

ADDRESSES ON THE EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

BY

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INTRODUCTION

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, and the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

The wonder of the word of God, the truth and teaching that it contains, and the commitment we are to make and the action we are to take in our lives. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants.” The first chapter of the Revelation sets out the pattern and the divisions of the balance of this book. Verse 19-20, “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter (after these). 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 which thou sawest are the seven churches.” The core divisions in this book are: The things which thou hast seen; The things that are; The things which shall be hereafter. Chapter one tells us of the things that John saw. The mystery of the unveiling unfolds and reveals to the initiated, to those who the Lord has called to be specially his and who have by faith accepted Jesus Christ as their saviour and Lord. If we pass on to Chapter four and onwards we see the things that shall be after the things described in chapters two and three as, “the things that are.” The seven epistles in these two chapters were sent to seven churches that existed in history in cities of Asia Minor. For some they have no significance and interest other than as historical accounts. A blessing is promised to all that hear and read the Revelation so we do well if we prayerfully study the messages to the seven churches and the sequence in which they are given. It will be found that these epistles present a prophetic history of the entire age of grace. When other scriptures are examined and scripture is compared with scripture this becomes increasingly evident. There are parallels between the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 and with the seven periods of Judges or Saviours of Israel; there are parallels between the seven churches and the seven kings of Judah and Israel; there are parallels between the seven churches and the seven parables in Matthew 13. Jesus was

asked, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive: For this peoples’ heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desire to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not have not heard them. Here ye therefore...” As man moves throughout history and makes changes he never seems to improve things. The charts have a downward slope because men mar and spoil. May we each, “hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”.

The church at Ephesus is representative of the church in all its initial wholeness and potential power and blessedness. This is comparable to the epistle to the Ephesians. It shows the aspect of a church at its best in a favourable position and yet there was one thing the Lord identifies they lacked. They had become complacent, and their fervour and their devotion to the Lord had been allowed to wane. The Lord said unto them, “thou hast left thy first love.” This church is a personal example for each of us. They were called upon to remember from where they had fallen and to repent. They were also called upon to do the first works again. To be reactivated to once more be restored in zealous activity and work for the Lord or lose there place of testimony. They were commended as many of these churches are for certain things they did, commended for not tolerating certain things and hating certain things. Intolerance is decried in our day and yet the Lord commended Ephesus for it. They did not allow and permit evil ones, false apostles or the deeds of the Nicolaitanes. The deeds of the Nicolaitanes were hated by the Lord. The word “Nikao” means to conquer, and “Laos” means the people. It is conquering and ruling over the people and this is found in the distinction between clergy and laity. Why is this distinction hated? This distinction between men, sets up mediators in place or perhaps alongside of the one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Believers belong to the Lord not to any man appointed ruler or leader. The believer is God’s portion, part of his flock, each one belongs to him. Ephesus parallels the parable of the sower. The good seed sown represents the word of God, and the field represents the world. Ephesus also corresponds to Israel under Joshua as their leader and saviour and to the times of the Kings David and Solomon.

Smyrna corresponds and parallels with the parable of the wheat and the tares when the enemy, Satan plants his counterfeits. It also corresponds with the splitting of Israel into two kingdoms Judah and Israel. Smyrna suffered much and endured great persecution and tribulation. There is no record of criticism or rebuke to this church. The Lord only had words of encouragement for those in the midst of suffering. He presented himself to them as the one who is dead and is alive again and he promised to the overcomer the crown of life and says they would not be hurt by the second death. The epistle is a

message of sympathy, understanding and comfort, consolation and encouragement to a church torn by persecution at its height. This persecution was Satan's work of opposition to the work of God. There were those who sought to reimpose or retain aspects of the Old Testament order of Judaism with its keeping of the law and with its earthly priesthood. These things were described as blasphemous. Why? Because effectively what they were saying and implying was that Christ's work on the cross was insufficient and incomplete. Judaism and Nicolaitanism feed upon one another and reinforce one another combining to produce a highly structured visible order seen and recognized today in modern Christendom.

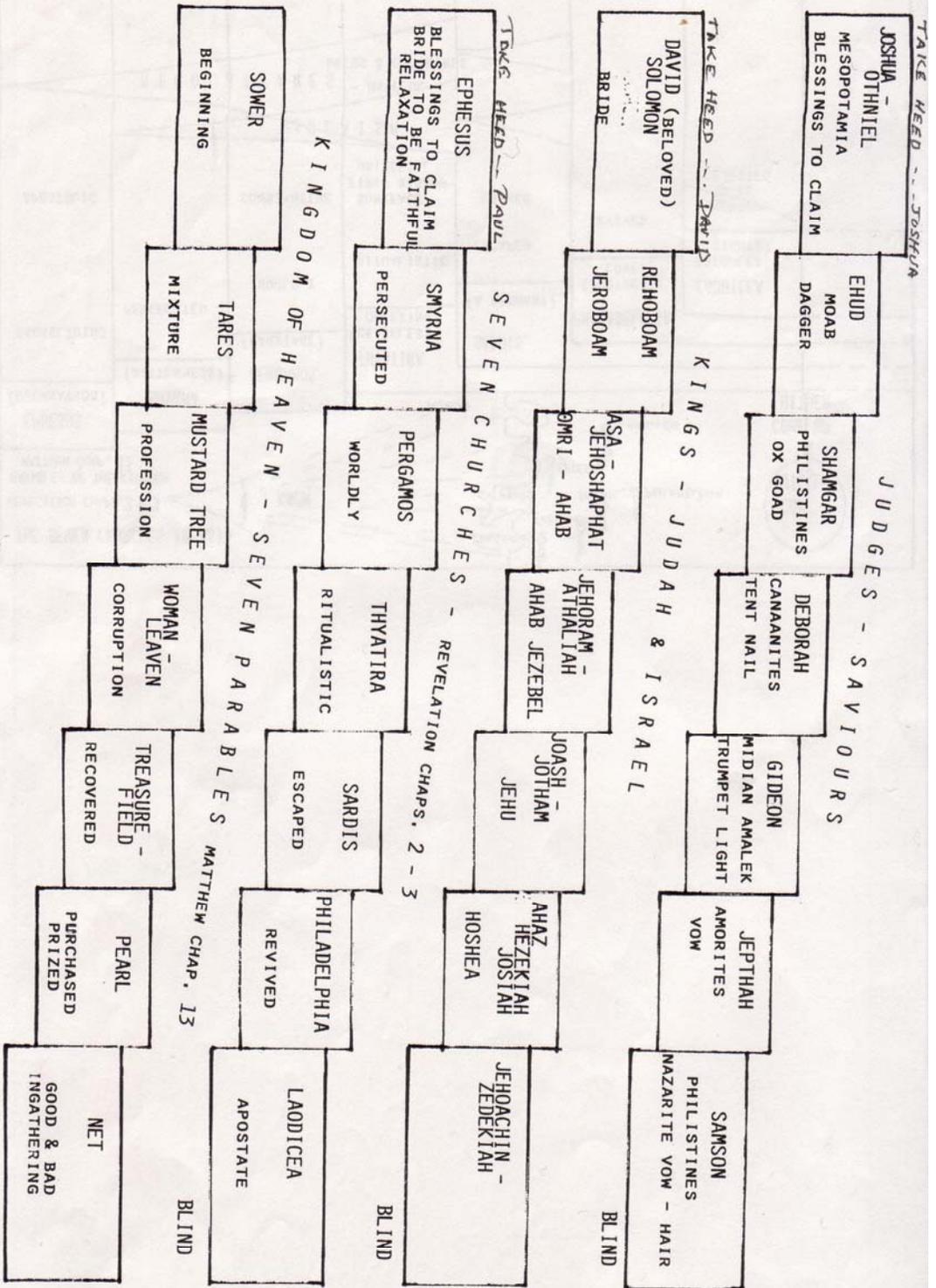
Pergamos means an adulterous marriage. Here we have brought before us the marriage of the church and the world. A marriage promoted and sponsored by Constantine in the early 3rd century. This church was commended for some still held fast the Lord's name; some were not denying the faith. But there were among them those who were described as dwelling at Satan's seat, who were involved with worldly worship, idolatry not the worship of the Lord, but of Satan. There were false teachers. False worship, wrong doctrine, wrong relationships with the unsaved collectively described as fornication. They also had the wrong order of service through the imposition of a clerical order and system. The Lord was presented and seen here as the possessor of the two edge sword, and as the one who is able and would supply his hidden manna. The answer to all that is wrong and all that is false is to turn to the Lord and to his word. We can summarise: first there is the exhortation and the responsibility for each of us to keep that first love for the Lord. Retain it, cultivate it, nurture it, and let it be seen in our devotion to him. Second, be zealous, enthusiastic and energetic in keeping his word and the faith. Third we should be active, vigilant and watchful of the enemy. If we sleep we will be easy prey for his attacks. Fourth, shun and avoid anything which embodies the principles and practices of the three things presented in these first three churches: Judaism, substituting Old Testament shadows for the substance and reality given in the New Testament; Nicolaitanism, the introduction of a clerical order amongst God's people; Baalism, the practice of worldly mixing entering in from the world around. Be ever watchful against these things, being introduced for unjudged they will spoil the witness and testimony we have for the Lord. The Old Testament says, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines." To be fruitful, we must be rid of these little foxes.

The message to the 7 churches gives the prophetic history of the entire church age. The age we are still in now rapidly drawing to a close. The aspects and the characteristics of the last four churches are all concurrent and in existence until the time of the Lord's coming for his own. In Thyatira, the ritualistic aspects of Christendom; In Sardis, those seeking to escape from the ritualism but stopping short and dead; In Philadelphia, meaning brotherly love, a faithful remnant not rebuked or corrected only encouraged; and in Laodicea, the blindness of the professing church at the end of the church age. Backsliding, worldly mixing, ritualism, the introduction of men's arrangements to compensate for failure, disobedience of the Lord's word and denial of His Name all culminate in Laodicea: a lukewarm and blinded church. There is a call particularly in these last four churches to the overcomer to consider where they actually stand. What is the most appropriate or apt description of ourselves as individuals and the fellowship

where we gather? The word of the Lord exhorts us to consider our personal position, for us each to hear and obey His call.

With hindsight we can clearly see the parallels that have existed as history has unfolded. Parallels not just confined to the Seven Churches, but they are found in the period of the Judges, and in the chronological history of the Kings of Judah and Israel. It is too much of a coincidence for these parallels and correspondences in different periods of history to be just that. In them we see God unfolding his eternal purposes. He is the standard and it is high for He is: Holy, Faithful and True. And man, through his failure, departure and disobedience starts a downward journey until the time comes when the Lord whose purposes cannot be withstood intervenes. He called a halt to the period of the Judges, as he called a halt to the period of the Kings, just as he will to the period of the church age.

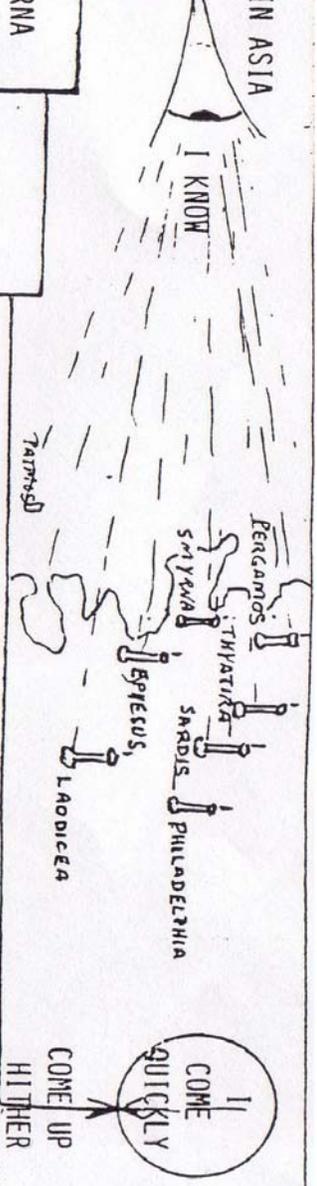
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THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA

REVELATION CHAPS. 2 & 3
 PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM
 MATTHEW CHAP. 13

EPHESUS (RELAXATION)	SHYRNA (BITTERNESS)	PERGAMOS (MARRIAGE)	THYATIRA (CEASELESS OFFERING)	SARDIS (A REMNANT)	PHILADELPHIA (BROTHERLY LOVE)	LAODICEA (PEOPLES' RIGHTS)
BACKSLIDING	PERSECUTED	WORLDLY	RITUALISTIC	ESCAPED	REVIVED	LUKEMARX TO BE REJECTED
APOSTOLIC	CONSTANTINE	BONIFACE FIRST BISHOP- UNIVERSAL	LUTHER			
AD 33 - 100 SOWER	AD 100 - 316 TARES	AD 316 - 606 MUSTARD TREE	AD 606 - 1520 WOMAN-LEAVEN	AD 1520 - 1750 HID TREASURE	AD 1750 - 1900 PEARL	AD 1900 - ? NET
NICOLAITANES DEEDS & DOCTRINES		LUDAIISM				
		HATEFUL				



THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA MINOR - REVELATION CHS 2 & 3

Reference & CHURCH -meaning	Condition & Dates	Presentation of the Lord	Observations & Commendations " I know "	Rebukes "Somewhat against thee "	Exhortations & Warnings	Promises to Overcomer
Ch 2 V 1-7 in EPHEBUS Desired	Backsliding AD 52 - 161	Holder of 7 stars Walker in midst of 7 golden candlesticks	Works Labour Patience Intolerance of evil ones Tried false apostles Fainted not Hated deeds of Nicolaitanes - conquerors of the people Lord also hates	Left first love	Remember former position/ condition Repent & Return Do firstworks (Re-activate) Removal of candlestick	Eat of the Tree of Life in midst of Paradise of God
Ch 2 V 8-11 in SMYRNA Myrrh - bitterness	Persecuted AD 161-313	The First & the Last He who was Dead - now alive	Works Tribulation Apparent poverty but Really rich. had Blaspheming False Jews - synagogue of Satan		Fear not suffering Devil will cast some into prison Tribulation 10 days Be faithful unto death	Crown of Life Not hurt of Second Death
Ch 2 V 12-17 in PERGAMOS Adulterous marriage	Licentious Constantine AD 311-606	Possessor of Two edged Sword	Works Dwelling at Satan's Seat Holding fast His name Not denied faith in face of martyrdom	Tolerate doctrine of Baalim Wrong teaching " worship " relationship Tolerate doctrine of Nicolaitanes Wrong order - Hated by Lord	Repent I come quickly to fight them(not you) with sword of my mouth	Eat of hidden manna. White stone with New Name
Ch 2 V 18-29 in THYATIRA Ceaseless offering (dung hill cesspool)	Lax AD 606-1500	Son of God Eyes as flame of fire Feet like fine brass Searcher of reins & hearts	Works Charity(love) Service Faith Patience Extra works	Tolerated Jezebel self appointed prophetess to teach & to seduce to fornication idolatry She remains unrepentent with adulterers to tribulation a warning	Lord says to faithful no burden but Hold fast what ye have till I come	Power over nations Rule with rod of iron Nations broken & subjected The morning star arises

THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA MINOR - REVELATION CHs 2 & 3 (Cont.)

