

# Study 25: Chapters 1-3 Revisited

## **Introduction**

As we look back at Revelation after studying through the book, there is much symbolism in the first three chapters that was “missed” as we approached the letter on the first occasion. We will now “revisit” these three chapters again. I will try to cover the previous material in outline only, rather than go over the same thing again.

The first chapter contains the first vision – Christ amongst the churches.

The second chapter contains things concerning the first four of the churches.

The third chapter contains things concerning the last three of the churches.

## **Body of the Study**

**The Prologue**

**Greetings and Blessing**

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**The Church at Sardis**

**The Church at Philadelphia**

**The Church at Laodicea**

## ***Homework and preparation for next week:***

*Re-read chapters 1-3*

*Read the notes as a review of the study*

*Think through the images that John gives, and how he leads into the material that has been dealt with in the book. Are there other images and phrases that he has used that you can find?*

## Notes for study 25: Revelation Chapters 1-3 - Revisited

As we look back at Revelation after studying through the book, there is much symbolism in the first three chapters that was “missed” as we approached the letter on the first occasion. We will now “revisit” these three chapters again. I will try to cover the previous material in outline only, rather than go over the same thing again.

The first chapter contains the first vision – Christ amongst the churches.

### The Prologue

The prologue sets the scene for the letter – it describes what the letter is about. “...<sup>REV 1:1</sup> *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testifies to everything he saw-- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near...*” (1:1-3 NIV).

John writes about events that would have a direct bearing on the brethren in Asia Minor – they would soon take place. We have seen that these events concern the rise in persecution under the Roman Empire, and would continue on through the decline and fall of the Empire.

Angels form a prominent place in the letter. God’s messengers revealed the visions to John. The word “angel” (*angelos*) just means messenger. Sometimes it is an earthly messenger, and sometimes it is a spiritual messenger. As we look into the scenes of heaven, we see the angels – God’s ministering spirits (Heb 1:14) – at work doing His will. The angels sounded forth the trumpet judgements, and also poured out the bowls of wrath. The letters to the churches are also addressed to the *angel* of each of the churches, but in this case nothing in the context suggests that it was a spiritual (heavenly) angel, and therefore was just the messenger of the church.

The book of Revelation was not John’s idea. It came from Jesus, and was a testimony delivered from Him to John through a spiritual messenger. Christ is central to the book (as with every book in the Bible, but especially so in Revelation). It was Christ and He alone that was able to take the scroll and open the seven seals, revealing God’s plan of salvation.

There are seven (a complete number) of “blessings” (beatitudes) that are given through the letter. The first appears here in the Prologue, and the others follow:

*“...Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near...”* (1:3 NIV)

*“...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”...*” (14:13 NIV)

*“...Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed...”* (16:15 NIV)

*“...Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! And he added, “These are the true words of God...”* (19:9 NIV)

*“...Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years...”* (20:6 NIV)

*“...Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book...”* (22:7 NIV)

*“...Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city...”* (22:14 NIV)

## Greetings and Blessing

The letter is formally addressed from John, to the seven churches “...To **the seven churches** in the province of Asia...” (1:4 NIV).

Whilst these were real churches, with real people, and with real problems, they are also representative of all churches everywhere. We can see one or more of the characteristics of the churches in every congregation. The seven churches are therefore not only real, but are also symbolic of the complete church everywhere and in every time.

“...Grace and peace to you **from him who is, and who was, and who is to come**, and from **the seven spirits before his throne**,<sup>5</sup> and from **Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness**, the firstborn from the dead, and **the ruler of the kings of the earth**.”

**To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood**,<sup>6</sup> and has made us to be **a kingdom and priests** to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen...” (1:4-6 NIV).

