

# ***The BIG Picture of Church History***



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## ***Introduction***

*The BIG Picture of Church History* was originally prepared by M.A. Butler during the year 2001 as a series of six articles in the *Herald of Hope* magazine; a bi-monthly Bible Prophecy publication.

A keen interest was shown in these articles and requests were received for a complete set of the six articles. In response to these requests the Herald of Hope Committee has now made the series available in this one publication.

The Herald of Hope Committee has been proclaiming the truth of the premillennial return of Jesus Christ through the magazine and conference ministries since 1948. The theological position taken by the Herald of Hope is conservative, non-denominational, and Biblical. Other FREE publications produced by the Committee include:

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*The Bible Prophecy Handbook* (420 pages) is available for sale from the Editor for \$12.50 AUD within Australia, and \$20.00 AUD outside Australia. It contains over 100 charts, maps and graphics and is simply written for easy reading. Many testify that it has removed the mystery from Bible Prophecy and given them a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches about the Last Days.

A complimentary copy of the *Herald of Hope* magazine containing our doctrinal statement may be obtained from:

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# Introduction

**F**or centuries the Book of the Revelation has been one of mystery to many hungry hearts. Confused teachers and theologians have said it could not be understood; so why should we today be concerned about it? Yet this final book in the library of sixty-six is amazingly clear once the obvious key is grasped.

As the Lord Jesus tarries His coming, it will prove to be so obvious that we are living in the end times, demonstrating the accuracy of the prophetic Scriptures. Since many of these prophetic truths have become historical facts over the past two thousand years, it is also reasonable to think that, since God gave the book to us, it is intended to be understood by His own.

Every “born again” (John 3:3, 5, 7) child of God who has put his faith in the risen Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, can understand this book. Thus, our challenge is to find the key to unlock the understanding of the Revelation, and to follow through in the study of the fulfillment of this prophecy regarding this present age, often referred to as the “Church Age”, or the “mystery age”.

## *The Setting (Rev 1:9-18)*

The Apostle John, doubtless the youngest of the twelve, penned the book of the Revelation under the direct dictation of Jesus Christ Himself, nearly sixty years after the resurrection, or about 96 A.D. John was being held as a prisoner of Rome on the rocky island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey)

- a prisoner for the “Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9).



Irenaeus (AD120-202) states that John wrote the Revelation at the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian, which places it at AD96. He also states that John lived to the reign of Emperor Trajan who began to rule in AD98. The historian Eusebius (4thC) and Jerome (4thC) both confirm these dates.

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It is important to realize that John wrote 26 years AFTER the destruction of Jerusalem, and the prophecies can therefore have nothing to do with the destruction of Jerusalem foretold by Jesus in Luke chapter 21.

In this first chapter John shares that one day he heard a voice behind him,

Saying, *"I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia"*(Rev1:11).

As he turned to see the voice John saw "...seven golden candlesticks" (1:12), which are the "seven churches" (1:20). Then he saw the living Christ and described Him in this majestic setting, doubtless as He is today (1:13-16).

The reaction of the apostle when confronted with the perfection and deity of the Messiah, was to fall "...at His feet as dead" (1:17). Then occurred one of the warmest of divine touches from the Lord Jesus, who said, "Fear not"(1:17). The compassionate response by the Son of God toward one of His own, for whom He gave His life, is beautiful. Indeed, this was the Lord Jesus Christ, who states, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore"(1:18).

### *The Scriptural Key (Rev 1:19)*

*"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter"* (1:19).

Friends, this verse 19 is the divine key that unlocks the door of this great book of prophecy. Without opening the book with the key, it cannot be rightly understood.

Note the command for John to write as the Lord Jesus dictates

this amazing outline, encompassing

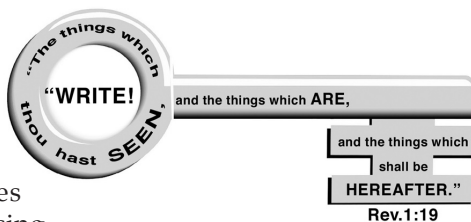
events of that time right into eternity future. We can divide the verse into three parts, noting the **three tenses: past, present, and future**.

