
Krapf Commentary Series

Revelation Pt.2: Letters to the Seven Churches (Rev. 2:1-3:22)

The letters to the seven churches are perhaps the best-known parts of the Revelation. Many commentators see the seven churches as periods of time through the history of the Church. In this view, Ephesus (2:1-7) would represent the apostolic age, and Laodicea (3:14-21) would represent the modern Church.

The problem with this view is that all seven churches existed together, side-by-side in John's day, and even today, there are churches that are cold and lukewarm and others that are vibrant and strong and enduring persecution. There are Ephesian churches and Laodicean churches co-existing today, and there have been through the history of the Church.

In writing to the churches, John used a template, and you can see a very definite uniformed structure across the seven letters. If you take time to identify the similarities and the differences between the seven letters, you will see this. Some of these similarities include the following.

- Each letter begins with "to the angel..." and "I know your works."
- All except two (Smyrna, 2:8-11 and Philadelphia, 3:7-13) are commanded to "repent."
- Two churches (Smyrna, 2:8-11 and Philadelphia, 3:7-13) receive positive commendation without any negative grievance, while two churches (Sadris, 3:1-6 and Laodicea 3:14-22) are charged negatively without any positive commendation.

In keeping with the theme of Revelation, all of these churches, (and the Church today) are called to suffering (2:10), to "patient endurance" (2:2), "hold[ing] fast" (2:13, 25; 3:11) in times of persecution (2:2,9) and to "overcome" (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21), listing to the voice (having an ear to hear) of the Master.

It would be a profitable exercise to memorise the list of churches in order to be able to identify each

quickly and also the separate issues, such as, for example, those without complaint (Smyrna and Philadelphia) and those without commendation (Sardis and Laodicea). For sermon material it would be helpful to list, develop and apply the commands given to each church; for example, "hold fast" 2:25, "wake up" 3:2, "be zealous" 3:19, etc. More of this later.

The Church in Ephesus: Orthodoxy without Love (2:1-7)

Ephesus was probably the largest of the seven cities and the richest, as a centre of trade and tourism (Acts 19:23-41), and religion. It was the home of the Temple of Artemis (Diana, Acts 19:34).

In Ephesus, a group of false teachers, the Nicolaitans (compared to Balaam for his idolatry and sexual immorality) had been tested and exposed (vs. 6, in Pergamum some of the believers there had believed their teaching, vss. 14-15, see also Numbers 25:1,9; 31:16, 1 Corinthians 10:8).

The church in Ephesus had enjoyed the ministry of Paul and Timothy, who had taught them to discern false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-4). It was privileged also to have a letter from the apostle Paul, and now to know that the Lord Jesus holds them in his right

hand and walks among them (2:1). This church was praised for remaining faithful to the truth of the gospel and its opposition to idolatry (2:2).

But the church in Ephesus, although discerning, had lost its first love. Is this "love" referring to the love they "had at first" for the Lord (i.e. their zeal)? Or is it that they had removed Jesus, their first love and replaced him with other gods (and become idolatrous, as in Jeremiah 2:2-3)? Or had they lost their love for one another?

Clearly, they had kept Jesus in first place, rejecting other doctrines, they were not lukewarm towards Jesus as the Church in Laodicea. It seems that the love referred to here is love towards others. Their greatest virtue (defence of the truth) had become their greatest vice, and they had become judgemental and censorious towards other believers. They had lost sight of their love for the brethren around them. This point of view is borne out in the use of the word "love" in 2:19 where it connected to "service" for others (see also Matthew 24:10-12; 1 John 3:16-19). Perhaps this is also connected to Paul's admonition to this same church, where he exhorts them to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

The Church in Smyrna: Poor but Rich (2:8-11)

The city of Smyrna (modern day Izmir) was the second largest city in the province of Asia at this time and one of the most prosperous. The church in Smyrna, struggling with both poverty and persecution, remained faithful. They had suffered the loss of their goods and were reduced to poverty, yet the Lord showed them that he knows their circumstances (as he does with all the churches) and that while they live in physical and temporal poverty, yet they are rich.

This is one of only two churches that does not receive a rebuke from the Lord. They had endured the slander of other religious groups, but the one behind the slander and persecution was Satan (2:9).