God the Father (here) and later, Jesus is the one *who is, and who was, and who is to come*. Christ is the Lamb who became worthy because of His sacrifice, and so the vision looks back to Jesus “who was”. Whilst under persecution, it would be easy for the brethren to think that they had been forsaken by God, and hence they have the assurance that “He is” there with them (and in the first vision of Him walking amongst the seven churches). When it seems that there is no justice for God’s people after suffering over 200 years of persecution, they are given the assurance that He will return to bring vengeance on the oppressors, and to eternally reward His people. He “is to come”.

In chapters 4 and 5 (and later in chapter 20) we are taken into God’s Throne Room. Here we see mysterious creatures serving God, including the seven spirits (4:5). The Lamb appears (5:6) and is supported by *the seven* (a complete and perfect number) *spirits of God*.

Jesus Christ is *the faithful witness*. Despite all of the trauma and persecution, He will stand by His people. He is the one who has overcome all sin and temptation, and He is the only one who was found worthy – there was no one else from heaven or earth who was able to deliver God’s people from the grip of Satan.

The Christians were suffering under the Roman Empire, which (amongst other things) demanded Emperor Worship. The Empire was mighty, and crushed all who went before it – it seemed unstoppable and as if no one could resist it. When faced with the prospect of saying “Caesar is Lord” or facing death, there was a bleak choice. They could not deny their Lord (and so many of them were put to death), but the Empire was so mighty and so strong that they could see no end to the suffering. Caesar might be at the head of the Roman Empire, but God is on control, and Jesus is the one who is the “...*the ruler over the kings of the earth*...” (1:5 NKJV).

But Christians are also in an exalted position, and as God’s people, we have been “...*made...to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father*...” (1:6 NIV). The assurance to the Christians is that God is on our side. The Roman Empire might be powerful, but we are God’s kingdom, and we are His priests – and have direct access to Him through Jesus our High Priest (Heb 8:1).

“... **Look, he is coming with the clouds**, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.<sup>8</sup> **“I am the Alpha and the Omega,”** says the Lord God, **“who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty...”** (1:7-8 NIV)

Jesus’ return is assured – He is coming – and will bring revenge to the oppressors of His people. In the face of the tribulation, the persecution, and the trials of life, we must not forget the assurance. Jesus will return. Not only that, but God is all powerful – the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end. He is much more powerful than Caesar, or than any other oppressors of God’s people. He is the Almighty – there is none beside Him. He is everything, all encompassing, and complete.

## **The Spirit and the Lord's Day**

“...I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,<sup>11</sup> which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea...” (1:9-11 NIV)

John has a personal association with the brethren, and writes to them with a personal message. He was fully acquainted with their suffering – a *companion in the suffering*, and was exiled to Patmos *because of* the word of God.

The call for patience and endurance echoes through the book (also 3:10, 13:10, 14:12).

John heard a voice like a trumpet. It was loud and clear, and heralded an announcement. The trumpet judgements called for repentance, as a third (a substantial part, but not complete) of creation was brought under judgement in order to bring about repentance. In a similar way, God sends out “trumpet judgements” to each of the seven churches, and they are called to repent or their candlestick would be removed.

The visions were to be written down on a scroll and sent to the churches. Scrolls were the normal way of writing, and were made from Egyptian papyrus. Writing materials would later be developed into books (called a CODEX), and were developed in the library at Pergamum, where an animal skin (Vellum) was developed after the Egyptians refused to give them papyrus. Scrolls and books feature in the letter. First there is the great scroll of God that could only be opened by the Lamb, representing God's plan of salvation that was concealed since the creation of the world, but has been revealed in the gospel. Later, a smaller scroll was given to John and he was told to eat it. It was bitter-sweet, and represents the effect of the gospel on our lives. Then there are the books at the final judgement. The things that we do in our lives have been recorded, and we must give account to God of what we have done. None of us are worthy, and we all fail. But then there is the Lamb's book of life. If our name is found in that book, it is because we have been made worthy by the blood of the Lamb, and the second death will not be imputed to us.