Write: "...the things which thou hast SEEN..." (**PAST TENSE**).

John does this in chapter one, in describing that which he had seen; Christ in the midst of the candlesticks.

Write: "...the things which ARE..." (**PRESENT TENSE**).

Let's spend a few moments here. In chapters two and three, John recorded seven unique letters to seven Churches in Asia which are



introduced in Revelation 1:11. Each of these letters can be applied in four ways:

1. They were **literal letters to literal Churches** of John's day. The safest way to interpret the Scripture is literally or "normally." Each of these churches had unique characteristics in comparison with the others, and there was a message to each one locally.
2. Each of these letters can minister **to our hearts as individuals**. That is the purpose of the Word of God. As we read and meditate on God's truth He can comfort, correct, warn, encourage, or stir us as the Spirit of God applies His Word to our lives as believers.
3. A third way to be challenged by the letters of chapters two and three is to see how they could relate **to local Churches and Assemblies today**. We can find Churches all around us that can be characterized by these divine letters, which have a message that God can use to conform Churches to His will and way.
4. Finally, as we look back over the past 1900 years of Church history, we can see that **there is a clear prophetic intent** in the seven letters that parallels the course of history during the Church Age (or "this present age"). God is presently dealing with His Church as His unique tool to be His witness while the nation of Israel, God's Old Testament and future tool, has been temporarily set aside.

The Lord Jesus Christ dictated to John these seven letters which were totally prophetic then; but today, as we look back over the past nineteen centuries, we can see how that which was prophetic has become factual history. Thus, these seven letters, prophetic to John, are now a clear picture of seven stages of nearly fulfilled Church history, yet picturing the age in which John was living. Though we are 1900 -plus years removed, we are still ministering in the same age – the age of "*the things which ARE*"; the Church Age or "*this present age*."

### ***Returning to Rev 1:19.***

John is told to write: "*...the things which SHALL BE hereafter*" (the third phase, or the FUTURE TENSE).

The question could be asked, "Hereafter what?" The answer being, "Hereafter the Church Age." The events which take place AFTER this present age are outlined briefly as follows:

- Ch. 4:1                      The "catching up" of the Church.
- Ch. 4-5                     The completed Church in heaven.
- Ch. 6-18                  The Tribulation on the earth.
- Ch. 19                     The return of the Lord to the earth.





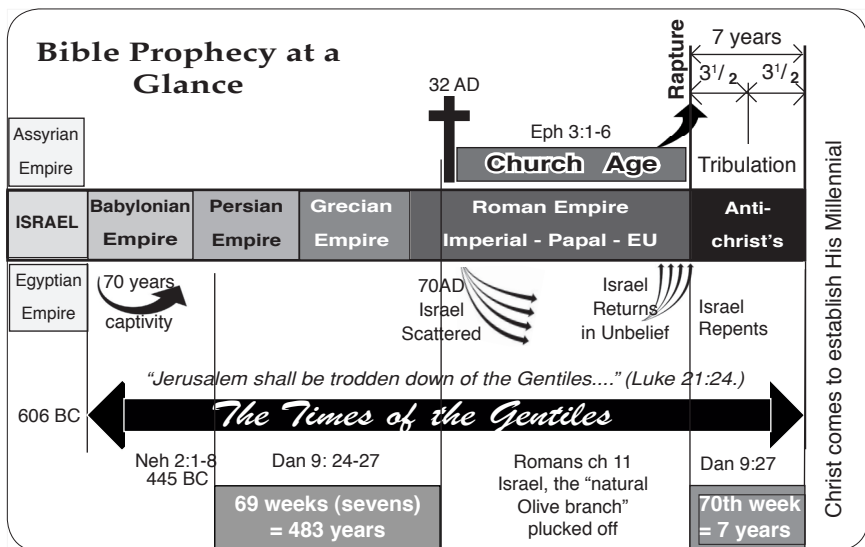
- Ch. 20                      The Millennial Kingdom on earth.
- Ch. 21-22    The New Heavens and the New Earth.

