

Revelation's HOPE

Lesson 4: Letters to the 7 Churches

I. Christ's Letter to US

- Revelation 1

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet ¹¹ saying, What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea" (**Rev 1:10-11 ASV**).

1. Lord's day – more later but for now realize John is worshipping His Creator.
2. Voice of trumpet – one of those allusions→

- **Exodus 19**

¹⁶ And when morning came on the third day, there were thunders and flames and a thick cloud on the mountain, and a horn sounding very loud; and all the people in the tents were shaking with fear. ¹⁷ And Moses made the people come out of their tents and take their places before God; and they came to the foot of the mountain, ¹⁸ And all the mountain of Sinai was smoking, for the Lord had come down on it in fire . . .

1. Lord = YHWH / Jehovah (JESUS)→

- Exodus 19 (cont.)

". . . and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a great burning; and all the mountain was shaking. ¹⁹ And when the sound of the horn became louder and louder, Moses' words were answered by the voice of God. (**Exo 19:18-19, BBE**).

1. Horn = trumpet
2. Voice of God – the response of the prophet is to listen and do as God says.

- John does so→

- **Revelation 1**

. . . and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. ¹² And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; ¹³ and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.

II. Where are we in the Sanctuary?

- Priest when doing the daily ministry would minister at the altar and in the Holy Place (where candlesticks are)
- This is where we find Jesus with noteworthy garments on→

- **Revelation 1**

. . . and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. ¹² And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; ¹³ and in the midst of the candlesticks one like

unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.

III. Girdle

- Exodus 28 & 39 – priestly garments
- Leviticus 8 & 16 – priestly garments
- 2 Samuel 18:11 – warrior / hero's belt
- Daniel 7

¹³ I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. (**Dan 7:13**, ASV)

- Allusion to Hebrew Scriptures
- Kingly authority given to Him

“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (**Dan 7:14**, ASV).

- What does He look like in Daniel?
- Son of Man

⁵ I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with pure gold of Uphaz: ⁶ his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as flaming torches, and his arms and his feet like unto burnished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. . .

IV. Daniel in Comparison to Revelation 1 →

Daniel and Revelation	
Daniel 7 & 10	Revelation 1, 19
• Girdle of gold	• Girdle of Gold
• Body of beryl	• Linen garment to feet
• Face of lightning	• White hair / face like sun
• Eyes as torches	• Eyes as flames of fire
• Arms and feet like burnished brass	• Feet burnished brass
• Voice of multitude	• Voice like many waters (17:15 = multitudes)
• “Son of man” who can approach the throne.	• “son of man”
• Kingly authority given	• Kingly authority (Rev. 19)
• Daniel falls at His feet	• Stars / Lampstand / Sword
	• John falls at His feet

V. Back to Revelation 1

¹⁴ “And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; ¹⁵ and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. ¹⁶ And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength”.

- Conclude→ Priestly Garments with Kingly authority = GRACE BEING SUPPLIED BY JESUS TO HIS CHURCH!

VI. More from Revelation 1

¹⁷ “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter. . .”

- Fear not – words of Jesus
- More on death later
- What do these symbols mean?
- Important principle: **let Scripture interpret itself.**
- Look in chapter, Book of Revelation, Other writings by John, The rest of Scripture
- What are the stars and candlesticks?

Revelation 1

²⁰ “the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches” (**Rev 1:1**, ASV).

- Angel / messenger / envoy: human or heavenly
- Candlesticks = churches. Lamp lit by Jesus!
- Messages to the Churches are for them and for us! “Which are. . .shall come”.

