

September 10<sup>th</sup>: Revelation 1-3

## Chapter 1

The prologue from vs. 1-8 tells how this writing came to be. The Revelation is that Jesus Christ is Lord, this message was given to Jesus which was given to the angel which was given to John to give to his audience. John is identified as a slave of Jesus, addressing other slaves. Slaves were expected to be obedient to their Lord above all else. The question underlying this entire work is: will the slaves be obedient to Jesus as their Lord or to the Emperor as their Lord? "The time (kairos, God's time) is near" there is an urgency to this writing!

"Grace and peace" was a common way for Paul to begin his letters, but it was also what was conveyed from Emperor Domitian when deciding to spare someone's life.... Here, God is the true source of Grace and Peace.

Jesus Christ is described as the "faithful witness" –that is, the one who testifies about real reality- Witness/testify is the same original Greek word –martyr. Jesus was the original faithful witness who died for his faithfulness, addressing other faithful witnesses who may face death for their testimony to the truth. But, martyrs are not only those who died for their faith, but all Christians who speak publicly to their faith in Jesus Christ, and his victory over the chaos of this world. Martyrs are those who profess Jesus as Lord no matter what. The "seven spirits" is another way of saying "the perfect Holy Spirit."

Alpha and Omega, all things are encompassed by God's reality. Greek Mythology described Zeus and Athena as "who is, who was, and who is to come," again John's writing provides a Christian counterpoint as God is truly the alpha and omega.

Vs. 7 is reminiscent of Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10, describing the coming of the Son of Man/the Lord.

Vs. 9-20, John was on Patmos because he had been banished there for his Christian faith. Endurance would be better translated as "resistance." He already has been a martyr. He can relate to what his fellow martyrs are going through, and Jesus –the Son of Man- has a message for them! Jesus is described with imagery already employed in the books of Daniel and Zechariah to describe the cosmic Son of Man/Messiah/Lord. The Cosmic Christ is all-powerful! The 7 stars refers to Christ's perfect dominion over the heavens, and the 7 lampstands refers to Christ's perfect dominion over the earth (lamps are the earthly equivalent to stars). Another way of thinking about this symbolism is the spiritual reality (stars) vs. the physical reality (lampstands). The sword coming from the mouth may symbolize the judgment of God, as the Word of God could be both creative and destructive in biblical tradition. Christ holds the keys to death, therefore death was no longer a threat to those faithful martyrs, even when their faithfulness resulted in persecution. The ultimate power of a government is to kill you, but that power was no threat to followers of Jesus, for Jesus had the power to loose the chains of death.

## Chapter 2

Vs. 1-7, Each church has “angels” associated with it... these are not guardian angels, but rather heavenly representatives. **Ephesus** is THE major city of Asia Minor, 1000 years old at the time of Revelation. A major earthquake devastated the city in 17AD under Tiberius the city was rebuilt after the earthquake. As a result of this rebuilding, a distinctive roman architecture follows. Regional Roman governor lived in Ephesus. Major cultural center. One of the 3 greatest cities along with Antioch and Alexandria. Major port city, Aegean came right up to Ephesus at that time. There were 4 imperial temples, theater seated 25,000 (meant that 250,000 population), competed with Pergamum for one of the best libraries in the ancient world. Artemis was the major mother goddess/fertility goddess which housed her temple which was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesians are praised for their “endurance”, that is “resistance.” There is a tension in this letter to the Ephesians. They are praised for their faithful preservation of orthodoxy within the church, and for their hate of Nicolaitans (no one knows who they were, but it’s assumed they’re some kind of heretical minority), but they are chastised for having abandoned love of neighbor. To everyone who conquers (manages to love others while still preserving orthodoxy) God will grant entrance into the paradise of God (reminiscent of a return to Eden, contrasted with the Paradise of Artemis).

Vs. 8-11, **Smyrna**- Birthplace of Homer. Formed and Functioned around its excellent harbor. The population might have been around 100,000 in the first century. Polycarp and Ignatious are attached to Smyrna. Had temples honoring the roman senate and emperors wife. Vs 9. Poverty was literal here, the Church was on the bottom of the social ladder. The Church had a negative relationship with the Jewish population in Smyrna because they felt like they’d been betrayed. Jews had a special tax they had to pay which went to the Romans (temple tax after temple was destroyed), this allowed Jews not to worship the emperor and have their own established religion. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Jews ousted Christians from the synagogue and sold them out to the Romans, therefore Christians don’t have the protection that the empire had given to the Jews. Likely that some synagogue leaders reported Christians to the local magistrates. The reference to the devil is likely depicting local authorities who do harm to Christians. Prison is not the place of punishment in the Roman era, prison is where you’re held until you’re adjudicated. Imprisonment would have been where you were held until you complied. Faithful until death, the wreath of life (wreath is what the winners of an athletic competition receive, finishing the whole course, endurance). The first death is our literal, physical death. The second death is the circumstances for eternity.

