

EPHESUS

1. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, and an illustrious city in the district of Ionia, nearly opposite the island of Samos. At the head of the harbor of Ephesus was the great temple of Diana. The city of Ephesus was called the "warden" of Diana. Read Acts 19:21-41.

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

1. Paul visits Ephesus and preaches the gospel of Christ. Acts 19:1-41.
2. Three years later Paul meets with the Ephesian elders at Miletus.
 - (1) His instructions to the elders.
 - (2) They pray together on the sea shore.
 - (3) They accompany Paul to the ship. Acts 20:17-38.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE EPHESIAN CHURCH Revelation 2:1-7

1. Commended:
 - (1) Her toil in suffering and patience in tribulation.
 - (2) Her unwearied endurance in suffering. Thou "hast borne", and "hast patience." ETC. Verse 3. This means they were not allowed to labor as they did unmolested.
 - (3) Their intolerance of evil. They had "tried them which say they are apostles, and had found them liars." They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes. Under the ban of this righteous wrath two sets of persons deservedly came, both being generally described as "them that are evil." They are:
 - a. Pretended apostles. The rise of these false apostles is but a fulfillment of the warning given by Paul to the Ephesian church. Acts 20:28-30.
 - b. Nicolaitanes. The Nicolaitanes were practically antinomians. (Look up the word antinomian in your dictionary). This sect flourishes still.
2. The Ephesian Church Censured:
 - (1) "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love." "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." The means of recovery for the Ephesian church:
 - a. The thoughtful recall of the church to its earlier condition.
 - b. Repentance. Repentance should follow the recollection.
 - c. Renewal. "Do thy first works." A true repentance will declare itself in works answerable to amendment. To every one that truly heareth and "overcometh" the words of promise hold out the cheering assurance of life "in the Paradise of God."

THE SAVIOUR'S WARNING TWOFOLD

1. The declining church will sooner or later receive from Christ some stern reminder of its sin. "I will come unto thee." Verse 5.
2. If the warning be unheeded, the church in time will disappear. "I will remove thy candlestick out of its place." Verse 5.

LESSON TWO

SMYRNA

1. Smyrna is north of Ephesus, about forty miles in a direct line, though farther by the regular route of travel. It is on the Aegean Sea, at the head of the Hermaean Gulf, at the foot of Mount Pagus. Its earliest mention in Christian history is in the book of Revelation. Polycarp, a pupil of John, was martyred in Smyrna 155 A. D., and his grave is still shown on a hill near the city. Despite fires, earthquakes, and wars, it has retained its importance, and is now the largest city on the Asiatic side of the Aegean Sea, having a population of nearly 200,000 people. The modern city is located about two miles from the site of the ancient city.

THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

1. All that we know of the church in Smyrna is found in Revelation 2:8-11. The letter addressed to this church speaks only words of praise.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

1. Out of the seven churches, two only are unrebuked. Of these two, Smyrna is one and Philadelphia is the other. The church at Smyrna is poor but Jesus calls it rich. It is beset with opposition but is addressed by Christ in words of cheer and hope.
2. "I know thy works and tribulation." Verse 9
It may be possible for a church to be so placed that the spreading of the gospel of Christ, for the moment, is impossible. It could, no doubt, be necessary to give up any attempt at sowing and reaping for a while, in order to secure the field in which sowing and harvesting may be done.
3. "I know thy poverty." Verse 9
Here the plea of poverty comes not from the church; the recognition of poverty came from the Lord Jesus Christ. This makes all the difference. Note: There are some now who seem to delight in making a show of their wealth and never dream of pleading poverty except when they are sked to give to the cause of Christ.
4. "But thou art rich." Verse 9
They were rich in faith and love two qualities of greater value than all the kingdoms of the earth. They were rich in faith and love but very poor in this world's goods.
5. "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." Verse 9
 - (1) As natural Jews they were not following the law of Moses, and therefore, were not worthy of the name.
 - (2) They were not Jews in a spiritual sense. The word used in that sense meant Christians. See Romans 2:28, 29. They were not then worthy of the name in either sense. "Synagogue of Satan," describes their extreme cruelty and wickedness.
6. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." Verse 10
 - (1) The devil and his work. "That ye may be tried" under pressure.
 - (2) Ye shall have tribulation ten days. May mean short or long persecution.
 - (3) Be thou faithful unto death...I will give thee a crown of life.
 - (4) He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. Verse 11
See Revelation 20:14

Lesson Three

PERGAMOS

1. Few, if any, parts of the world present greater attractions to the student of nature, history, or art, than Pergamos. About a three days journey, Pergamos is located north from Smyrna in the province of Mysia. It stand today under the modern name of Bergama. Though it has fallen from its original grandeur, it has not become a desolation, or an abode for wild beasts. Its public library was second only to that of Alexandria. In the course of time Mark Antony carried the library out of Pergamos to Egypt and gave it as a present to Cleopatra. Our english word Parchment gets its name from Pergamum. It was in Pergamos that the great physician Galen was born. Pergamos has been described as a "city of temples," and again as "a sort of union of a pagan cathedral city, a university town, and a royal residence."