What made this church “rich” was the blessing of God in their faithful endurance during a time of suffering. Faithfulness in suffering is the measure of sincere Christianity and comes with the blessing of God (See Job 1 and James 5:11). Jesus did not promise that he would save them (nor us) from persecution, or even from martyrdom, but he does promise a crown of life to those who are faithful (vs. 10, see Psalm 23:4; Matthew 28:19-20; Hebrews 13:5).

The Church in Pergamum: Steady in Persecution (2:12-17)

Pergamum was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia and contained one of the largest libraries in the world, rivalling that of Alexandria in Egypt. It is thought that parchment was developed in Pergamum after Egypt refused to ship papyrus to Pergamum. Most of the text of the New Testament was written on parchment.

The mention of the “throne of Satan” (vs. 13) may be a reference to the Roman authority centralised there, or to the altar of Zeus located there. The title used here regarding Jesus with the “sharp sword with two edges” (vs. 12) shows that this is the only legitimate weapon available to the Church.

The commendation is that this church had held fast to their “faith in me [i.e. Christ],” even when one of their number had been martyred (vs. 12). This is the only reference to martyrdom in the churches, and it indicates that God does not forget those individuals who suffer for him.

Heresy and sin still creep into the Church today, and here the Lord had a “few things” against the church at Pergamum. He listed two items, although these two issues are possibly linked. First there

were those who followed the philosophy and practice of Balaam, eating things sacrificed to idols and fornication (Numbers 25:1-2; 31: 16), and those who had believed in the teaching of the Nicolaitans (see vs. 6).

The Church in Thyatira: Love without Discernment (2:18-29)

The church in Thyatira is mentioned one other time in the Bible, identified as the home of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15). There is no mention of any evangelistic work being done there, or any apostolic ministry going on there. It may be that the gospel was brought there by Lydia. Thyatira was situated close to the city of Pergamos. It was a small town (the smallest of the seven cities) but grew into a major communication and trading centre. In this commercial environment Thyatira became famous for its trade guilds (associations of craftsmen) for the manufacturing of cloth; woolworkers, linen-workers, dyers, leatherworkers, tanners and potters, etc.

The church at Thyatira was commended for its charity, service, faith, and patience, and for growth in these virtues; "the last to be more than the first" (vs. 19). But there was a problem with the church, which arose out of this commercial situation. It was

an ethical dilemma, for the church had fallen into the trap of idolatry for the sake of worldly position.

To prosper in business in this city it was important to be part of the trade associations. The problem however was that each guild had its guardian god and membership meant that they worship the god of that guild and attend the religious festivals. What was a Christian to do? To attend the festivals meant eating meat sacrificed to idols, but then he might be tempted to remain for the immoral festivities that followed the meal.

The Christians at Thyatira must learn how to live in the world and keep themselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27). The authority for the Christian is not the worldly organisations, however necessary they seem to be, but the "Son of God" who has "eyes like a flame of fire" (2:18).

The Church in Sardis: Reputation but no Life (3:1-6)

Like most of these cities Sardis was a major trading hub, the meeting place of five major roads, and a leader in wool and fabric trade, thought to be the first in the art of wool-dyeing. The Fortress of Sardis was surrounded on three sides by sheer cliffs and

was thought to be impregnable but fell to the forces of Persia.

Along with the church of Laodicea, there was nothing in the church at Sardis to commend – the truth is that although it had a reputation for being conservative, the church at Sardis was dead. This, however, was not true of everyone in the church, for there were a few who had remained faithful – whose garments were not spoiled (their wool was not dyed, vss. 4-5).

This is an interesting description of the church, primarily because there is no specific sin or theological heresy as in other churches. The reputation was one that they held outwardly to the orthodox faith, there was no glaring sin. But the all-seeing, all-knowing God knew what was behind the false reputation and he could see there was no spiritual life. Sardis was in a spiritual coma.

The problem here is not primarily one of relationship to Jesus, but to the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls this church to “wake up” to the reality of the living gospel. The head knows what it believes and holds fast to that, but the heart has no feeling and no response towards God.

The Church in Philadelphia: The Open Door (3:7-13)

The city of Philadelphia was one of the smaller cities, about thirty miles south of Sardis. In AD 17 the city suffered destruction by an earthquake. As in the other cities, paganism flourished in Philadelphia, and since the region was known for vineyards, one of the most prominent gods was Dionysus the god of winemaking. It was common in these cities to name pillars in the temple after prominent individuals in the city, as Solomon did in the temple at Jerusalem, 2 Chronicles 3:17, and so the Lord has his own "pillars" (3:12).