Jesus to the 7 Churches (Paulien)

<p>1) 2:1 Seven stars 1:16,20 Among the lampstands 1:13</p>	<p>He presents Himself to each church in a unique way.</p>
<p>2) 2:8 First and last 1:17 Died and came to life 1:18</p>	<p>He respects the different churches and their unique needs.</p>
<p>3) 2:12 Sharp double-edged sword 1:16</p>	<p>He meets each church where they are!</p>
<p>4) 2:18 Son of God 1:6 Eyes like blazing fire 1:14 Feet like burnished bronze 1:15</p>	<p>[Jon Paulien, Spring 2005 @ Andrews University]</p>
<p>5) 3:1 Holds the seven Spirits of God 1:4 Holds the seven stars 1:16,20</p>	
<p>6) 3:7 Holy and true ? (6:10, cf. 3:14) The holder of keys 1:18</p>	
<p>7) 3:14 Faithful and true witness 1:5; 3:7 Ruler of God's creation ? (1:5-- prototokos = archon)</p>	

VII. A Look at the 7 Churches

A. Ephesus

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden

candlesticks: ² I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false. . . (Rev. 2:1-2, ASV).

1. Angel – messenger / envoy. Matthew 28
2. Apostles = tells us this is during 1st Century

B. More for Ephesus

³ and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. ⁵ Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. ⁶ But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (verses 3-7).

1. Patience = ὑπομονή / “stand firm” in persecution→
2. Jesus had Said

¹⁶ “But ye shall be delivered up even by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. ¹⁷ And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. ¹⁸ And not a hair of your head shall perish. ¹⁹ In your patience ye shall win your souls” (Luk 21:15-19, ASV).

C. A problem in Ephesus

³ and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. ⁵ Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. ⁶ But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (verses 3-7).

1. Repent – change mind/ go back. Nicolaitans→
2. Nicolaitans

“Νικολαιτου, ὁ, a follower of Nicolaus. . . Nicolaitan: plural, Rev. 2:6,15 -- a name which. . . refers symbolically to the same persons who in Rev. 2:14 are charged with holding τὴν διδασχὴν Βαλαάμ. . . casting a stumblingblock before the church of God (Num. 24:1-3) by upholding the liberty of eating things sacrificed unto idols as well as of committing fornication. . .” (Thayer ‘s Greek Lexicon, Nikolaitou).

D. Message to Ephesus Literal or Symbolic→

¹⁹ Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter. . .

- **Rev 3:18, cf. 16:15** – one church has what is said to them echoed right before the Coming!
- Revelation 1:1: signify = symbolic, and remember “things” which must soon come to pass? Daniel 2 is an anchor point for Revelation. We should expect a continuation of the outline Daniel provided = goes from the Iron legs onward to the coming King!
- Revelation 12 = history of God’s people from before Christ’s time to the End.
- Judgment language in Laodicea = END →
- Spirit and Bride say “come” in Revelation 22 = more than 7 churches will be audience.

- Unbelievers will have a chance to hear = Gospel and then END (Matt. 28).
- **Possible time periods beginning with Ephesus in the 1st Century**→



VIII. Smyrna - Persecution

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again: ⁹ I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they art not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. . .

- 10 Days
- **Numbers 14:34** – days can be symbolic for years; **Ezekiel 4:4-6** says the same.
- Persecution after the Apostolic times increased
- Diocletian ruled as emperor of Rome from 284 to 305 AD. During his reign “A persecution of Christians began during Diocletian’s reign in 303, which was aimed at destroying church buildings and copies of the New Testament Scriptures” (Illumina, “Diocletian”).
- This persecution lasted approximately **10 years**.
- Imagine suffering for your faith→

IX. Pergamum - Union

¹² and to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. . . “

- Satan’s throne = he appears to be ruling / Zeus worship→
- “City” does not occur in Greek.
- Antipas – Christian witness/martyr in Pergamum.
- Under Eumenes (197-159 BC), Pergamum attained the height of its power and glory. He expanded the library to 200,000 volumes, almost rivaling the great one at Alexandria. He constructed the altar of Zeus, which stood on a hill 800 feet

(243.8 meters) above the city and could be seen for miles. It is tempting to imagine this altar as the place “where Satan’s throne is” (Revelation 2:13), especially since Pergamum was the chief center of worship for four of the greatest pagan gods. . . gods-Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius. However, it may be that Revelation is referring to the fact that Pergamum was the center of emperor worship in Asia at that time” (Illumina, Pergamos).