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

1. A once faithful church waning from internal decay. Errors in teaching, and departures within the church are more to be feared than outward foes.
2. The immediate duty of the church in Pergamos summed up in the word "repent" which really is the watch word of the epistle.
3. He "that hath the sharp sword with two edges" bears it not in vain. It is a keen weapon of judgement against all adversaries; a true and effectual warning to faithless ones within the church and threatening ones without.
SCRIPTURES: Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:17.

THINGS IN FAVOR OF THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS Revelation 2:12, 13.

1. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest."
2. "Thou holdest fast my name." They held the name of Christ faithfully above all other names.
3. "Thou hast not denied my faith." They had loyally stood by the name of Christ and their faith in Christ had not wavered even under the most adverse circumstances. In those fearful days...days like those of the persecution that arose about Stephen in Jerusalem...the faithful in Pergamos had not flinched.

THINGS AGAINST THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS Revelation 2:14, 15

1. "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." Three things said of Balaam:
 - (1) The error of Balaam. Jude 11
 - (2) The way of Balaam. 2 Peter 2:15
 - (3) The doctrine of Balaam. Revelation 2:14
2. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Verse 15
 - (1) Review the doctrine of the Nicolaitans from your study of it in lesson on the Ephesian church.
3. Satan's Seat was in Pergamos. Note: It is not known how Pergamos came to be regarded as Satan's throne or why.

When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.

A MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA... "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first."

Revelation 2:18-29

Lesson Four

THYATIRA

1. The circuit turns southwards from Pergamos to Thyatira which is located on the Lycus river very close to the Roman road between Pergamos and Sardis. In population, Thyatira was strongly Macedonian; and it is worthy of note that it is in the city of Philippi, a city of Macedonia, that Lydia of Thyatira is found by the Apostle Paul in his first journey there. See Acts 16:14, 15. Some ancient inscriptions mention the dyers for which Thyatira was so famous. It is thought that Lydia belonged to this guild. Acts 16:14.

THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

1. This fourth and therefore central epistle is the longest (12 verses) of the seven letters. Like Ephesus, the Thyatira church is both praised and blamed; but where Ephesus has gone back Thyatira has gone forward. In some respects the two churches are the exact opposite one of the other. In Ephesus there is much zeal for orthodoxy, but little love. In Thyatira there is much love, but a carelessness about false doctrine. The church in Thyatira is the growing church exposed to corruption of unsound doctrine.

THINGS IN FAVOR OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

1. Works; Charity which is love; Service and Faith, and they patience. In these great qualities there is set forth their love to God and to each other. Properly pious and benevolent service which, no doubt, included widows, orphans, and the poor in general. Study the following scriptures:
 - (1) James 1:27
 - (2) Galatians 5:6
 - (3) 1 Timothy 5:1-16
2. "That thy last works are more than the first."
 - (1) They not only had retained what they had received at first, but grew in grace and knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. This seems to be a rare thing among churches. As they grow larger in membership there is danger of resting in their former accomplishments and in the forms of worship. It requires a powerful revival to bring them to such a state that their last works shall be more than their first. -ADAM CLARKE

THINGS AGAINST THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

1. "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee." Revelation 2:20-29
 - (1) "...thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto animals." NOTE: Perhaps all that is indicated here is that the church in Thyatira is suffering from the tolerated presence of a baneful influence, as did Ahab, "Whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." See 1 Kings 21:1-29
2. "I gave her space to repent of her fornication." Rev. 2:21. That God is long suffering see 2 Peter 3:9.

"For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin."

READ AND STUDY CAREFULLY GOD'S WORD AND IT WILL BE A GREAT BLESSING TO YOU ALWAYS

Lesson Five

THE CITY OF SARDIS

1. Sardis is almost due south of Thyatira, on the road to Philadelphia. Sardis had been in turn Lydian, Persian, Greek, and Roman. Like its last Lydian king, Croesus, Sardis had been celebrated for its wealth. In A. D. 17 "twelve famous cities of Asia fell by an earthquake during one night. The calamity fell most heavily on the people of Sardis, and it brought to them the largest share of sympathy. The emperor, Tiberius, promised ten million sesterces, eighty-five thousand pounds, and remitted for five years all they paid to the exchequer. Sardis still retains its ancient name in the form of Sart. Today, travellers describe the appearance of the locality as that of complete solitude. The only mention of Sardis in the Bible is found in our lesson text, Revelation 3:1-6. Take your Bible map and locate Sardis and read about Sardis in your Bible dictionary.

