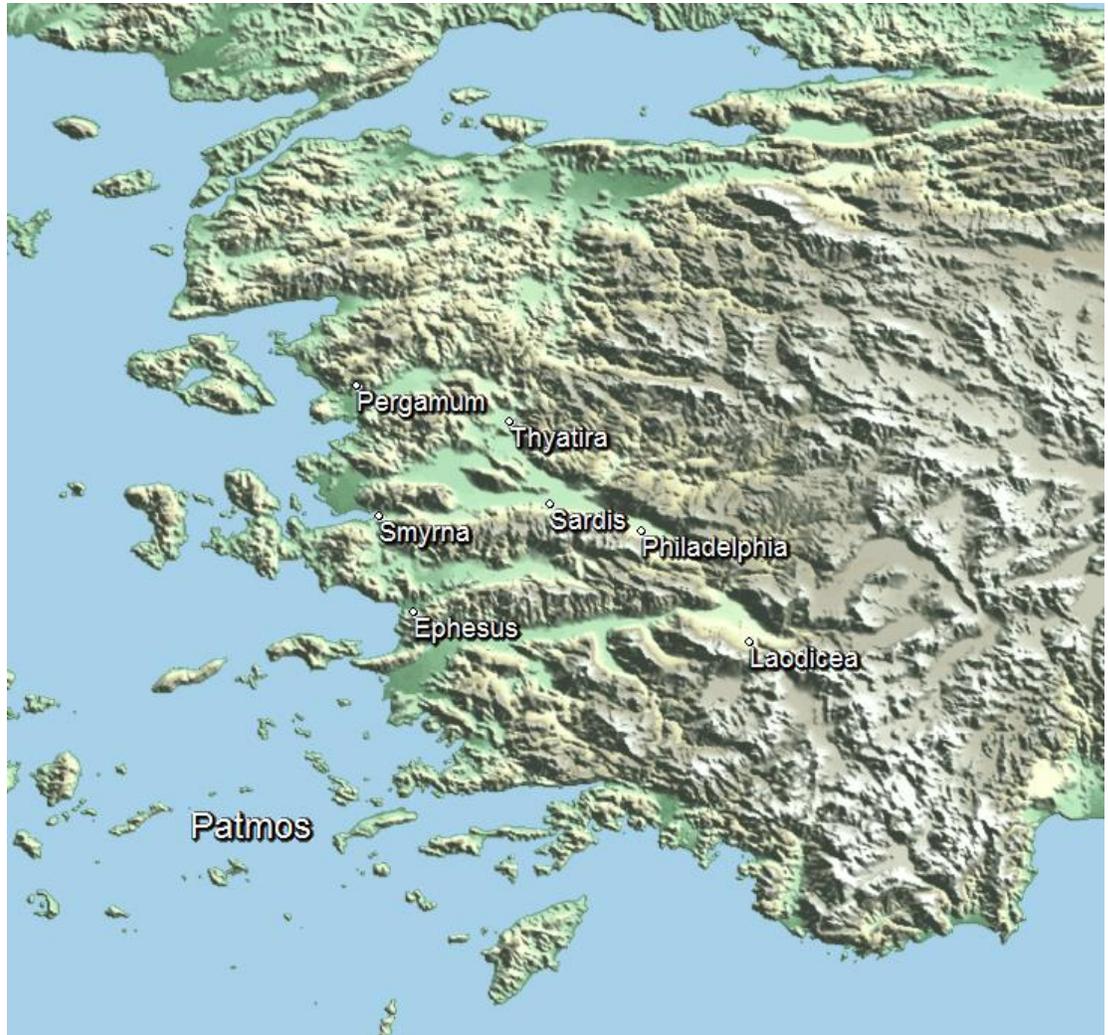

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson #2 (22 January 2016): Revelation 2-3 The Messages to the Seven Churches: “I know thy works, and tribulation”

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INTRODUCTION

Chapters 2-3 include messages to seven cities in Asia (western Turkey today) where there were members of the Church. The message to each church has a similar structure (see the chart below). It starts with a symbol that identifies Christ, taken from Revelation 1, so it was clear from whom the message came. Then there are some compliments or recognition of good, followed by some warnings of the need to repent. Finally, the Lord gives an ‘overcome’ promise which anticipates themes developed later in the letter. Not all elements are in every passage to each city, but the pattern is consistent enough to be clearly intentional.



These messages show Christ’s individual knowledge of and love for the members of the church and his desire to bring each one of us back to the Father. All the messages apply equally to us today, as John shows by his consistent plural wording: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the *churches*.” Seven

represents perfection, so using that number also shows he is writing to the entire Church.¹

The messages also show a church in apostasy. The cities that John mentioned were all strong during Paul’s day, but now they were slipping away, full of false doctrine and sin. The Lord and John were anxious to reclaim the Saints, but the Lord knew—and John had to also—that

¹ Draper, 36-37.

the church as a whole was quickly moving away from the truth and into the darkness of confusion that lasted until a spring day in 1820.

A note about the common theme of 'overcoming': See Matthew 16:24, footnote d, where the JST changes the verse to say, "And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust,

and keep my commandments." Overcoming is about leaving the world behind, repenting of our sins, and embracing the truths that will bring us eternal joy. These promises provide the hope that the other things in Revelation—and our lives—are truly not significant. The blessings are far greater than the sacrifices and trials.

OUTLINE

There are many ways to outline any book, and Revelation is no exception. Below are the lessons in this series with chapter summaries. For the lesson in these notes, the chapter is broken down into more detailed sections and bolded.

1. The Majesty of Christ (1:1-20)
2. **The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1 - 3:22)**
 - a. **Ephesus (2:1-7)**
 - b. **Smyrna (2:8-11)**
 - c. **Pergamos (2:12-17)**
 - d. **Thyatira (2:18-29)**
 - e. **Sardis (3:1-6)**
 - f. **Philadelphia (3:7-13)**
 - g. **Laodicea (3:14-22)**
3. God and the Lamb
 - a. The Vision of Heaven (4:1-11)
 - b. The Sealed Book and the Worthy Lamb (5:1-14)
4. The Scroll Begins to Open
 - a. The Six Seals (6:1-17)
 - b. The Seal of the Living God (7:1-17)
5. The Opening of the Seventh Seal

- a. The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets (8:1-13)
- b. The Great War (9:1-21)
6. John's Mission; Two Prophets
 - a. The Little Scroll (10:1-11)
 - b. The Seventh Trumpet (11:1-19)
7. The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon
 - a. The Church and the Devil (12:1-18)
 - b. The Beasts of Revelation (13:1-18)
8. Judgment and Praise
 - a. The Winepress of the Wrath of God (14:1-20)
 - b. The Seven Angels (15:1-8)
9. Seven Last Plagues and Babylon the Great
 - a. The Seven Bowls (16:1-21)
 - b. Babylon the Great (17:1-18)
10. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb
 - a. The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)
 - b. The King of Kings (19:1-21)
11. Heirs of the Celestial Glory
 - a. The Thousand Years (20:1-15)
 - b. The New Jerusalem (21:1-27)
 - c. Blessed Are They That Do His Commandments (22:1-21)

THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES (2:1 - 3:22)

As mentioned above, the messages to the seven churches follow a similar pattern, divided into four parts. First, the speaker is identified by characteristics drawn mostly from the imagery in chapter 1 (starting with the phrase "These things saith..."). Second, there is recognition of good works or attributes (starting with the phrase "I know thy works..."). Third is an admonition of some kind, typically with a consequence if they don't repent. And fourth, is an overriding

blessing (starting with the phrase "To him that overcometh...").²

There are some who see these not as current letters to seven Asia churches of the first century but as seven purely prophetic images of the church down through the ages, from John's time until the Second Coming.³ This is a minority opinion but an intriguing one given the depth of meaning in John's writing. The letters

² Michael Wilcox, 29-30, observes that this is a good pattern for correcting anyone—in families, callings, and more.