## **The Vision of Christ amongst the Churches**

“...I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,<sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.<sup>14</sup> His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.<sup>15</sup> His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.<sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance...” (1:12-16 NIV)

Seven is the perfect number, and the seven lampstands provide perfect illumination. The seven are later revealed to represent the seven churches (1:20). The significance of the lampstand as a symbol of the church will be revealed later – when it fails to provide the light to the world, it will be removed from its place. In the middle of the candlesticks, stands Christ, and the vision is about Christ walking in the middle of the churches.

Christ's head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire. The image is of the Lamb (wool), and the whiteness indicates its purity. There are also parallels to Daniel's description of the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9), although there are significant differences, so that the readers would clearly understand that it is not the same image.

The eyes like blazing fire are all-seeing, and this thought occurs again in 19:12. They were sharp and penetrating, showing His scrutiny and judgement.

His voice roars like an ocean crashing on the beach, *like the sound of rushing waters*. This description occurs again in 14:2 and 19:6 where the voice appears from heaven (the voice of God).

Coming from His mouth was *a sharp double-edged sword*, which is the word of God (Heb 4:12). It is the gospel, which convicts us of our sin, and also that by which we will be judged. In preparation for the final battle, Jesus appears triumphantly on a white horse (19:11), and out of His mouth we again have the sharp sword (19:15).

Lastly, *His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance*. The sun appears in several of the visions, if only “incidentally” as the source of light. However at the end in the New Jerusalem there will be no need for the sun or the moon, because the Lamb is its light (21:23).

### **The Assurance from the Lord**

“...When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> *I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades...*” (1:17-18 NIV).

Peter was promised *the keys of the kingdom* (Mt 16:18-19), with the assurance that *the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*. Satan tried to overthrow the Christ, but failed and was defeated at the Cross. He now holds the keys of death (having overcome death, and tasted death for every one of us Heb 2:9), and Hades (having been there and come back Acts 2:31). He is able to claim such a victory because He is the living one, and His resurrection was substantiated by a host of witnesses (1 Cor 15:4-8).

### **The Charge to Write**

“...Write, therefore, what you have seen, *what is now and what will take place later*. <sup>20</sup> *The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches...*” (1:19-20 NIV).

Some of the mystery is then revealed “...*The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches...*” (1:20 NKJV).

However, importantly, the visions concern things that were relevant to the seven churches in the second and third centuries. They concerned *things which must shortly take place* (1:1), which John describes here as *what is now*. And it also concerns things of the future – *what will take place later* – which are things about the final defeat of Satan, the end of the world, and the New City for God’s people.

## **Chapter 2 - Revisited**

### **The Church at Ephesus**

“... <sup>REV 2:1</sup> *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds *the seven stars in his right hand* and walks among the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> I know your deeds, your hard work and *your perseverance*. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup> *You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.**

<sup>REV 2:4</sup> *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. <sup>5</sup> *Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do**

*not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. <sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

*REV 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God...*” (2:1-7 NIV)

The *seven stars* have already been revealed as the seven churches. Whilst they are specific and individual churches, they are representative of churches everywhere. They are *in his right hand*, which is a position of power. Jesus takes hold of the churches, and gives them power and authority – at his right hand. As the churches faced trials and were preparing for persecution, they could rest assured of their standing with God.

They had put in a lot of hard work in spreading the gospel in Ephesus, despite the riot and rejection that occurred whilst Paul was in the city (Acts 19:23-41). It required *perseverance*, and similar further continued perseverance would be required as they faced the persecutions under the Roman Empire (Rev 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). The Ephesian church had faced trials, and had grown by them. Paul had warned the elders in AD 58 about the apostasy that would arise from the elders themselves (Acts 20:30). Later, he sent Timothy to sort out the problems around AD 65 (see introduction to 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy), and they were still not solved by AD 68 (see introduction to 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy). Some of the hardships they had endured had come from within the church (although many were external, such as the influence of the silversmiths and those who came to Ephesus to worship Diana). However, the future hardships would come from the Roman Empire as the envoy of Satan.

