



The Book of Revelation

(Part 1 of 2) Chapters 1-3

The Book of Revelation is one of the most mysterious books of the Bible. As the last book of the Bible, it often receives a great deal of attention and study. It is filled with heavenly perspectives, tales of two cities, beasts and dragons, other worldly and heavenly visions of the past present and the future. But what on earth is it all about?

The Apostle John is writing from prison in the Island of Patmos concerning the prophetic “revelations” which he has received from the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This is the last of his works which include the Gospel of John and 1, 2, & 3 John. Many of the theological themes found in those works are also found here. However, Revelation has more in common with the prophetic literature found in the Old Testament prophets. As a literary genre, it contains visions and revelations of future judgment and future restoration.

Like the prophetic books, the purpose of the book is not so much about providing a handbook for predicting the details of the future, but rather providing motivation and instruction for living faithfully in the present.

While there is predictive material in the book of Revelation, the future orientation of judgment and hope helps to provide a present perspective to the trials and temptations for faithful Christians living in a corrupt and fallen world. The prophet’s job is to provide the larger context of what God is doing in the world and cosmically in the heavenly realms; the prophet is *interpreting* history from God’s ultimate perspective.



St. John at Patmos - Pine Panel Alte Pinakothek at Munich, 1518

Options for a Christian in A.D. 96

Being a Christian in a hostile culture where one is expected to “pledge allegiance” to Caesar and false gods was tough politically, socially, economically, emotionally. How did people of that time deal with the pressure? They could¹:

Quit. They could capitulate under the pressure and as a good Roman citizen and renounce Jesus Christ and bow before the almighty Caesar and Rome.

Lie. This is the “Situation Ethics” option. It is sometimes called making the choice of the lesser of two evils. Christians would lie about their allegiance to Rome, but with mental reservations, all the while keeping their true faith and beliefs *private*.

Fight. They could organize, take up arms and resist oppressive powers with force. Many Jewish Zealot Sects chose this—and they were resoundingly squashed.

Change the “Law”. Christians could work within the system to change the political situation and laws. While this ultimately would become what happened to the Roman Empire over the next several hundred years, this was not a real good short term solution.

Adjust. This was the syncretism of Christianity to incorporate beliefs and practices of the other Roman cults in order to “fit in.” For those who advocated adjusting, the “intolerance and exclusiveness” of faithful Christians must be avoided, so that Christians should do nothing that would indicate disrespect for the religion of other people.” Many did this.

Martyrdom. The faithful path was to be an enduring witness to faith and loyalty to Jesus. For many faithful Christians the implications of faithfulness meant persecution and temptation. Many would die at the hands of the Romans. John indicates that faithful **endurance** to the end is the only appropriate Christian response to the threat and allures of the evil powers of the present age.

Literary Structure

General Outline of Revelation

I.	The King Speaks to the Church in the City	Chaps. 1– 3
II.	The King Judges the “Great City”	Chaps. 4–18
III.	The King Redeems the “Holy City”	Chaps. 19–22

¹ Adapted from Boring, M. Eugene, Revelation, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989) pgs. 21-23.

Expanded Outline of Revelation

I. <i>The King Speaks to the Church in the City</i>		<i>Revelation 1–3</i>
A.	The Prophet's Call in the Presence of the King	1:1–20
B.	Seven Letters to Seven Churches	2:1–3:22
II. <i>The King Judges the "Great City"</i>		<i>Revelation 4–18</i>
A.	Heavenly Throne Room: Who is Worthy?	4:1–5:14
B.	Opening the Scroll: The Seven Seals	6:1–8:1
C.	Seven Angels sounding the Seven Trumpets	8:2–11:19
D.	Seven Signs: Exposé of the Powers of Evil	12:1–14:20
E.	Seven Bowls: The Last Plagues	15:1–16:21
F.	The Fall of the Great City: Babylon	17:1–18:24
III. <i>The King Redeems the "Holy City"</i>		<i>Revelation 19–22</i>
A.	Throne Room: Praise of Lamb's Victory	19:1–10
B.	Seven Visions of the End	19:11–21:8
C.	The Advent of the Holy City: The New Jerusalem	21:9–22:11
D.	The Letter Ends	22:12–21

The Key Question of Revelation: Will the Christians who must decide how to live their lives in the Mundane Cities of Asia (Part I) orient themselves to the 'Great City' that will inevitably receive God's Judgment (Part II) or to the 'Holy City' that will be redeemed by God (Part III)?

The Key Spiritual Dilemma of Revelation:

It is easy to understand when unfaithful people experience the consequences of sin and rebellion to God. But, how are we to understand the call to endure trial, persecution and suffering with faith in the reality of God? Is God being faithful to his promises to the prophets of old?

Does trusting God and the Messiah make any difference? What is God going to do about all of this evil mess!?!