A brief picture of “*the things that shall be hereafter*” is initiated with the Rapture of the Church (Rev4:1); and, while the Church is “*with the Lord*” in heaven (chapters 4-5), the seven-year Tribulation and judgment is poured out on the earth and **Israel** becomes God’s witness (chapters 6-18). This culminates with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth, this time **with** the Church, to defeat the enemy at Armageddon (chapter 19) and to usher in the Millennial Kingdom. Satan will be bound for these 1,000 years, and the Great White Throne Judgment of all unbelievers of all the ages (chapter 20) will take place. The closing two chapters of Revelation focus on the New Heavens and the New Earth which is “perfection” and is beyond our human imagination. These are the things which **SHALL BE HEREFTER** the Church of this present age.

### *Where are we Today?*

The focus of this study will be on the seven letters of Revelation two and three, with an emphasis on the prophetic, now historical, stages.

Our study will take us from the **Apostolic Church** of John’s day, through the **Persecuted Church**, to the beginning of the world’s **State Church**, which developed into the **Papal Church**. The **Reformation Church** which followed led to great days of revival and the **Missionary Church**, while this present age of lukewarmness, materialism, and departure from the Word of God, concludes with the **Apostate Church**.





## ***A Promised Blessing***

*“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev1:3).*

In *The Revelation Record*, by Henry M. Morris, (page 36) he states: “A special blessing is promised to all who read or even who hear the words...of this book of prophecy, and who keep what is written.... This wonderful promise clearly presupposes that those who read or hear these words are well able to understand and appropriate them. And this can only be true if the words are to be taken literally.”

## **Chapter 1**

### ***The Apostolic and Suffering Churches (AD32-311)***

**T**he aging Apostle John focused on the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His judicial deity in chapter one, and wrote the “*things that thou (John) HAST seen*”. In chapters two and three we see the prophetic, but now historic, picture of this present age, which started at Pentecost (Acts 2) and will conclude with the mystery catching up of the Church (1 Cor.15:51-52; 1 Thess.4:16-17, Rev.4:1), as the “*things which ARE*” (Rev.1:19b). Following these seven letters we see the future tense, “*things which SHALL BE hereafter*” (Rev. 1:19c), beginning with the first verse of chapter four - the catching up into heaven; then all the events that follow this present age, right on to eternity future (Rev.21-22). The Church is not found on earth in the prophecies from Rev.4:1 to Rev 19 because it has been translated into heaven. Israel appears again as God’s witness.

#### ***The Church at Ephesus - the Apostolic Era (Rev 2:1-7)***

Though the seven letters are literal letters to literal Churches, we can now study them from a prophetic, as well as an historical point of view. Let’s begin with the first letter that the Saviour directs to the Church at Ephesus, a Church that Paul had started on his third missionary journey. He fed them great doctrinal teaching for three years (Acts 20:31). The early days of this great Church can be studied from Acts 19.