Reference & CHURCH -meaning	Condition & Dates	Presentation of the Lord	Observations & Commendations " I know "	Rebukes "Somewhat against thee "	Exhortations & Warnings	Promises to Overcomer
Ch 3 V 1-6 in SARDIS Escaped, delivered, renewed	Dead Martin Luther AD 1517 AD 1500--	Possessor of 7 Spirits of God & 7 stars	Works Reputedly alive but Really dead Few undefiled even still	Works imperfect (not complete) before God	Be watchful Strengthen things remaining & ready to die Remember how received & heard Hold fast Repent Watch or I'll come as unexpected thief	Undefiled worthy to walk with Him arrayed in white Name preserved in book of life & confessed before Father & angels
Ch 3 V 7-13 in PHILADELPHIA Brotherly love	Favoured/ Blessed AD 1840--	He that is Holy is True has key of David openeth & shutteth despite man	Works Little strength Kept His word Not denied His name Kept word of His patience Centred on Lord		Open door To be worshipped by false Jews of synagogue of Satan Loved of Lord Hold fast what you have	Kept from hour of temptation to try all earth dwellers I come quickly Crown Pillar in temple of God Go no more out God's name written & God's city's name & Lord's new name
Ch 3 V 14-22 in LAODICEA Justice for the people	Lukewarm/ Rejected Most of this century	The Amen Faithful & true witness Beginning of creation of God One shut out	Works - not cold nor hot Whole heartedness preferred Imagined riches, possessions, self-sufficiency Really wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked Self-centred	Rejected Loved ones rebuked & chastened Buy of Lord tried gold eyesalve white raiment	Be zealous Repent Hear Him Admit Him Host to Him Eat with Him as guest	Sit with Him on His throne

EPHESUS

God delights in saying to us again, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” Whatever we do as we read through this book and whatever we think about what men do, remember, the book of Revelation presents Jesus Christ in relation to: the church, to the world, and to the new Jerusalem because “the Lamb is the light thereof.” The Lamb is the wonderful title given to the Lord twenty eight times in this book. God delights to bring his beloved son before us. He is the Lamb of God’s providing, the answer to Isaac’s cry echoed over the ages, “Where is the lamb?” Abraham answered, “God Himself will provide a lamb for a burnt offering”, and John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God.”

Read Revelation 1:4 to 2:7

You will notice in the chart that each of the three periods ends in blindness. Among the Judges it begins with blessing and in Samson ends in blindness. In the period of the Kings, stage-by-stage we move through the history of the people of God until we come to Zedekiah. Babylon claims him and he is blinded. The history of the churches ends with the Lord telling Laodicea, “Thou art... blind.” What an awful outcome shared in common by these three periods of history. All are linked because the principles of departure from the Lord are the same, and so to, the principles of restoration. In the letter to Ephesus the principles of restoration are presented. They are: REMEMBER, REPENT and RETURN.

The Lord always calls his own people back to himself. Joshua was called to lead the people of God into their inheritance. God had brought them out of Egypt, the place of darkness. He had told them of the land to which he was bringing them and he said, “I have begun to give.... begin to possess.” There was before them a land to be claimed just as there are fellow believers, things for us to claim. These are set forth in the book of Ephesians. The church at Ephesus was the recipient of that book that tells of the fullness of the blessings we have in Christ. We are now blessed “with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.” Never believe Satan’s lie that we are bankrupt. We were, but no more. The blessings are there for us to claim. In Joshua’s day the people were to claim what God had said was theirs already. All that was required was for them to place their foot on what God had given them, but they failed to possess what was promised them. Again and again in the book of Judges we read the sad lament that they did not drive out the inhabitants, the different nations in the land. Not only this, these nations became welcomed neighbours, they dwelt among them and exchanged their children in marriage. For their disobedience God brought upon them, seven times in all, captivities, bondage, slavery until they cried to him for deliverance. God responded and raised up Judges, saviours and deliverers.

Have you ever felt the need to cry to the Lord for deliverance from the pressures of the world today? He allows his people to experience the pressures of bondage, the robbery of the world so we might turn back to him and claim his deliverance. When we call upon the saviour God has raised up, we find the deliverance he has won for us. In the message to each of the seven churches there is always a call to the overcomer. In John’s first Epistle we read, “I have written unto you, father’s because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” The key to the overcomers’ strength is that the word of God abides in them. The overcomer is one who has been

gripped by the word of God and has been made strong by the word of the Lord. In each of the seven Judges or Saviours raised up to deliver the people, a symbol of the word of God is seen. Othniel's name means, the lion of God. He was truly an overcomer. He was married to the daughter of Caleb the wholehearted one. Caleb could stand and say, "I wholly followed the Lord my God" and the Lord confirms this four other times in his word. Othniel was raised up to deliver Israel from the king of Mesopotamia. He came from a city called Debir, which means "the word". Ehud used the two edged dagger and slew the king to deliver the people at Gilgal. The word of God is a two edged sword. Shamgar delivered Israel with the Ox goad. "The words of the wise are as goads", the Bible says. We need the goad and we need the nail. The nail was also used to deliver the Lord's people. The word of God gives us stability, like the nail. The word of God fastens us so we can stand fast for him, while the goad is to get us going in the way of the Lord. There is always deliverance by the word of the Lord. These deliverers inspired the people to claim more of Gods inheritance. Fellow Christians, boredom, laziness, lethargy in spiritual things, and the relaxation found in Ephesus is the enemy of spiritual blessing in our lives. There are many blessings for us to claim from the Lord. "Let us go on to perfection" is what the word says. We need to hear what the Lord says and to respond. King David's son Solomon wrote a book called the Song of Solomon about the bride. Alas, the man who could write so beautifully about the relationship of the Lord to his church was himself unfaithful and he failed in the very thing that he sets before us. In the next stage of the Kings the kingdom is divided. While men slept the enemy sowed tares. The meaning of the word Ephesus especially has the thought of relaxation. Ephesus was an exemplary church. The Lord commends seven features.

1. "I know thy works". He tells each of the seven churches this. He has perfect knowledge. He is one from whom we can never hide. Adam found what man has discovered ever since, sin causes us to try and hide from God, "but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him". Sin confessed and dealt with brings us back into the Lords blessing.
2. "I know ... thy labour". We focus on the fact that this church had left their first love but let us measure ourselves and be humbled. The Lord speaks of their labour. The word here is to labour until exhaustion. Have we done this?
3. "I know... thy patience", their endurance, their steadfastness, for they stayed put.
4. They are commended for their refusal to tolerate evil. What a rebuke to us in this day when so much evil doctrine is tolerated among the Lords people.
5. Commendation is also given because "they tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars"
6. Further commendation is given, because they have "borne and hast patience and for my names sake has laboured"
7. Finally, the Lord commends them because they have not fainted. Exhausted yet not wearied, however hard the trials they had kept on going.

Nevertheless he says I have against thee (somewhat is not in the original). He who loves without measure and without end cannot tolerate anything less than wholehearted love to himself. He identifies and judges that which is wrong. I have against thee thou hast left, departed from thy first love. They are divorced from their lover, their bridegroom. Whatever there is of obedience and of work for him does not satisfy when love to him is

missing and wanting. If we went home and found everything prepared and ready but no welcome, how would we feel? Empty. What does the Lord find in our hearts? How cold our love for him compared with his love for us. "Having loved his own...he loved them unto the end." "The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." And he has to say, "Thou hast left thy first love." Then he warns, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." Remember. There are times when the backward look is not right, "forgetting those things which are behind." But here the Lord calls upon us to look back into the past and remember when we were first blessed with salvation. Remember again our gratitude, our joy, knowing for the first time of his love toward us, and the blessing of his salvation. Next he says, repent. In the book, "Jungle Doctor's Fables", the monkey cuts the branch standing on the side that is to fall over the cliff. Warnings are given to him to change his mind and then to change his direction and move to safety. This is what repent means.

Joshua and the children of Israel crossed the river Jordan to enter the land promised them and they came to a place and in obedience to the Lord's commandments took knives and circumcised themselves. The Lord named the place Gilgal. Throughout the scriptures the action there is a picture of self judgment and judgment of the flesh that each believer must face before God. God has crucified the flesh, our old man with him at Calvary. We are called upon to "mortify the deeds of the body" Here at Gilgal they did just that and when they departed and went to Jericho, they conquered. At first they returned to Gilgal for self-judgment, confession and putting things right before God. However, early in Judges it is noted the people returned no more to Gilgal so the Angel of the Lord came from Gilgal to Bochim. Bochim means weeping. The Lord came to them after he had long waited for them to return to Gilgal. He reminded them of what he had done and promised and commanded. But he says, "You have not obeyed my voice." And the people wept and did nothing more about it. Many a believer has looked back to the past and wept because of lost blessings and done nothing more about it. This is a deadly dangerous practice. Remembrance should lead us to repentance and to confession back to himself. Self-examination and judgment allows the word of God to search us. The Lord calls upon us to return to himself not to our first experiences. He gives us deepening experiences as we grow. Christians are meant to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We can experience and prove the reality of his sufficiency in all things. When we come back to obedience to his voice and walk with him, we can claim again the blessings that are ours in Christ, and live to his glory. The Lord then says, "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." Notice he does not say that he hates the Nicolaitanes. There is no room in the believers' heart for hatred or enmity. It is hatred of the deeds that the Lord condemns. R.C. Trench in his book on the Seven Churches says, "The Nicolaitanes whose deeds were the object of the earnest hate of Christ's servants, as also of his own, who were they? It is not an easy question to answer. Was there in the first place, any sect existing at the time when these words were uttered, which actually bore this name? I believe not. The other names of this book, Egypt, Babylon, Sodom, Jezebel, in agreement with its apocalyptic character were predominately mystical and symbolic; and in all probability this is so as well." The word itself provides its own interpretation. The meaning of the word "Nikao" is to conquer. Laos means people, the laity. The word speaks of those who come forth as the conquerors of the people. Edward Gibbon, who

did not profess to be a believer, records in his book, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", the rapid rise of the distinction between clergy and laity among the people of God. In the New Testament the word "kleros" from which the word clergy derives is found in 1 Peter 5:3. Reading from verse 1, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight there, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage..." The word translated heritage is kleros. The kleros is God's allotted portion, his part, and his inheritance. There was a day when some came forward from among the people of God to rule over them and said we are the "kleros." We are God's allotted portion. The apostle called the elders of the church at Ephesus and warned them saying, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves among the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock: Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Those claiming to be the "kleros" distinguished themselves by calling those they ruled the "laos", the laity, the common people. Mark's gospel tells us "the common people heard him, (Jesus) gladly." It was ever so but the chief priests and the rulers of the people delivered Jesus Christ to be condemned to death. There are many fine sincere believers who have taken the pathway of clerisy by setting themselves apart from the people of God. The word of God condemns this deed that in a later epistle becomes established as doctrine. God's kleros, his portion, his inheritance is every believer, all the people of God. There is great controversy today as to whether both men and women should be made priests. The moment we are converted and trust in Jesus Christ we are priests. If we are related to our great High Priest by new birth, we are, every single one of us, priests. No man can make a child of God anymore a priest than they are already. Priests offer to God praises. "Ye are a ... royal priesthood... that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Yet there are those who seek to add to this by appointment and accreditation, calling their appointee who may have been a believer many years, a priest. These are those who would as it were, sew up the veil again and put God at a distance, coming between him and those for whom he died. They assert the common people cannot approach God. The voice Peter heard from heaven said, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times..." None who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ are common but by him they are made a kingdom of priests unto our God. No wonder the Lord says of this practice, "which I also hate." The Nicolaitanes came between a redeemed people and their Redeemer. But there is something worse, if it could be so than claiming to be the kleros when they are not. Dare I reach up and take from the Lord that which the word of God says is his name, and be called reverend? "Holy and reverend is his name", and none other surely is entitled to take his name. Take heed that we do not come between the Lord and his people.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." This is a call to the overcomer. The church as a whole at Ephesus is wholesome. We would feel privileged to be in this church. There is however a fatal flaw, a symptom

which if not remedied will lead to great departure by the people of God. This is why the Lord calls upon them individually, and us, to be overcomers. To the overcomer he promises that the way to the tree of life guarded in Genesis, is now open. Every believer in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord is now able to freely partake of the fruits of blessing he has won for them at the cross of Calvary. Are we willing to claim what he promises to give? In reading this Epistle we are brought to a realization that the one who speaks is the Saviour, the Lord. He stands before us and says, Remember, Repent and do the first works, and then he calls us to return in fullness of love and to follow him.