-Vs. 12-17, **Pergamum**- Atalus III, king in 133 BC, he willed the whole area to the Romans because he acknowledged that that was where the future was going. Pergamum had the 1<sup>st</sup> imperial temple. Held the Altar of Zeus, which had Sacrifices going 24/7. Temples to Athena, Dionysys, Serapis. Pergamum was a provincial capital with a population of 125,000 people. It contained a library that housed over 200,000 books. It was home to a major Asklepion, which dated all the way back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. If you were too sick you were not allowed in the Asklepion because death was forbidden in the ancient hospitals. “Throne of Satan” –could refer to the altar of

Zeus, could refer to the imperial temple, the seat of government, or to Asklepiion. vs. 13, Antipas is one of 2 human beings named in Revelation, John and Antipas! Antipas has been martyred for his faithful testimony. Vs 14, eating idol food as a way of fitting in. Balaam from Numbers. Comparable to calling someone Hitler in today's language. Balaam is THE false prophet, Balaam gets Balak to have the Israelites commit sexual immorality with the pagan prophetesses. Eating sacrificial meat was a big issue, sacrifices in the altar of Zeus going 24/7. Meat would be used in ceremonies, banquets, and sold on the streets. Calls on them to repent. Greek says "I am coming to you quickly": better shape up quickly, because Jesus is coming whether you repent or not. vs. 17, White pebbles were used in several ways... If someone wanted to belong to a local trade guild, the guild members would decide whether they wanted to vote the person in. Each person would get a white stone and a black stone and put either a white or black stone in the box. The box would be opened and if there were more white stones than black, the person would be voted in (this is where the phrase "black balled" came from). Those who repent would get a white stone (an entrance ticket). A new name represents a changed person (if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation). - Vs. 18-29, **Thyatira**- Dealt with textiles and the dying industry. Lydia was from Thyatira (purple cloth). Apollo was the patron god of Thyatira. vs. 20, the church is praised for its faith, love, and service, BUT, sexual immorality may not be literal immorality, idolatry is imaged as sexual immorality. Her children are her disciples. Issue of cultural accommodation, the ones who do not acclimate themselves to the culture will not be burdened by divine judgment. Conquering includes fidelity to Jesus' words, participation in the messianic rule. Eschatological (end time) reversal where the Christians rule over the nations. Morning star is Venus, the symbol of sovereignty, applied to Christ.

### Chapter 3

-**Sardis**- King Croesus (the real king whom the Midas legend was based on) ruled the rich kingdom from Sardis, with gold in the hills. 60,000 population. Devastated in earthquake in 17AD, but rebuilt by Romans. Twice in the history of Sardis, it was captured because watchmen were not watching. Invaders scaled the mountains on the sly in the middle of the night. White clothing as opposed to soiled clothing (some form of sinfulness or cultural accommodation). White clothing is reminiscent of Baptism, eternal life, celebration/victory. Calls for fidelity. Will not have their names erased from the book of life. The truly faithful are registered citizens of God's nation. If you're a citizen of Rome, your name is in the registry. If someone is disloyal, their name is blotted out from the register. Church in Sardis is being called to awaken from their deadly condition, to return to their spiritual roots. Wake up! Strengthen! Obey! Repent! Right now, they're in a state of deadness in terms of their discipleship. Christ finds them guilty.

-**Philadelphia** endured a massive earthquake which wiped out the city in 17 AD. It was rebuilt with Roman help. Grapes, wine, and raisin are prominent crops here. Philadelphia had little social standing, was basically powerless according to the world's standards, yet they exude faithful enduring resistance. **vs 7** Revelation form of Keys of the Kingdom is the Keys of David. Christ has Authority for entrance to the

kingdom. “Synagogue of Satan” may refer to local Jews outing Christians. Flip of Isaiah ch 60: Who will come to worship at Mt Zion? The Nations! Imagery is flipped around in this passage and says that the Jews will come and worship before your feet (not worship you) because they will know that I love you. “Keeping from the hour of trial” means preserving and protecting you through the tribulations. We don’t have a rapture theology in revelation.

- vs 12 ironic juxtaposition with the well known geological instability of the region... the whole city had been decimated just a generation prior. Unshakable promise to be a pillar in the temple of my God.

-Buildings shake and fall, but the victorious one will never be shaken.

-In the ancient world you got public glory for donating money to the city (put up plaques of names of those who paid the bill). Vs.12 Christ is putting the inscription on us of the name of God and the name of the city of my God (foreshadowing ch. 21). Having God’s name on us, shows that we belong to God.

**-Laodicea** was a major terminus point for the East/West Road and North/South road. Mountains are on 2.5 sides of Laodicea. City gate dedicated to Domitian, Stadium dedicated to Vespasian. Some mountains nearby had snowcaps which melted and made cold water. 6mi away there are limestone cliffs on top of Hieropolis which came from hot water springs. Laodicea was the financial and spiritual center of that part of Asia. They are neither hot (like Hieropolis with hot springs) nor cold (like Colossae with snowcapped mountains). Laodicea was famous for its black wool production and its healing eye salve production. Ironic imagery throughout. They’re relying on the trappings of pagan spirituality rather than on their faith in Jesus to truly open their eyes. Vs. 14-17. Only time in the New Testament where Jesus is imaged as “the Amen”, Jesus is the verifier of oaths, the sealer of the deal. Jesus is the testifier, the faithful one. Is it Jesus identity or action? BOTH! Therefore, we’re expected to be the testifier and faithful ones!

-Problem is that the Laodiceans are lukewarm in their faith. They’ve acculturated themselves to the point that they’re pitiful. They’re an apathetic community that doesn’t know where they stand. They’re comfortable and complacent. Culturally prosperous while religiously bankrupt.

-Vs. 21, imagery of a bicelium, a two seated throne... big enough for the king and his heir. Christ’s experience, we will experience. We will have the same status as the sovereign one. “Jesus is standing at the door knocking” is a call of repentance, a call to return to your roots! Jesus has the key to heaven and hades, yet the Laodiceans have shut their lives to Jesus’ presence and expectations. If they open themselves to Jesus, Jesus will come dine with them (sign of restored, healthy relationship).