"Response to the message of Revelation is an expression of faith in the Faithfulness of God in a situation which gives no indication of it in this world; it is faith's "nevertheless" when "therefore" makes no sense."

--Eugene Boring, Revelation

The Prophet's Call (1:1-20)

1. The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ
 - a. "Revelation" or "Unveiling"
 - b. Chain: God→Jesus Christ→ Angel→ John→One who Reads→ Those who Hear
 - c. First Blessing: read and heard in worship.
2. Prophecy
3. Crisis: "what must soon take place" and the "time is near"
 - a. What is so urgent? The end of the world? Persecution?
 - b. Reject, Reinterpret, Reaffirm²
4. The Word of God and The Testimony (Greek *martyr*) of Jesus Christ
 - a. Over 500 allusions to the OT
 - b. This is what is required of us.
5. Seven
 - a. Churches
 - b. Spirits
 - c. The Significance of Seven: New Creation
6. Province of Asia
 - a. Under the control of Domitian (81-96)
 - b. "All hail to our Lord (Greek *kurios*) and to his Lady"
 - c. Everyone who addressed him in speech or writing had to begin "Lord and God..."
7. Royal Titles
 - a. Faithful Witness (Greek *martyr*)
 - b. Firstborn of the Dead
 - c. Ruler of Earthly Kings
 - d. A Royal House of Priests
 - e. "I am" the Alpha and Omega
 - f. Who was, and is and is coming
 - g. The Omnipotent (Greek *pantokrator*)
8. The Exile
 - a. The ordeal and sovereignty which are ours in Jesus Christ



Figure 1 Christ Pantocrator St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai 6th or 7th Century

² See 2 Peter 3:3-16

- b. Patient Endurance – key Christian Characteristic for John. (Read Pliney)
- c. Patmos—place of Exile
- 9. The 'Son of Man'
 - a. Daniel 7:13-14
 - d. The Seven
 - i. Gold Lamps
 - ii. Stars
 - iii. Angels
 - iv. Churches
 - e. Like a dead man vs. The living one
 - f. The Keys of Death and the Grave (Hades Gk. Sheol Hb.)
 - g. What you see, what now is and what is to happen hereafter

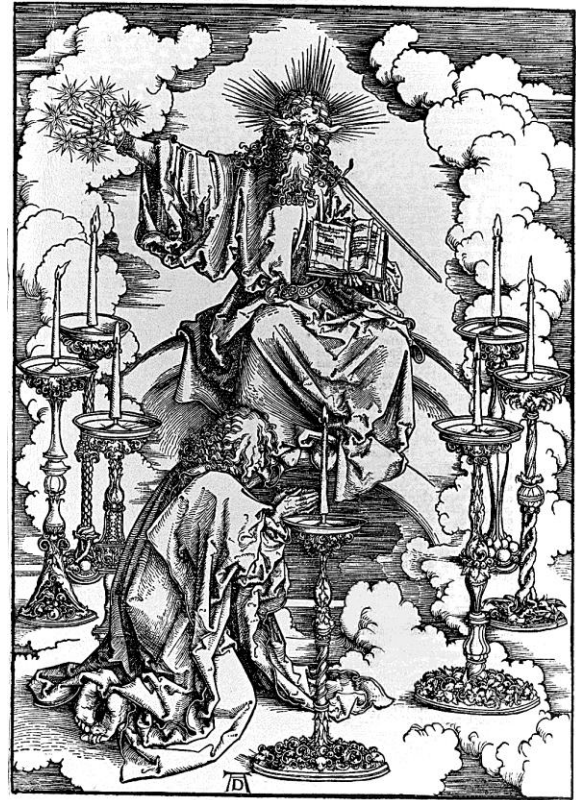


Figure 2 Christ among the seven lampstands Albrecht Durer, 1528.

The Letters to the Seven Churches



Figure 3: Mosaic of the Seven Angels St. Mark's Basilica Venice, Italy

The Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1-29)

To the church in Ephesus

2:1-7 ¹"To the angel³ 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: ²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵Remember the height from which 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. ⁶But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

The Letter to Ephesus: Love

1. The City of Ephesus
 - a. 60 Miles from Patmos
 - b. "the metropolis of Asia"
 - c. The Ionic temple of Artemis, one of the seven

³ Or messenger; also in verses 8, 12 and 18

wonders of the ancient world.⁴

2. Paul and Ephesus
 - a. Ministry Acts 16:6; 18:24
 - b. Riot Acts 19:21
 - c. Farewell Acts 20:7-38
 - d. Letter to the Ephesians
3. 1&2 Timothy and 1 John

A Commendation

1. The church at Ephesus exhibited three virtues as evaluated by the Lord Jesus (cf. Matt. 18:20):
 - a. The Church's Deeds (Hard Work)
 - b. The Church's Endurance
 - c. The Church's Orthodoxy
 1. Nicolaitans (p. 17)
 2. Warning: Acts 20:28-31; Eph. 4
 - d. A Pure Church⁵

⁴ It was described by Antipater of Sidon, who compiled the list of the Seven Wonders: "I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labour of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, 'Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.'"