SMYRNA

Matthew 13:24-30

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares you root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say unto the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Revelation 2:8-12

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

1 A Rock that stands for ever

2 There is no condemnation,
Is Christ my righteousness,
There is no hell for me,
And there I stand unfearing
The torment and the fire
In everlasting bliss;
Mine eyes shall never see;
No earthly thing is needful
To this my life from heaven,

And nought of love is worthy
Save that which Christ has given.
Shall shield me with His wing.

For me there is no sentence,
For me death has no sting,
Because the Lord who loves me

3 No angel and no devil,

4 My soul with joy uleapeth,
No throne, nor power, nor might: Grief cannot linger there,

No love, no tribulation,
No danger, fear, nor fight
No height, no depth, no creature
That has been, or can be,
Can drive me from thy bosom
Can sever me from Thee.

She singeth high in glory,
Amid the sunshine fair;
The sun that shines upon me
Is Jesus and His love;
The fountain of my singing
Is deep in heaven above

I was thrilled to hear a brother say years ago how these words were found on the cell of a man after he was taken out to be burnt at the stake for his faith in Jesus Christ. It gives meaning to the words to realize in the light of eternity how that man could rejoice in the reality expressed.

Last week I sat with a lady and her husband who have been clients for fifteen or so years. He telephoned a short time earlier and said his wife had about a week to live. They are not believers yet and it was quite a concern how to approach them and to ask guidance and wisdom from the Lord. As we sat together the husband said, “There is something I cannot understand, why does God allow suffering?”

Why suffer?

There are deep reasons for it, wonderful reasons. Peter could not understand it when he tried to dissuade the Lord from the cross. He could not understand it when he took the sword and tried to defend the Lord. But later he entered into it and was able to write wonderfully of this, “that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” He spoke there of the need for suffering and the marvellous results. The Lord Jesus could say, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory.” That lady, and I have never seen it before in her life, had a few tears. And quite remarkably during the last few visits the Lord has helped to share a little of his things. Your prayers are sought for her before she is taken. She has time and is still able to trust in Jesus.

Suffering

This is the thought in this epistle. You will remember that we have read the second parable in Matthew 13. As you search through the word of God you will discover this; while one has the note of unity, when we reach the number two there is the possibility of division. This is why in the law the Lord points out the need for in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word to be established. For when there is two there is the possibility of division, and there is the possibility of agreement. So it is in the second parable we have the enemy who introduces division, the tares. We find now the wheat and the tares grow together, but remember this, not in the church. They grow together in the field and the Lord himself says, “The field is the world.” The two appear, and as we come to this letter to Smyrna we notice that the Lord in his wisdom, and as a result of this mixing that the enemy has introduced, allows and permits the deep trial of suffering. The very name Smyrna reminds us of this. It tells us of the myrrh that speaks of death and sorrow. The myrrh that the wise men brought surely forecasts the reality of the one who was born a babe at Bethlehem, born king. They asked, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” They looked for one who was not to become King, but who already at his birth was King. And he was born to die so as he speaks in this epistle he does so as the one who is the first and the last. He is also able to add, “Who became dead and lived”. He

has passed the way before. One has spoken to me today about the thought of the Lord laughing. Only once do we read about the laughter of God and it is a fearful reality that it is at judgment. He who had deep joy and bequeathed unto us his joy is spoken of as the man of sorrows. He is presented in this epistle in the character of one who has travelled the pathway of suffering and death. Here is a message to comfort and to tell of that which is to purge the church from the admixture of the confusion of the tares. Let us look again at what the Lord has to say.

“I know thy works”

Sometimes as children we are afraid to realize that our parents know. We wish they did not. And how many times it is a comfort to realize they know, and we are glad they do when we have need. Here he speaks from heaven and says to us today as he did to them, I know. It is a warning at times of discipline and yet, it is a wonderful comfort to know that whatever others may think, and however much they may misunderstand, here is one who looks with divine wisdom, and he knows. He knows when we desire to please him and we fail. He knows when we sorrow. He knows every step of the way and the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. And so he says, “I know thy works and thy tribulations”

I know.... “thy tribulations”

The thought of this is pressure, afflictions. The kind of pressure brought upon the grapes in the wine press as the juice is extracted. They knew pressure in Smyrna. The pressure of the enemy that they were made to feel and the Lord says, I know it. He trod the wine press of the wrath of God alone. He knows the pressure his children undergo and he knows their poverty.

I know thy “poverty”

They were indeed made poor by the afflictions of their persecutors, but the Lord tells them, “thou art rich.” Now here is the point. Who is to assess poverty and riches? Laodicea says, “I am rich”, and the Lord says, “thou art... poor.” There are those who are poor in the sight of the world and the Lord says, but you are rich. And where are we? I said to a brother the other day, and I really believe this, in these days amongst the Lord’s people there are many in the professional classes. In earlier days out at Footscray I remember we came by train to the meetings and we just about lifted the roof off the carriage as we travelled to the meetings singing hymns. It was an uplifting experience. Most were tradesmen, working people unable to afford cars so we travelled together singing. They were simple plain people. At that time there was a wonderful simplicity amongst the Lord’s people. We can become too intellectual, too rich and wealthy, and we can become too independent of the Lord. And the Lord speaks to these in their poverty and says, “thou art rich.” For they are rich in faith, rich indeed in all the inheritance that God has given. If you want to look for riches look to Christ. The letter to the Ephesians tells us how we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. Here are the riches that the Smyrnese found, and experienced, and enjoyed. They were robbed of all else and had to look to Christ and him alone for their riches.

“And I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not”

They are not Jews that is one thing. They say they are Jews and it is blasphemy for them to say so. Who then are these? You will notice in the chart two streams. The stream of the Nicolaitanes and the stream of Judaism, and they merge. For both of these streams need each other and feed upon each other. Those who would be conquerors of the people of God will put the people of God apart and away from God. Judaism introduces the law again as the law of life. You will find many Christian books sincerely written that tell about the Law being our rule of life. Paul says to the Galatians, “you are fallen from grace”, did you receive salvation by the Law? , Are you going to be made perfect in the law? Those who say they are Jews and who are not would bring us under the law. They would put us apart from God and introduce a man between; a separate priestly caste. Those who say they are Jews would rob us of the rapture and heavenly calling of the Church. You will notice they are, “the synagogue of Satan.”

“The synagogue of Satan”

A synagogue is gathering without a centre. It speaks of those who gather together, whereas the Church is the ecclesia (ek out of, kaleo to call), the called out company of his own.” God...did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.” Ecclesia, called out of the world, out of that which is around, gathered to Him and gathered to His name. They are the Lord’s, his Church and he is the centre of the gathering. But, the synagogue of Satan is a gathering without a centre. It is the difference between the fold and the flock. In John 10 you find the fold of Judaism and the good Shepherd leads his sheep out from there and they are gathered around the one Shepherd. Those of the synagogue of Satan would bring back the children of God to bondage. The bondage of Judaism, when the Lord has called us out and set us free to gather around himself. To bring back this bondage is blasphemy. Why, because it says the cross of Christ has not made a difference. It is blasphemy, because again, it puts man to finish the work that was completed at the cross of Calvary. Fellow Christians, let us remember this, let us cling fast to the inheritance that we have of being among those saved by the precious blood of Christ, and being complete in him. We need nothing of the law, we need not turn back to the shadows, we need not, must not depart from that which is in Christ. Those who would do so would rob the people of God of their inheritance.

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer”

Fear none. It is a wonderful expression of the word of God where the Lord again and again writes from the Old Testament to the New Testament and says to his own, “Fear not.” Many a time we need to fear, but here he tells us, fear not because he has travelled the pathway. What we experience is allowed by him in his wisdom and purpose and must lead to our blessing. The word of God says, “And we know all things work together for good...” If only it had said some thing, or most things, but God allows us no latitude and he declares what is true. “All things (both good and bad) work together for good to them that love God”, and I would hate to finish there, “who are the called according to his purpose.” It is not the measure of your love or mine that ensures the working together for good. It is the reality of his purpose in love and grace that all things work together for good to them that love him, who are the called according to his purpose. He therefore says, “fear none of those things.”

Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison

The Devil has power to do this. Power God allows him and only to the extent God permits. The Devil is but an instrument in the hand of God

That ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days

Awful pressures were to come upon them and have occurred during the age. You shudder to read of the things done in the name of religion by judaizers against those who are the Lord's own people. And yet through it all the trials there is a song of triumph as those who suffer are made to gloriously overcome in Christ. They were to have tribulation for ten days. God always sets a limit, and the limit is always within the bounds of his authority. Many believe that the period to which this corresponds was during the rule of the Roman Emperor Dioclesian. And through their suffering they became overcomers.

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”

Not the regal crown but the victors crown for they have passed through suffering and become overcomers.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

The parable of the wheat and the tares

Turn back again to Matthew 13 to consider the second parable. Again we see how the parallel is seen. You will recall that Ephesus speaks of relaxation. And so in this parable at verse 25 you find that while men slept the enemy came and sowed the tares. Relaxation fellow believer is not meant for us this side of the glory. Rest is different. To be still and know He is God is a wonderful reality but relaxation is not for us here. When it happens we will find that trials will come for the Lords will stir us up and say to us as he said to those of old, “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it will destroy you, even with a sore destruction.” It is not our rest here. While men sleep the enemy works and the tares are sown. Those in the parable meant well and offered to go and gather them up. And even in the Reformation days there were those Christians who with the sword sought to remove the tares. But God has given us one sword and there is no sword like it. The only sword we have to wield is the word of God. The tares must grow in the field. We read at verse 30, “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” We see here that the tares are gathered into bundles, but they are not burnt immediately. Today we are seeing throughout this world every aspect of union, cooperation, federation and association of all sorts. We are seeing the tares gathered into bundles. Do not envy them their sudden growth of power and wealth in the world today, for the burning is coming. Let us rather pity them and seek from the Lord that many may yet be saved before judgment comes. Fellow believers we are to be gathered into the barn. One has said, the picture of the wheat is a wonderfully appropriate representation of the believer. As the wheat ripens for harvest its roots in the earth die. Its grip on the earth is loosened in readiness to be gathered into the barn. Have you ever noticed this? I saw it wonderfully in the lives of my parents as they grew older and were ready for the Lord to take them. Their grip on the world here lessened in anticipation of that step into the Lord's presence. Although mother

right to the end used to say, "I might not die, the Lord may come first." What a blessed hope.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam

Let's read the parallel section in the history of the Kings, which is again in the second section. The possibility of division is seen once more as we turn to 2 Chronicles 10: 1-3 "And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for to Shechem were all Israel come to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt, whither he had fled from the presence of Solomon the king, heard it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt. And they sent and called him. So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam." The two stood face to face. Rehoboam the rightful king following Solomon and Jeroboam. There was a challenge and there was a division. The house of Israel followed Jeroboam, and those of Judah and Benjamin followed Rehoboam, and so the division occurred. If you read further you will find that Rehoboam assembled an army together to bring about an enforced unity but he was told by the Lord, "this thing is done of me." Rehoboam obeyed the words of the Lord and the division continued. Jeroboam was not satisfied. In 1 Kings Chapter 14 we find he set up two golden calves, one in Beth-el and one in Dan in case the children went to Jerusalem in Judah to worship. This is referred to in God's word again and again and again. For this sin carries on right through amongst the people of God. The sin of Jeroboam caused the people of God to sin. You will find in the account in Kings that the man of God came down to speak and pronounce judgment against the altar at Beth-el. The division occurred and from then on the kingdoms were marked by the sadness of departure.

Moab, Ammon and Amalek

We saw last week in the book of Judges by failing to go forward, by failing to claim their inheritance, by allowing the enemy to live among them and being prepared to live among the enemy, the people of God were robbed and gradually weakened. We read in the third chapter of Judges from verse 12, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees. So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years." Reading from half way through Verse 20, "And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly." And verse 30, "So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years." The enemy here is the unjudged fruit of those who follow with the Lord's people. The Bible speaks of the righteous soul of Lot. We would not know that unless God had said so. But Lot chose his place down at Sodom and the fruit of his shamed life was Moab and Ammon. Here we find that which resulted from Lot's departure from God and from his border dwelling. It is always the same; those who disobey the Lord leave of their unjudged life, sadness for others. It happens. Moab and Ammon and with them Amalek the descendant of Esau unite. Amalek the picture of the flesh in us. Amalek the one of whom God said must be utterly destroyed. Here these three are found attacking, afflicting, conquering and ruling the people of God. Why is it so? It was because the children of Israel departed from the Lord and committed evil. Fellow Christians what is your experience? I remember years ago we treasured the liberty of the ministry of the word among believers. But a time came when as we gathered there were

long pauses, pauses not of enjoyment, but pauses of poverty. As a younger Christian I sat and listened to older ones discuss what should be done. “Aah... we’ll arrange for two or three brethren to speak. What about you brother will you be ready to speak at the next conference meeting and after that we will leave it open for the Spirit of God.” What a horrifying thought. We will do it ourselves and then we will ask the Lord to step in later. How much more wonderful if we had knelt before the Lord and confessed it was our sin, our own failing that caused the pauses of emptiness. Why should the Bethlehemite go to Moab with his family to find bread when it was not at the house of God? Why not stay and there confess their need. Moab lurks always for the children of God. When we turn away from the Lord we find within our hearts emptiness. Others come amongst us and we feel the poverty is a disgrace, and so it is. And yet we never realized that five minutes before when no one was exercised in ministry it was a disgrace before the Lord that we should be found empty. Still, we do not return to the Lord to confess our need. It is always easier to go down to Moab to find there man’s order of things that will provide and cover up.

The way of deliverance

Moab was allowed by God and strengthened by God to cause the people of God in their bondage to cry unto him for deliverance. If you look around among the Lord’s people today and see the need and are caused to cry to him for help, do so with gratitude because it is his chastening hand that makes us do so. It is not because we have anything in our selves, but he who listens to our cry will surely answer in blessing, raising up those who treasure his word and who will use his word to deliver others. His word is a two edged sword. Where have we heard that before? The two edged sword of his word is what the deliverer or the overcomer uses for and on himself first. The word of God is allowed to judge self and then it can be used to deliver the Lord’s people. Ehud the left-handed man is able, and it was at Gilgal he used the sword and there delivered the people of God. He is the second of the saviours, the overcomer who with the use of the sword of the Lord delivers the people from that which is of Amalek, of Ammon and of Moab. In Rehoboam and Jeroboam there again is the division. We find that Jeroboam is turned away from God, and Rehoboam as he sees the need turns back to God and is blessed in his time.