³ They say "Ephesus stood for the early church, Smyrna the period of persecution in the patristic era, Pergamum the time of Constantine, Thyatira the Middle Ages, Sardis the

Reformation, Philadelphia the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (missionary outreach), and Laodicea the modern era (time of growing apostasy before the return of Christ" (Osborne, 105).

could certainly be written for specific cities, for the whole church of that day, and *also* be predictive of future events. However, it seems more likely that the various characteristics, challenges, and promises of the churches called out by the Lord are representative of church members in all ages and places, rather than a shadow of a specific period of the last two millennia. As we look for those patterns of belief and behavior, we will humbly see ourselves and hear the same call to repent overcome our sins to be closer to what the Lord wants and needs from his church, so we can be prepared for the challenges of life. “The entire sequence,” notes one scholar, “is a literary composition designed to impress upon the church universal the necessity of patient endurance in the period of impending persecution.”⁴

The messages can be summarized as follows:

A. Ephesus (7:1-7)

- a. Speaker: He that holds the seven stars and walks among the lampstands (see 1:13, 16, 20)
- b. Recognition: Patience, rejection of evil, false apostles, and Nicolaitans.
- c. Admonition: Left first love, repent, do first works; will remove lampstand
- d. Blessing: Eat of the tree of life

B. Smyrna (2:8-11)

- a. Speaker: The first and the last, who was dead but is alive (see 1:17-18)
- b. Recognition: Tribulation, poverty, persecution, prison
- c. Admonition: [none]
- d. Blessing: Not be hurt of the second death

C. Pergamos (2:12-17)

- a. Speaker: He with the sharp, two-edged sword (see 1:16)
- b. Recognition: Hold fast God’s name, don’t deny, even after Antipus’s martyrdom
- c. Admonition: Allow the doctrine of Balaam, eat food sacrificed to idols, commit fornication, allow Nicolaitans; will fight against them
- d. Blessing: Hidden manna, white stone, new name

D. Thyatira (2:18-29)

- a. Speaker: Son of God, eyes like flame, feet like brass (see 1:13-15)

- b. Recognition: Charity, service, faith, patience, and works
- c. Admonition: Suffer Jezebel to teach and seduce many to fornicate and sacrifice to idols; tribulation and punishment coming according to works
- d. Blessing: Power over nations, rule with rod of iron, break them, receive the morning star

E. Sardis (3:1-6)

- a. Speaker: Has the seven spirits and stars (see 1:16)
- b. Recognition: Have a name, strengthen what remains, not defiled garments; walk with the Lord in white
- c. Admonition: Not perfect, remember and hold fast to teachings, repent; Lord comes as a thief and surprises them
- d. Blessing: Clothed in white, name in the book of life, confessed before Father and angels

F. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

- a. Speaker: He that is hold, true, has the key of David, opens and shuts and no man can change it (see 1:18)
- b. Recognition: Kept the word and not denied God; others will know of God’s love for them, kept from temptation, won’t lose crown
- c. Admonition: [none]
- d. Blessing: Pillar in the temple, name of God and his city written on, new name

G. Laodicea (3:14-22)

- a. Speaker: The Amen, faithful and true witness, beginning of creation (see 1:5, 8, 18)
- b. Recognition: [none]
- c. Admonition: Not hold or cold; spued out of the mouth; rich and happy with the things of the world; buy divine gold and white raiment, anoint eyes to see; the Lord will come in if they open the door
- d. Blessing: Sit with the Lord in his throne and with the Father

EPHESUS (2:1-7)

John started with the most important city in Asia, at mouth of the Cayster River leading out to the Aegean Sea, which was likely his home before and after he was exiled to Patmos. Ephesus was an important government, commerce, and athletic center—the fourth most important city in the Roman empire.⁵ Alexander

⁴ Mounce, 65.

⁵ Osborne, 108; Arnold, 260.

the Great is credited with founding the city at its current location (previously, the center of it was closer to the temple of Artemis). In John's day, the population was about 250,000, with temples, a theater, and paved streets. Ephesus had an excellent harbor and a large market leading up from the docks into the city proper. It was surrounded by a protective wall that was almost six miles in length.⁶

The temple of Diana/Artemis there was one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the platform being as big as two football fields with a report 127 columns, each 60 feet high, holding it up.⁷ A booming business was creating and selling images of the goddess, which is reflected in Paul's struggles there (Acts 19:23-41). Artemis was a huntress and a goddess of the forest and trees, and a fertility goddess, things that play into the blessing promised Ephesus by the Lord at the end of the letter. This worship of Artemis included ritual prostitution, and combined with emperor worship in Asia in general (in John's day, Domitian, the Roman emperor, had a temple to himself built there) put much pressure on early Christian converts to participate in pagan practices, since they were so tied to the local economy and culture.

Aquila and Priscilla brought Christianity to Ephesus under Paul's direction (Acts 18:18-21). Paul lived there for up to three years and wrote a letter to the members of the Church in Ephesus. Timothy also labored there (1 Timothy 1:3), and John appears to have spent many years in Ephesus after the destruction of Jerusalem, even making it church headquarters, in a sense. In the fourth century A.D., the harbor silted up and the city was abandoned. Today it's the largest open air archaeological park in the world visited by thousands each year who can walk the excavated streets much as they were in John's day.

The Ephesus message could be summarized: 'The love of God takes ongoing commitment, an act of will, and love of each other.' As outlined above, the message to Ephesus was one of the two strongest, with a powerful condemnation of certain actions and a call to immediately repent. They were commended for their faith and their rejection of the perversion of the

Nicolaitans, but they seem to have forgotten the reason for their faithfulness—their commitment to Christ and his teachings of inner change and love. In other words, they were seemingly going through the motions but not feeling the gospel truly in their lives and changing their hearts. They were likely not showing love to each other but rather criticizing those who were not living up to the letter of the law.

SPEAKER (2:1)

2:1 ***These things saith***. This phrase, found at the beginning of each of the seven messages to the churches, echoes in Greek the OT prophetic language, 'Thus saith the Lord.'⁸

2:1 ***angel***. The JST changes "angel" to "servant" in every case in these chapters. The Greek word *angelos* means 'messenger' and doesn't necessarily imply a divine connection. Thus it is an appropriate term for the local leader of each church who is charged to read the message of John's letter to the congregation (see 1:3).

2:1 ***holdeth the seven stars***. "Holdeth" is *kratōn*, meaning to seize, grasp, or retain. The churches are not just lying in his open hand but he is holding them tightly, protecting them.

2:1 ***walketh in the midst***. "Walketh" is Greek *peripateō*, meaning 'to live or follow as a companion'; Jesus was actively and daily with them, not just standing passively and watching. This is likely a reference to Leviticus 26:12: "And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people."