⁵ A decade or two later, Ignatius of Antioch would write to them that their bishop, Onesimus, had praised them because "you all live according to truth, and no heresy dwells among you; in fact you will not even listen to anyone who does not speak about Jesus Christ in truth" (Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 6.2). "I have learned," Ignatius added, "that some from elsewhere who have evil teaching stayed with you, but you did not allow them to sow it among you, and stopped your ears, so that you might not receive what they sow" (*To the Ephesians* 9.1)

A Complaint

1. "Because of lawlessness the love of many will grow cold." (Matt. 24:12)
2. God's Bride (Ezek. 16:8; Jer. 2:2; 2 Cor. 11:2,3; Ephesians 5)
3. First Love (Hosea 2:14-16; 19-20)⁶
4. Undying Love (Ephesians 6:24)
5. "The Greatest thing in the World" 1 Cor. 13

A Concluding Command

1. Remember
2. Repent
3. Resume
4. A Solemn Warning (v. 5)
5. A Promise to the Penitent (v.7)

To the Church in Smyrna (2:8-11)

⁸"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. ⁹I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

⁶ Wilson Carlile, founder of Salvation Army said, "Jesus captured me. For me to know Jesus is a love affair."

The Letter to Smyrna: Suffering

- Smyrna
- "The pride of Asia"
- One of the Most Prosperous Cities in Asia Minor
- Temple to *Dea Roma* "Goddess Rome"

The Sufferings they Endured for Christ

1. Christ and Caesar
2. Jewish Opposition⁷

What Form Did the Persecution take in Smyrna? How did the Christians Suffer?

1. Four Trials:
 - a. Poverty (1 Cor. 1:26, Heb. 10:34)
 - b. Slander
 - i. (John 8:44 "Father of Lies")
 - ii. 1 Peter 2:23
 - iii. Fear of what others think, say or do to you. (v.10)
 - c. Prison
 - d. Death
2. The Death of Polycarp
3. A Call to Suffer (Matt. 5:10-12; Luke 6:26; John 15:18, 20; 16:33)
4. Hallmark of the Church
 - a. See 2 Cor. 11:23-27; 2 Tim 3:12; Phil 1:29
 - b. The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁸

⁷ See Acts 13:45, 50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5-7; 18:5, 6; 21:27; 25:12; 28:17-28

⁸ "Suffering then is the Badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master...Luther reckoned

5. Compromise (Gal. 6:12)

The Comforts they received from Christ

1. He is Eternal v. 8 (cf 1:17)
2. He is Victorious v. 8 (1:18 Heb. 2:14, 15)
3. He is All Knowing v. 9
 - a. *"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, nobody knows but Jesus"*⁹
4. He is Balanced v. 9 (2 Cor. 8:9)
5. He is in Control v. 10 (Job)
6. He is Purposeful v. 10 Luke 22:31; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:7)
7. He is Generous v. 10, 11

To the Church in Pergamum (2:12-17)

¹²"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³I 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.

¹⁴Nevertheless, 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

suffering among the marks of the true church...Discipleship means allegiance to the Suffering Christ, and it is not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."

⁹ "Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen" is a traditional Black Gospel Song. The author is unknown.

immorality. ¹⁵Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

¹⁶Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

The Letter to Pergamum: Truth

Pergamum & The Imperial Cult

- "A strong center of Paganism"
- Immense Altar to Zeus
- Elegant Temple to Athena
- 29 BC Temple to Augustus – first provincial temple to a living emperor.

Christ's Concern for Truth

1. Love and Truth
2. Does Truth Matter?
"Unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials and charity in everything."¹⁰
3. Truth about Christ v. 13
 - a. Antipas the Martyr

¹⁰ Rupert Meldenius 17th Century

- b. “Confess the Name” Eph. 1:20; Phil 2:9-11; 1 Cor. 12:3
- 4. Truth about Holiness
 - a. Nicolaitans and Balaamites (2 Pet. 2:15, Jude 11 Num. 25, 31:16)
 - b. 1 John 2:4, 22; 1 Cor. 5:11)
- 5. Travesty of Truth
 - a. Gal. 5:1; Rom. 6:1; Jude 4

Christ’s Recognition of the Source of Error

1. Satan’s Overthrow
2. A Dark Place

Christ’s Resolve that Truth shall Triumph over Error

1. The double-edged Sword v. 16 (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12)
2. Message of Judgment (Num 31:8; Josh 13:12; John 12:47, 48)
3. Hidden Manna (Ex 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4; John 6:31-35, 48-51)
4. The White Stone
5. The New Name
6. Cf. 1 Tim. 6:20; Jude 3

Map of the Seven Churches¹¹



¹¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Seven_churches_of_asia.svg