PERGAMOS

Matthew 13:31-32;

Revelation 2:12-17

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” All trees in the Bible are not bad. There are trees of testimony presented growing on earth such as the Olive tree. But here is a tree that is a monstrosity. Out of the least of seeds it becomes the greatest of herbs. A tree must grip firmly to the earth to hold its place. This tree becomes a dwelling place for the birds of the air. The first parable tells us the birds represent the wicked one who comes and takes away the good seed that is sown. The good seed represents the word of God taken away from hearts when it is not properly received. Why does this monstrous growth cause the birds to dwell there? Please read Revelation 2:12-17.

Pergamos means marriage. The per seems to indicate a marriage that is not good. James 4:4 seems to refer to this, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” In Pergamos we have the church engaged to Christ, having left their first love in Ephesus, now in a marriage. “These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.” What sword is that? Further on in Revelation 2:16 we are told, “The sword of my mouth.” In the Old Testament we read of a man named Phinehas. His name means mouth of brass: the word of God spoken in judgment. The one spoken of in the epistle to Pergamos is our heavenly Phinehas coming at a time of need when the word of God must be wielded in judgment. He says he will come to this church, “and will fight against them.” Not against believers but those amongst the believers who are the devourers, the plunderers and conquerors of the people of God.

“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is.” There is historical interest here. The serpent is found and it is his symbol that is worshipped. After Alexander took Babylon he became sick and grew tired of the conniving and scheming of the Magi so he expelled them from Babylon. The king of Pergamos welcomed them and so as a reward they gave him a title of their order, “Pontifex Maximus” The name means the bridge builder, the great mediator. The king of Pergamos some time, later killed his uncle and took his throne but he did not reign long after this. When he died he left his kingdom to Rome, and possibly, it was the only kingdom Rome received that was not taken by force of arms. The kingdom of Pergamos brought tremendous wealth and it became a form of corruption for Rome. The title Pontifex Maximus passed to Rome and was used later by the Roman Emperor Constantine when he as head of state adopted Christianity as the state religion. Today the head of one branch of Christendom still proudly uses the same title. We hear of the Pontiff, the mediator, but the word of God says, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Any form of religious pretension that robs the Lord Jesus Christ of his place as the only mediator is abhorrent to God.

“Thou dwellest, where Satan’s seat (throne) is.” The word rendered dwellest or dwell is used about a dozen times in the book of Revelation. It is never used there in a good sense. It speaks about those who dwell upon the earth. The sad danger is that believers are not only amongst the earth dwellers, but they are settling down and living at home with them. The same word is used in Ephesians, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” That is, that he may settle down at home in our hearts. Is he at home in your heart or is he an honoured guest? If he is at home he is Lord of all: every part of the house is open to him, but if only a guest he is not permitted to order and control every aspect of our life. In Pergamos we see the first hint of danger, they were settling down and dwelling at home where Satan’s throne is.

Still the Lord commends them and says, “Thou holdest fast my name.” There is a regard for the Deity of Christ, for his virgin birth, for him as the Son of God and let us be thankful for this. “Thou holdest fast.” In the first verse of Chapter 2 of Revelation the Lord is seen holding the seven stars in his right hand. They are safe with him for he says of his sheep “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” They hold fast his name because they value it and later we read in the letter to Philadelphia at verse 11, “Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” Fellow Christians this applies to us. Whatever we have received from the Lord, however small it may be, it is enough to ensure our blessing in time and for eternity, so hold it fast that no man takes your crown.

“Even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr.” His name means, “against all” The martyr the witness for the word of God is always in the minority, apparently. Antipas was against all but he was a faithful witness where Satan dwelleth. But if we too are faithful to the Lord with him we will be the majority and cannot be overcome.

“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam. Fellow Christians we are responsible for the doctrine of those that dwell among us. What the Lord has against them is not that they held the doctrine, but they allowed amongst themselves without judgment, those that held this doctrine. Balaam means the destroyer of the people, he “taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel.”

“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.” The deeds mentioned in the epistle to Ephesus become doctrines Always when a wrong action is taken you will find the doctrine is established to justify the deed already carried out. The word of God teaches first doctrine then deeds. This is seen in the early church, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and (the) fellowship, and in (the) breaking of bread, and in (the) prayers.” The Christian is to act because the word of God sanctions the action. Practice must not be allowed to establish the principle. How often has divine order been reversed; actions taken in self will and then a doctrine built to justify the action? “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Numbers 22:1-6 “And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us....He then sent messengers therefore unto Balaam....Come now therefore I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me.” How much better if they had asked for blessing so they too could have grown in prosperity. Why do they seek a curse on others? It is the work of the enemy, Satan himself who hates to see the people of God blest. Balaam is sent for and from the account we learn of, “the way of Balaam”, “the error of Balaam” and “the doctrine of Balaam.” His gift as a prophet is hired. Beware lest we make merchandise of the things of the Lord. The way of Balaam is seen where he promotes the mixing of the children of God with the world. He knew it was God’s will that Israel should be separated unto Him, but he thought in his heart, if they are mixed with the world God must judge them. He did not know the grace of God, nor his mercy and power to forgive. The mixing occurs but how? We read in Numbers 25:1, “And Israel abode in Shittim,” which is in the plains of Moab. Pergamos was told, “Thou dwellest where Satan’s throne is” The same thing is seen here. First they pitched their tents in the plains of Moab, now they are dwelling at ease there. They settled down and made this their home not realizing that above them were those who were seeking their destruction. They were to be pilgrims and strangers but this is forgotten. There is always danger for the children of God when they settle down and dwell at ease in the beckoning plains of Moab. The valley is the place through which we must travel. God hems in the plain and brings us to that valley of the shadow of death. But the valley of Achor becomes the door of hope for he encourages us to go forward as pilgrims, to journey through the valley to the glory and blessing he has for all who trust him. Israel abode in the plains of Moab and what happened? “And the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel...And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through” Numbers 25:1-3,7-8

The voice of God spoke in judgment through Phinehas the mouth of brass. He spoke to the people and God spoke of him as one to be blessed forever because he was zealous for his God. Fellow Christians, the word of God is living powerful and available for use. The man of God is someone who has been gripped by the word of God, and at the time God sees the need, uses that word to deliver the children of God. If we are to be used to deliver others God’s word, “the sharp sword with two edges,” must first be applied to our own hearts in self judgment. Our heavenly Phinehas warns in the epistle to Pergamos of the time when he will come to fight against the devourers and conquerors of the people and set them free. Beware of dwelling when we should be travelling.

In the book of Kings we read of two kings, Omri in the Kingdom of Israel and Asa king of Judah. Asa did much that pleased the Lord and was blessed by him, but there came a time when he failed. "In the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet," "Yet in his disease he sought not the Lord, but to the physicians." Some may ask, what was wrong with that? Even before this a little earlier he had gone astray. God sent a prophet to warn him of his error and "Asa was wrath...and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time." A man who had been so faithful to God turns from him. Fellow believers, we need to take heed to ourselves that in our walk before the Lord we continue in self judgment.

In the northern kingdom Omri's son Ahab is seen. Here we have another marriage that brings evil: the marriage of an apostate Jew, Ahab and a heathen woman Jezebel. One has suggested this is what is seen in Christendom: the fruits of heathenism and Judaism linked together. The awful sadness of the marriage of the church and the world that has brought dishonour to the Lord, failure and backsliding is also seen in the church at Thyatira.

Please read the promise the Lord gives to the overcomer in Revelation 2:17. For always with the promise the Lord gives the power for it to be claimed. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." How blessed if we continually went back to the word of God, discovered what it says and obeyed immediately and unquestioningly. Our ears should be holy and ready to hear what he has to say to us. The consecration of the priests for tabernacle service required the blood of the sacrifice to be placed on the tip of their right ear, upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot. Exodus 29:20 This was also to be done for the leper who had been healed. Leviticus 14:14. The leper healed is one who has had the ugliness of sin worked out in his life. This presents the position of every redeemed sinner now claimed by the blood on his ear, the blood on the thumb of his hand and the blood on the toe of his foot. The blood was applied to the ear to hear the word of God; to the thumb to do the will of God and on the toe to walk with God. What a privilege that we should be so marked and so claimed. "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ." We are called to be holy and to be obedient. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Many things are happening in the world and what men are doing is widely published and spoken about. There are some who stride through the world with great power, wealth and influence, and some fall. Beware of becoming preoccupied with what men are doing and remember behind it all, the Lord is working out his purposes. The word of God must be fulfilled. What is the believer to do? Exactly what the Lord says, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up". His coming is drawing nigh. It is as the hymn writer says, "I can almost hear his footfall on the threshold of the door, and my heart, and my

heart is longing to be with him evermore.” Let us not be troubled, the Lord Jesus is preparing a place for us and he is coming for us. As Naomi could say, “the man will not be in rest, until he have finished.” He says to us as he did to those at Pergamos, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.” There was the manna for the people in the wilderness and a day’s rations preserved in the presence of the Lord in the ark of the tabernacle. The manna was hidden from view in the ark. It was God’s provision for his people. He gives to his children what they can share with him in his own presence, the hidden manna.

“To him that overcometh will I give...a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” The “white stone”, what is this? The white stone was widely used in the ancient world as a vote of approval. It could well be Urim and Thummim in the breastplate of judgment worn by the high priest. When the stone was removed from the breastplate it showed by the manner in which it shone the will of God. Believers today have in their own hearts the Spirit of God to reveal the Lord and his will. There is guidance and discernment available through these dark days. He will lead us in a plain pathway wherever he would have us go. When we follow his guidance we find the white stone of the certainty of his will, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter who will be with us always. “The Spirit of truth...he will guide you into all truth.”

“No man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” speaks of a secret. Every believer has a secret with the Lord that they share only with him. There are experiences of life to which each of us are called. Experiences that are ours, which he only knows completely for he has been with us through them all. How remarkable that of all the multitudes of the redeemed each one can say, he is mine and I am his. He looks down to where we are and exhorts us to be among the overcomers despite our weakness. He speaks to each of his own personally, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” In Pergamos the marriage of the church to the world begins. This becomes so entrenched that there is no turning back or recovery. Therefore, in the messages to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, the hope set before the overcomer is the coming again of the Lord. This blessed hope is for those who are called out to himself, who walk with him, who know that shared secret of his will and purpose, and who wait for his coming from heaven. And when he comes, all who are his will see him as he is, and will be like him. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus”.

In Judges 3:31 Shamgar uses the ox goad to deliver Israel from the Philistines and this corresponds to Pergamos. The name Philistine has the thought of wanderer. Christians are pilgrims. When I was younger we always spoke of the land of Israel as Palestine. The Philistines had claimed the land as their own. The place given to the Lord’s people was lost. And so today in Christendom we find the wanderers have taken over from the Lord’s pilgrims. The ox goad Shamgar used to deliver the people speaks of the word of God. This is the goad we so often need to stir and prod us to claim our inheritance. Notice the nail and the goad in Ecclesiastes 12:11, both are mentioned. The nail gives stability and

fastens so we can stand; the goad is to get us going to move forward for him. Both are needed. We are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth”. A stranger is someone away from home and a pilgrim is going home.

THYATIRA

Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” While we consider this fourth church we need to be reminded of this truth. If the Lord hated the sinner however would we have fared? God so loved the world; He loves every sinner. When we speak, we are never to show hatred or dislike of persons. This is not of the Lord. The Lord hates sin in our lives and we all need to allow his word to reprove, rebuke and correct us. Please notice again that the Lord matches the description of himself to the needs of those to whom he is speaking. He speaks of himself as the Son of God. The one who has eyes as a flame of fire and feet like unto fine brass. The one who is all knowing with piercing eyes and his feet like highly burnished copper that speaks of his walk of judgment. As he walks amongst the churches there is that which he must reprove and rebuke. We sang, “those eyes, flames of fire, that so searching we prove, shall beam on us then inexpressible love.” He sees our hearts and assesses with perfect wisdom what is the motive for the action. In Revelation 2:19 he says, “I know thy works, and love”. Of the seven, only the church in Thyatira was told by the Lord, “I know thy love.” This is agape, self- sacrificing love, the love that God shows and this is noted. In a church overtaken by very dark deeds it is striking that he is able to speak to those there of that love.

At the beginning of the history of this church we find that there is another woman mentioned in verse 20 very different to the one we read of in Acts 16:14. “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened.” There is a wonderful simplicity about this. The first person we read about from Thyatira has her heart opened to receive the Lord, and then she receives the Lord’s people.

In verse 19 of the epistle to this church there is much that the Lord sees and commends. “I know thy works, and love, and service and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.” There is an increase in works that the Lord commends. How different even to Ephesus when he has to speak otherwise. No other Church is commended in this way.

But we then come to the sadness of verse 20. “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.” “Thou sufferest that woman,” you will notice that in all our lives there must be growth. There will be either growth in the things of the Lord or growth in things not of him. In the church in Ephesus the Lord detects that which was false and not of him. It was the deeds of the Nicolaitanes that were resisted and rejected by that church but there was relaxation. Therefore in Smyrna the existence of the synagogue of Satan is seen. The relaxation found in Ephesus that which is allowed to come among them leads to departure. In Pergamos there is a settling down to dwell where there is unfaithfulness to the Lord. There is a tolerance of those who hold doctrine which the Lord judges. In Thyatira their condition and the state of things is worse. “Thou sufferest”, they permit, and they allow a growth not of the Lord. There is no thought of resistance to “earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.” There is allowed to dwell one whom the Lord says calls herself a prophetess and who is able to teach authoritatively. What does she introduce?

