Geneva adopting Calvinism prior to his returning to Scotland.*

On graduation from St. Andrew’s University, Scotland, Knox took orders as a priest in the Catholic Church (1536), and apparently because of legal studies became a papal notary (1540). At the same time, while serving as a tutor to some landholders’ sons, he came into contact with a number of Protestant families. How or when Knox himself became a protestant is not known, for he never reveals anything about his conversion, but it is known that it was by 1545. At that time a certain George Wishart, a Scot who had spent some time in Switzerland and England, returned to his native land where he began preaching the gospel. In January 1545, after preaching in other places, he came to East Lothian where Knox acted as his bodyguard, carrying a two-handed sword. Despite Wishart’s acceptance by the local gentry, however, he was arrested by the earl of Bothwell and taken to St. Andrew’s, where after a trial before Cardinal Beaton, he was burned at the stake as a heretic in March 1546. Knox became a blazing reformer. [W.S.Reid]

LAODICEA	The Compromising Era	1967-? Revelation 3:14-22
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<u>Church</u>	<u>Period represented</u>	<u>Suggested dates</u>
EPHESUS	The Apostolic Period	33-95
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PHILADELPHIA	The Opportunity Period	1517-1967
LAODICEA	The Compromising Period	1967-

To the Church in Laodicea

14 "To the angel (messenger) of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me. 21 To those who are victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.

22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

LAODICEA is the recipient of the last letter. Laodicea receives no commendation. The unfavourable condition in this church was lukewarmness: the members were **neither hot nor** cold (v.15). The lukewarm person does not become greatly disturbed at hearing heretical teaching, and is not vigorous in the defence of the truth. This spirit of indifference is the most tragic thing that can happen to a church. The close of this letter is different from the conclusions of the other six in that it makes an application to the individual: **If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him**, etc.

HISTORICALLY and prophetically, the Laodicean church represents the period of history that remains in place until the risen Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth in glory.

How do we arrive at a beginning date for this final period in church history? The Philadelphia era began with the Reformation expanding into worldwide mission activity and evangelism. Gradually this changed into traditionalism and a mixture of 'hot' and 'cold' spirituality. Evangelist Don E. Stanton (Maranatha Revival Crusade) in his "Things Which Are To Come" dates the Laodicean Period as beginning AD 1750. Other suggested dates include 1914 (the beginning of world wars), 1938 (when the World Council of Churches was born), or 1948 (when the State of Israel was born). There is probably no specific date but I have chosen **7 June 1967** which is the day, when for the first time since the Romans captured Jerusalem on the 7th September AD 70, the Jewish people gained occupancy and ownership of God's holy city

Jerusalem. Since 1967 there have been many evidences that we are in the seventh period. Here are five of them based on the Laodicean Scripture passage Revelation 3:14-22.

There are **five Scripture statements** that point to Laodicea being the final church period:

- **You are neither hot nor cold but a lukewarm mixture...** The worldwide church today – Christendom – is a two billion mixture of hot, cold and lukewarm.

*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because **you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.***

As at 2008 Barratt's world religious statistics says that the percentage of those who claim to be "Christian" is 2.2 billion - 33.4% of world population. This is a very slowly increasing percentage of world population growth indicating that Christians are matching population increase. The Muslim growth is faster than Christianity but it is the next biggest at 1.7 billion or 22%. Non-religious are 1.1 billion or 16%, Hinduism is 900 million or 14%, Buddhism is 376 million or 6% and the rest occupy 8-9%. By way of interest, Judaism is 14 million or just .22%.

Of the Christian 'family' how many can we say are 'hot' spiritually and how many are 'cold' spiritually? We may not know the facts but we do know that it is a fact that Christians vary widely in their commitment to Jesus Christ.

- **You say, "I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing."** While there are extremes of poverty and wealth in the world today, most 'do not need a thing.'

You say, I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy `from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So repent.

I write this on the 10 October 2008: The US government has been forced to approve \$700 billion to rescue collapsing financial institutions and governments in the UK, Europe and elsewhere have been forced to follow. Stock exchanges around the world have seen stocks and shares plummet. We await developments.

- **"I stand at the door and knock..." (says Jesus)** Out of all Seven Churches this is the only church that ends with an invitation by the risen Jesus to join with Him.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

Prophetic speakers are near unanimous in saying that the present world situation seems to point to the immanency of the second coming of Jesus Christ. This is the only church description that has the Lord Jesus Christ knocking on the door suggesting that there is a moment in history when share the presence of Jesus.

- **"To the one who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me..."** This is a promise and a call by Jesus that sharing glory with him is imminent.

To the one who overcomes, 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.

When things around us look grim, we must never, never, forget that God is on the throne we are promised a “glory-sharing” intimacy with God our Father.

- **“After this I looked and there before me was a door standing before me in heaven..”** Revelation 4:1. Immediately following the Laodicean description comes this powerful verse. The earthly scene has gone. The new scene is heaven. This is a further evidence, that the preceding two chapters (2 and 3) are historical and prepare for the bulk of the Book of Revelation where it deals with seven years of terrible happenings followed by the 1000-year peace and eternal heavenly life.

DISCUSSION POINTS

11. Remember the SMYRNA PERIOD (95-313) where ten vicious Roman Emperors relentlessly persecuted Christians. As you look back on this, what were you impressed by as you read of the way Christians suffered?
12. The PERGAMUM PERIOD (313-732) was a time when the Church was totally accepted by the state. It was influential and powerful. What do you perceive as dangers or disadvantages for Christians in this type of situation?
13. The THYATIRA PERIOD (732-1294) was the period when the church was never so unified, so rich, so powerful. And Jezebel was in the background. We don't have the church in that position today. Yet today, in some nations, a religious organisation (Muslim) actually controls the laws of the land. What are your comments on a 'religious-controlled' government?
14. The SARDIS PERIOD was spiritually 'dead'. Explain this. The PHILADELPHIA PERIOD began with the Reformation. Comment on the change.