To the Church in Thyatira

¹⁸"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. ¹⁹I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

²⁰Nevertheless, I have this against you: 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. ²¹I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²²So 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. ²³I 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. ²⁴Now

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):

²⁵Only hold on to what you have until I come. ²⁶To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—

²⁷He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery¹²— just as I have received authority from my Father. ²⁸I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

¹² Psalm 2:9

- A Prosperous Center for Commerce (Acts 16:4)
- A Beautiful Garden of Virtue
 - Deeds, Love, Faith, Service and Perseverance (v. 19)
 - The Fruit of the Spirit: 1 Thes. 1:3
- Christian Growth
 - "now doing more than you did at first"
 - Compare with Ephesus: "abandoned first love"
 - 2 Thes. 1:3
- A Poisonous Weed
 - Tolerated a false teacher and sexual immorality and idolatry.
 - Compare with Ephesus (2:2,4)
- Christian Holiness--Mark of true Christian¹³

Jezebel

- In the Old Testament:¹⁴
 - Queen, wife of King Ahab
 - Jezebel means "pure or chaste" but she was a priestess of Ashtoreth (Greek Aphrodite, Roman Venus)
 - She had 850 Prophets and killed all of YHWH's prophets.
- The Second Jezebel
- Tolerating Sin

¹³ See 1 Thes. 4:3; Eph. 1:4; Tit. 2:13, 14; 1 Thes. 4:7,8

¹⁴ See 1 Kings 16:30-32; 18:4, 19; 21:25; 2 Kings 9:22.

- Ephesus would not tolerate their teaching or practice. Pergamum tolerated their “teaching”, Thyatira tolerated her!
- “my servants” v. 20

Christ’s Statement to the Whole Church

- Burning Eyes – Sees what is done in Secret v. 23 (cf. 1:14; 19:12)
- Divine Insight¹⁵
- Folly of Secrecy¹⁶

Christ’s Warning to the Jezebel Party

- Repent! (2 Pet. 3:9)
- New Covenant Judgment (Ex. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:17-32; 1 Cor. 6:9)

Christ’s Advice to the Remnant –

Glorious Liberty—1 John 5:3, Matt. 11:30 (contra. Mark 7:8-13; Matt. 11:30)

Christ’s Promise to the Overcomer

- Two Promises:
 - Sharing Christ’s reign (Ps. 2:8,9; Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17; 1 Cor. 6:2)
 - The Morning Star (22:16; cf. 2 Peter 1:19)

To the Church in Sardis

1“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds

¹⁵ Jer. 17:10; 11:20; 20:12; Ps. 7:9; Mark 2:8; John 2:25; 21:17; Acts 1:24, 15:8 *kardiognostes*, “heart-knower”.

¹⁶ Isa. 29:15,16; Heb. 4:12, 13 Rom. 2:16

the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

3Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, 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. 4Yet 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. 5He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. 6He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Letter to Sardis: Reality

Sardis in History

- Capital of Lydia, King Croesus conquered by Cyrus of Persia
- Conquered by Alexander and Antiochus the Great
- Earthquake in 17 AD
- Tiberius had it rebuilt by a 5 year tax holiday.

A Critical Letter—Wake up call!

The Rebuke Christ Gives

- A Spiritual Graveyard (1 Sam. 16:7)
- Spiritual Death – Sin, Defilement¹⁷
- Nominal Faith—Christians in Name, not heart. (Isa. 29:13)

¹⁷ Matt. 8:22; Luke 9:60; Ephesians 2:1; 1 Tim. 5:6; John 5:25

- Hypocrites!¹⁸
 - Actor, plays a part on stage
 - Charlatan or pretender

The Remedy Christ Proposes

- Wake Up! Strengthen what remains! Remember! Obey! Repent!
- The Godly Remnant¹⁹
- A Small Flock
- Strengthen What Remains
 - Paul Acts 18:23; Romans 1:11.
 - Scriptures Acts 20:32
 - Training in Godliness 1 Tim 4:7b-8
 - Make Disciples 2 Tim. 2:1
- Coming Judgment
- The Gift of the Spirit and the Truth Acts 2:32-38; John 4:23, 24
- Seven Spirits 1:4; 4:5; 5:6 Rom. 8:2; Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:25
- Seven Stars

The Reward Christ Promises

- White Clothes Rev. 7:14
- God's Book²⁰ (13:8; 20:11-25; 21:27)



To the Church in Philadelphia

7"To the angel 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. 8I 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. 9I 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. 10Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him 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 him my new name. 13He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

¹⁸ Like the Pharisees: Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18; 23:5, 27, 28.

