

## Intro:

1. Review of what the interpretations are.
2. Review of how the letters are interpreted.
3. Previous Churches: Ephesus-Cooling Off Church; Smyrna-Church of Persecution

## I. The Pergamum Church: The Church of Compromise

**Rev 2:12-17**, *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. <sup>13</sup> I know where you live--where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”*

1. This was the provincial capital of Asia. If Ephesus was New York City, this is Washington D.C.. Had the second largest library in the world. It was the oldest city in Asia, and also the first to erect a temple to Caesar Augustus, and to Zeus. It was the place where emperor cult was very popular.
2. It was also known for its pagan worship. On a hill about a thousand feet behind the city was a temple to Zeus, to Athena, to Bacchus (god of wine and drama) and also one to Aesculapius (the healer). The priest for this temple were skilled in medical skills and there were claims of miraculous healing from their. According Hugh Martin the priest was associated with a serpent and when he appeared (not dressed as a serpent), he would be holding a staff with a serpent wreath around it. This would be interpreted by both Christian and Jew as belonging to Satan.
3. Even in the awful place, they still held firm to the name of Christ even when one of their leaders was killed. This group was faithful, but not all.
4. But then there is a but- the church is a compromising church. Some of the members have given in to the false teachings.
5. **Balaam was a true prophet who prostituted his gifts out to make money, and he was hired by the king of Balak to curse Israel but God would not allow it, so instead of cursing he blessed them. But Balak still got his moneys worth because Balaam convinced him to make friends with them and invite them to worship and feast at pagan altars. The Jewish men fell right into the trap of being good neighbors and they ate meat from the idol altars and committed fornication as part of heathen religious rights. 24,000 died because of this act of compromise.**
  - a. This was the same thing going on. It is believed by some that the Nicolaitans was an out-in-out antinomians who thought that the Christian law was not binding on people. Some Christians were making friends with Rome. And they were compromising by going along with the idol worship. And this is a question for us today in how far to we go with the culture before we become part of the culture?
    - i. Let me set this in a way that you can really sympathize for these Christians: Imagine you get invited to a dinner and the invitation read like this. These are two examples found from this era: “Chareremon requests your company at dinner at the table of the lord Serapis tomorrow, the 15<sup>th</sup>, at 9.” “Antoninus, son of Ptolemaus, invites you to dine with him at the table of the Lord Serapis in the house of Claudius Serapion on the 16<sup>th</sup> at 9” Should Christians accept these invitations? (Apply to if Muslim asked you to come to a party where there would be worship of Allah.”
6. Hidden Manna- There was a tradition at the time (**2 Macc 2:4-8 (RSV)**), *“It was also in the writing that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. <sup>5</sup> And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance. <sup>6</sup> Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it. <sup>7</sup> When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: “The place shall be unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. <sup>8</sup> And then the Lord will disclose these*

things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated." that said that the Prophet Jeremiah had taken the ark of the covenant, containing the golden pot of manna, with him when he fled to Egypt before the Babylonians took over. Some thought that when the kingdom age came, Jeremiah would return and would serve the hidden manna from the ark. Some in Jesus day thought that He was Jeremiah (**Matt. 16:14**) thought because of His miracle of the loaves.

7. The White Stone- Some take it to mean a white stone means innocent, black stone guilty. Others believe that it was like a ticket to get into a temple or an event. So if you don't compromise, you get your ticket into Heaven.

## II. The Thyatira Church: The Church of Toleration

**Rev 2:18-29** *"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. <sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. <sup>22</sup> So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. <sup>23</sup> I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. <sup>24</sup> Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): <sup>25</sup> Only hold on to what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup> To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations-- <sup>27</sup> 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -- just as I have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup> I will also give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