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

1. The church in Sardis is one of the two which receive unmixed reproof. Smyrna and Philadelphia receive no blame. Sardis and Laodicea receive no praise.
2. The church in Sardis has no Nicolaitans, no Balaam, no Jezebel. However, in the church at Sardis there is found an evil that is as bad as the toleration of moral and doctrinal corruption. Scarcely out of its infancy, the church at Sardis has already the signs of an effete and moribund faith. The numbness of spiritual torpor is as hopeless as the toleration of moral and doctrinal corruption.
3. The address of Christ to this church, as recorded in Revelation 3:1-6, forcibly calls our attention to the consideration of three things:
 1. THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF MANY IN THE CHURCH
 - (1) "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."
 - (2) They had a reputation for being what they were not. Study the difference between Reputation and Character.
 - (3) The sight of death is bad enough, but garbed and decorated with the semblance of life is awful. See 1 Timothy 5:6.
 - (4) They were in a state of spiritual consumption. The symptoms of spiritual consumption are:
 - a. Spiritual weakness. 1 Corinthians 8:11
 - b. Morbid appetites. 1 Peter 2:1-3
 - c. False view of life. Romans 12:1, 2; James 1:26, 27
 11. THE EXCEPTIONAL CHARACTER OF THE FEW
 - (1) There were a few in Sardis who had not defiled their garments with the popular sins about them.
 - (2) In Sardis we have an example of goodness in the midst of sin and spiritual decay which teaches that goodness can exist under external circumstances not favorable to goodness.
 - (3) We note that true goodness here, as always, engages the attention of Christ.
 111. THAT CHRIST WILL CONFESS TO GOD THE NAMES OF THE FAITHFUL
 - (1) Christ called them to repentance but the call went unheeded.
 - (2) The name of the faithful will not be blotted out of the book of life.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA... "I have set before thee an open door,
and no man can shut it."

--Revelation 3:7-13--

Lesson Six

PHILADELPHIA

1. From Sardis we continue south-east about thirty miles to Philadelphia which is on the road to Laodicea. Philadelphia is located at the western edge of a district which was highly volcanic in character and therefore constantly suffered from earthquakes. Philadelphia was destroyed along with Sardis in the catastrophe of A. D. 17.
2. In Roman times Philadelphia was not equal to Ephesus or even Laodicea; and for law courts its citizens had to travel to Sardis. Philadelphia still continues on the same site, and perhaps within the same walls as of old. At the close of the fourteenth century it was the last Byzantine city to surrender to the Turks, and, when it did surrender, made better terms than any of the others. To this day it retains the privilege of free worship which is not allowed by the Turks in any other island city of Asia Minor. Its modern Turkish name is Allah Shehr, which means, "the city of God."

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

1. All we know of the church in Philadelphia is set down in Revelation 3:7-13, and in Revelation 1:11 where the other six churches of Asia Minor are mentioned also.
2. It is one of two of the churches which received letters without rebuke. Smyrna is the other one.
3. To this steadfast church Christ speaks his word of commendation and blessing, and promise.
4. To the church at Philadelphia Christ asserts his supreme power to shut and open at his will and declares that no man can withstand his work. Verse 7
From this letter to Philadelphia we gather the following:
 1. The Lord's distinct recognition of the church's fidelity. This recognition gives the details and particulars of service which may be suggested as follows:
 - (1) "Thou hast a little strength." This is an estimate of the church's ability.
 - (2) "Thou didst keep my word." Faithfulness to the truth. Faithfulness to the truth when others turned to error.
 - (3) "Thou didst not deny my name." This would indicate steadfastness in the hour of trial.
 2. The opening of enlarged spheres of usefulness. "I have set before thee an open door." Verse 8. See also 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12.
 3. Defence and help in the hour of trial. "I will also keep thee from the hour of trial." Verse 10
 4. Beyond lies the blessing and reward. These may be summed up as follows:
 - (1) The Permanent abode in the eternal temple of the Lord. Verse 12. Read also the last two chapters in Revelation.
 - (2) Recognition as the Lord's. "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God." Verse 12
 - (3) Some form of personal recognition. Read and study Luke 16:19-31.