As with the church at Smyrna, there was no rebuke for this church in Philadelphia. Like the church in Smyrna, here the church was also impoverished, with little power (vs. 8). Yet, despite little in this world this church held fast and endured in the face of opposition. The opposition was primarily from hostile Jews (3:9, see also 2:9), but the Lord had given them an "open door" (3:8).

The question is, does this "open door" refer to opportunities for missionary service as Paul uses it (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3 along with Acts 14:27)? Or does it mean that he who has the key of David, who opens and shuts (3:7) has a door open into heaven for the faithful in

Philadelphia, and no opposition will shut that door (as John will later see 4:1)?

The context seems to suggest that this statement about “an open door” was a statement designed to encourage the faithful in the face of opposition—the door of mercy is open in heaven for them and shut to those who oppose them.

The Church in Laodicea: The Indifferent Church (3:14-22).

The city of Laodicea was an extremely rich and cultured city, known for banking, textiles, medicine and pharmaceuticals. The church in this well-to-do city existed during Paul’s time and several manuscripts of Paul’s first letter to Timothy say that it was written from Laodicea (1 Timothy 6:21). Colossae and Laodicea are only ten miles apart and there was evidently some interaction between the two churches (Colossians 2:1; 4:13-16).

There is nothing good to say about the church at Laodicea, and for this church the Lord has the severest condemnation. Despite the banks and the medicine, and the fabric industries, the Church at Laodicea was “poor,” “blind,” and “naked” (3:17).

The imagery that the Lord uses is shocking but would have been well understood by the Laodiceans due to the hot springs close to Laodicea that flowed over the cliffs right opposite the city. As the Laodiceans watched the lukewarm water flow over the cliff and read in the letter that the Lord would spit them out, it must have had some impact. They did not reject or oppose the gospel, neither did they affirm it by their lives nor show any zeal for the Lord. They were in the murky middle of self-satisfied indifference.

They had shut the Lord out of the church and of their lives, but the Lord stood at the door, knocking. It is his house, his church and if we give him his place he will sit with us in sweet fellowship.

Appendix 1: The Threat of Theological Heresy

Notice that theological heresy is among the dangers that Jesus raised in the letters to the seven churches (2:14, 15; 20). Theological heresy is any deviation from an orthodox understanding of Scripture, as it has been received by the Christian Church.

Throughout the New Testament there are repeated references to the heresies of the Judaizers ("those

of the circumcision”), Gnostics, and here in Revelation to the Nicolaitans. Paul repeatedly warns against false doctrine and encourages the elders to teach “sound doctrine” (Romans 16:17; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 1:3, 10; 6:3). The word “sound” that Paul uses refers to that which is *healthy* or *well*, or that which is uncorrupted.

The Nicolaitans made such a distinction between the body and spirit to the extent that they placed all religious significance on the spirit. The physical body was evil and therefore they could indulge it with anything they pleased; sexual relationships, eating food that had been offered to idols, etc. (1 and 2 John; Rev 2:6, 14-15). The Lord refers to this in connection with the seduction of Balaam who put a “stumbling block before the sons of Israel” (2:14). The point is clear, Balaam professed to be a prophet of God, when in fact he was set on leading the people away from God to their own destruction (See Numbers 22).

To the Church at Thyatira, there is another seductive teaching; that of Jezebel (2:20; see 1 Kings 16:30-33; 2 Kings 9:22). Jezebel in the Old Testament was the wicked queen of Israel who undermined the nation’s morality with the practice of idolatry with Baal. It seems that this seducer, whom Jesus calls Jezebel (most likely not her real

name), was seducing the people into idolatry and immorality (2:20).

Heresy creeps into the thinking of the Church silently and often in the guise of sound doctrine. The seduction of the church at Thyatira (2:20) may help us understand something of the later vision regarding the seduction of the Church at large by the harlot Babylon (14:8; 16:6; Ch. 17-18).

We can see this subtle creeping heresy even today in the Church, in a very common doctrine that has crept into the consciousness of broad evangelicalism called Universalism—the belief that everyone will be saved. This teaching is presented as the work of a gracious God, who is too loving to judge anyone for sin, even though the Bible teaches clearly with many examples that God judges sin.