The Ephesian church had left their first love, and they are exhorted to *remember the height from which they had fallen*. They had failed the Lord by forsaking Him (compare the notes from the chapter 1 study), and whilst they loved to do things right, they had overlooked the centrality of Christ who had made them right (justified them by His blood). In contrast, Christ is held as the central position – particularly so through Revelation. Just as the Ephesians had greatly fallen, so the Roman Empire would also fall from a great height.

Revelation ends with God’s people in paradise with Him. The letter to the Ephesians has the promise *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God*. Jesus foreshadows the coming situation, where His people will be fed by the tree of life. It should be noted that the reward in heaven is dependent upon “overcoming” which is John’s favourite term for martyrdom – specifically, remaining faithful, even in the face of death.

### **The Church at Smyrna**

*“...<sup>REV 2:8</sup> To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. <sup>9</sup> I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

*REV 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death...*” (2:8-11 NIV)

Both Jesus and The Father are said to be *the First and the Last* (1:8; 1:17; 22:13), and here it is Jesus – who died and came to life again – who speaks.

The Christians at Smyrna were suffering, not only from the physical persecution under Rome, but many of them were poor because they were unable to work – which in turn meant they had insufficient food. Whilst Jesus *knows their afflictions and poverty, yet they are rich* spiritually.

The Jews were active in persecuting the Christians at Smyrna, as in other places. They are described as a *synagogue of Satan*, which has illusions to the two beasts (13:1; 11) that Satan uses to help him accomplish his work. The two beasts were the two arms of the Roman Empire, but they are not the only method that Satan uses – and he will use everything in his power to fight against God. The Jewish religion was fulfilled at the cross (Col 2:14; Heb 8:13, 9:16), although it continued to be practised until the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, and some forms of it continue to this day. Its purpose was fulfilled in Christ, and to continue to practice what God has fulfilled only demonstrates false worship that originates from Satan.

Persecution was to come upon the brethren, and they are exhorted to *not be afraid of what you are about to suffer* which is a preparation for the coming persecutions. The suffering would be for a short period only – for ten days – short in comparison to eternity, although still difficult to endure when you are in the middle of it.

It is important to keep focussed on the goal. If we endure the persecutions, then we will *escape the second death* which has further references to the lake of fire (20:14; 21:8). Remaining faithful to Jesus – even to the point of death in this life, will enable us to avoid the eternal death in the lake of fire with Satan and his angels.

### **The Church at Pergamum**

“...<sup>REV 2:12</sup> *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>REV 2:14</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>REV 2:17</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...* (2:12-17 NIV)

Jesus is the one who has *the sharp two-edged sword*. The Hebrew writer used these words to describe the word of God (Heb 4:12), and the term appears several times throughout Revelation. In the vision of Christ walking amongst the churches, the sword appears out of His mouth. It is the gospel that came from Jesus. The church is commanded to repent, or they will find that the word of God (the sword) will cut them down (2:16). When Christ comes riding on the white horse, in the final showdown with Satan, the sharp sword appears out of His mouth, and He uses it to strike down the disobedient nations (19:15). After the beast (Satan) was captured, He used the sword to kill those who were disobedient and followed after Satan. The message is the same one Jesus gave “...*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day...*” (Jn 12:48 NKJV).

At the beginning of the visions (chapter 4) and at the end (chapters 19-22) the throne is central. In fact, there are 35 references to a throne throughout the letter, with the primary reference being to God’s Throne. The key theme throughout the letter is the battle between God and Satan, and whilst it appears that Satan might be winning the battle, the victory belongs to God. Emperor worship was strongly practiced in Pergamum, and Jesus (through John) describes one of the places in the city as *where Satan has his throne*. It is in stark contrast to the awe-inspiring description of God’s Throne and Throne-room in chapters 4 & 5.