- Whether Zeus or Emperor – the worship of a being other than God shows that there would be the temptation to unite with pagan practices.
- This is why Pergamum can aptly represent a period of Union →

X. Pergamum - Union

¹⁴ “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. ¹⁵ So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. ¹⁶ Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. . .”

- Fornication – spiritual/physical = not faithful to God
- ¹⁷ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it” (**Rev 2:12-17**, ASV).
- Manna stored in the MHP / ark of Covenant
- New name = reminiscent of Jacob / Israel = Reformation possible.
- More later on this dark period of Christian history.

XI. Thyatira – Medieval

¹⁸ And to the angel of the church in Thyatira say: These things says the Son of God, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and his feet like polished brass: ¹⁹ I have knowledge of your works, and your love and faith and help and strength in trouble, and that your last works are more than the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you let the woman Jezebel say she is a prophet and give false teaching, making my servants go after the desires of the flesh and take food offered to false gods. . .

²¹ And I gave her time for a change of heart, but she has no mind to give up her unclean ways. ²² See, I will put her into a bed, and those who make themselves unclean with her, into great trouble, if they go on with her works. ²³ And I will put her children to death; and all the churches will see that I am he who makes search into the secret thoughts and hearts of men: and I will give to every one of you the reward of your works. . .

- Eventually will judge “her” = apostate Church(es)
- But Thyatira shows signs of one more group – Reformation could happen
- ²⁴ But to you I say, to the rest in Thyatira, even to those who have not this teaching, and have no knowledge of the secrets of Satan, as they say; I put on you no other weight. ²⁵ But what you have, keep safe till I come. . .
- Rest – remnant / those remaining (**same as in 12:17**)
- Secrets – deep sleep just before dawn. Below the surface of the shallow water. Knowledge out of reach or forbidden (**Genesis 3:5**)

- Teaching – didaskalos = opposite of Christ’s teachings. False teaching came into the Church.
- Weight – to come back from such darkness would be as far as some would be able to handle. More truth would have to be restored later. FAITHFUL PEOPLE REMAINED→
- ²⁶ He who overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him I will give rule over the nations, ²⁷ And he will be ruling them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of the potter they will be broken, even as I have power from my Father; ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has ears, let him give ear to what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:18-29, BBE).
- Jesus is talking and says the faithful will rule the nations with a rod of iron just as He does.

XII. Sardis - Orthodoxy

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. ² Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. . .

- Christians in name only but lacking the power. They tied themselves to their teachers rather than to the Teacher. Their buildings too→
- ³ Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. ⁴ But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. . .” (Revelation 3:1-4).
- Remember & Repent – same as Ephesus. They need to have a monument that God has led them so far and will KEEP on leading. Hence, they may have stopped in their pursuit of knowing Him.
- Few names – always a group that keeps following. This prepares the way for the next phase of Christian history.

XIII. Philadelphia – World Mission

“This city was founded about 140 BC by Attalus II of the city of Pergamum. Attalus II was also known as “Philadelphus”; the name of the city was derived from this royal nickname. He intended that it would serve as a center for the spread of Greek culture throughout the region, especially to the people of Phrygia. Situated on a fertile plain, it was rich with vineyards and wine production” (Ilumina, “Philadelphia”).

- Well situated for a church to take the gospel to the Roman world.
- ⁷ “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth: ⁸ I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. . .”
- Root of David = humanity. Jesus has access to ALL humanity. What is His desire?
- Hebrew Scriptures

“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (**Isa 22:22**, ASV).

- Context? Destruction of Jerusalem and the promise of a coming ruler:
- More from Hebrew Scriptures

²⁰ "Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah ²¹ And I will clothe him with your tunic, And tie your sash securely about him, I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. . . (**Isaiah 22:20-22** NAS)

- Eliakim: Ruler from Davidic line
- Key of David: “This may refer to a literal insignia worn by the chief administrator. Even so, it would still symbolize the administrator's authority to grant or exclude access to the king. See J. N. Oswalt, *Isaiah* [NICOT]” (NET BIBLE, Isaiah 22:22).
- Key of David = rulership and authority given. Jesus is claiming this. Where else do we see this?
- Open door – access to the King.
- Eliakim’s Reign ends

²³ "And I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house. ²⁴ "So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. ²⁵ "In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken." (**Isa 22:23-25** NAS)

- David Ruler’s Reign Never Ends!
“And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (**Mat 28:18-20** ASV).