RECOGNITION (2:2-3)

2:2 ***I know thy works, and thy labour***. "Know" is *oida*, meaning 'to know fully, with perfect knowledge'; "the Lord has full knowledge of the deeds—good and evil—of all who belong to the seven churches."⁹ "Labour" is *kopos*, or 'toil to the point of exhaustion, an all-out effort.'

2:2 ***tried them which say they are apostles, and are not***. False apostles were appearing among the churches,

⁶ Draper & Rhodes, 223.

⁷ Smalley, 59. Only one column remains standing today, and that was reassembled from the parts of several; most of the stone was later re-used in other building projects after the temple was destroyed by Goths in AD 262 (Arnold, 260).

⁸ A quick electronic search of the phrase "Thus saith the Lord" turns up 413 verses in the OT.

⁹ Parry and Parry, 29, quoting 2 Nephi 9:20 and D&C 38:1-2 as latter-day scriptures that emphasize the same point.

trying to lure some away.¹⁰ Ephesus was commended for knowing truth from error. They “tried” them, meaning put them on trial or to the test. These were not pretenders to the Quorum of the Twelve but “apostles” in the sense that they felt they were ‘sent’ to teach the people (or may have been sent/commissioned by someone), but were not teaching true Christianity.

2:3 **hast borne.** Greek *hypomonēn*, “endurance’ or ‘perseverance.’ Another translation could be, ‘And possess endurance...’

ADMONITION (2:4-6)

2:4 **I have somewhat against thee.** Or, “I hold this against you” (NIV, NAB). This phrase turns the letter from praise to problem and indicates that something must be done or the Lord’s favor will be lost.

2:4 **left thy first love.** “Left” here is *aphiēmi*, or, sent away, even to divorce¹¹; we are the ones that leave Christ and send him away. “First love” reminds us of marriage and how strong that bond is, where we highly value that relationship and spend much time and effort on it. A common metaphor is that Christ is the bridegroom and we (the Church) are the bride. “They had lost the first flush of enthusiasm and excitement in their Christian life and had settled into a cold orthodoxy with more surface strength than depth.”¹² The word used for love here is *agapē*, which can have the sense of love for others or love for God. Both are probably relevant in this accusation of a lost in Ephesus.

2:5 **remember...repent...do.** These three steps are part of the repentance process, but the way John presents them is helpful. All three are imperative (commands), but the first is present and the other two are aorist; in other words, the first (remember) is something we should always continue to do, while the other two are actions that result from remembering and should be done immediately.¹³ Indeed, to remember in John’s world is to take action; here the Ephesian saints needed

to remember their first love and return to that state of existence: “remembering is the basis of repentance.”¹⁴

2:5 **I will come unto thee quickly.** The Parry brothers note a number of references in the Doctrine & Covenants to this same idea, confirming that it is just as relevant for our day.¹⁵

2:5 **remove thy candlestick.** Or, “remove your lampstand” (NIV, NAS, NASB, RSV). The threat was that their place among the churches would be lost, with their lampstand moved out of the Savior’s presence and thus no longer under his care, leaving them in the dark. “Without a change of heart, leading to loving conduct, the community is in danger of extinction.”¹⁶ This is perhaps more relevant to the Ephesians because their city had historically moved locations twice before¹⁷ (and will move one more time in a few centuries, to modern Selçuk).

2:6 **Nicolaitans.** The meaning is uncertain, but perhaps a contraction of *nichos* (victory) and *loas* (people) making it the Greek equivalent to Hebrew ‘Balaam’ (*he has consumed/conquered the people*), thus representing a false teacher or someone that leads them into idolatrous practices and worship.¹⁸ This is exactly what Paul prophesied to the Ephesian leaders in Acts 20:29. Early church leaders inaccurately “trace the name back to Nicolaus of Antioch,” one of those called in Acts 6 to lead the temporal affairs of the church.¹⁹ This group apparently taught that idol worship practices of fornication and eating the meat of the sacrifices was acceptable because Christ had freed them from all sin.²⁰ This was contrary to the decision at the council of Jerusalem for Gentile converts (Acts 15:19-29). Elder Bruce McConkie said they were “members of the Church who were trying to maintain their church standing while continuing to live after the manner of

¹⁰ In one instance, Paul sarcastically called them “super-apostles” (NIV 2 Corinthians 12:11-12; the KJV says “the very chiefest apostles” but the Greek sense is excessive, extreme, or superlative, hence the very descriptive NIV translation).

¹¹ Draper and Rhodes, 227.

¹² Osborne, 115. He notes that this fulfills Christ’s prophesy in Matthew 24:12 that the love of many would grow cold.

¹³ Smalley, 61-62.

¹⁴ Osborne, 116-117.

¹⁵ Parry and Parry, 30; they cite D&C 33:18; 34:12; 35:27; 39:24; 41:4; 49:28; 68:35; 88:126; and 112:34.

¹⁶ Smalley, 62.

¹⁷ Osborne, 118-119.

¹⁸ Compare D&C 117:11.

¹⁹ Draper and Rhodes, 229; Mounce, 71.

²⁰ Some refer to the Nicolaitans as “pre-gnostic,” meaning they focused on secret knowledge and practices for a few and had a divine view of Christ that cancelled out his mortality, thus creating many false doctrines about the man Jesus.

the world....[they] do not want to devote themselves to the gospel cause with full purpose of heart.”²¹

BLESSING (2:7)

2:7 *He that hath an ear, let him hear.* To hear in the ancient world was an action verb—when you heard (in your ear), you acted. The Lord is saying that those that hear the warning he has just given should act immediately. This phrase is repeated with each city’s instructions. It probably is an allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10, Jeremiah 5:21, or Ezekiel 3:27,²² and is used in the Synoptic gospels by Jesus as well.²³ Besides the seven occurrences in chapters 2-3, the phrase is also used once in the section of Revelation talking about the dragon and his beast (13:9).

2:7 *what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* Also with each city’s portion of the letter, the message is nevertheless to all the churches together. It is spoken by the Spirit so comes from God directly, and it is spoken continually (*legei* is present tense so an ongoing activity).

2:7 *To him that overcometh.* “Overcometh” is *nikōnti*, or literally, ‘one who is conquering’; it also has the sense of subduing and being victorious over a foe. This is a major theme through Revelation. We are victorious over ourselves or the natural man when we conquer and fully submit our wills to God and not give in to the temptations and distractions of the world. It is a daily, ongoing effort, not a one-time experience or activity. So 1 John 5:4-5: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” Jesus is our partner in this, for he tells us to “be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The outcome is sure, even if the battle has not yet been fully fought.

2:7 *tree of life.* This is a reversal of the Fall where Adam and Eve lost access to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). Now with Christ, if we overcome the natural man, we can re-enter the presence of God. See 22:2 and 1 Nephi 11:21-23. The symbol of the tree of life is known in

many cultures in the ancient world, including the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 8:10-16; 11:8-9, 21-23). The local goddess of Ephesus, Artemis, was a goddess of the forest and a mother goddess associated with giving and nurturing life; the symbol for her in the temple at Ephesus was a date palm tree.²⁴ So the image of the tree of life is particularly appropriate for that city. It also works well because as we learn from the Book of Mormon, the tree of life represents the love of God (1 Nephi 11:22), and love of God and man was the challenge at Ephesus.²⁵

2:7 *the paradise of God.* *Paradeisos* means ‘a walled garden.’²⁶ In the Greek, this is the same word used for the garden of Eden in Genesis 2-3, further linking the tree of life to the creation and the Fall.

