

Revelation 1:9-11 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

- John is a part of the tribulation. Whereas the other disciples were all martyred, John was banished to this island jail. Here, he was likely forced to work in marble quarries. There were other prisoners there also.
- John identifies with the tribulation, but also with the Kingdom, and with the patience of Christ.
 - The patience of Christ is always about salvations. It is Him delaying His return so that more may be saved.
 - **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
- In the Spirit is a deeper meaning than walking in the spirit. This is John caught up in a spirit-fueled vision. This was completely supernatural and there was no flesh involved. One of the rare times that the Spirit overtakes someone to reveal things that are otherwise unknowable.
- The Lord's Day is Sunday. It is called that after the resurrection of Jesus and is why we tend to go to church on Sundays rather than Saturday (Sabbath). This was happening prior to Constantine.
- Jesus speaks and it is loud and clear. This is not the still small voice Elijah heard. And there was no mistaking this voice.
- Jesus gives the instructions – I will show you things, you write them and give them to the churches.

- These 7 churches were not the only churches and not even the only churches within the region. For example, Colosse had a church but isn't included.
- 7 represents completeness. Within these 7 churches the churches of all time are comprehended. They signify everything that is in all churches to the end of time.
- Interestingly, the Apostle Paul also wrote to **seven churches**: Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Colosse, Philippi, and Thessalonika.
- It is agreed on by many scholars that the 7 letters to the 7 churches give everything we need to know about how churches should be according to Jesus Himself.
- These cities were central to seven postal districts, allowing the messages to spread efficiently throughout the region.
- The order of the letters follows a typical postal route from Ephesus, the closest city to Patmos, and reflects a logical sequence for message delivery. The recurring phrase "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" at the end of each letter underscores that the message was not limited to the original recipients but was meant for the universal Church. Thus, while the letters were initially directed to specific first-century congregations, their deeper purpose was **to convey timeless spiritual truths and warnings relevant to all believers.**

Revelation 1:12-13 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

- Note the lampstands.

Revelation 1:16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

- Again, note the stars

Revelation 1:19-20 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

- Jesus commands John to write 3 things:
 - What he has seen – This current vision of Jesus
 - The things which are – The current day things specifically regarding the 7 churches
 - The things which will take place – The prophecies in chapter 4 and on
- The stars – The angels of the 7 churches. In His right hand – a place of strength, protection and authority.
- The lampstands are the 7 churches. Lampstands only give light when there is oil in them and it is set on fire
- This is the importance of the church to Jesus. He appears in the midst of the churches. He holds their angels in His right hand. They are filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus is appearing dressed as a priest, in the midst of the seven lampstands, holding the seven stars. The priest's role (one of them) was to care for and tend the candles, so that their flames never went out.
 - Jesus tends to and cares for His church.

- It is surrounded by the symbolic representation of the church that Jesus makes His appearance. It is also one of the few symbols explained by Jesus Himself.

The Letter to Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ² "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." '

- To the angel – Here it is the word messenger. It is usually translated as angel. But the word means one who speaks and delivers a message. It could be the pastor of the church. Or it could be the angel looking over that church. Either way, it was written for the whole church.
- **Ephesus:** This was a famous city in the ancient world, with an equally famous church. Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years. Aquilla and Priscilla, with Apollos served there. Paul's close associate Timothy worked in Ephesus. According to strong and consistent historic tradition, the Apostle John also ministered there.
 - This great city was also world-famous as a religious, cultural, and economic center of the region. Ephesus had the notable temple of Diana, a fertility goddess worshipped with immoral

sex. This tremendous temple to Diana in Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

- "The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity."
- "Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan. Here many evil things both superstitious and satanic were practiced. Books containing formula for sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city."
- Jesus introduces Himself as the one caring for and tending to the churches, as noted in chapter 1. – Note that He holds them. The churches belong to Jesus, not the pastors or the cities.
- God notes that their works, labor, patience, etc. is good.
 - Jesus is well aware of what is happening. He is not distant and uninformed. They were solid in what they were doing.
- you cannot bear those who are evil -
 - There is the evil that the church did not tolerate in the form of Pagan practices happening all around them.
 - There is also the evil of false doctrine's as is mentioned towards the end of this letter.
 - They have weeded out heresy and false apostles. Paul warned the Ephesians in **Acts 20:29-31**: For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.
 - From this commendation of Jesus, we know that the Ephesians took Paul's warning seriously.