In the fourth parable in Matthew 13:33 the woman is seen introducing leaven and here there is evil that she introduces. What does the leaven represent? In Matthew 16:6 we read, “then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees,” and at verse 12, “beware...of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” The leaven then speaks of teaching. The woman is teaching and she has an evil teaching hidden in the meal. Mark 8:15 adds that Jesus also said, “beware... of the leaven of Herod.” The Herodians were the followers of Herod who were seeking worldly political power. The leaven of the Sadducees was rationalism. They believed in only what they could see. They were sad you see because they had no thought of God’s power to help, power stronger than the grave. Jesus said unto them, “Ye do err not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” The Pharisees were the formalists following the traditions of men so intensely they failed to realize the power of the living God and his word. The Lord said of them, “Ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” The leaven of earthly power, of high minded rationalism, and of formalism and tradition, are three varieties of leaven working and growing among the Lord’s people, and drawing them away from him.

What does this woman teach? It is the corresponding section in history that followed the union of church and state by Constantine. We have then in Boniface the first universal Bishop and the establishment of what we know as the Church of Rome. In this church many worldly people have been received who have been born “Catholics” but who have never become Christians. These have grasped power and have been permitted to introduce much leaven that has worked to pervert the meal, the scripture of truth. It is not food to continually indulge in judgmental attitudes towards what is wrong. It is to be like the man who could only look down with a muck-rake in his hand spoken of in Pilgrims Progress. We grow only as we look up and feed upon the word of God. Warnings must be given lest we become entangled with error. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Jeremiah 44:18-19, “But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and the famine. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink-offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?” They offered their little buns to the queen of heaven. They put on them the little T symbol in the feast of Astarte. In our day this is done with hot cross buns on a Friday. In Deuteronomy 18 Israel was told not to have among them a necromancer. A necromancer is someone who consults or speaks to the dead. There is no authority in the word of God for prayer to anyone else but to God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the titles used by the head of the Roman Catholic Church is Pontiff, which means the bridge maker. This title came from Babylon then to Pergamos and then to Rome. The antidote for this leaven is the word of God received and believed. It says, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

God choose one to be the mother of Jesus, and she is to be respected for this, but not worshipped. She is not the mother of God. Her last recorded words in scripture in John 2 point to the Lord Jesus Christ. She is last referred to in Chapter I of Acts in company with many others and none are praying to her. We are not to worship a creature instead of the creator.

In the Roman Catholic Church the bread or wafer used in the mass is called the host. The Greek word for host is, "hostia" meaning sacrifice. It is this bloodless sacrifice that is offered after consecration by the priest. It is claimed to be the very body and blood of the Lord and throughout the world it is offered again and again as a sacrifice in the mass. It is claimed the host is changed into the actual body, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The host is placed in the centre of what looks like a sun-image that is called the monstrance, and this is worshipped. Thyatira means ceaseless offering speaking of the core of the evil found there, many times offering that which has already been done and finished at the cross of Calvary by our Lord Jesus Christ. "For by one offering, he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified". "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever sat down on the right hand of God." That one sacrifice is ever efficacious, ever enough to bring blessing to us all. There are no grounds in the word of God for this ceaseless offering of what is said to be the actual body and blood of the Lord. Such offering is idolatry. It is the leaven introduced into the pure meal of the word of God.

The practice of confessing sin to a priest must be considered. The Bible says, "Confess your faults one to another." It is mutual one to the other, and then we can, "pray for one another." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He alone can forgive sin because he has the nail prints in his hands. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" he has paid the price, and he is faithful to his promise to forgive them. Put aside that sad dreadful error that we have to do penance for sin. The Bible calls upon us to confess our sins and to forsake them, but we cannot do anything to earn forgiveness. Forgiveness is freely given because of the finished work of Christ at Calvary.

Many things have been introduced amongst the people of God that obscure the completeness and magnitude of that work. They have also turned many away from the purity of God's word. The progress of apostasy is outlined in 2 Timothy 3:1 to 13. In Thyatira Jezebel seduced the servants of God. What is to be done in the face of such seduction? "Continue thou in the things that thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ. All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Some read this as, all that is scripture, but it is, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word."

If you go back to the Old Testament in 2 Kings 4: 38-41 you read of a time when they gathered around the man of God and one went out into the field to gather herbs. He found a wild vine and he collected its fruit and put this in a seething pot. As they were eating from the pot they cried out, "there is death in the pot. And they could not eat." One had gone out into the world and gathered the savoury stuff. The man of God was called for and he said, "Bring meal and he cast it into the pot." This brought healing. The same is found in 2 Timothy 3:1-13 where Paul speaks of many being lead astray. What is the remedy? He says, "Preach the word." We will find there is no answer going around cutting the heads of thistles of concentrating on all that is wrong about us, we must come

back to the word of God and feed upon this. We then discover the word is a two edged sword first to be applied to self. After this we can use it, speak of it, and preach the word for the blessing of others. The word of God is the antidote for the leaven introduced among the Lord's people.

Revelation 2:21, "And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not." She wills not to repent. Time has been given for repentance and the Lord then says in verses 21-22, "Behold I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." He says he will kill her children. Here is growth of evil. Jezebel now has children. Today we see this growth, the children of Babylon. "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots." On the 21st September 1989, The Archbishop of Canterbury will be present in Rome to share mass with the Pope. The Archbishop says he desires to recognize the Pope as a universal figurehead over all Christendom. We can see the fulfilling of biblical prophecy that tells of the coming together of the great world church at the time of the end. The Lord says, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." The tares are being gathered up into bundles, the stage is being prepared for judgment, but the wheat is to be gathered into his barn. We look forward to this.

Revelation 2:24-25 "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come." This is the first time in the message to the Churches that the Lord points onwards. Now there is no return possible because the church is married to the world. It is the rest in Thyatira who are addressed, the remanent who still walk before him in love and seek to honour him. "Those who have not known the depths of Satan....I will put upon you none other burden." Whatever we have, whatever he has given us of his word, of himself, of his ways, of his will, we are to hold fast till he come. Three times that exhortation is given. In 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 we are told to remember him, "till he come." Week by week as we gather to remember him not offering a sacrifice afresh but as Hebrews 13:15 instructs, "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." This is the sacrifice for us. The bread on the table is a remembrance of him, but it is not a sacrifice. It is not a repetition of what Jesus did once for all at the cross of Calvary. The fruit of our lips as we come to remember him is what we offer to God in sacrifice through our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 16 adds to this, "Do good and to communicate (share what you have with others) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Another serious aspect of leaven is presented in Hebrews 13:10, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." Fellow Christians, there is no altar on earth that the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ can approach to offer according to the Lord's will. For he is in heaven and he is the one to whom we approach. Our altar is in heaven. It is a heavenly altar for those who worship the Lord. If we remember this we will be kept from many sad things. I went to a funeral held in a certain gathering and a man stood and bowed before what he believed was an altar. The Lord speaks against such things in his word. These are aspects of truth we need to grasp, enjoy and hold fast till he

come. The heavenly altar is ours. The Lord in heaven is ours. He is not the infant Jesus nor the Jesus on the cross. He is Lord who is living, who was dead and who is alive for evermore. We offer him the fruit of our lips and give thanks to his name.

The apostate church will be cast into a bed with those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation and her children will be killed. To whom does this speak? Please turn to Revelation 17:1-2 “ And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me saying unto me, Come hither I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” Again we have here one who has caused those she has taught to commit fornication. Verse 5-6 “And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.” Verse 14 “ These shall make war with the lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.” Verse 16-18 “And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” Her doom is certain. Fellow believers, we will not be here to see this for we shall be kept from that hour. Those left on earth after the time of the Lord’s patience; those who have been unfaithful to him and have refused to repent; those who have led others astray and who have made merchandise of the souls of men: God will judge. This is the fruit of the teaching of this woman Jezebel.

Revelation 2:26-29 “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Jesus was promised the kingdoms of the earth by God in Psalm 2 and was offered them by Satan in Matthew 4. If ever we grasp anything before God’s time we must take it from the hand of Satan. Power in the world today does not belong to the believer. You search from Matthew to Revelation and significantly there is no instruction to the believer how to reign and govern. How could we? For the world has said of the Lord, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” There is every form of guidance and instruction in the New Testament for husbands and wives, parents and children, employer and employee and for those who are governed. There is a time coming when the Lord’s people will reign. This will be when the Lord reigns in righteousness. Paul speaks with irony in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 of those who “have reigned as kings without us... we are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ: we are weak, but ye are strong: ye are honourable, but we are despised.” Believers today are not called upon to reign; above all they are to be submissive to him who is Lord of all, and to be governed by and submissive to the powers that be.

“ And I will give him the morning star.” This is the Lord’s promise to the overcomer for only the remanent will listen to the final exhortation, “He that hath an ear, let him hear

what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” At the end of the Old Testament the Lord spoke of a small remnant “that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name.” He said, “And they shall be mine...in that day when I make up my jewels” Here at the end of the epistle to Thyatira we have the earlier arrival of the morning star before the break of day. When the morning star appears all who are the Lord’s will enter into eternal day with him. All who love and wait for his appearing are pointed away from the failure and departure around them, upward to himself. We should rejoice in this blessed prospect of his return, and remember him till he come. Every believer is exhorted to be faithful to The Lord Jesus Christ until the time of his coming. He tells each one, “Hold fast till I come.” In Matthews gospel the exhortation is to, “Occupy till I come.” This is the word to the businessman, the farmer, the housewife, the tradesman, to every believer in every sphere of life to live to work faithfully for him till he come. And so when he comes we will be able to render to him an accounting of faithful service. May we all hear him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” He will perfectly assess our service and only his judgment matters.

SARDIS

2 Kings 9:22-25, 30-33;
2 Kings 10:15-28;
Matthew 13:44; Revelation 3:1-6

In the second chapter of first Epistle of John “little children”, “fathers” and “young men” are addressed. The little children under instruction (bairns), the born ones includes all whose “sins are forgiven.” Then the fathers are addressed, “Because ye have known him that is from the beginning.” What more could be said to those who have a personal knowledge of the Father and his Son Jesus Christ? To the young men he says, “I have written unto you....because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” He goes on to say, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” This is the injunction to young men feeling their strength and finding it in the word of God and using it for the Lord. All such are overcomers and the Lord speaks to them in each of the seven epistles to the churches that are in Asia. The strength to overcome is only found as we lay hold of the word of God and as it lays hold of us. In the days of the Judges or Saviours each one was raised up by God to deliver the people when they turned back to him confessing their sins and called upon him for deliverance. In each case the instrument of deliverance is a symbol of the word of God: the two edged sword, the ox goad, the tent nail, the trumpet and the vow. The vow of Jephthah was what he was going to do. There was a weakening here but God honoured his response and blessed him. Gideon was a young man who was an overcomer. His name means one who cuts down. This was also the work of Jehu. Both were reformers and both cut down that which was opposed to God. Luther in his day in the power of God cut down what was opposed to God and brought blessing to many. There have been many others unknown to the world but known to God who have been similarly used.

Judges chapter 6:1-4 “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.” Here at Gaza need was found. The people had sinned and God allowed these Midianites, the traders to come and rob them. Sometimes it seems that we labour in life to acquire money to put in bags with holes. What we earn disappears and does not seem to help us. In Haggai 1:9 the Lord says, “Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little, and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it.” The reason why is because God is not put first. Many things of God have passed into ordinary speech. We speak of being on a treadmill and forget that this was where the world put Samson. He was blinded and brought down to Gaza bound “with fetters of brass, and he did grind in the prison house.” He who thought he could use the world as he liked found that he was working for the world going nowhere.

In Gideon's day the people of God were starving and impoverished because of the Midianites. What is to be done and who can be found to meet the need? "And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Orah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites." Judges 6:11. Here is a good beginning. Gideon starts by realizing his own depth of need yet first his desire is to feed himself. Fellow believers, in the world today when we are conscious of the pressures and the failure within and without, we are not to become preoccupied with our selves and the world, we are to look up to our saviour. Our responsibility is to call upon him, listen to his voice and feed upon his word. As the Apostle wrote to Timothy, "meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them...continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." We must claim what God has given, just as Gideon did. Feeding on what God has provided gives us the strength to overcome and serve in whatever sphere or place he appoints. There is no enemy beyond his power. The Lord finds Gideon in hiding, poor and the least in his father's house, and commissions him, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?...Surely I will be with thee."

And the Lord said unto Gideon, the people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." Judges 7:2. How strange an army that is too big. The Lord knows our hearts and our readiness to trust ourselves to win the battle in our own strength. "And the Lord said unto Gideon, the people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there...every one that lapped of the water with his tongue as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men... And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you." There was a crisis, a need, and there were three hundred soldiers who remained vigilant recognizing their duty to serve and not to indulge themselves. The others thought: it is peaceful; we have been brought to the water; and we have the opportunity to drink to the full. The water was not forbidden, but three hundred soldiers were ready to endure hardness as good soldiers of the Lord. They drank as disciplined soldiers ready to deny themselves for the greater call to duty. And Gideon "divided the three hundred into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers." We read in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 of those who preach Christ Jesus the Lord, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." Fellow believers, we are earthen vessels and we must be broken before the light can shine forth and the victory won for the Lord and his people. The cry that they were to give was, "the sword of the Lord." They had no sword but this, the word of God that they were to cry out. And they stood every man in his place, they blew the trumpets, and brake the empty pitchers and the light shone forth, and the Lord gave them the victory.

A further characteristic of these men of faith is presented in Judges 8:4. "And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them." They were really exhausted, but they kept going because they were

men of faith, conscious of their mission for the Lord. They were ready to fight for him in spite of the circumstances. Dear saints, we are called upon to do nothing less however we may feel.

“Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you. And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)” Here is another lesson that must be remembered. Whenever the Lord blesses his people in service and testimony, all must get back to him quickly for cleansing so they may be kept for his glory. There is no more dangerous time for a believer than just at the moment of victory. Many times victory becomes defeat because we move on from there instead of returning to Gilgal as Israel did at the first. Gilgal is the place of self judgment, the place of cleansing. You will remember that as the lamps in the tabernacle burnt, they were defiled, and so at the time of the sacrifice the wicks had to be cleansed. And so it is in the life of the believer, we continually need cleansing from the Lord. Gideon was sincere when he said he would not rule, and yet he sought the gold earrings from the people, and from these made an ephod, “And put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.” Gideon was a young man willing to act for God to deliver the people and God blessed his testimony. Gideon hankered somewhat after the priestly gift and this ephod became a snare. “And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.” This is the only name recorded of Gideon’s many sons. It means, my father is king. Every time that young man name was spoken, my father is king was declared. This sad unjudged indulgence in Gideon led to Abimelech claiming kingship and destroying all his brothers. Just as is seen in Gideon’s life we may at the moment of victory sow the seeds of defeat. Deliverance yes, and yet if the flesh is unjudged, there remains the possibility of failure.

Let us turn to Jehu. He obviously corresponds to Sardis because he destroys Jezebel. In Thyatira we see the ugliness of the sin Jezebel caused the people to commit. Jehu is not of the same calibre as Gideon. In Gideon we view a true and committed believer responding in faith to the call of God. Jehu is rather different. “Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel. Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Beth-el, and that were in Dan. And the Lord said unto Jehu, because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in my eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin. In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short.” As far as it suited Jehu he did what the Lord wanted, but not if it differed from his own will. It is not in the ninety percent we do as believers that we are judged as obedient. Most of what we do we would rather do anyway and this has been established by the patterns and habits of life. There are however areas of our lives where our wills differ from the Lord’s. It is here that our obedience is tested, not in the rest of what we do. Just as the disobedience in a child is seen in the one thing they do wrong and that

requires correction. Grasp this, whatever our age there is always something more in the word of the Lord to claim. There are still parts of my life to be yielded to the Lord, and still more blessing he has to give us. Moment by moment we need to be kept in his love to walk in obedience to him.

Jehu says to Jehonadab, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." Jehonadab rode in Jehu's chariot and saw the prophets of Baal killed. We will turn to Jeremiah chapter 35 to read of the beauty of the lives of those who followed Jehonadab. His father was Rechab whose descendants were known as the Rechabites. The book of Jeremiah is a sad commentary on the failure of the people of God. Please read from verse 1 to 14. Jehu destroyed the wickedness of Jezebel but he did little to build up and strengthen the children of God. But there was a man in his chariot that witnessed the destruction, and he went home and spoke to his family sickened by what he had seen. Jehonadab said there is one way to live in this land and that is as a Nazarite, as one set apart for God, to live as a stranger and pilgrim claiming nothing; for then God will bless you. And so the centuries past. The Rechabites were of the seed of the Kenites and not the seed of Abraham to whom the land had been promised yet they dwelt among the people of Judah and enjoyed God's blessing. This was because they followed the instruction of Jehonadab. In the day of departure and ugliness God sends Jeremiah to look at the house of Rechab. He then tells him, reading from verses 13 and 14. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? Saith the Lord. The words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me." He refers to this obedience as an example to the wayward people of God. Whatever the departure from the word of God, the simplicity of obedience is always open to any one of us. Whatever others may do none of us has an excuse if we fail to obey the instructions of our heavenly Father. We have an individual and personal responsibility to obey the Lord's voice. The epistle to the Laodiceans ends with a personal call. "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." Gideon and Jonadab both found this to be blessedly true. Jehu was used as the cutter down in that day of reformation.

It seemed a mystery to me that the Lord should speak with such judgment to Sardis a church apparently corresponding to the time of the Reformation. Why is this?

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God", what does that mean? If you take a prism and shine a white light through it you will discover the light divides into seven colours. Seven colours yet one light. The Spirit of God is presented in the fullness of his sufficiency for our every need. Peter writes of the manifold grace of God and the manifold temptations. There is always a sufficiency of God's grace to meet our every need. Here the seven fold power of the Spirit of God is brought before us see also, Isaiah 11:2 where we read of seven aspects of the Spirit of God.

"He that hath...the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." There are three reputations among these seven epistles. Smyrna had a reputation before men of being poor, Laodicia says she is rich and at Sardis a name before others that they lived. Poor, Rich and Living but what does the Lord say? To Smyrna he

says, “Thou art rich”; To Laodicea, you say you are rich and you do not know, “Thou art...poor”; To Sardis, you have a name that you live, but “Thou art...dead.”

The Lord speaks as one who is able to give a revival of life. Reputation among men is not to be used to measure truth. It is the Lord’s assessment that matters.

The Lord speaks to them, “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works fulfilled.” It was a beginning but they had not gone onto fulfilment. “Be watchful”, but the thought is more, “wake up”. It is very easy for us to be indolent.

Sardis was built on a small plateau and there was only one approach from the south through a narrow isthmus. The other sides of the plateau were steep cliffs of muddy friable stone. Over the years Sardis was a very secure fortress. The little stream running through the valley there was said to have provided the gold that gave its king great power over the Lydian Empire. The king was attacked and he retreated to his fortress at Sardis and went to sleep, believing he was secure. The attackers found a way up a cliff and by morning the king and his fortress were captured. The Lord writes to people familiar with the history of their own locality and tells them to wake up. We must also learn the lessons of history the word of God records to teach and instruct us. The night is a time to be watchful. It is now night when the power of darkness is assailing believers; it is a time for watchfulness, a time to strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. Fellow Christians, is there anything in your life that needs to be strengthened? Is there anything that you need to be watchful about? Of course there is. Unless we are daily drawing on the Lord’s sustaining grace and walking in obedience to him we will grow weak and lifeless.

They are told, “I have not found thy works fulfilled”, and so they are exhorted to, “Remember therefore how thou hast received.” How did they receive blessing and how do we? Paul wrote to the Galatians and asked if they received salvation by the law. He asked if they were to go on to perfection by what could not save them. Justification is only by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ at Calvary as Martin Luther testified. The truth that the just shall live by faith was received and taught. In Romans 1:17 the just are found, but how can a man be justified before God? Romans 5 and verse 1 provides the answer. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In Galatians 3:11 we are told, “The just shall live by faith.” Here we have the principle of living before the Lord. In Hebrews 10:38 the same words are again quoted. The emphasis here is on faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Faith is simply laying hold of the word of God and trusting what he has said. The truth thrice repeated, “The just shall live by faith” is to be applied in our lives. Remember, he says to those in Sardis, how you received blessing first by faith in the word of God through his grace. Remember, the power you received to overcome, and remember that power is still available for the Saviour is living.

“Hold fast and repent.” It does not take long to repent. There was time for the thief on the cross to repent, and the moment he did, he was blessed for all eternity. Whenever there is conscious failure in our lives we must never let the devil blackmail us into continuing in the path of disobedience. The moment we are convicted of sin it will be cleansed if we immediately confess it to the Lord. Cleansing brings freedom of guilt because, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful (to his word) and just (because the price has been paid) to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” To continue in a pathway

of disobedience will not bring happiness, it will not honour the Lord, and it will not bring blessing to others.

“If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” In Matthew 13:44 we read of the one who found treasure hid in a field. Hidden treasure is spoken of in the book of Malachi. Years ago a man who had been very severely injured in an accident used to walk the streets near my office. His injuries meant he could only speak indistinctly but he was able to tell me that it was those injuries that caused him to turn to God’s word. Wherever he went he used to say, “God bless you.” He was incapable of saying much else. He changed his name by deed poll to Malachi, which means the Lord’s messenger. It was some time later I saw him on the street far from my office. He did not recognize me but he stopped, looked towards me and lifted up his stick. I could see his lips move, not in bitterness because of his disabilities, again to say, “God bless you.” He was a messenger of God faithfully delivering his message to all who passed by. But how many failed to receive it?

In the days of Malachi God’s messenger was needed. It was a day every bit as bad as Laodicea. Again and again we read in Malachi, “ye say.” They were always ready to talk about their opinion. “Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, what have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said it is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” But in the spite of this apostasy in the very next verse we read, “Then they that feared the Lord..” That word “then” is splendid. They could have looked around and thrown their hands up in horror and exclaimed, “what can you do about it.” They must have been saddened and discouraged, but what did they do? They “spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and thought upon his name.” If you turn to the letter to Sardis, Revelation 3:5 the overcomer is told, “I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” And here in Malachi we read of a book kept where names are recorded and of the Lord drawing near to hear his own hidden ones as they spoke, but what does he say about them? “And they shall be mine saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels..” His hidden ones are his treasure. And so it is even in Sardis, when he comes as a thief in the night he finds his hidden ones.

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” How remarkable to hear this. None could be worthy without his redeeming work. The Lord has sustained and kept them faithful, and it is this that we seek in our day, so when he comes, “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” He says, “they shall walk with me in white.” They have not defiled their garments. Jude says we are to save some, “hating even the garment to be spotted by the flesh.” The thought is that they have not defiled and spotted their garments with the filth of the world. James says “Pure religion” includes keeping oneself, “unspotted from the world.” How is this to be done? We are told of those in Revelation in another age who, “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” We have cleansing by the precious blood of Christ as we walk day by day. In Ecclesiastes the preacher says, “Let thy garments be always white.” And so they can be, as they are washed white in his precious blood. The culmination of this is found at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The bride, the Lamb’s wife is seen, “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the

fine linen is the righteousness's of saints." All who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ are sewing the garment in their daily life for the bridegroom. The bridal gown in glory will be seen as the righteous acts of the saints on earth to his glory. But in that day, the bride eyes not her garment but her dear bridegrooms face, for then every one he has purchased will see him as he is, and will be with him as he makes up his jewels.

"And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." How wonderful to be acknowledged by him when he has done so much for us and we so little in return. Surely we should acknowledge and be faithful to him who is faithful and true. If we fail, "He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Perhaps at Colossae when the Epistle addressed to them was read in a corner at the back there was a man half nodding off to sleep. And perhaps this had developed into a habit, and despite his best intentions he also habitually deferred doing what should be done to another day. The word of God seems to suggest someone rather like this because suddenly, when the Epistle had nearly been read, this man was startled to realize it was addressed to him. We can be like Archippus of whom we read in Colossians 4:17. Archippus was like Sardis, making a start, intending to go on, meaning to do and act, and now God says get going and do it. "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." What ministry have we each received from the Lord? All believers have some ministry entrusted to them to fulfil for the Lord. The world has an Olympic torch relay. Believers too have a torch to carry and pass on to others. They have been handed the torch by faithful saints redeemed by the blood of Christ and now rejoicing with him in glory. "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." He is there at the Bema, the throne where he will dispense the rewards, the commendations to runners. And the finish is in view; we are on the bell lap. Think of the anguish when the baton is dropped when runners compete for a corruptible crown. Paul says to Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me", this is the trust, the charge, the truth of the word of God, the witness to himself, "commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." We have been given the torch of testimony, and soon we will complete the race set before us, then to deliver to our God what he has entrusted to us. How shall we meet him? Will we be able to say with the Apostle, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"?

PHILADELPHIA

2 Chron 29:1-11, 15-19,27-29;

Matt 13:45-46; Rev 3:7-13

The atmosphere of this epistle and the corresponding periods surely is joy. There is joy in the discovery of the pearl in the parable. There is joy and rejoicing in the obedience, the sacrifices and the praise in the days of Hezekiah. There is joy in the gathering together and mutual valuing of the Lord and his word in Philadelphia, and his joy in them. It reminds us of the day when the Lord will rejoice over Israel “with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” Zeph 3:17

The word Philadelphia occurs seven times in the New Testament. One of these occurrences is Hebrews 13:1. Here is a simple statement to which every believer should say, Amen. “Let brotherly love continue.” Let Philadelphia continue, for Philadelphia means brotherly love. This passage links with Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” That word “together” is found often in the word of God. It is a reality God treasures as he calls from heaven and says, “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” It is in this way and in this light the church at Philadelphia is found. Brotherly love is indeed a wonderful reality, but it is not natural love. Natural love is selective. It is not a problem loving Christ like ones but agape love goes far beyond this. Such love is seen in love to the loveless, a love that reaches out to each and all impartially, a sacrificial love expressed always together with truth. Love for the brethren for his sake is his love shed abroad in our hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Spiritual love is from the Lord himself. It is released as we abide in Christ as John 15 tells us, and bear the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self control. This fruit is found in the church of Philadelphia

The Lord speaks of himself first, “He that is holy.” This is his personal character. In his messages to the other churches we read of what the Lord does. We can look at the creation and see his acts, but here we have himself. He is Holy and it is this characteristic that is valued by those who seek to know him. “He that is true.” The result of his inward holiness is the outward reality of truth. “He that hath the key of David, and that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth.” This truth needed to be addressed to this assembly because the Lord says of them, “thou hast a little strength”, little inherent power. They must then depend upon the one who is great and powerful and the source of all power and authority. “The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make their houses in the rocks.” They “are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise.” This is wisdom given them by their creator. Knowing our weakness and our feebleness we too can be wise and find in our creator, the Rock of Ages all that we will ever need.

This epistle corresponds with the time of Hezekiah and it was in his reign that the men mentioned in Isaiah 20-23 were found. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder: so shall he open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he

shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house." The one spoken of here is a real person yet a person who is a type or illustration of one who is far greater, far grander. The passage in Isaiah presents the real King to come whose authority will be established, and into whose hand the government is committed. Shebna the treasurer to whom it belonged was rejected and another is selected.

In Revelation 3:7, the Lord speaks of having the key of David and of being the one who opens and the one who closes. There are doors set before us and there are doors opened. In verse 8 we read, "I have set before thee an open door." It is more than just an open door; it is a door that was closed now opened by one who holds all authority. There are deep reasons for the words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28: 18. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." All power is given to him so here he speaks of doors he opens. When Peter was imprisoned he was powerless to open the doors but God sent an angel and they were all opened. Peter walks out of prison through unlocked doors and comes to a prayer meeting where the door is not opened. This is a door in the power and sphere of the responsibility of men to open. We may stand in front of doors in life and pray for the Lord to open them and they are never opened. Why? These are doors we are responsible to open. But there are other doors that the Lord will open through his power and in his time; and there are doors he will close.