SMYRNA (2:8-11)

Called “The Jewel of Asia” and “The first in Asia,” Smyrna was actually a close second to Ephesus as the leading city in the area, with its population of about 200,000.²⁷ Today called Izmir, with an excellent harbor, it was an important trade center, as it still is now. The Greek poet Homer was from here, they said.²⁸ Destroyed by an war and earthquake in the days of Lehi and Jeremiah, Smyrna was rebuilt by Alexander the Great’s successors to the south of the original city and became a strong center for the worship of the emperor, Zeus, and the Sipylene Mother (Cybele) during the Roman Empire. The alliance with Rome was so strong, they even had a temple to Roma, a female embodiment of the city of Rome. A beautifully located and carefully planned and built city, Smyrna had the largest amphitheater in Asia, a famous library, and a “Street of Gold” that went around its acropolis, with a temple at each end. It had great wealth, but also a large part of the people who lived in great poverty, many of whom joined the church.

The Saints in Smyrna seemed to have been under great persecution from Roman edicts making Christianity illegal and from Jewish persecution—perhaps such that they received no criticism. Polycarp, an early Church father and bishop of Smyrna and who knew and was taught by John, was burned at the stake in Smyrna in

²¹ DNTC, 3:446.

²² Beale and Carson, 1093.

²³ E.g., Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 18:17; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35; 16:29.

²⁴ Osborne, 124.

²⁵ Wilcox, 32.

²⁶ Smalley, 64.

²⁷ Mounce, 73.

²⁸ Arnold, 263. However, other cities also claimed that distinction (Osborne, 127).

156 when he was eighty-six years old, about 60 years after Revelation was written. A big part of those who helped in his death were Jews in the town.²⁹

The name “Smyrna” is a translation of the word for the incense myrrh, the sap from a balsam tree. So their town was associated with that resin, which was often used for anointing and preserving the dead. The name goes well with their message: “Its association with death perfectly pictures the suffering church at Smyrna. Like myrrh, produced by crushing a fragrant plant, the church at Smyrna, crushed by persecution, gave off a fragrant aroma of faithfulness to God.”³⁰

Their letter is the shortest of the seven messages. As noted, it has no admonition but it also has no soothing words for immediate relief from persecution: “The Lord does not promise them power over the first death, only the second.”³¹ Instead, they are counseled to endure it with faith and patience. Thus the Smyrna message could be: ‘The ultimate crown is greater than life’s relatively short trials.’

SPEAKER (2:8)

2:8 **the first and the last.** Like 1:17, Jesus refers to himself as the *protos* and the *eschatos*, the greatest and the least, the one who was God and yet became mortal for our sakes. The sufferings they were experiencing were known to and understood by him. This title is appropriate for Smyrna which liked to call itself the *protos* of Asia. Using those same terms, Jesus taught that the “first shall be last; and the last shall be first” (Matthew 19:30).

2:8 **which was dead, and is alive.** The second title Jesus chose to identify himself reflects the persecutions and deaths that Christians were experiencing in Smyrna. Just as he was killed and resurrected, so they could have faith that in their suffering, they would be alive with him again.³² It also might reflect the history of their city which was dead when conquered and destroyed, then made alive again when rebuilt in 290 BC.³³

RECOGNITION (2:9-10)

2:9 **tribulation, and poverty.** Smyrna is the only church mentioned suffering from poverty. But the word is not just to be “poor” (which would be *penēs*), but “real deprivation” (*tēn ptōcheian*).³⁴ It is likely that the Christians there could not get work as many jobs were tied to pagan worship practices through the guilds, so refusing to worship the emperor or Zeus could make a person unemployable and thus suffer distress and affliction.³⁵ Other may have lost property, or simply been poor when they joined the church. “Both in the OT and the NT the poor have a special relationship to God as their protector....God watches out for the poor and will vindicate them.”³⁶

2:9 **thou art rich.** Though the people were suffering financially and in other ways, this parenthetical reminder is that the blessings of the gospel are great and make us eternally ‘rich.’ This is just the opposite of the Laodicean’s situation (3:17-18).

2:9 **blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not.** Blasphemy is false or slanderous accusations, usually directed at God. Some Jews were lying to get Christians persecuted or put in prison, equating their slander with speaking against the Lord himself and earning them the title “the synagogue of Satan” (*satan* in Hebrew means ‘adversary’ or ‘accuser’). Judaism was a protected religion, meaning Jews could not be officially persecuted for not worshipping the emperor and other Roman gods. In many parts of the Roman empire in the early days of the church, Christians were viewed as a sect of Judaism, allowing them the same protections. In Smyrna, however, the Jews (whom the Lord says are really not Jews because of their behavior) seem to have been very vocal about that relationship and disowned the Christians, leaving followers of Christ open to persecution.³⁷ The irony is that the charge the Jews labeled against Christians was just what the Lord said about the Jews; as the Christians tried to claim the same status as Jews but were denounced as ‘not Jews’ in the synagogue, so the Lord declared that the Jews were not true Jews because of their feelings and actions toward the Christians. This is reflected in Paul’s statement that a Jew is not something outwardly

²⁹ Smalley, 66; Arnold, 264, who cites *Mart. Poly.* 12.2; 13.1; 17.2; 18.1.

³⁰ MacArthur, 1:69-70.

³¹ Draper and Rhodes, 255, who compare it to D&C 121:7-8.

³² Mounce, 74.

³³ Osborne, 128.

³⁴ Smalley, 65.

³⁵ Draper and Rhodes, 246.

³⁶ Osborne, 130.

³⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 247-248, 252.

visible, “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly” (Romans 2:28-29). Behavior and change of heart matter more than outward appearances.

Another possibility is that Jews who had joined the Christian church turned away and became persecutors instead.³⁸ This was experienced in the Church in our day when other Christian people joined the Church but left it to lead the persecution against it; they could say they were Christians, but they were not living up to Christian ideals. This same situation existed in Philadelphia (3:9).

2:10 **cast some of you into prison.** Romans didn’t have prisons like we do today. Rather, prison was a temporary situation leading to one of three outcomes: “coercion against recalcitrance, detention pending trial, and detention awaiting execution.”³⁹ Many Christians thrown into prison experienced the last two.

2:10 **ten days.** A testing period, a short time (similar to D&C 121:7, ‘a small moment’). This should be compared to Daniel 1:12-14 where Daniel and the other young men were tested for ten days against pagan practices and withstood the test. See also Romans 8:18 (suffering worth the glory).

2:10 **faithful unto death.** While it could mean, ‘endure to the end,’ it was also a reflection of the literal challenges these saints would face. Many of them would face death for their beliefs and would need to be strong through that eventuality. As the Lord counseled during his ministry, they should not fear those who could harm their bodies, just those who could destroy their souls and cast them into hell.⁴⁰

2:10 **crown of life.** A crown here is Greek *stephanon*, which was the wreath that triumphant athletes or others wore on their heads after a great victory. Smyrna had major athletic games every five years, so the image was well known to them.⁴¹ Sometimes the crowns were made to look like wreaths but were made of gold. Those who faithfully endured tribulation and death would receive such a crown. The “crown of life” represents

eternal life, “the ultimate symbol of the individual Saint’s triumph or all his foes.”⁴² As with Christ himself, the saints in Smyrna are promised victory out of death. D&C 124:55 says that faithful saints will be crowned “with honor, immortality, and eternal life.”