¹⁹ Remnant in Old and New: Gen. 6:5-18; 19:24. 25; 2 Pet. 2:7; 1 Kings 19:18; Isa. 1:9; 10:20-22; 6:13; 7:3; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:32; 18:8

²⁰ Exodus 32:32, 33; Ps. 69:28; Mal. 3:16; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Luke 10:20; Heb. 12:23

The Letter to Philadelphia: Opportunity

The Church and the Open Door

- The Opportunity of Salvation Matt. 7:13, 14
- The Opportunity of Service
- A Great Door for effective work
 - 1 Cor. 16:9, Col. 4:3,4; 2 Cor. 2:12

- Fierce Opposition (Isa. 60:14)
- The Threat of Persecution
- A Strategic Location—Roman Road (gateway to Mysia, Lydia, Phrygia)
- Open Doors

Christ and the Key of David

- The Key of David (2 Kings 18:17, 18; Isa. 22:21-22)
- The Key of Salvation Heb. 10:19, 20
- A Locked Door (Luke 13:24-28)
- The Key of Service Acts 14:27
- “Come over...and help us”

The Overcomer as a Pillar in God’s Temple

- To be a Pilgrim (Phil 3:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-11)

To the Church in Laodicea

14“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17You 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. 18I 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. 19Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20Here 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. 21To him 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. 22He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The Letter to Laodicea: Wholeheartedness

Laodicea

- A Stern Letter
- On Fire for Christ – Complacency Kills
- A Time for Enthusiasm

The Diagnosis Christ Makes

- An Opulent Society
 - After Earthquake in 60 AD quickly rebuilt
 - Banking and Merchant Center
 - Famous Medical School
- Naked, Blind Beggars

The Advice Christ Gives

- Desolation and Waste
- The Divine Merchant (Isa. 55:1)
- Two Steps to Take
 - Repentance
 - Faith “Open the Door”
- Paupers to Princes
- The Master of the House

The Prospect Christ Offers

- The Great Choice

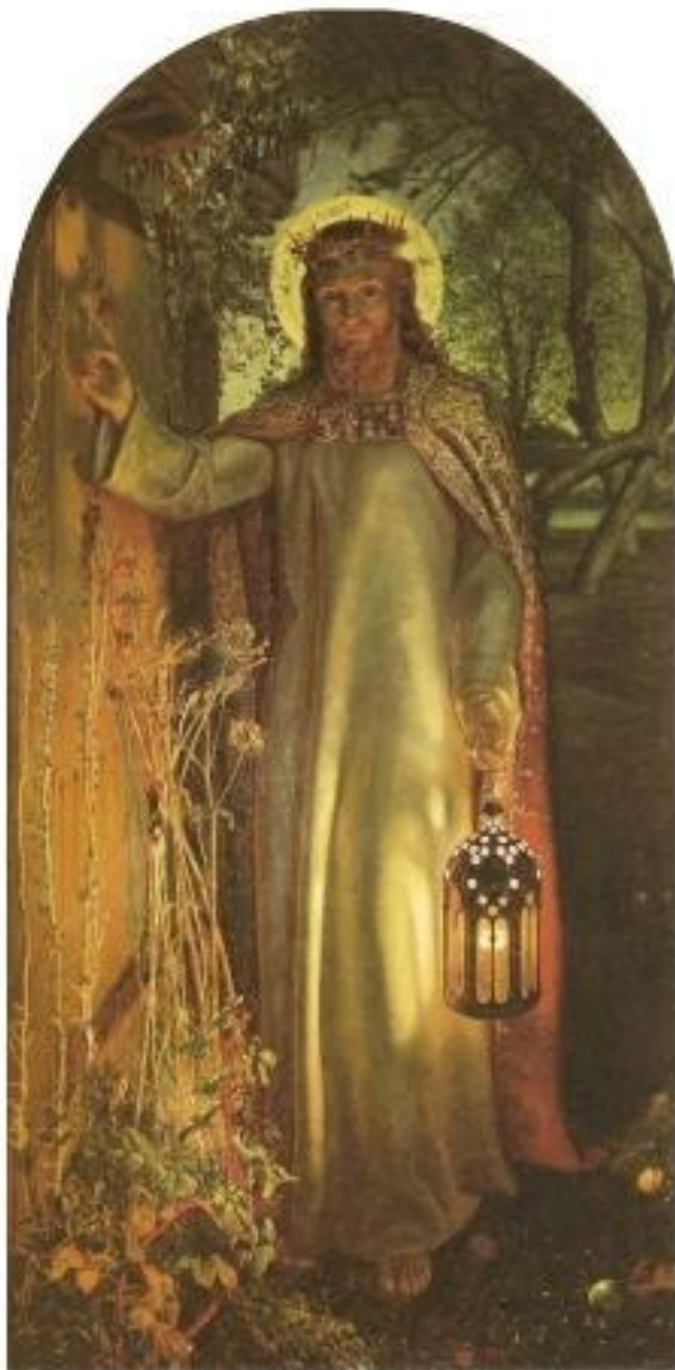


Figure 4 "Light of the World" William Holman Hunt

Gaius Plinius to the Emperor Trajan²¹:

It is for me an important point of responsibility to refer to you as Head of State [*latin domine, equivalent of Greek, kurios, used by Christians only of God and Jesus as Lord but claimed as a title by the emperors and especially important to Domitian in John's time*], things about which I have questions, since you are the person best able to set straight my hesitations and correct my lack of information.