When Japan invaded China in the last war many missionaries were repatriated. One spoke at a meeting and lamented that the work begun was now finished. An aged brother read the words of the Apostle, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." He explained the proper rendering was God kept on giving the increase. The preaching of the Gospel in China was not finished, he said for God was keeping on giving the increase. When Christians returned to China they found an increase in the gatherings of the Lord's people. When a door closes it is in God's hand, but when the door is opened we must grasp the opportunity and go forward. If he closes a door do not spend time lamenting, look for the door that he is going to open and be ready to move. There are times when he says stand still, and there are times when he says go forward. This church needed to be assured of these things and the assurance was received.

The Lord then speaks of four things: "Thou hast a little strength", "Hast kept my word", "Hast not denied my name" and, "I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and 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." Those who oppose him of the synagogue of Satan are mentioned. There is an enemy, at times within and at times without, but always some expression of the power of the enemy is found.

"Thou...hast kept my word", is an important expression to note. Jesus says in John 14:23, "If a man love me, he will keep my word."(RV) When we read the word of God, it is a whole word all parts must be studied. There are some who take parts of the word of God and give this precedence over other parts and say, but that's Paul speaking or that's Peter speaking. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God". Love to him will take the entire word and will obey it all, not just selected parts. The Lord treasured the regard those at Philadelphia had for his whole word as an inheritance to maintain, guard, obey and keep. When we search the scripture let it be your judge. Do not presume to judge any part of what God says will stand forever and that will judge us.

“Thou... hast not denied my name.” Peter says in his first epistle, “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.” “The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch” The Corinthians were rebuked for saying, “I am of Paul”, “I of Apollos”, “I of Cephas” and, “I of Christ”. The Apostle asks, “are ye not carnal?” Taking for a name to gather under is not the Lord’s will and purpose. To be gathered to his name means his name alone is treasured and magnified. His name is not for one gathering to claim to the exclusion of others. One brother greatly used of the Lord spoke of the Philadelphian age as being marked by a gathering of Brethren. Those of whom he spoke would deny this except as they regard themselves as brethren in the Lord. In Philadelphia we do not find a Brethren movement. We find a movement of the redeemed of the Lord to the person of Christ. There are no organizational structures or arrangements setting them apart from others. We are not to ever regard ourselves as gathered against others but rather, gathered to the Lord himself. Let us not use words about ourselves that would set us apart from those who treasure his name. It is a denial of his name when we gather to any other; it is a denial of himself when we regard any other or anything else as the centre of the gathering. When saints gather in a circle to remember the Lord as he has appointed, how blessed it is that he only is pre-eminent and his promise realized, “There am I in the midst.” The Lord is to be the centre of our lives individually and when believers meet together. Repeatedly we slip away from this. “Let brotherly love continue” is the exhortation, but this is not found without great loss of self.

The Lord says in Revelation 3:10, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” “Kept the word of my patience”, speaks of the waiting down the centuries to the moment when the Father will say to the Son arise and claim that which is thine own. “The word of my patience”, speaks of the waiting down the centuries during the time of his rejection for the moment when the Father will say to the Son, arise and claim that which is thine own. And because of this the promise is made. It is not, I will take thee from the hour, for then we might have been in the hour. The promise is, “I also will keep thee from the hour.” What is this hour? It is to “come upon the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

The earth dwellers are to be tried. Who are they? Philippians 3:18-19 speaks of many who are, “Enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” Those who are earthly minded are contrasted in the next verse with those whose citizenship is in heaven. We read in Revelation 6:10 of those who have been killed and persecuted for the word of God and for their testimony. They ask the Lord to, “judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth.” These earth dwellers are persecutors of the faithful of the Lord and in Revelation 8:13 they receive woe from heaven. Revelation 11:10 records that the earth dwellers rejoice to see the two witnesses of God dead, “and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them.” Tormented because the prophets spoke of righteousness of sin and judgment to come. Tormented because the earth dwellers had rejected the word of God and his warnings of judgment, and hated any who spoke of the futility seeking peace unrighteously without God. In Revelation chapter 12 we read of Satan being cast down to earth and of those who overcome him, “by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.” The heaven dwellers rejoice but woe is pronounced to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea.

Verse 12 of the next chapter says, “All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (the beast), whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Carefully note this, the earth dwellers worship the beast, and in verses 13-14 the earth dwellers are deceived by great wonders and miracles. It is they who will find the hour of temptation come upon them. The Lord speaks to his blood bought ones from heaven and promises; I will keep thee from the hour of temptation. What is to come is to try the earth dwellers. They will be cast into the awful time of tribulation and wrath. This time of judgment has nothing to do with those who are the Lord’s own redeemed people.

Revelation 3:11, “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” The crown here is not the crown of those of those who would reign, the kingly crown. It is the crown of the victor, the crown of the overcomer who strives and gains mastery. The Lord offers this crown to those who are faithful to him until his coming again.

Revelation 3:12, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.” Philadelphia was in an area peculiarly prone to earth quakes. In AD 17 earthquakes shattered twelve cities including Philadelphia. These continued for a number of years so much so that the citizens of Philadelphia lived in the fields outside the city walls to escape the danger of falling buildings. When men need safety they will strive to find it, but what despair and anguish when no refuge can be found. The Lord speaks of those in glory who shall go no more out, of a building that will stand, and of those who will be made pillars in that building which is eternal. The Philadelphians were prepared by experience to treasure the blessedness of what was promised.

Hebrews 1:10-11, “And Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest.” What a cheering word is this. Whatever happens in our lives or in the world, whatever we treasure and whatever we fear, we can look upon and know for a certainty, “They shall perish.” And then we can look off unto Jesus to where he sits in glory and rejoice in this: “But thou remainest.” As we look within and without there are many reasons to be fearful but dear saints, look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, “consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

Hebrews 12:25-27 “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” When God shakes our lives his purpose is to remove the dross and to leave in us that what cannot be shaken. Many question, doubt, and disbelieve the word of God and so unsettle the faith of others. One who had seen many truths once believed given up by those with whom he gathered despairingly asked, whatever will be left? He was told, exactly what Christians are not willing to surrender. Satan will not allow us to keep what we do not value. This is why the Lord says, “Hold fast which thou hast.” He will allow us to be shaken so we will look up to him who cannot be shaken, who remains, and find rest and deep blessing. This is what the Philadelphians found; the one they treasured was the one they gathered to. They

rested on the Lord's assurance, "because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee."

In the parable of the treasure found in the field it was valued so much that for joy the finder sold all he had and bought the field. In the next parable, Matthew 13:46 a man came seeking goodly pearls and he found one pearl of great price. It is said that the pearl is the tear of the oyster. A pearl is formed from sorrow and pain. It is a fitting symbol of the church of God surely, for it is taken up from depths and treasured. "Christ...loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." And in the wholeness and beauty of the pearl we see something of what Christ loved, what he came to seek and find in the depths, what he has redeemed by his own precious blood, and what he values. To purchase the church, he gave all that he had.

Hezekiah's day was a time of recovery. Prior to this King Uzziah reigned for fifty two years. He is also referred to in scripture by the name Azariah. He was faithful to the Lord and greatly used of God but toward the end of his reign, "when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense." He thought because he was king and had been honoured and blessed by God it would be permissible for him to act as a priest and to do what God had appointed to others. The pride of his heart was revealed in the leprosy that rose up in his forehead for God smote him. He left the temple in shame and until the day of his death lived apart cut off from the house of the Lord. Uzziah's son Jotham was faithful and honoured by God. He dared not enter into the temple of God and did not follow his father's example. He built the higher gate of the house of the Lord but did not remove the high places where the people sacrificed and burned incense. Ahaz his son then reigned. His reign is a picture of the Reformation period. Here you find promises that were not fulfilled. He turned aside and returned to worship and sacrifice to idols. "They were the ruin of him and of all Israel."

His son Hezekiah reigned in his stead. 2 Chronicles 29:3 says, "In the first year of his reign, in the first month, (he) opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them." Earlier we read about the one who had the key of David who opens and no man shuts and shuts and no man opens. Here there are doors to be opened and it was Hezekiah's responsibility to open them. There are doors we too must open. Hezekiah was not tardy; he did not prevaricate, procrastinate or equivocate. In the first year, in the first month he opened the doors of the Lord's house that had been shut and repaired them. Verse 16, "And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord." "They began on the first day of the first month to sanctify". "And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly."

Fellow Christians, there is something that spoils so much of the joy of the Lord among us. It is our tardiness; our failure to act when God speaks; our sitting down deaf, dumb and lame when God would have us to listen, to speak and to act. Often when we are faced with sin in our selves or in our midst we do nothing, and later when the fruit of departure is seen, we must acknowledge our neglect. Oh the shame and disappointment knowing that there was something we should have done but we let it go. Have we not all found

this? The sadness of what might have been, of opportunities lost and failure to respond in obedience to the voice of the Lord.

Hezekiah began acting promptly at the beginning of his reign, and this was not running ahead of the Lord. When urgent action is needed Christians will say, "Wait upon the Lord". This is true. There is a time to wait and a time to act. As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went out to meet him: "but Mary sat still in the house." When Mary was told, "The master is come, and calleth for thee," she arose quickly, and came to him. What a moment before was right waiting would now have been disobedience if she had not immediately moved and gone to the Lord. Her ready response to the Lord's call led the Jews in her house to follow and to witness the wonder of what was then done. Whenever God speaks do not foolishly make excuses for not acting. If we are not sure what to do he will not condemn us if we wait upon him to seek the knowledge of his will. Better than our earthly father he takes the responsibility of giving us clear instructions. "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you, and take your journey and go." When Joshua was on his face before the Lord following the defeat at Ai seeking to know what was wrong, the Lord said unto him, "Get thee up...Israel hath sinned." There is a time to wait, a time to pray and a time to act and do what God has commanded.

Hezekiah was a man who acted when he knew what was God's will. Later in his reign the Assyrian king, Sennacherib blasphemously challenged the power of God to deliver Judah from his hands. Hezekiah waited upon the Lord: he prayed, cried to heaven and "spread it before the Lord." God acted and 185,000 in the Assyrian army were killed in one night. When God's servant waited upon the Lord he was glorified and acted, showing he only is the Lord God. Hezekiah acted promptly when action was needed and he also waited upon the Lord before acting. Yet there were times when he failed. Earlier he tried to buy off Sennacherib by robbing the treasury of the house of the Lord and cut the gold from the doors of the temple and the pillars to pay him. He did not wait upon the Lord before doing these things.

We too will experience failure, and when this is realized; immediately confess the failure and sin to the Lord and to each other. Let us never be bound by Satan to continue in the failure and sin of yesterday. We have a loving merciful God full of grace who forgives and who restores and cleanses. He knows we have "little strength." He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And again, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord of hosts." It is those who deny themselves and who faithfully obey and serve God who will be used by him to bring victory. The Lord is not swayed by our greatness or impressed by our pretensions. He sees the heart, he knows and in every epistle to each of the seven churches he says again and again, "I know." The Lord Jesus Christ loved, and gave himself to ransom and redeem we who were dead in sin, but who now have passed from death unto life everlasting. How precious are the redeemed to God all who are part of that pearl. Philadelphia continues until that moment when the dead in Christ and every living believer in him will rise to meet him in the air. He tells those in Philadelphia he is coming quickly; he says to the overcomer he will write upon them, the name of my God, the name of the city of my God which is new Jerusalem, and his new name. And in the joy of that new name no more to go out, to forever be with him. How unspeakably blessed.

LAODICEA

Matthew 13:47-53;
Revelation 3:14-22

It is sad and disappointing to read of the life of Samson. A man wonderfully blessed with power and mission and enablement, but how blind and self deceived. As we consider this church let us start with the Lord's side of things. Ephesians 5:25-26: "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." Isaiah 53 speaks of the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ and then we read in verse 10-11: "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, and he shall be satisfied". We do find apostasy and departure as we observe the history of the church in this world, but let us remember, failing people like ourselves introduced the decline in testimony and faithfulness to God. And in spite of it all at the close, at the culmination, the word of God says, "He shall see the travail of his soul and he shall be satisfied". For he loved the church and it is his purpose and it will be so, to present unto himself "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." We have failed and marred, but what a cause for thanksgiving and praise to know the grace of God forgives, and the glory of God is placed upon those who are his redeemed. The Lord says to the church at Laodicea, "Thou art lukewarm" and, "I would thou wert cold or hot." But in Revelation 3:19 we find two words of exhortation addressed to each one personally, and these are to be applied whatever happens. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." The two words are: "be zealous," and they mean: Be Hot.

The period of the Judges in the person of Samson ends in blindness, the period of the Kings in the person of Zedekiah ends in blindness and the Lord said to Laodicea, "Thou art...blind." The last verse in Judges repeats what was said in Judges 17:6 and is most instructive, " In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." They did not do anything wrong. Everyone had reasons for what was done and it was right in their own eyes. There was no King, no recognized authority; the only authority recognized was self.

Samson was to be a Nazarite. The word Nazarite means one who is completely separated unto God. One who is to be holy and who is to live apart from the world. Those who were Nazarites were to allow their hair to grow long. The long hair was a witness of submission to authority. This is why the scripture says, "if a woman have long hair it is a glory to her" Our greatest glory is to take the place the Lord has given us. And so as the Nazarite walked amongst men he wore the long hair that told of his submission. The word says it is a shame for a man to have long hair but the Nazarite was called to submit, to be dedicated wholly to the will of God and this required self-sacrifice. He was also not to take of the fruit of the vine, grapes or wine. Scripture speaks of the wine cheering man and making glad his heart. In his submission to God, his self-denial and dedication to the

will of God, the Nazarite showed that because the vow of the Lord was upon him there was a greater call for self-sacrifice, so what was permissible to others was not for him. He was to shun all that would hinder or weaken his consecration to the Lord. In John 17:19 the Lord Jesus prays for those the Father has given him and says, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself", or "I Nazarite myself." Shortly before Gethsemane at the supper he said to his disciples, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." At that time he took the willing vow of the Nazarite to be wholly dedicated to carry out the will of his Father. He is seated in heaven, set apart from the nation and the world as the true Nazarite. His perfect submission to the Father's will is announced in Isaiah, "I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from the shame and the spitting." The plucking of the hair from his cheeks was Satan's attack on that declaration of his dedication to the will of God. His Nazariteship continues until that day when he will drink the fruit of the vine and shall joy in his people. Abraham rejoiced to see his day and was glad. Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist were all Nazarites from birth.