1. The smallest town yet it got the longest letter. It was known as the city that had many trade guilds, and it would have been hard to make a living without belonging to one.
  - a. Many of these people were workers of a trade, and in the city they had what was called a guild. They would pull their resources together for better wages and such, it was like a union. And if you didn't belong to one of these guilds, you didn't work. Problem for the Christians, is that most of these guilds had a pagan god or goddess they would meet and sacrifice their food to the god and then eat it. As a Christian what do you do? (It was like if there was a teachers union that used its dues for political purposes you don't agree with, so you don't want to give them your union dues, but if you aren't part of the union, you don't get a job. So what means more to you, your beliefs or your job.)
  - b. Jezebel probably wasn't an actual name of the person, but symbolically, she would entice people to go along with the Roman worship and the practices of the guilds so that they wouldn't lose their jobs or their lives.
  - c. Probably dealt with (especially in vs 24) to the Gnostics who believed that they had a deeper knowledge of God. Kind of like a divine knowledge that superceded anything else. There were many branches of Gnosticism, and it is believed that here was one where they had divine knowledge that made certain things okay.
  - d. The big thing here, and really in keeping with the whole theme so far is this: Christians had to ask themselves, what is non-negotiable to you. What are you willing to compromise and what are you not willing.
  - e. Look at the results of the compromise, they might of kept their job, but look at what they had to suffer. Interestingly, this is the sternest letter and the one in which Jesus is described as having eyes of blazing fire!
  - f. Historicist view this period as the papal period and they interpret the killing children as the black death.

### **III. The Letter to the Church in Sardis: The Sin of Lethargy**

**Rev 3:1-6**, *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. <sup>4</sup> Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. <sup>6</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

1. Discuss the idea of how universe is. One light year equals the distance that light would travel-at a rate of 186,000 miles per second, for one year which would be more than 6 trillion miles. Now why say all this. Because something interesting can happen. If a star thirty light years away exploded and died, we would not know by looking at it for another twenty five years. Though no longer in existence, the light from the star would go on shining. So even though it was dead, it would look like it was alive. And you kind of get that impression with this church and many churches just like it.
  - a. Churches that have had rich past experiences still live in those past experiences. It was a great church, and still is a great church but truth be told, it is no longer a great church.
2. Some interesting things to keep in mind about Sardis. Sardis was a city that was thought to be impregnable. It was thought to have been one of the greatest cities of the ancient world and was known to be very wealthy. Aesop, from the fables, is believed to be from Sardis. It was on a hill 1500 ft above sea level and had natural smooth rock walls on three sides of it making the only entrance into the city was up a long difficult path. It was thought that no one could conquer it, but the city fell. It fell because they were so confident that no one could scale their walls, so they had no one stand guard there to watch for enemies. They thought they didn't have to. So the Persians used rock climbers and went unnoticed. They were conquered again 300 years later by the same thing, being over confident and not keeping watch.
3. Also this city was known for its red dye. They claimed they were the ones who discovered how to dye wool and most people in that town wore red outfits.
4. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17, and was rebuilt by the generous aid of Emperor Tiberius, and so in his honor they built a temple, but their main goddess was the same goddess that the Ephesians worshiped, Diana.
5. Now again notice how Jesus doesn't start out with a compliment here. He just goes straight to the bad news. He starts with His knowledge of them, and says how they have a reputation for being alive, but I know you are dead.
  - a. The idea there, you can fool a lot of folks, but there is no fooling God. I think that's an important lesson for not only our churches but in our lives as well. Ask yourself, where are you spiritually? Not what have I convinced others to think of where I am at, but where is my heart with God's heart, because God knows.
6. Now they were doing deeds. But you kind of get the impression that this was deeds that they were kind of just going through the motions with. Kind of like if you have a program or ministry at the church that we do each year or each month just because we always have done it.
7. Example was the Church of England before the Methodist Revival. The church had become one of a tame respectability and one of tolerance to the extremes. So when Wesley and others came on the scene, it was considered a bad form of the clergy. But this is really telling. At that time the dominant influence of the church was Bishop Tillotson. After commending much that he did, Canon Charles Smith wrote, “The Content of his preaching was little more than a prudential morality, based rather on reason than on revelation, and appealing deliberately to sober common

sense. The Gospel of Moral rectitude rendered to the English character a service which only bigotry would ignore in implanting in the Englishman a characteristic sense of duty...yet, it falls short of the Christian Gospel.