- We must test those that claim to be apostles, or any form of teaching. Everything must be weighed against the Word of God. The church must remain pure, with no heresy or wrong doctrines. Discernment is critical. Jesus wants pure Gospel in the church.
- You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary
 - The Ephesian church continued to do these things without becoming weary. How is that possible? When we do things in God's strength. When we allow the life of Christ to live through us we can accomplish much without growing weary.
 - **Isaiah 40:29-31** He gives power to the weak, And to *those who have* no might He increases strength. ³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, ³¹ But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.
 - **Matthew 11:28-30** Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."
- **Nevertheless** – Despite all this good that I have seen...
 - They have left their first love.
 - To have all the works, patience and labor means nothing without love. Specifically loving Jesus.
 - **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all

knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

- Note that they left. Not lost. Not got left. Lost is accidental. Getting Left is not their doing. They left. They probably got so involved in trying to do everything right, that they gradually, without even knowing it, left their true passionate love for God behind.
- It is way too easy to get caught up in trying to do everything. Yet the greatest commandment is to love God, then love others.
- Truth and love must go hand-in-hand. A church that upholds doctrinal purity at the expense of showing love is just as flawed as a church that upholds congregational harmony at the expense of truthful teachings.
- Remember – their first step is to remember. Like the prodigal son coming to his senses remembering what it was like. Remember that initial zeal and love for Christ. Never lose that.
- Repent and do the first works – what does this mean?
- **Mark 1:14-15** Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”
- **John 6:29** Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”
- I will come quickly and remove your lampstand – This is so important that Jesus says He will remove them – even though their works are great.
 - Does removing them mean they cease to exist as a church?

- Maybe. But more likely He is removing His presence from their church. There will be no oil of the Holy Spirit in that lamp. They will be operating out of the flesh at that point.
- But – they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans.
 - The Nicolaitans are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. Nicolaitans deny the true faith and are part of a group holding "the doctrine of Balaam," (using gifts of God for material gain) and taught Israel "to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality." Clement of Alexandria says, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license. Basically they are hyper-grace.
 - Note that Jesus did not say He hates Nicolaitans, He hates their deeds. Jesus hates sin, especially sin that mocks His grace. He wants His people to hate sin also.
- He who has an ear... - Basically to those that will listen
- To him who overcomes – Overcomes their coldness. Their lack of love towards God.
- **I will give to eat from the tree of life:** The promise for these overcomers was a return to Eden, a restoration, and eternal life. This was meant first in the eternal sense of making it to heaven. It is also meant in the sense of seeing the effects of the curse rolled back in our own lives though walking in Jesus' redeeming love.
 - Don't forget that these 7 churches represent the complete church. This promise, while given to the church at Ephesus is meant for everyone that overcomes. This is one of the 7 blessings we get laid out here in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

The Church of Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹ "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

- Smyrna was a large, beautiful city. A center for learning and culture. It was a very rich city. There was a strong trade there due to the valley that ended in the harbor at the river Hermus.
- Smyrna was deeply religious and had many idols. This is the first city to demand worship of the Roman Emperor.
- The Roman Emperor Domitian (a.d. 81-96) was the first to demand worship under the title "Lord" from the people of the Roman Empire as a test of political loyalty. According to ancient church history, it was under the reign of Domitian that John was banished to the Island of Patmos where he received this vision. "Emperor worship had begun as spontaneous demonstration of gratitude to Rome; but toward the end of the first century, in the days of Domitian, the final step was taken and Caesar worship became compulsory. Once a year the Roman citizen must burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar; and having done so, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had performed his religious duty." "All that the Christians had to do was to burn that pinch of incense, say, 'Caesar is Lord,' receive their certificate, and go away and worship as they pleased. But that is precisely what the Christians would not do. They would give no man the name of Lord; that name they would keep for Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. They would not even formally conform." (Barclay)
- Jesus continues to allude to the name Yahweh with First and Last. Of course this speaks to His eternal character.