Judges 13:24, "And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew and the Lord blessed Him." What a wonderful beginning to life to know the Lord's blessing when young. "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol." Here there were stirrings of the leading of the Spirit of God. At the end of his life twenty years later we read in Judges 16:31 he was buried in the same district, "between Zorah and Eshtaol." It was in his death Samson gained his greatest victory but at the cost of his own life. As we look at Samson's life we see some of the characteristics of the age of Laodicea.

Judges 14:1, "And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughter of the Philistines. There was always conflict between the children of God and the Philistines. Although they were the enemies of the people of God, Samson looks to them for a partner in life. He acts by what he sees. He who was so blessed by the movement of the Spirit of God has no time for faith, which comes from hearing the word of God. Verse 2, "And he came up and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife." Samson's desire shows that the supremacy and absolute authority of the word of God did not grip him because the union he purposed was contrary to the commands given to Israel to be separate. Remember the account in Luke 15 of the younger son who journeyed into the far country. His first recorded words were, "Father give me" This attitude lead to him being sent to feed pigs. How appropriate for pigs squeal for their food and in fattening themselves merely hasten the day of their slaughter. A man who only lives for self at the end has very little to live for. Samson with all the blessing of the call of God starts with the demand of his father, "Get her for me", and which he repeats after his parents protest adding, "She pleases me well."

His parents asked, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" Why did they refer to circumcision? Circumcision was given by God as a mark of distinction between his own people and those around. The picture of circumcision is this,

I judge my flesh, I say no to self. But Samson who wears the marks of the Nazarite and who was to be a Nazarite unto God from the womb, to please himself goes to those who do not have the covenant mark of God's blessing, and who do not judge themselves. His parents accede to his demands and they go down to Timnath with him.

A young lion roared against Samson. Now here we have a strange paradox. There are two sides of the work of Satan. Peter speaks of him "as a roaring lion, walk(ing) about, seeking whom he may devour", and Paul says, "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." Samson is able to discern the one but not the other. Satan is seen as a roaring lion and Samson immediately discerns the enemy and immediately acts in the power of the Spirit of God. He kills the lion with his bare hands but there is no victory over self and he continues to seek the Philistine woman he desires. He then discovers that to be linked with the woman he must have thirty Philistine companions for this was their custom. Before his birth the angel of the Lord had said he would begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines and now he has them as his companions. He tells his worldly companions a riddle, which they are unable to answer. They speak to Samson's wife and threaten to burn her and her father's house unless she can discover the answer for them. She approaches Samson and discovers that he is different from the world and that there are things he cannot share with her. Those who truly belong to the Lord cannot link with those in the world because they do not belong there. It is an unequal yoke and the differences are soon revealed. The woman discovers his secret and she immediately "told the riddle to the children of her people." Samson is angry at her betrayal and her loyalty to her own people. The Lord said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own." Here we find this acted out.

Samson responds by killing thirty Philistines to take their garments to pay those who answered his riddle. It was a victory but only because self was involved. The Lord used this but self was on the throne in Samson's life. He later returns to the woman with a gift and finds that she has been given to another. This causes him to burn the corn, vineyards and olives of the Philistines. There could have been something for the Lord here but he acts for the Lord only as far it is in his interest. The Philistines respond by burning Samson's choice of a wife and her father. He immediately avenges their deaths, acts in wrath and kills a great multitude. He then dwelt on the top of the rock Etam and the Philistines gather to take him prisoner.

The men of Judah came to him to take him prisoner to the Philistines. They knew his great strength and did not want to fight with him. Here is a flash of beauty. Samson would not use his great strength the Lord had given him against the Lord's own people. He submits and allows them to take him prisoner to the Philistines. How sad that the people of God had sunk so low they preferred bondage to the Philistines rather than the risks associated with testimony and witness. They did not want the unhindered power of the Spirit of God and so bound and delivered Samson to the world.

Again the Spirit of God comes upon him for the Lord will not surrender Samson to his own will and way easily. God is there and the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him he breaks the cords that bind him and a thousand Philistines are slain as he uses the jawbone of an ass. A live ass spoke to a prophet and he heard and learnt, here a dead ass is used to

kill a thousand men. “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” It pleases God “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Samson is exhausted, thirsty and fatigued and we hear him pray for the first time. He asked what is the use of a victory if he going to die of thirst and be taken by the uncircumcised. The Lord refreshes him from the hollow place in the jaw. This victory causes the people to give him the place of leadership and for twenty years he is used of God to deliver Israel. We do not read what occurred over this period.

In Judges chapter 16 we read Samson went to Gaza. The people of God are tested at Gaza. Previously at least Samson sought marriage, now it is not that. He sees a harlot and went in unto her. The Philistines learn of his presence and wait for him in the darkness. Samson is aware of this and at midnight arises and takes the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts on his shoulders carries them out on the way to Hebron, and leaves them on top of a hill. What a contemptuous attitude he displays to the power of these people. The dreadful consequence here is that he has escaped and experiences no restraint to his own will.

Verse 4, “ And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.” Delilah means delicate and exhaustion. Sorek has the thought of a fragrant vine that entangles. Here is a man who could carry away the doors and posts, who had no fear of the lion, who can destroy multitudes in anger but who is entrapped again by a woman used by the subtlety of Satan. Do not condemn the woman as such; remember the wiles of Satan and be not ignorant of his devices. A man of God is caught and entangled as he plays with the world. Delilah asks him the secret of his strength. He has played with the world many times before and has escaped. He lies to her. This man upon whom the Spirit came upon mightily has no problem repeatedly lying. There are those today in positions of power and influence who play with fire apparently untouched and so are emboldened to continue. There is a need for us each one to take heed to ourselves. These are days when many saints are allowing into their homes and lives defiling, corrupting things to gratify the flesh. When worldly lusts remain unjudged before God they can only lead to greater departure.

“She made him sleep upon her knees.” Judges 16:19 and in the next verse, “And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist (knew) not that the Lord was departed from him.” He was asleep in the lap of the world. This is the essence of the problem. How many believers are in this position? This is the trouble with Laodicea. Asleep in the lap of the world, thinking they were so right, so rich, so strong and so full of everything. He awakes and says, “I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.” The awful errors and the depths to which he had sunk are revealed. Samson is so blinded by his own will, by doing that which was right in his own eyes, that he has no consciousness of the Lord’s presence at all. This is the Laodicean condition. The Lord is outside knocking for admission and they are so organized, so occupied with what pleases them they have not missed him. Be sure of this, Laodicea was not a heretical church. Laodicea could be where we are. It could be our own hearts condition. Those in Laodicea are active but

there is one meeting that they would neglect. Business meetings would be well attended because there is much to be done and wealth to gather and administer. How many would steadfastly attend the prayer meeting? The Laodicean says, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." They would not feel the need to be at a prayer meeting. Dear saints, we have needs and at the prayer meeting we find him who is able to meet those needs. The prayer meeting tests our condition of heart and of the hearts of those with whom we gather. Samson did not realize he had a need and that the Lord was not there. He went out but his strength was gone and he was taken captive.

The Philistines put out his eyes. They only did what had already happened, they blinded a blinded man. Yet this blinding was the means used by God to give Samson the vision that his own will had so long obscured. They brought him to Gaza, which means stronghold, "and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house." It is in this condition he sees and is set free from bondage to his own will. Verse 22, "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven." He realizes he is there as a prisoner of the Lord. The Philistines mock him and say that their god Dagon has delivered their enemy into their hands. When we fail we give the enemies of God the opportunity to mock and to boast. We need to come before the Lord in self judgment of our wayward natural tendencies. Samson had allowed his head to be shaven. The hair that spoke outwardly of his Nazariteship was removed, so his outward state was brought into conformity with his inward condition just as with his eyes. God will permit this for our blessing. Samson was blind and the world had blinded him. The entangling vines of the world bound him and now the Lord allowed him to be bound by fetters of brass. And as he ground in the prison house he began to seek deliverance from the Lord. His strength and the sign of it gone but the Lord starts to give him a sign of revival, his hair begins to grow again. It was a reminder to him of life and of the grace and power of God to forgive and to restore.

Small things can speak in blessing to us and remind us of God's presence. The Lord reminds us of this in Luke 12:6-7, "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." The grace of God extends to every repentant sinner who calls upon the living God. Samson calls upon the Lord and asks for strength. The Lord remembers him and he is guided to the two middle pillars upon which the house stood. He prays, "Let me die with the Philistines" and the pillars are moved and the house collapses. This brought victory to the people of God but it was gained by the death of Samson. Those who overcome Satan are spoken of in the book of Revelation. They overcome "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony: and they loved not their lives unto the death." Blessing will come through our lives if we daily die to self and submit our wills to the Lamb. The Lord spoke to Baruch in the days of Jeremiah saying, "Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted will I pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." In this our day there is no time for us to seek things for ourselves. Samson is a picture to us of a church that is so full of strength and self sufficiency they do not know their need for his presence, his word, his will and his power. Do we?

The last of the kings of Judah was Zedekiah. He was captured and his sons were killed; he was blinded and taken to Babylon together with all the vessels of the house of God. His father was Jehoiakim and his brother was Jeconiah. Matthew 1 records the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David. Verse 11 tells us Josias begat Jechonias. The mention of Jechonias in the genealogy of Christ is remarkable because in Jeremiah 22:24 we read, "As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence." Verse 30, "Thus saith the Lord, Write this man (Coniah) childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." Coniah is a contraction of Jechonias. God would not link his name Ja with this wicked man. If the genealogy in Matthew was not that of Joseph, the supposed father of Jesus Christ, the scripture would be broken, but these verses supply remarkable testimony to his virgin birth. Zedekiah is blinded and he and all the vessels prepared of the Lord are taken to Babylon to be used by them.

You will recall that Belshazzar made a great feast and he, his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank from them and praised their gods. They despised the vessels of the Lord just as does Babylon today. The Lord's own people are to be vessels for him and ready and available for his use. As you read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah you find there was a measure of recovery and restoration given by the Lord. He carefully numbered the vessels that he brought back to be separated unto him. Second Timothy refers to the last days, the times we are in now, and it speaks of vessels: of Nazariteship. The vessels are to be holy, and to "depart from iniquity." They are to be purged and separated, vessels "unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared for every good work." Vessels that are claimed by Babylon are recovered by the Lord to be used for his glory. Fellow Christians, we are to be cleansed vessels, emptied of self, filled by him ready to be used for his service in bringing Jesus Christ to others.

Revelation 3:14, Notice the way the Lord speaks of himself as "The Amen." When God says "Amen", it means that what has been said stands, and always will. The Lord Jesus says, "Verily, verily I say unto you" two dozen times in John's gospel, and nothing more can be said because all his power and authority forever establishes the truth of what he tells us. "The word of our God shall stand forever." When man says "Amen", it means submission for we say to the Lord, so be it. Now every person's responsibility is to say yes to what God says. The Lord is, "The faithful and true witness." He also speaks of himself as, "The beginning of the creation of God." He is not the first of the creations of God, he is the initiator, the source of the creation of God for "by him were all things created" and "he is before all things and by him all things consist."

Verse 16, "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth." It is not a statement of certainty; it is a statement of warning. The Lord wants his own people to hear his voice, to be guided by him and to have hearts fixed upon him. This is why he says in verse 19, "Be hot and repent."

Verse 17, "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods." Where did their riches come from? Ezekiel chapter 16:7-14 gives us a description of the Lord's provision for his people and then the succeeding verses relate the ugliness of what the people of

God had done with these blessings. They used his blessings to commit spiritual immorality and this led to the other. When we depart from God's word this unfaithfulness will be manifested in the flesh. Those in Laodicea thought they were rich; they were entirely ignorant of their true condition before God, "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

There is a teaching in some circles of prosperity blessing and this has stumbled some. Man's estimate of riches is not God's. Smyrna were poor but the Lord said, "but thou art rich" Peter could say, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Paul preached the unsearchable riches of Christ and says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

We are called to seek Christ first and to live for him. How difficult it is in these days when there is so much knowledge so much activity and so little realization of our need of him. Let us ask him to help us always in all things to realize our need for him. We are weak and failing yet we have his promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Do not be occupied with what others should do. One of the Lord's sharpest rebukes was given after Peter had been restored. Peter turned about and saw John following and asked, "Lord what shall this man do?" and the Lord replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." When we are moved to go on for the Lord we instinctively turn around and say what about them? This is a snare and a diversion because it causes us to look away from the Lord and interferes with our walk with him.

The last of the parables speaks of the great ingathering. In that day when the gospel net is drawn all those who are the Lord's will rejoice in his presence forever. It was no mistake when the Lord said, "I will make you fishers of men," and Peter and Andrew, "left their nets, and followed him." Yes there is sadness, there is departure and there is failure, yet in spite of it all, the Lord is still knocking. He has not given up. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." He will share his throne with the overcomer. And what does the overcomer have to overcome? the Lion that roars? Not in our country. We have more to fear from the world's attractions, its allurements and its friendship than we ever do from its persecutions. When the world smiles believers are so often disarmed. How quickly their armour is removed "and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God", forgotten.

This last message is a call of encouragement from the Lord to open the door and let him come in. He has the key of David to open doors of opportunity but he does not use this key to open the heart's door. He uses the entreaty of his voice and calls us to open our heart's door and our life to him. And if we do this he promises, "I will come in to him, and will sup with him." For we can make him a feast as they did at Bethany. "And he with me," for he will sup with us and provide for us as he has ever done. Let us thank him for it.