*Antipas was a faithful witness who was put to death in Pergamum.* Whilst we know nothing else about him, we do know that he was faithful, and that he suffered – apparently as a martyr – being put to death. In several places throughout the letter, we see the suffering of the martyrs, as their prayers go up to God like smoke from an altar of incense (5:8; 8:3), and as their shed blood is avenged by God (16:6; 17:6; 18:24).

Some of the brethren in Pergamum were *committing sexual immorality* by engaging in sexually immoral practices, and they are rightly condemned for their actions. Temple prostitution was common in the Roman and Greek pagan religions, but under Roman rule sexual “liberty” reached decadent heights. In many ways, our society is going down the same path as we see the breakdown of marriage, and many people “living together” before they get married. In the visions, the description of the Roman Empire and its allurements is described as *the wine of her adulteries* (14:8; 17:2; 18:3), but God will bring retribution and make them drink of *the wine of His wrath* (14:10; 14:20; 16:19; 19:15).

Jesus said that He would cast His vote in their favour (the white voting stone), and on it was a *new name written known only to him who receives it*. When Jesus returns in victory He wears a “new name” “...*He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.* <sup>13</sup>*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God...*” (19:12-13 NIV). Those who belonged to Satan wore his name on the foreheads, but those who belong to Jesus wear His name on the hearts as well as their foreheads (22:4).

### **The Church at Thyatira**

“...<sup>REV 2:18</sup> *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>REV 2:20</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>REV 2:26</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....”* (2:18-29 NIV)

The description of Jesus in the beginning is the same as that at the end: *whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze*. When Jesus rides in to conquer on the white horse, there is a similar description “...*His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself...*” (19:12 NIV). The descriptions are relevant to the cities the letters are addressed to (refer to studies 3 & 4).

Once again, the saints are called upon to *persevere* in the face of the trials, tribulations, and persecutions that would come upon them.

Jezebel typifies the workers of Satan. *She misleads God's servants into sexual immorality*, and like the church at Pergamum, such immorality seems sweet at the time (like wine) but afterwards

it leads to wrath. Jezebel was *given time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling*. This statement typifies the events that will unwind with the trumpet judgements. Their purpose was not total destruction (only 1/3 of the “things” were destroyed), but rather they were to bring about repentance (9:21).

Those who engaged in the immoral practices would be punished: *I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely*. Repeatedly, they would be *made to drink of the wine of God’s wrath*. The retribution will surely come, when God appeases the suffering of His people. The statement *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* typified God’s retribution on the Roman Empire. They would get back more than they dished out on God’s people (14:10; 18:6).

Some in Thyatira had remained faithful *and have not learned Satan’s so called deep secrets*. Paul reminded the Ephesians to “...*have nothing to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them...*” (Eph 5:11). As christians, our instruction is “don’t go there – don’t even think about it!” We should not be exploring “magic crystals” or witchcraft, or fortune-telling, or palmistry, or any other occult practices. You only have to walk past some shops in your local shopping mall to see what kind of things Paul and John have in mind! The kind of things that the occult-shop sells are things that as christians we should avoid!

Jesus promises *those who overcome* that He will *give them authority over the nations*. God’s people would rule over them, and rather than being persecuted by kings, the christians would be placed in a position of power (as a kingdom of priests).

## Chapter 3 - Revisited

### The Church at Sardis

*REV 3:1 "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.*

*REV 3:4 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. (3:1-6 NIV)*

The *seven spirits* were discussed in 1:4, and alludes to the Throne Room scenes (4:5 and 5:6). The *seven stars* have already been revealed as the seven churches (see discussion on Ephesus, 2:1). Whilst they are specific and individual churches, they are representative of churches everywhere.

*They have a reputation of being alive, but they were dead*. The situation with the church was discussed in the study of chapter 3, but the description is a parody of Jesus. They were once alive spiritually, but they died. They need to repent and come alive again. Jesus was alive, and died, and came back to life in the resurrection. The church in Sardis needed to follow suit. There is also a parallel to the beast *who was, and is not, and yet is* (17:8). Because the church had not repented, rather than being like Christ, they were like the Beast.