- Church in Philadelphia would appear weak but have ALL power! Open Door→
- Paul talks of an open door of MISSIONS
“Continue stedfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving; ³ withal praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds; ⁴ that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (**Col 4:2-4** ASV).
- **Revelation 3:20** – letting Jesus in the door of the CHURCH!
- Philadelphia represents a period of time where Christians can begin to freely speak of Christ. However, it is not without challenges.
- Promise to the church of Philadelphia – World Mission

⁹ Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. ¹⁰ Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. ¹¹ I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. . . (**Rev. 2:9-11**)

XIV. After Reformation

- Christianity began to spread like wildfire.
- Bible societies developed (Tyndale, etc)
- Awakenings began and TRUE Christianity was spread everywhere (John Edwards to North America; Moravians 1732 onward; 1780 – William Carey, etc)
- One easily accessible summary→
- A door was opened that no man could shut.

“After the Reformation, for nearly a hundred years, occupied by their struggle with the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches were not missionary-sending churches. But in the centuries that followed, the Protestant churches began sending missionaries in increasing numbers, spreading the proclamation of the Christian message to previously unreached people”
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mission_\(Christianity\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mission_(Christianity))).

- Open because of receptivity, printing and travel.
“This city was founded about 140 BC by Attalus II of the city of Pergamum. Attalus II was also known as “Philadelphus”; the name of the city was derived from this royal nickname. He intended that it would serve as a center for the spread of Greek culture throughout the region, especially to the people of Phrygia. Situated on a fertile plain, it was rich with vineyards and wine production” (Illumina, “Philadelphia”).
- Well situated for a church to take the gospel to the Roman world and aptly describing the time after the Reformation.

XV. Laodicea: Message to Us

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see” (**Rev 3:18** ASV).

- Some have noted parallels between this and Revelation 16:15 (Paulien)→
“(Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame)” (**Rev 16:15** ASV).
- If Jesus is not the center of our worship, then we can be swept into deception by demon spirits and found naked!
- Garments of Jesus or Babylon!
- What does the Church need? To see Jesus!

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (**Rev 1:1** ASV).

- Revelation: apocalypse. “Lay open”. Daniel’s book was closed, Revelation is open and reveals SOMEONE!

XVI. Personal Letter

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (**Rev 1:1** ASV).

- Of Jesus Christ: about / from / belonging to.
- God → Jesus → Angel → John → Churches → US

- We NEED a proper understanding of the book of Revelation to SEE Jesus personally!
- He stands and knocks – will we “see” and let Him in?

Additional Notes for the 7 Churches

I. We find ourselves at the end of time when the message to Laodicea is given to the Church. Why? Because JUDGMENT is the focus for Laodicea. We will learn more later but for now note the progression.

A. Sanctuary Progression

1. 7 churches = HP. Focus: Primarily Grace w/ Lao judgment
 2. 7 Seals = Ark / Throne MHP. Focus: Grace / Judgment
 3. 7 Trumpets = MHP. Focus: Grace / Judgment
 4. 7 Plagues = out of MHP. Focus: Grace / Judgment
- 7 Shouts = source is MHP, receptor is Earth. Focus: Grace / Judgment
New Jerusalem: Grace

B. Priest during Sanctuary Progression

1. Priest moves from Holy to Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement.
2. Grace is still available through the daily (Tamid) sacrifice at evening and morning. Also through the Lord's goat. However, it is a clear transition in Revelation →
3. After the 7 Churches, we move into grace mingled with judgment as Earth's history wraps up.
4. We need to remember this as Revelation progresses!