BLESSING (2:11)

2:11 **second death.** This is the to die a spiritual death after the mortal death we all experience at the end of our lives. This death forever separates us from God. Fortunately, it appears to impact very few—only the sons of perdition. See Alma 12:16, 32-36, Helaman 14:18-19, and D&C 76:31-37. See also Revelation 20:14; 21:8. This is another appropriate image for Smyrna, whose name was associated with the spice used to wrap dead bodies.

PERGAMOS (2:12-17)

This city’s name was also written Pergamum (modern Bergama), the capital city of the Asia province in Roman times, with a population of about 150,000-180,000.⁴³ Its name meant “citadel,” probably referring to its tall, cone-shaped acropolis.⁴⁴ It housed a major library on its acropolis, with 200,000 scrolls—only Alexandria’s was larger in the Roman world. In fact, parchment is said to have been invented here, hence its name in Greek, *pergamēnē*.⁴⁵ Pergamos included temples to Asclepius, the serpent god of healing, as well as Roma (like Smyrna), Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and the emperor Augustus.⁴⁶ The acropolis with the temple to Zeus rose more than one thousand feet above the river.⁴⁷ It was at its peak in the days of John and steadily declined afterwards until it was destroyed by the Arabs in the eighth century A.D.

The Pergamos message: If we reject the ‘wisdom’ of the world, God will give us true knowledge and wisdom, a new name, and a place in his kingdom.

³⁸ Smalley, 66.

³⁹ Osborne, 133.

⁴⁰ Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4-5.

⁴¹ Smalley, 67; Arnold, 265, notes that the acropolis on Mount Pagus, which surrounded the city, was also described as a crown, making that another potential tie to the metaphor.

⁴² Draper and Rhodes, 250.

⁴³ Arnold, 266.

⁴⁴ Smalley, 67; Mounce, 78.

⁴⁵ Smalley, 68; parchment was likely known well before, but Pergamos may have made its use more widespread than others (MacArthur, 1:85).

⁴⁶ Draper and Rhodes, 262; Arnold, 266.

⁴⁷ Many of the ruins of Pergamos are displayed today in the *Pergamonmuseum* in Berlin, Germany, the most visited museum in that country, according to Wikipedia.

SPEAKER (2:12)

2:12 **sharp sword with two edges.** The symbol used to describe Jesus in 1:16 (also in 19:15, 21), this is a *rhomphaia* or long sword or javelin, used to pierce from a distance.⁴⁸ The imagery may originate from Isaiah 11:4 (“he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth”). In contrast, Pergamos was the capital of the province, so its proconsul was given *ius gladii*, or “the right of the sword,” meaning he had power over life and death. The “sword” in that latter phrase was a short, two-edged sword (the *machaira*, found in 6:4; 13:10, 14), used by Roman soldiers in close combat.⁴⁹ The proconsul may have had power over life and death, but Jesus had power over the proconsul and everyone else by virtue of his greater sword—his divine words.

RECOGNITION (2:13)

2:13 **Satan’s seat.** Perhaps this refers to Zeus’ temple and throne with sacrifices day and night, or to the temple to the emperor. More likely, it refers to the proconsul’s bench or throne (place of judgment), since Christians were brought to trial there.⁵⁰

2:13 **holdest fast my name.** Christians could save themselves from death and prison by cursing Christ and worshipping the emperor; the Saints at Pergamos did not. They held to the name of Christ that they had taken upon themselves at baptism and looked to it as the only name whereby they could be saved (2 Nephi 25:20; 31:21; 33:12; D&C 20:29).⁵¹

2:13 **Antipas was my faithful martyr.** Nothing is known of this man except this verse. Perhaps he was a leader in their church who was killed for his beliefs, as were many Christians during this time. The term translated here “faithful martyr” is the same in Greek as the phrase used to describe Christ in the KJV and John in the JST: “faithful witness” (1:5).

ADMONITION (2:14-16)

2:14 **Balaam.** We encounter Balaam in Numbers 22:5 – 25:3 and 31:8, 16, when Balak, king of Moab, feared Israel and asked Balaam to curse them. The Lord told

him not to do it so Balaam sent them away but then went with them to get honors and the reward. He ended up blessing not cursing Israel and losing the payment, but then tried to corrupt the Israelites with immoral beliefs and practices through marrying pagan women (the “stumblingblock” of v. 15). Thus the *doctrine of Balaam* is (per Bruce McConkie) “to divine for hire; to give counsel contrary to the divine will; to pervert the right way of the Lord—all with a view to gaining wealth and the honors of men. In effect, to preach for money, or to gain personal power or influence.”⁵²

2:14 **commit fornication.** “Fornication” is the Greek *porneuō*, meaning unlawful sexual relations of any kind. Here it could refer to sexual acts associated with pagan worship or the symbolic act of leaving the Lord for another god, which the scriptures refer to as adultery or prostitution in many cases⁵³—or both, in this society.

2:15 **the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.** Like Ephesus (2:6), this heresy had come to Pergamos but was apparently more successful here.

2:16 **I will come unto thee quickly.** The form of this phrase suggests not just coming to them but against them.

2:16 **will fight against them.** Since the warning is in the second person, “them” must be someone other than the members of the church reading the letter. The likely candidates are the Nicolaitans. In other words, the church members can either repent and reject those evil doctrines or the Lord will do it himself. This is the same verb used in 11:7, 12:17, and 13:7 where the dragon wages war on the saints and in 12:7 and 19:11 where God wages war on evil.

2:16 **the sword of my mouth.** The method of removing the problem is God’s word—he speaks and the universe obeys. This also continues the link with Balaam, who was threatened and finally killed by the sword (Numbers 22:23, 31; Joshua 13:22).⁵⁴

BLESSING (2:17)

2:17 **hidden manna.** Manna (which means in Hebrew, “What is it?”) was the miraculous bread given to Israel in

⁴⁸ Arnold, 265.

⁴⁹ Draper and Rhodes, 263.

⁵⁰ Draper and Rhodes, 264; Smalley, 68.

⁵¹ See also Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” General Conference, April 1985.

⁵² *DNTC*, 3:450.

⁵³ For example, Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 2:20; Ezekiel 16:15-16; Hosea 2:5; also 2 Chronicles 21:10-11.

⁵⁴ Beale and Carson, 1094.

the wilderness (Numbers 11:6-9). In Deuteronomy 8:3, Moses taught that manna was given to the Israelites to teach them that man must live by God's word. "Hidden manna" thus means sacred knowledge from God, precious revelation that we need to survive this world. It also refers to Christ himself who was the bread of life (see John 6:48-51) and who is 'hidden,' meaning "unseen and unknown by the wicked."⁵⁵ The symbol is directly applicable to Pergamos—those who refused to eat the pagan sacrificial meals would be eternal fed with bread from heaven.⁵⁶

In Moses' day, a sample of the manna was put in a pot in the ark in the temple, to be preserved as a memorial (Exodus 16:32-34). When the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC, it was looted and the sacred contents taken away. However, tradition has it that Jeremiah was able to get the ark and hide it in a cave in Mt. Nebo (or Sinai⁵⁷), to be preserved until the last days when the Lord would give it back to his covenant people (2 Maccabees 2:4-7).⁵⁸ This 'hidden manna' could be the concept behind the symbol as well, with God returning it to Israel after all those many years as a symbol of his renewed covenant.