Back in the 1960s and 70s, the Nigerian theological Byang Kato raised concern about the heresy of syncretism; that is, the thought that Christianity and African traditional religions can be brought together on equal grounds. This practice of polluting Christianity by accommodating or synchronizing it with African traditional religions has risen again in recent years.

Another heresy that has polluted the Christian Church is called the Prosperity Gospel. This gospel teaches that salvation promises physical health and temporal prosperity, but it is no gospel at all. We need to watch and pray!

Appendix 2: How to preach from the letters to the Seven Churches

There are different ways you could preach the letters to the seven churches. You could take each church and go through a series of seven sermons.

Or you could approach the text from these five different areas. First see how these areas apply to each church specifically and then make an application to the church today and then to your church specifically.

- **The Presence of Jesus in his Church.**
Jesus identifies himself differently to each church at the beginning of each letter (2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14). See Appendix 3.
- **The Promise of Jesus to his Church.**
What promises does Jesus give to each church?

- **The Threats of Jesus to his Church.**
How Jesus threatens to deal with each church that he rebukes.
- **The knowledge of Jesus of his Church**
Notice what Jesus knows specifically about the church.
- **The Commands of Jesus to his Church**
(what Jesus tells the churches to do)

Appendix 3: How Jesus Manifests His Presence in His Church

To each of the seven Churches in Revelation, Jesus identified himself with some characteristic of his person and work (2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14). These serve as a title of the Lord Jesus, identifying the sphere of his work and ministry in his Church, and bringing both rebuke and comfort.

While these titles are true statements in themselves (i.e. they can stand alone), they are made in the context of a given church and so have particular meaning to that church. This is clear from the corresponding promises made to the church. Each of these self-identifying titles explain something of how he manifests himself in the Church and holds their ministers in his right hand.

First: his unchanging care for the Church—*“The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”* (2:1).

These words are repeated from the general truth mentioned concerning the Church (1:20). To the church at Ephesus however, who had lost *“the love they had at first,”* Jesus assures them of his unchanging nature; he has not lost his love for them but still he walks among the churches and holds its minister *“in his right hand.”*

Second: his identity with the Church—*“The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life”* (2:8).

To the church at Smyrna, which was suffering persecution, Jesus gives these fitting words of comfort. They are following in the path of suffering, which Jesus had walked as a *“man of sorrows”* (Isaiah 53:3). They may be called to suffer even to death, but they can be assured that as their master had *“died and come to life,”* so they too who shared in his suffering would enjoy the blessing of his resurrection (Philippians 3:10-11).

Third: his defence of the Church—*“The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword”* (2:12).

This title is intended to show the general truth that this is the only legitimate weapon available to the church – the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Corinthians 10:4). There is however, a very pointed application to the church at Pergamum, that Jesus would come with the “sword of [his] mouth” and war against the heretics in the church, unless they repent (2:16).

Fourth: his authority over the Church—*“The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze”* (2:18).

This title to the church at Thyatira, identifies Jesus with heart searching and conquering authority. He will search out the heart and mind and expose those who follow the seduction of Jezebel (2:23). But to the faithful, they will share in the promise of the Father given to the incarnate and victorious Jesus, for they will, with him “rule the nations” (2:26-27; Psalm 2:7-9).

It is a reminder that whatever position of authority or prosperity we aspire to in this world it is only temporary. In the gospel, Jesus holds out an offer

of shared sovereignty with him as the “Son of God,” if we will follow him and reject the mirage of worldly authority and power.

Fifth: his knowledge of the Church—*“The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars”* (3:1).

The church at Sardis had a great reputation for outward orthodox religion, but behind the appearance of conservative Christianity, there was no heart-feeling or response to the Spirit of Life. This title Jesus is a pointed reminder of the all-seeing eye of the Holy Spirit—the seven spirits of God, “sent out into all the earth” (Revelation 5:6; see also Zechariah 3:9; 4:10).

Sixth: his sovereignty over the Church—*“The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens”* (3:7).

The trouble at the church in Philadelphia came from hostile Jews, perhaps claiming that the Christians had no part of the kingdom of God—they were locked out from the people of God. But Jesus tells these Christians that he holds the key—he alone opens the door of mercy to whom he will and he alone shuts it. The connection with David

here is important in the context of the opposing Jews. It was God's intent from the time of David, and before, to open the door of mercy to the Gentiles and nationalistic Jews never understood this.

Seventh: the final word for the Church—*"The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation."* (3:14).