Actually I have never been present at a Examination of Christians, so I do not know what punishment is required or how far it is to be carried out. Nor do I understand the legal grounds for a prosecution, or how stringently it is to be prosecuted. I am not clear about prosecutions in respect to the age of the persons, whether no distinction should be made between the young and the old, and furthermore whether a pardon should be granted in cases of recanting [*Latin paenitentiae*], or if there is no advantage for a person completely ceasing to be a Christian. Or is it the name "Christian" which is prosecutable, even if not involved in criminal actions, or is that "criminality" is automatically attached to the name?

In the meantime, I now handle it this way with those who are turned over to me as Christians.

I ask them directly, in person, if they are Christian, I ask a second and third time to be sure, and indicate to them the danger of their situation. If they persist [*Latin perseverantes, related to "endurance", Greek hypomone, the central virtue of Christians in Revelation*], I order them led dispatched (= executed). I have had no trouble with this, since whatever it was they admitted or professed, I decided that their obstinacy and unyielding inflexibility should be sufficient reason for punishment. Some others who were virtually insane with this cult, but Roman citizens, I sent back to Rome for trial.

As I continue with this handling of the situation, as often happens, the numbers and kinds of incriminations are becoming more widespread. An anonymous List has been brought out which contains the names of a great many persons. I decided to dismiss charges again any on this list who stated that they were now not, nor had ever been Christians, if they repeated after me a prayer of invocation to the Gods, and made an offering of wine and incense to your statue, [*According to tradition they were required to make the two word acknowledgement of Roman sovereignty "Kurios Kaisaros" ("Caesar is Lord"), and exact counterpart to the Christian confession "Jesus is Lord" (cf. Romans 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3)*] which I had brought in to the court along with the statues of the Gods, for this purpose. And in addition they were to formally curse Christ, which I understand true Christians will never do.

Other named by the anonymous List said they were Christians, and later changed their statement. Some said that they had been and

²¹ (Letters X.96 translated from Latin by William Harris, Prof. Em. Middlebury College)

then stopped, some three years before, some longer, some even twenty years before. *[Note this would be in the time of Domitian]* All these revered your statue and those of the Gods, and cursed Christ. They stated that the sum total of their error or misjudgment, had been coming to a meeting on a given day before dawn, and singing responsively a hymn to Christ as to God, swearing with a holy oath not to commit any crime, never to steal or commit robbery, commit adultery, fail a sworn agreement or refuse to return a sum left in trust. When all this was finished, it was their custom to go their separate ways, and later re-assemble to take food of an ordinary and simple kind. But after my edict which forbids all political Societies, they did in fact give this up. I thought at this point that it was necessary to get information from two slave women, whom they call Deaconesses (*ministrae*) about the actual truth, by means of torture. I found nothing worthy of blame other than the blind and over-wrought nature of their cult-superstition.

I have therefore postponed further Examinations (*cognitiones*) and made haste to come to you immediately for consultation. This situation seem to demand serious consultation, especially in view of the large number of people falling into this danger. A great many persons of every age, of every social class, men and women alike, are being brought in to trial, and this seems likely to continue. It is not only the cities, but also the towns and even the country villages which are being infected with this cult-contagion.

It seems possible to check and reverse this direction at this point, for it is quite clear that the Temples of the Gods which have been empty for so long, now begin to be filled again, the sacred rites which had lapsed are now being performed and flesh for sacrificial rites is now sold again at the shops, although for a while nobody would buy it. So it seems reasonable to think that a great many people could be persuaded to reform, IF there were a legal procedure for Repentance.

Emperor Trajan to Pliny:

You have done the right thing, my dear Pliny, in handling the cases of those who were brought to you under the charge of being Christians. But it is not possible to make hard and fast rule with one specific formula. These people must not be searched out, if they are brought before your court and the case against them is proved, they must be punished, but in the case of anyone who states that he is not a Christian and makes it perfectly clear that he is not, by offering prayers to our Gods, such a one is to be pardoned on the grounds of his present repentance [*Latin paenitentiae*], however suspect he may have been in the past.