2:17 white stone. White stones were used in many situations in the ancient world, including as an admission token (to an event or group), for casting a vote,⁵⁹ as a symbol of victory,⁶⁰ as a way to write official edicts, and in the service of Asclepius, the god of healing. In Pergamos, a white stone was in the temple of Augustus and copied and sent to other nearby cities, declaring his birthday as an official holiday. Each of these could play into the meaning of the symbol in Revelation.

However, D&C 130:10 helpfully interprets this symbol: "Then the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one, whereby things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms will be made known." *Urim* means "lights" and *thummim* means "perfections" or 'higher.' The color white represents purity and victory, tying its reception back to the concept of overcoming in order to receive it. It also relates back to the hidden

manna, which was described as "white" in color (Exodus 16:31).

2:17 new name. D&C 130:11 continues the interpretation: "And a white stone is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom, whereon is a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. The new name is the key word." Isaiah 62:2-3 and 65:15 also speak of God giving Israel a new name, and 2 Corinthians 5:17 of all things becoming new in Christ.

This is a sacred concept and one covered in many scriptures and in the temple, but one example from the OT is instructive: kings received a coronation or throne name, symbolizing greater authority and knowledge that went with their new office and anointing. Writing the name on a stone makes it permanent,⁶¹ and on a white stone could associate personal and eternal victory with the name.

THYATIRA (2:18-29)

Thyatira is located where the modern city of Akhisar is today. The name might be a version of the Greek word for daughter (*thugatera*). Lydia, a convert of Paul who was a seller of 'purple,' was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14), though she was living in Philippi when she was taught and baptized. There was a big wool trade in Thyatira and many dyers and fullers, with guilds (unions) dominating the culture—these each had an annual feast to a patron god that required members of the guild to participate. Two large temples to Apollo and Helios were in the town, each of which had statues of those gods with blazing eyes and brass feet (see verse 18). Because it was in a flat plain, it was frequently attacked, destroyed, and rebuilt.

Their letter is the longest one which has been ironically noted to have been written the smallest and least important church.⁶²

⁵⁵ Parry and Parry, 37.

⁵⁶ Beale and Carson, 1094.

⁵⁷ Osborne, 147.

⁵⁸ Mounce, 82.

⁵⁹ See Acts 26:10, where "voice" is actually *psēphon*, meaning a small, voting stone—black for guilty, white for innocent (Danker, 1098).

⁶⁰ Gladiators were given a white stone or white bone tablet to represent their victories and were then allowed to retire from the games (Mounce, 83; Osborne, 149).

⁶¹ Draper and Rhodes, 274.

⁶² Draper and Rhodes, 284.

The Thyatira message: Those who follow Christ's righteous example will rule with faith, equity, and justice.

SPEAKER (2:18)

2:18 **the Son of God**. This is the only occurrence of this word in Revelation. This begins the tie of this section to Psalm 2, which is a coronation and messianic scripture—in this case, verse 7 where the Lord declares, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” This was a good title for this audience; their city had temples to two gods who were worshipped as sons of Zeus, or sons of god. Jesus declares that he is the true Son of God.

2:18 **fire...brass**. Both fire and bronze were symbols of purity and godhood; compare D&C 110:3. “The blazing eyes enable Jesus to see through the misguided beliefs...while the burnished feet speak of Christ's strength and judgement.”⁶³ The unique Greek word *chalkolibanō*, translated “brass,” is only found in this verse and 1:15 in all of Greek literature, so its meaning is uncertain; it was likely a metallurgic term known in Thyatira and could be a mixture of copper and gold. The important connotation seems to be that it was polished to a great luster.⁶⁴

RECOGNITION (2:19)

2:19 **charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience**. These good traits serve the church well here, as they exhibit care for others and faith and patience in persecution or challenges.

ADMONITION (2:20-25)

2:20 **Jezebel**. Other letters mention evil groups but only here do we have an individual featured. This unknown woman, who is allowed to freely carry out her efforts in Thyatira, carries the symbolic name of Ahab's infamous wife, queen of Israel at time of Elijah and Elisha. Jezebel in the OT defied the prophets and promoted the worship of Baal. In the end, she was thrown from a window and her children were slain by Jehu (1 Kings 16-21; 2 Kings 9). The Jezebel in Thyatira similarly advised people to break the Christian laws of eating

food sacrificed to idols and being involved in immoral behavior.

2:22 **cast her into a bed**. Or, ‘Throw her violently onto a couch.’ This word has a dual meaning: first, the ancient Jezebel reclined in her wealth on a couch and used it as a place of immoral activities; second, the term also signifies a place of illness—a sickbed. This Jezebel (and her followers) will be struck with illness on the very couch where they sought pleasures.⁶⁵ The JST changes “bed” to “hell” (footnote a), making explicit her sad end.

2:23 **kill her children**. Just like Jezebel in the Old Testament, only here this is probably symbolic of her followers.

2:23 **all the churches shall know**. Jezebel must have been well-known in Asia, for when Jezebel and her followers are destroyed, everyone in the church would recognize the Lord's hand and thus know that God knew their inner thoughts and feelings. This is the only reference, outside of the blessing formulas at the end of city's letter, that mentions all the churches doing something together.

2:23 **reins and hearts**. An OT phrase from Psalm 7:9 and Jeremiah 17:10. “Reins” were kidneys which were the place of emotion, the mind, and the will; “hearts” were the place of rational thought, the spiritual center.⁶⁶

2:24 **the rest in Thyatira**. The message is addressed to those who have not followed Jezebel and her pernicious ways. On them, who have already suffered, the Lord “will put upon you none other burden.”

2:24 **the depths of Satan, as they speak**. Or, “Satan's so-called deep secrets” (NIV). Unlike the Lord, Satan has no mysteries—things known only by revelation. Jezebel and her followers taught that things that others said were sinful were permitted, something that later Gnostic heretics tried to push upon the church, along with their hidden secrets. But these things only came from Satan.

BLESSING (2:25-29)

⁶³ Smalley, 72.

⁶⁴ Draper and Rhodes, 285.

⁶⁵ Arnold, 269-270.

⁶⁶ Smalley, 76.

2:26-27 KJV	2:26-27 JST ⁶⁷
26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations : 27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers : even as I received of my Father.	26 And to him who overcometh, and keepeth my commandments unto the end, will I give power over many kingdoms ; 27 And he shall rule them with the word of God; and they shall be in his hands as the vessels clay in the hands of a potter; and he shall govern them by faith , even as I received of my Father.

Compare these verses to Psalm 2:8-9. This may be the closest thing to a direct OT quotation in Revelation, though there are differences. In the JST version, the differences are even more pronounced and more like the kind of liberties John took with OT text in the rest of the book.