On the plains of hesitation
Bleach the bones of countless millions
Who sat down at dawn of victory
Sat down to rest, and resting died.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA... "I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold; I would thou wert hot or cold."

-Revelation 3:14-19-

-Lesson Seven-

LAODICEA

1. It was a wealthy city in which this church had her home, and the city was large and beautiful also. Laodicea stood on one of the great Roman roads which led away to Damascus and Arabia. Hence there was a large stream of traffic continually flowing through it. As a result, its inhabitants became very rich. As a further evidence of their wealth, it is recorded how, when their city was almost destroyed by an earthquake in A. D. 17, they rebuilt it entirely at their own cost. A church was early formed in Laodicea and seems to have been one of considerable importance.
2. One of the Councils at which the canon of Scripture was determined was held in Laodicea in 361 A. D.

THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

1. We can have not doubt but that the church in Laodicea was once in a flourishing condition. The Laodicean church claimed to be rich but Christ said of them, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Revelation 3:17
2. We do not know for certain who established the church in Laodicea. We know that Epaphras was a near neighbor, Colossae being only six or eight miles distant from Laodicea; so it is likely that he "a faithful minister of Christ, and beloved fellow servant," as Paul calls him (Colossians 1:7; 4:12-13) had something to do with the planting of the church there.
3. The high praise which Paul gave to the Colossian church is to be regarded as given also to the church in Laodicea, which now, when John writes to it, is so sadly fallen. In Colossians 2:1-5; 4:13-16, Paul speaks of them and of the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. Since Paul wrote the Colossian-Laodicean letter (A. D. 64) thirty-two years are now passed and a sad change has come over the Laodiceans, and the result is this letter before us in Revelation 3:14-22. WE NOTE:

THE CHURCH'S STATE DESCRIBED

1. "Thou sayest, I am rich...Thou knowest not that thou art poor, and blind, and naked, thou miserable one."
 - (1) Spiritually poor...so much so that they were not aware of their true condition.
 - (2) They were ignorant...without knowledge as to their true condition.
 - (3) They were presumptuous...self deceived.
 - (4) They were attempting to serve God and mammon. See Matthew 6:24.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Revelation 3:15,16

THE LORD'S COUNSEL TO HIS DECEIVED CHURCH

1. Seek ye the true riches. "Buy of me gold tried in the fire." Buy without money and without price the true spiritual things.
2. Buy of me "white garments" the true spiritual virtues.
3. Buy also "eyesalve" the true spiritual illumination. They should carefully consider God's word, applying its teaching to themselves, till they could fully see their pitiable and sinful condition.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR. The record does not tell why messages were sent to just seven churches, nor why sent to the seven named. See and study carefully Revelation 2:1-29; 3:1-22.

-Lesson Eight-

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD INDICATED IN THESE LETTERS

1. These letters and their language clearly indicate the individual and personal responsibility of man to God. Each congregation received praise or rebuke, or both, just as each individual case required. Even the distinct classes in each congregation were pointed out and held to account for their peculiar sins. Two principles are verified in these letters. They are as follows:
(1) That "God is no respecter of persons." Acts 10:34
(2) That "each one shall give account of himself to God." Romans 14:12

EACH LETTER CONTAINS ONE OR MORE PROMISES ON THE CONDITION THAT THE INDIVIDUAL OVERCOME.

1. . . This certainly would teach that these rewards would be lost if one failed to overcome.
2. All the exhortations and warnings would be without meaning if such rewards could not be finally lost.
3. In these promises, which are conditional, we have the strongest possible argument that Christians may be finally lost; or, that the doctrine, "Once in grace, always in grace," as taught by the Baptists and others is not true.
4. In order that we may see the full force of the argument on the possibility of complete apostasy, the rewards that may be lost for failing to overcome are listed as follows:
 - (1) The privilege to "eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God." Revelation 2:7
 - (2) Failure to receive a "crown of life" and not to be "hurt of the second death." Revelation 2:10,11
 - (3) Failure to receive the "hidden Manna," "white stone," and "new name." Revelation 2:17
 - (4) Will fail to receive authority to rule over nations. Revelation 2:26, 27
 - (5) If he does not overcome he will not be "arrayed in white garments," and his name will be "blotted out of the book of life," and he will not "be confessed before God and the angels." Revelation 3:5
 - (6) If one does not overcome he will not be made a "Pillar in the temple of my God," and he will not have the names of God and Christ written upon him. Revelation 3:12
 - (7) If he does not overcome he will not be able to sit with Christ in his Throne. Revelation 3:21
 - (8) Considering the fact that all of these may be lost, how much more would one have to lose to be eternally lost? Nothing more. Read and study carefully 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 and Hebrews 6:1-8.