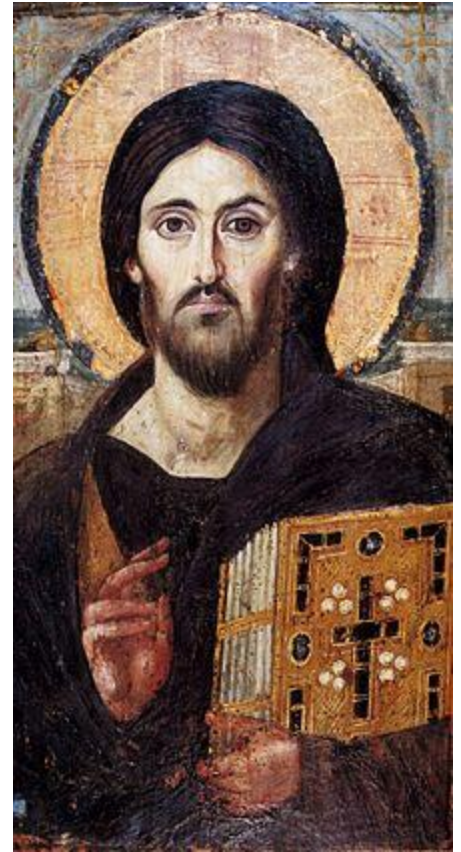
But anonymous lists must not have any place in the court proceedings. They are a terrible example and not at all in keeping with our times.

Christ Pantocrator: St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Egypt

"This is an early type of the Christ Pantocrator. Wearing a tunic (chiton) and a draped outer garment (himation), Christ makes the sign of blessing with the right hand and holds in the left a very thick Gospel-book with a cover adorned with jewels and precious stones. The eyes are not alike in size and shape, the mouth is asymmetrical with a melancholy expression, the rather short beard has an inward curve and the hair falls back over the left shoulder.

"The exceptionally high quality of the painted icon suggests that it must have been the product of a Constantinopolitan atelier in Justinian's age. This may be further confirmed by the fact that the iconographical type it represents was created at the time when Justinian was emperor, although we cannot be absolutely certain about that. It should be remembered at this point that the Monastery of St. Catherine had been founded by Justinian and that the emperor had presumably sent various gifts to the Monastery, including perhaps this very icon.

"At one time the icon was dated to the 13th century. However, its cleaning and conservation in 1962 revealed the original encaustic layer, thus pointing to a much earlier date in the 6th or 7th century."²²



Meaning if the term "Pantocrator"

"The most common translation of Pantocrator is "Almighty" or "All-powerful". In this understanding, Pantokrator is a compound word formed from the Greek words for "all" and the noun "strength" (κρατος). This is often understood in terms of potential power; i.e., ability to do anything, omnipotence.

"Another, more literal translation is "Ruler of All" or, less literally, "Sustainer of the World". In this understanding, Pantokrator is a compound word formed from the Greek for "all" and the verb meaning "To accomplish something" or "to sustain something" (κρατω). This translation speaks more to God's actual power; i.e., God does everything (as opposed to God can do everything).²³

Uses in the New Testament

"In the New Testament, Pantokrator is used once by Saint Paul (2 Cor 6:18). Aside from that one occurrence, the author of the Book of Revelation is the only New Testament author to use the word Pantokrator. The author of Revelation uses the word nine times, and while the references to God and Christ in Revelation are at times interchangeable, Pantokrator appears to be reserved for God alone."²⁴

²² <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/catherines2-1.htm>

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_Pantocrator

²⁴ Ibid.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp²⁵

CHAPTER IX -- POLYCARP REFUSES TO REVILE CHRIST.

Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, "Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp !" No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, "Have respect to thy old age," and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], "Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists." But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, "Away with the Atheists." Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;" Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"

CHAPTER X -- POLYCARP CONFESSES HIMSELF A CHRISTIAN.

And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar," he answered, "Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by the fortune of Caesar, and pretendest not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and thou shalt hear them." The proconsul replied, "Persuade the people." But Polycarp said, "To thee I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God. But as for these, I do not deem them worthy of receiving any account from me."

CHAPTER XI -- NO THREATS HAVE ANY EFFECT ON POLYCARP.

The proconsul then said to him, "I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent." But he answered, "Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous." But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."

²⁵ The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is one of the works of the Apostolic Fathers, and as such is one of the very few eyewitness writings from the actual age of the persecutions. Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna around the years AD 155-160 (possibly AD 170-180).

CHAPTER XII -- POLYCARP IS SENTENCED TO BE BURNED.

While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods." Speaking thus, they cried out, and besought Philip the Asiarch to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But Philip answered that it was not lawful for him to do so, seeing the shows of wild beasts were already finished. Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. For thus it behooved the vision which was revealed to him in regard to his pillow to be fulfilled, when, seeing it on fire as he was praying, he turned about and said prophetically to the faithful that were with him, "I must be burnt alive."

CHAPTER XIII -- THE FUNERAL PILE IS ERECTED,

This, then, was carried into effect with greater speed than it was spoken, the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and fagots out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it. And when the funeral pile was ready, Polycarp, laying aside all his garments, and loosing his girdle, sought also to take off his sandals,--a thing he was not accustomed to do, inasmuch as every one of the faithful was always eager who should first touch his skin. For, on account of his holy life, he was, even before his martyrdom, adorned with every kind of good. Immediately then they surrounded him with those substances which had been prepared for the funeral pile. But when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, "Leave me as I am; for He that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile."