One fascinating issue with the JST changes is the tone, which greatly softens the KJV's harsh rule, lording over the people with an iron rod and breaking them like pottery, which is also the sense of it in Psalms. Instead in the JST, they are ruled by "the word of God" (which the Book of Mormon teaches is the meaning of the rod of iron in Lehi and Nephi's visions—1 Nephi 11:25) and they are gently molded in the Lord's hands as a potter working with clay. They are also governed "by faith," all of which sounds very patient and loving. In the Greek version of Psalm 2:9 and in the Greek text of Revelation 2:27, the word "rule" is *poimainō*, which has the meaning of rule but is better translated "shepherd."⁶⁸ That image is much kinder than the KJV language would indicate, so the JST change overall matches that tone wonderfully.

2:26 power over the nations. From Psalm 2:9, this promise of the Lord that his faithful followers will rule over nations is fulfilled in the imagery of 19:14-15 and 20:4.

2:27 rod of iron. Numbers 24:17 refers to a "Sceptre" that will arise. The Hebrew word there is *shebet*, which

⁶⁷ JST quotations taken from Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, and compared with Wayment for verifying the marking of differences.

⁶⁸ Beale and Carson, 1095.

is also translated "rod of iron" in Psalm 2:9, on which this expression in Revelation is based.

2:28 morning star. This is Christ (see 22:16 and 2 Peter 1:19). The morning star astronomically is Venus, which often rises with the sun and is the brightest star in the sky, an appropriate symbol for the one holding tightly to the stars representing the leaders of the churches (1:16).⁶⁹ It was a symbol of rule in the ancient world.⁷⁰ It also refers to Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:17-20 with its "Star out of Jacob."

SARDIS (3:1-6)

Capital of the Lydian province and the ancient Seleucid Empire, Sardis (modern Sart) had a large Jewish population and an equally impressive synagogue at the time of Revelation that probably held 1,000 people (a 3rd century synagogue on the likely 1st century location is the only one found in Asia Minor).⁷¹ Christianity was established early here and the city had bishops recorded from the time of Constantine to the thirteenth century A.D.

It was at the crossroads of five major trade routes, making them known for prosperity and fame but also for corruption (3:1). The city had natural gold sources right in their river, and developed a way to separate gold from silver, and their currency was valued and trusted all over the empire for its purity. It was well-fortified, on top of a large hill, and had a population of up to 100,000. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17 and rebuilt though a large investment from the emperor and with tax breaks over several years.

The Sardis message: Honor our covenants and Christ will be our advocate. They receive the strongest condemnation of any of the cities and their slight recognition is not the leading message, but is blended in with the admonition.

SPEAKER (3:1)

3:1 KJV	3:1 JST
And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that	And unto the servant of the church in Sardis write; These things saith

⁶⁹ Smalley, 79.

⁷⁰ Arnold, 270 reports that Roman legions had Venus's zodiac sign, the bull, on their flags.

⁷¹ Arnold, 264.

hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

he **who** hath the seven stars, which are the servants of God; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art **not** dead.

that their names will never be erased from the list in God's eternal city.⁷²

3:5 **confess his name**. There are at least two ways Jesus does this: see D&C 45:3-5 and Hebrews 2:11. See also Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8.

3:5 **before my Father, and before his angels**. In Matthew 10:32, Jesus promised to acknowledge his disciples before the Father, and in Luke 12:8 before the angels of God. Here, he combines both promises.

This change harkens back to chapter 1 and continues the clarification of the symbols there, turning the spirits into stars and declaring that they are servants or local leaders in each church.

3:1 **hast a name . . . art dead**. They called themselves Saints but lived hypocritically; though interestingly the JST adds "art **not** dead" turning it into a complement!

PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13)

RECOGNITION AND ADMONITION (3:2-4)

3:2 **things which remain**. This receives various translations, including "put some resolve in what little vigor you have left" (NJB). The JST renders it, "**those who** remain," putting the focus on the people who are left but about to die.

3:2 **ready to die**. Or, "is on the point of death" (RSV).

3:3 **I will come on thee as a thief**. Jesus taught this in his mortal ministry (Matthew 24:42-44; Luke 12:39-40) as did both Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:2) and Peter (2 Peter 3:10). The phrase is repeated in 16:15. Jesus isn't like a thief in his coming except that a thief comes when he is not expected and no one is prepared.

3:4 **defiled their garments**. Broke their covenants.

Philadelphia, which means 'brotherly love,' was in the district of Sardis, at the upper end of a fertile plateau. Today it is called Alaşehir. It was a place of many earthquakes. One in A.D. 17 destroyed the city; aftershocks caused people to live outside the city proper for many years. When the emperor offered generous assistance rebuilding the city, the people called it Neocaesarea and later Flavia. The native god was Bacchus, the god of wine, due to the large vineyards around the city. They held many religious festivals.

The Philadelphia message: Stay faithful and receive the greatest blessing of all—to become like God.

SPEAKER (3:7)

3:7 **key of David**. This is victory over death. See Isaiah 22:15-22 where the key is taken from one because of wickedness and given to another who has power to open and shut that no one can alter. Compare also Isaiah 9:6-7 where "the government shall be upon his shoulder" (keys were very large in those days and could be slung on the shoulder for carrying). Note that this images does not come from chapter 1 but from the larger OT context of Revelation.

BLESSING (3:5-6)

3:5 **clothed in white**. White is symbolic of purity and victory, as previously mentioned. The imagery of Daniel 12:3 and 10 is invoked with those that overcome the world bright as the sun and dressed in pure robes of victory.

3:5 **book of life**. A prominent theme in Revelation, mentioned at least six other times, and in other scriptures (see Exodus 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3; Daniel 7:10; 12:1-2; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23). Cities kept lists of their citizens. When someone was condemned as a criminal, their name was erased from the list. Here the Sardinians are promised

RECOGNITION (3:8-11)

3:8 **open door**. Christ opens the door and no man shuts it; see 1:18. The idea of a 'shut door' may refer to excommunication from the synagogue (see 3:9; Luke 13:25), while an open door represents opportunity and blessing (see 1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:3).⁷³

⁷² Arnold, 272.

⁷³ Arnold, 274.

3:8 **no man can shut it.** In Isaiah 45:1, the Lord promises “to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.” No one has the power to override what God does.

3:9 **I will make them to come and worship before thy feet.** Alludes to the promise of the Lord that the world will fall at the feet of Israel in Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14; and potentially Psalm 86:9, though ironically it is the evil Jews that are bowing down before the predominately Gentile church members in Philadelphia.⁷⁴

3:10 **temptation.** *Peirasmos*, meaning ‘trial’ or ‘adversity.’ This refers to those things discussed in the rest of the letter. Keeping them from such trials is the theme in Daniel 12:1.

BLESSING (3:12-13)

3:12 **a pillar in the temple of my God.** All Greek cities had temples with pillars to hold up the roof.

3:12 **he shall no more go out.** This relates to the many earthquakes in this area and them fleeing the city when one starts. God’s temple will withstand any shaking and the pillars will remain standing, so those inside are safe and secure. Compare Isaiah 56:5 (also 62:2; 65:15) where the Lord gives the faithful a place within his walls and a new name to set them apart (see the note below on name).

3:12 **write upon him the name of my God.** Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “God’s name is God. To have his name written on a person is to identify that person as a god. How can it be said more plainly? Those who gain eternal life become gods!”⁷⁵ Those who overcome are made pillars in the temple. In the ancient world, pillars were inscribed with the names, such as the priests who work there. In Revelation, the faithful “pillars” receive three names—the name of God, the name of God’s city, and Jesus’ new name.