Some in Sardis had *not soiled their clothes*, which is contrasted with the *white clothes* of purity of *those who are worthy*. The *white robes* indicate purity, and they were made white by the blood of the Lamb (4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13; 19:4).

Those who made themselves pure received their reward of *never having their name blotted out of the book of life*, which has its fruition in 13:15 & 20:8.

### **The Church at Philadelphia**

*REV 3:7 "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.*

*REV 3:11 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. (3:7-13 NIV)*

Like the christians in Smyrna (2:9), those in Philadelphia were (apparently) persecuted by the Jews, described as a *synagogue of Satan*. They *claim to be Jews, although they are not* which suggests that they are falsely representing themselves as devout followers of God, and claiming to be His people. See notes on the Smyrna church in the previous study.

Philadelphia (like Smyrna) was a church for which Jesus had no condemnation, but only praise. Tribulation from the Roman persecution was coming upon the christians, but God was going to bring retribution and judgement upon the oppressors. Jesus promised: *I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth*. The fall of Rome was sudden (described as *one day* in 18:8, and as *one hour* in 18:10,17,19). God's reference to preservation may also extend to their perseverance when the area fell under Islam. Philadelphia lasted much longer than any of the other cities, and stood as a lighthouse of christianity amongst the Moslem cities around it. The New International Bible Commentary notes:

Long after all the surrounding country had succumbed to Muslim control under Turkey, Philadelphia held out as a Christian populace till 1392. (NIVBC)

Jesus promised them that no-one could take away their victory – *no one will take your crown*. The crown is Stephanos – the crown of victory, and it is the same crown worn by the rider on the white horse when the first seal was opened (6:2). This represented Jesus, going forth victoriously with the gospel. The crown of victory is also worn by the woman clothed with the sun (12:1), who represents the church – God's glorious creation. It was also worn by the "son of man" when He came to reap (prune out) the nations (14:14) with the sharp sickle. The message is clear and consistent. Jesus wears the victor's crown, and as His people, so do we. No one can take that away from us, (which is not to say that we can't give it away).

If we overcome – which is John's favourite description for martyrdom – and remain faithful to Jesus, even in the face of death, will be made *a pillar in the temple of God*. The passage looks

forward to our ultimate fulfilment in heaven, *the city of God, the new Jerusalem*. The city is revealed in chapters 21 and 22.

Those who belong to Jesus will have *a new name* (christians). The same promise was made to Pergamum (2:17), and also by the rider on the white horse (Jesus) when He rode in victoriously to overcome Satan (19:12).

### **The Church at Laodicea**

*REV 3:14 "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.*

*REV 3:19 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.*

*REV 3:21 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." (3:14-21 NIV)*

Jesus calls Himself *the faithful and true witness*, (see comments on 1:5). There is also an illusion to the two witnesses – the law and the Prophets (11:3-6).

Like the church at Sardis, they need to make themselves pure, and *wear white clothes*. They were deceiving themselves into thinking that they were right with God, but *they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*.

If they repented, and remained faithful unto death (“overcome”), Jesus would *give them the right to sit with Him on His throne*. The same message was given to the church at Ephesus (2:7) where they were given the right to eat of the tree of life. In the letter to the church at Pergamum, a contrast was made between Satan’s throne and God’s Throne. God is in control, although Satan has deceived many into thinking that God is dead. The same message is true in our society. Men are blind to the evidence before them of the existence of God, and regard the scriptures as nothing more than “myth” or “a few ancient scribblings<sup>1</sup>”

We can rest assured that the battle was won at Calvary, and Jesus is the victor. We might seem to be losing the battle, but the Lamb who is the Lion of Judah is on our side. We have the victory through the blood of the Lamb, but it is up to us to remain faithful – even in the face of death – and we will *overcome* and sit with Him in eternity in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem!

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<sup>1</sup> So described by Richard Dawkins in a recent television series.