The Church at Laodicea needed to know that the good life does not begin here on earth and certainly not in Laodicea, but with the "beginning of God's creation," Jesus Christ. Jesus has nothing good to say about this church, but he points them to himself as the final word, "the Amen" and informs them that his word is faithful and true. Their response must be to stir up their zeal for the Lord (3:19).

Appendix 5: The Promises of Jesus to his Church

To each of the seven churches in Revelation, Jesus gives a promise to those in the church who "overcomes" (2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21).

Some commentators believe that these promises are given to those only who are martyrs, but this cannot be so, since the promises of the gospel are not limited to martyrs, but to all the church.

The promises given to the church in these letters show us clearly that the gospel is not just the story of Jesus overcoming Satan at the cross, but Jesus' victory played out in the lives of the faithful. The victory of Calvary is manifested in the lives of every true believer, who enters into Jesus' victory and will sit with him on his throne (Revelation 3:21). Jesus identifies the works of the Christian as his own works (see 2:26).

- **Ephesus:** *"To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (2:7)*

These words could have been spoken to Adam at the end of his life. He had been expelled from the garden to endure the trials of a cursed earth in the hope of eating one day of the tree of life (Genesis 3:24, see also Romans 8:20). These Christians in Ephesus had "overcome", Jesus said, and had "borne and had patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted," and would enter into the paradise promised in the gospel. John Gill writes that the tree of life is "Jesus Christ

himself, in allusion to the tree of life in the garden of Eden; and is so called, because he is the author of life, natural, spiritual, and eternal; and because of his fruit, the blessings of life and grace, that are in him..." Christ, who is identified as "wisdom" in the Proverbs, is called the "Tree of life" (Proverbs 3:18, see also Revelation 22:2).

- **Smyrna:** *"The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death" (2:11).*

The "second death" was a common concept among the Jews, as they made a contrast between the death that all must suffer and the death of judgement from which some would never escape.

The Rabbis appealed to Jeremiah 20:6 and the prophet's message to Pashur; "to Babylon you shall go, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried..." The Jews interpreted this to mean that those who died there would remain there, in the grave, with no resurrection. But those who died in the Holy Land would suffer death, but they would rise again. The promise of the gospel to the saints in Smyrna who were threatened with martyrdom, was not just one of resurrection from death, but of deliverance from the judgement of God, the destruction of both body and soul in hell; the "second death" (20:14-15).

- **Pergamum:** *"To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."* (2:17)

Two things are in focus in this promise: hidden manna and a white stone with a name on it. Let's think of manna. The immediate context is the contrast between eating those things that were sacrificed to idols (vs. 14) and eating the manna.

There is, however, a clear reference to the life-giving food from heaven which sustained the Israelites during the wilderness years. So, what is in view here is the Bread of Life of which John speaks (John 6:26ff). Those who ate in the wilderness all died, but those who eat of this manna, the Bread of Life, will live forever (John 6:31ff, 58).

The fact that this manna is "hidden" may refer to the manna concealed in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 16:33; Hebrews 9:4), but it no doubt points to the fact that the gospel, the Bread of Life, is hidden from the "wise and prudent" and has been revealed to babes (Matthew 11:25).

The significance of the “white stone” with a “new name” on it is less clear. I would suggest that these stones spoke of deliverance from judgment and the transformed character of the individual through the gospel. In the ancient world, stones were given on various occasions and for different purposes. In law courts, for example, stones were given to an individual under trial, and a white stone was a symbol of acquittal. But the name on the stone is important also, it’s a new name, just as Abraham’s name was changed and Jacob, and Peter also and Paul, so the gospel gives us a new name, i.e. a new character. The secrecy of the name perhaps points to the unique relationship with the Lord and the individual who have been conformed to the image of the Son (Romans 8:29).

- **Thyatira:** *“The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star.” (2:26-28)*

The overcomers in the church at Thyatira had been torn between the “deep things of Satan” and the

things of God (2:24-25). Some had held fast, and they would share in the victory of Jesus in this messianic authority (See Psalm 2). The king has been promised the nations (Psalm 2:8) and to rule the nations he will shatter all opposition with a "rod of iron" (see Revelation 19:15).

The "morning star" could refer to the sovereign reign of a warrior king. Some point to Numbers 24:17 and the prophecy of Balaam; "... a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth" and connect this with Jesus' declaration, *"I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."* (Revelation 22:16). Jesus, according to this interpretation, is the star that the overcomer is given.