8. Now another take on this is that the deeds they were doing were deeds that the world saw as good but that God saw as not so good. In other words it was one of those churches that said the right things to make it popular but went contrary to God's word, so that it was thought to be a church that was alive with deeds, but God said, "Your dead!"
9. SO how do you fix a dead church. Well here we have it. The first thing to do is to wake up! (Tell story about putting Prune juice in the communion cup. If Spirit won't get them moving, the prune juice will!). Look around and know that were dead. The idea if given is that there is a group there in that church who is still good, and they have to get things going! They can't just go with the flow or pretend that nothing is wrong, but instead they have to wake up and help the church turn around.
  - a. God always keeps a remnant. Whether its with the Old Testament, or in a church.
10. The second step is to strengthen what remains and is about to die. I take that to mean two things. Get your members going again, and get the things you got going, get them going well again. Revival starts with the members of the church, not the community.
11. The third step is to remember what you have received and heard: I take that to mean, go back to the basics of what it is all about. Those basic doctrines, those basic commands. (Remember the Rocky film, where he got caught up in the money and all, he lost to Mr. T, so he went back to his roots, to the old gym, to the hard work ethic and such.)
12. The fourth step is simply this: Do them! Go back to what you are supposed to do then do them! That means repent. Remember how we talked about repent meaning to see things differently. In a way, Jesus is saying here, "Go back to seeing things the way you were supposed to see them at first."
13. If not, the thief is going to come. This is an image often used in the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, but here it probably means more along the lines of judgment upon the church.
14. They had not soiled their garments. The word used there is the Gk word "*Moluno*" which means to defile, to smear, or to pollute. It would have been familiar to those people who dealt with garments so much.
  - a. White garments is used often in Revelation and it has the symbolic meaning of being righteous and pure.
  - b. The book of life is an image that we will see later, and it is a book that contains the name of the followers of Christ. In John's day, rulers would often keep a register of the people in the town and if they died or committed a serious crime, there name would be removed from that list, taking with it all the benefits of being a part of that city. Same thing with the book of life. If name is not in there, your not part of the Kingdom of God and you don't get the benefits, primarily which is living with God so you are kicked out of the Kingdom of God which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> death, separation from God.

#### **IV. The Church of Philadelphia**

**Rev 3:7-13**, *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. <sup>8</sup> I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup> I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. <sup>12</sup> Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new*

*Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. <sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

1. This is the story of the little church that could. It was small, had little strength was being persecuted but they overcame and Jesus didn't have anything bad to say about them.
2. A few things to point out in this passage. Vs. 10 where it says I will keep you from the hour of trial- some futurist see here that this means that there will be a pre-tribulation rapture. (Describe different views of the rapture).
3. I want to get your opinion on vs. 9. What do you all think about the idea of those who opposed these Christians being made to come and fall down at their feet and acknowledge that God really did love them? (Is this like rubbing it in their faces or is this more like vindication).
  - a. Compare it to my run in with the Church of Christ member who told me I was a wolf in Sheep's clothing. In Heaven, I hope he's there, and I can't wait to see his expression when he sees that I'm there.

## **V. *The Church of Laodicea:***

**Rev 3:14-22**, *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. <sup>20</sup> Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup> To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

1. Laodicea was a very prosperous city. It was located at the junction of two important trade routs. It was said to be a center for banking. It was so rich that when an earthquake leveled the city, they refused help from the Roman authorities. They were also known for their medicine, particularly eye medicine that was believed to help people see and it was the producer of soft black wool that was sought after by many.
2. Now here is another church with no good news. The bad thing is that they are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. Let me ask, why would it be better to be cold then lukewarm. (use example of a cup of coffee. If I take a sip and its hot, that's what I want. If I take a sip and its cold, I go and get me another cup. But if its at that point where its warm, its not what I want but its not making me make any changes to it either.)
3. This church had a false impression about itself. (Relate to what they were known for).