CHAPTER XIV -- THE PRAYER OF POLYCARP.

They did not nail him then, but simply bound him. And he, placing his hands behind him, and being bound like a distinguished ram [taken] out of a great flock for sacrifice, and prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering unto God, looked up to heaven, and said, "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before thee, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me, worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast fore-ordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen."

CHAPTER XV -- POLYCARP IS NOT INJURED BY THE FIRE.

When he had pronounced this amen, and so finished his prayer, those who were appointed for the purpose kindled the fire. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury, we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odour [coming from the pile], as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there.

CHAPTER XVI -- POLYCARP IS PIERCED BY A DAGGER.

At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near and pierce him through with a dagger. And on his doing this, there came forth a dove, and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished; and all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp was one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic Church which is in Smyrna. For every word that went out of his mouth either has been or shall yet be accomplished.

CHAPTER XVII -- THE CHRISTIANS ARE REFUSED POLYCARP'S BODY.

But when the adversary of the race of the righteous, the envious, malicious, and wicked one, perceived the impressive nature of his martyrdom, and [considered] the blameless life he had led from the beginning, and how he was now crowned with the wreath of immortality, having beyond dispute received his reward, he did his utmost that not the least memorial of him should be taken away by us, although many desired to do this, and to become possessors of his holy flesh. For this end he suggested it to Nicetes, the father of Herod and brother of Alce, to go and entreat the governor not to give up his body to be buried, "lest," said he, "forsaking Him that was crucified, they begin to worship this one." This he said at the suggestion and urgent persuasion of the Jews, who also watched us, as we sought to take him out of the fire, being ignorant of this, that it is neither possible for us ever to forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of such as shall be saved throughout the whole world (the blameless one for sinners), nor to worship any other. For Him indeed, as being the Son of God, we adore; but the martyrs, as disciples and followers of the Lord, we worthily love on account of their extraordinary affection towards their own King and Master, of whom may we also be made companions and fellow-disciples!

CHAPTER XVIII -- THE BODY OF POLYCARP IS BURNED.

The centurion then, seeing the strife excited by the Jews, placed the body in the midst of the fire, and consumed it. Accordingly, we afterwards took up his bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, whither, being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.

CHAPTER XIX -- PRAISE OF THE MARTYR POLYCARP.

This, then, is the account of the blessed Polycarp, who, being the twelfth that was martyred in Smyrna (reckoning those also of Philadelphia), yet occupies a place of his own in the memory of all men, insomuch that he is everywhere spoken of by the heathen themselves. He was not merely an illustrious teacher, but also a pre-eminent martyr, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, as having been altogether consistent with the Gospel of Christ. For, having through patience overcome the unjust governor, and thus acquired the crown of immortality, he now, with the apostles and all the righteous[in heaven], rejoicingly glorifies God, even the Father, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls, the Governor of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.

Question: "Who are the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation 2:6, 14-15?"²⁶

Answer: The exact origin of the Nicolaitans is unclear. Some Bible commentators believe they were a heretical sect who followed the teachings of Nicolas—whose name means “one who conquers the people”—who was possibly one of the deacons of the early church mentioned in Acts 6:5. It is possible that Nicolas became an apostate, denying the true faith and became part of a group holding "the doctrine of Balaam," who taught Israel "to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality." Clement of Alexander says, “They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.” Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license.

Other commentators believe that these Nicolaitans were not so-called from any man, but from the Greek word *Nicolah* meaning "let us eat," as they often encouraged each other to eat things offered to idols. Whichever theory is true, it is certain that the deeds of the Nicolaitans were an abomination to Christ. They, like the Gnostics and other false teachers, abused the doctrine of grace and tried to introduce licentiousness in its place (2 Peter 2:15, 19; Jude 1:4).

Jesus commends the church of Ephesus for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans as He does (Revelation 2:6). No doubt the leaders of the Ephesian church protected their flock from these destructive heresies and kept them from committing the same evil deeds. All sin is hateful to Christ as it should be to His followers, as we hate men’s evil deeds, not the men themselves. To the church at Pergamos, He had not commendation, but censure. Unlike the Ephesians, they actually embraced the teachings of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:15). Jesus warns them that unless they repent, they are in danger of the judgment that is sure to fall on those who teach false doctrine, attack His church, and destroy His people. The sword of judgment is poised over their heads and His patience is not limitless (Revelation 2:16, 19:15).

The lesson for us is that the church of the Lord Jesus throughout the ages has been plagued by those of the Nicolaitan spirit. The only way to recognize false teaching is to be intimately familiar with truth through the diligent study of the Word of God.

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²⁶ www.GotQuestions.org