But others see this reference to the morning star in the context of the culture both in ancient Babylon and in Rome at that time. According to this thought, Venus is the star, which in Babylonian times was a symbol of sovereignty. In Roman times, Caesar's legions had the sign of Venus on their banners as a symbol of conquest and rule over the nations. The double promise of shared victory should not be overlooked. Those who hold fast to the word of Jesus will share in Jesus' victory, his sovereignty and his judicial authority. We need to

see this gospel promise in light of the entire book of Revelation, as this is the victory that is held out throughout Revelation.

- **Sardis:** *"The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels."* (3:5)

There were a "few" in the church at Sardis whom Jesus knew by name (2 Timothy 2:19), who had not soiled their garments—they had not denied or departed from Christ and who had stayed alert (vs. 3). These unsoiled garments of the saints on earth, foreshadow the pure and perfect garments promised in the gospel; the perfect righteousness of Jesus (the wedding garment of Matthew 22:12). There is an important connection between the two, he who has this hope in Jesus purifies himself (1 John 3:3).

Those who will not be blotted out of God's book (vs. 5) may be a reference to church or baptismal registers in the churches. In the Old Testament, however, reference is made of people being listed in God's book (Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1), and the Jews prayed that apostates would be erased from the book of life. Other references to the book of life

are found in Philippians 4:3; Revelation 20:12,15; 21:27; 22:19. While some will be erased from church and baptismal registers, Jesus confirms that the overcomer will not be blotted out of his book, and he will acknowledge them (*"confess his name"*) not only before the Father, but also the angels (See Matthew 10:33). Theological concepts in this promise include the election of God in salvation, his steadfast love, his omniscience, for he knows his own and his omnipotence for he powerfully preserves them.

- **Philadelphia:** *"The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."* (3:12)

The promise given to the overcomer in the church at Philadelphia is a promise of honour, strength, stability and permanency. The Jews in this city opposed the Church (3:9). They thought that their temple was the place alone where God dwelt, that Jerusalem was the city of our Lord (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 8:23; 14:16). God assured these Christians that they are his dwelling place

(Revelation 21:3), and that they would be made pillars in the Church, the temple of God (for the Church as the temple of God see 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 2:5).

Jesus opposed the Jewish mindset and confirmed his people in their faith. He referred to the "key of David" (3:7), and here, most likely referred to the temple at Jerusalem where two pillars were called Jachin and Boaz (2 Chronicles 3:17). Paul used this image when he spoke about James, Peter and John who *"seemed to be pillars"* (Galatians 2:9). But it is also important to notice that in a city destroyed by earthquakes, when people would have to flee the city, Jesus said, he would make their place in the city permanent; *"never shall he go out of it..."* (3:12).

There were three inscriptions on the pillars; first, *"the name of my God,"* second, *"the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem,"* and third, *"my own new name."* These inscriptions of God and his Christ and of citizens of the New Jerusalem (Psalm 87:5-6), are perhaps intended to call our attention to the brand made on the Roman slave, or the seal on the forehead of the servants of God (Revelation 7:3, 14:1), and a contrast to those who have the mark of the beast on their forehead (Revelation

13:16ff). We should note here, (and perhaps also later in 7:3, 14:1, 13:16ff) that these marks and seals were not visible, but marks of God's ownership, and characteristics of the believer, as Paul also used the image of the seal (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30).

- **Laodicea:** *"The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21).*

This is the ultimate promise for a persecuted Church in any age and this promise to the church at Laodicea summarises the theme of the Revelation - we are the victors through Christ!!

There are two ways to look at this promise. It is really two sides of the one gospel coin. First, from the perspective of the cross-work of Christ, the victory on the cross was the ultimate victory and this promise shows us that the cross is lived out in the life of every believer. Christ's victory continues to bear fruit through the lives of his children. The prophet said, *"he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand"* (Isaiah 53:10).

Second, from the perspective of the overcoming believer. This promise shows us that Jesus identifies with his people in a way that his victory becomes the victory of every true believer, and his throne becomes their throne also. The one who overcomes will have a seat beside the Father, indeed on the Father's throne. This is the ultimate victory over the world and of the powers of darkness. All other authorities will be destroyed, and we will reign with him with the world (that which causes us so much trouble today) as our footstool (Hebrews 1:13; 10:10).