3:12 **name of the city of my God.** They are a citizen of that city; this practice refers to them renaming their city for the emperors.

3:12 **new Jerusalem.** In John’s day, the “old” Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans and reoccupied by

them as a military camp. This city is the new Jerusalem, which in Ezekiel 48:35 is named “the Lord is there” because of his continual presence.

3:12 **my new name.** Christ’s new name is his throne name; when he is triumphant, we shall join him if we have served him well. See Mosiah 5:12-13.

LAODICEA (3:14-22)

Founded about 261 B.C. and named after Antiochus II’s wife, Laodice, this was the chief royal city of the area for many years. Also a place of many earthquakes, it was destroyed at the time of Christ and again during the last days of the apostle Paul, who sent Epaphras there. Still, as a banking center, it had adequate funds and rebuilt within just a few years so it was again a major city in the region.⁷⁶ It was known for textile products, especially wool, unique because its sheep were pure black, and for a medical school that produced, among other things, *kollourion*, a poultice or plaster used for various ailments, including eyes. Unlike other cities in this list, no modern city was built on top of Laodicea but the site was abandoned after it was destroyed by the Turks and Mongols.

The Laodicea message: Watch and be always ready; live worthy at every moment; abandon pride and be humble.

SPEAKER (3:14)

3:14 **the Amen.** This unusual title is only used here in all of the NT, refers to the truthfulness of the Lord (the word “amen” means ‘truly’). See Isaiah 65:16 where the Lord is twice called “the God of truth” which in Hebrew is *elohey amen*.⁷⁷

3:14 **the faithful and true witness.** Jesus is the ultimate witness of truth and the martyr that gave his life (witness = martyr) for us. He can be fully trusted, unlike the Roman and Greek gods who were capricious and unpredictable, focused more on their own self-interest than that of their worshippers who would go from god to god asking for help, never knowing which, if any, would help.

3:14 **the beginning of the creation of God.** This refers to Jesus being the firstborn of the Father (Colossians

⁷⁴ Beale and Carson, 1097.

⁷⁵ *DNTC*, 3:458.

⁷⁶ Smalley, 96.

⁷⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 330.

1:15, a verse that may have been very familiar to the Laodiceans since they shared the Colossian letter—see Colossians 4:16). See also D&C 93:21-22.

ADMONITION (3:15-19)

3:15 **neither cold nor hot.** Nearby cities Hierapolis and Colossae had, respectively, naturally therapeutic hot water and refreshingly cold water, while Laodicea had water from the Baspinar spring at Denizli, that was notoriously tepid and nauseous (downstream from Hierapolis and thus carrying many of the minerals from the hot springs). It was known at times to make some sick and even vomit.

Some believe that the metaphor of hot and cold here represents obedience versus disobedience, but since Jesus asks them to be one or the other, just not lukewarm, that doesn't appear to work. Another suggestion is that the hot represents healing and service and the cold purity and refreshment. Lukewarm water could do neither, so the sin was being useless.

3:16 **I will spue thee out of my mouth.** The Greek word *emeō*, here translated “spue,” means to vomit. Jesus' reaction to their lukewarm nature is more violent than to simply spit them out.

3:17 **thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.** Their mortal riches blinded them to their true eternal condition. King Benjamin taught his people similarly, that they were less than the dust of the earth (Mosiah 2:25) and that we are to acknowledge our own nothingness next to him and repent (Mosiah 4:11). The people did that and found “exceedingly great joy” in the “mighty change” they experienced as a result (Mosiah 5:2-4). Our ability to stay humble and recognize our own mortal failings is a huge part of what allows the Lord to save us.

These also play directly against the things the city was most known for—riches, excellent medical care, especially for eyes, and nice clothing (see v. 18).

3:18 **buy of me.** This wealthy city bought many things that made their lives easier in this life. The Lord taught them to put their efforts into obtaining other, more important things, that they could only ‘buy’ from him through the Atonement, which makes all things “without price” (Isaiah 55:1).

3:18 **gold tried in the fire.** Gold found in a stream or mine was not as valuable as gold that had been refined and purified by fire. The testing and trials that refine us are blessings from the Lord, in the eternal perspective.

3:18 **that thou mayest be rich.** “Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich” (D&C 6:7).

3:18 **white raiment.** The famous black wool of Laodicea was rare and expensive.⁷⁸ Jesus used that familiar image and reversed it, telling them to wear white clothing that they could ‘purchase’ from him.

3:18 **anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.** The famous eye medicine of the city helped many, but they were still blind spiritually. The Lord's salve represents anointing their eyes with truth so they could clearly see the things of eternity.

BLESSING (3:20-22)

3:20 **I stand at the door, and know.** This famous scripture is the second door mentioned in this chapter: the first one (3:8) was the door to the Lord's kingdom, while this door is to our hearts and lives. He softly knocks and calls to us, and if we open, he will feed us. See Luke 12:35-37 where the disciples are anxiously waiting and ready by the door for the moment when the master knocks, that they can “open unto him immediately.”

3:21 **sit with me in my throne.** Not only does he bring the feast and serve us, but then he puts us on his throne and we reign together.

CONCLUSION

Several themes arise in the letters to the churches. The messages to the churches are ones that we should all be able to relate to. There are people like those represented here in many churches, and traits like

those called out by the Lord in many hearts. A healthy and humble self-examination can lead us to repent and improve our discipleship.

⁷⁸ Arnold, 276-277.

Second, the promised blessings are stunning, piling one atop the other and concluding with the ultimate blessing that we can sit beside Jesus and share in his eternal reign as we overcome evil, sin, and the carnal nature we struggle with each day. But they are only available to us if we “overcome” the world through Christ.

Third, life is full of trials and challenges. In many cases, the Lord does nothing to remove them from our lives because they further our personal growth and discipleship. But he always provides support, encouragement, and an admonition to keep going, move forward, and patiently wait for the greater reward that inevitably follows. We are engaged in a cosmic battle and there are many casualties, but the war has already been won by Jesus, so the outcome is assured. The question for us is which side do we choose?

Fourth, do not follow after false leaders and false ideas. The consistent condemnation and what led to the

apostasy in most NT cities was straying from the core gospel message and either getting caught up in ‘extra’ efforts and higher status, or being duped by false teachings that convinced many to act contrary to gospel teachings and their covenants. How critical it is to follow the prophet, follow the scriptures, and follow the Spirit and don’t be moved by false voices that contradict those sources of truth.

Fifth, pride and indifference can kill our progression and separate us from God. The antidote for pride is humility and a correct understanding of who we are. The remedy for indifference is to remember our covenants and have that memory drive us to action.

Finally, love is at the core of all God does for us and with the world. Love is action—it inspires good works and service to others, as well as repentance and an improved relationship with God, because God is love.

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Bible versions cited (if no version is cited, it is the KJV; any translation or paraphrase in single quotes is the author's):

KJV – King James Version (Authorized Version)

JST – Joseph Smith Translation

BYU – BYU New Testament Rendition (from Draper and Rhodes)

CJB – Complete Jewish Bible

LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

NAB – The New American Bible

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NIV – New International Version

NJB – New Jerusalem Bible

NLT – New Living Translation