- He also reminds them that He died and came back to life. The theme of being dead and coming to life is prevalent throughout Revelation, but is also the major theme of the Gospel, not just Jesus, but all who give their lives to Him.
- Jesus has nothing negative to say about this church.
- I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich):
 - Works – In Ephesus, He knew their works, but then said nevertheless. There the works were not enough, nor were they impressive to Jesus. Here, Jesus acknowledges them and leaves it at that. Their works were being done with the right motives. Jesus is not against works, but He is very concerned with the heart, and why we are doing those works.
 - Tribulation and poverty - Smyrna was a prosperous city. Yet the Christians there were poor. "The word used for 'poverty' is the word for abject poverty. The Christians of Smyrna knew poverty because they were robbed and fired from jobs in persecution for the gospel. This kind of economic persecution was one important reason why Christians were poor in Smyrna.
 - Note that Jesus does not indicate rescue from this tribulation.
 - But you are rich – Jesus knows that they have treasure in Heaven. For us on earth, that may seem very distant and not helpful in our current situation. But it is true. And Jesus knows that eternity is far more important. Plus they are rich as they have everything in Christ.
 - Rich: This is what Jesus thought of them, and if Jesus considered them rich, then they were rich. Our estimation of ourselves is far less important than God's estimation of us.
 - In contrast, the Christians at Laodicea thought they were rich, but they were really poor (Revelation 3:17). Laodicea was a poor rich church. Smyrna was a rich poor church. Better to be a rich poor church than a poor rich church.

- The church at Smyrna was also **rich** in leadership. One of the pastors of that church was named Polycarp. He was one of the Apostle John's disciples and served at Smyrna until a.d. 155 when he died heroically as a martyr.
- I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. – There were those that claimed to be Jews, but also contributed to their persecution. They succumbed to worshipping idols, even if they lied to themselves that it didn't matter because they didn't believe. They pressured Christians to do the same.
- Do not fear – Jesus tells them two seemingly contradictory things – Do not fear, you are about to suffer. This could not seem like good news. They are already suffering. He then tells them that the devil will throw some of them into prison, and they will have tribulation for 10 days.
 - First of all, the persecution is from the devil. All evil that comes against us, no matter the form it takes is from the enemy. Not people.
 - Jesus indicated that this will be a test of their faith. God is saying that He is allowing the devil to do this. Through this, the church of Smyrna would be proven to be faithful and strong. Through the making of martyrs, His Kingdom will go forward.
 - How could they not fear in the face of this? By knowing 2 things: Jesus, and their future.
 - 10 days – a limited time of intense persecution where many were martyred.
 - Some think that Jesus really meant ten years of persecution. "As the days in this book are what is commonly called prophetic days, each answering to a year, the ten years of tribulation may denote ten years of persecution; and this was precisely the duration of the persecution under Diocletian, during which all the Asiatic Churches were grievously afflicted." (Clarke)
 - Others think that Jesus really meant persecution over the reign of ten Roman Emperors. "

- Be faithful – Do not conform to the world to stave off persecution. I would say the same thing to everyone today. Never bow to the world. Even if it will lead to death. As it did with many Smyrnians
- I will give you the crown of life – Crown (stephanos) is a victor's crown. Not a crown of royalty. Basically a trophy they get for all of eternity and to display in Heaven. This is also referred to as a martyr's crown.
- He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. – The second death is Hell. The lake of fire. But those that overcome – overcome fear and do not reject God – They will never face true death.