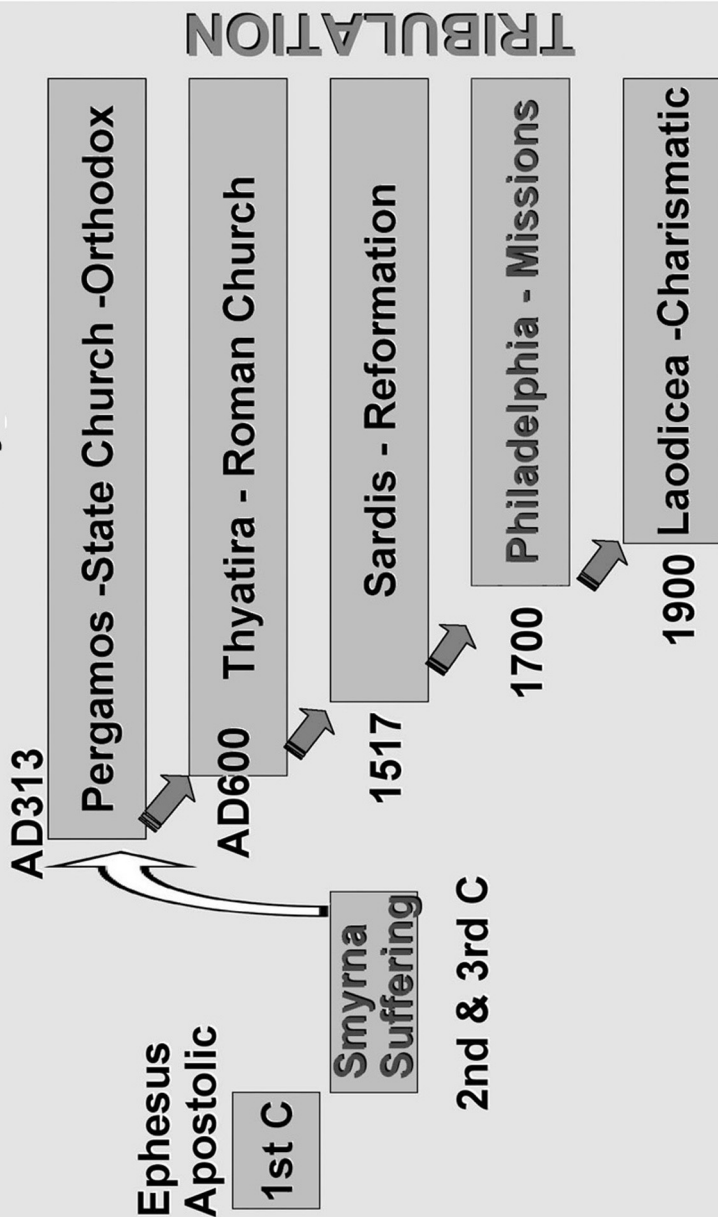
This first letter to Ephesus pictures the APOSTOLIC CHURCH of the first century. The etymology of the word “*Ephesus*” means



**Ancient Theatre at Ephesus**

Paul said: “*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?*”  
(1Cor. 15:32)

# The Seven Churches are Seven Stages of Church History



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*“desirable,”* or better, *“the desired one”*, and pictures that **first stage of Church history** when the apostles moved out with the message of the risen Lord Jesus Christ; a message so unique that it touched the lives of the multitudes of the then-known world. World population was only a fraction of what it is today, and Paul urged the Colossian Christians not to be *“moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature under heaven”*. This was doubtless the only time when the *“great commission”* (Matt.28:19-20) was actually fulfilled. Yet the opposition was so strong that tradition tells us the apostles gave their lives in martyrdom, standing for the message of a risen, coming Messiah.

The believers at Ephesus, like the early Church leaders, were commended for their maturity in exposing and condemning false teachers (Rev.2:2-3). They were also commended for hating *“the deeds of the Nicolaitanes”*, which the Lord also hated (Rev.2:6).

Conservative scholars feel we cannot be dogmatic as to just what the teaching of this group was because of the lack of information. Yet the word *“Nicolaitan”* can be rendered *“conquerors of the people”*, and would suggest a time when there was a philosophy of dividing the Church into classes – clergy and laity, to establish a rule (domination) over the Church, ignoring the priesthood of the believer. What was exposed in Ephesus as *“deeds”* (Rev.2:6), later became false *“doctrine”* (Rev.2:15) in the letter to Pergamos.

The best way to protect oneself against false doctrine is to know true doctrine. Knowing the Word of God characterized the Church at Ephesus and their faith. They hated what the Lord hated (Rev.2:6).

The blessings of this Church were genuine because

*“The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, and many that believed came and confessed and showed their deeds,.....so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed”* (Acts19:17b-18, 20).

God was at work, and dear friends, where God is at work you can count on one thing for sure – **there will be opposition**. Note the enemy in Paul’s day in Acts19:23, *“and at the same time there arose no small stir”*. The resurrection message was becoming a problem to the world system.

The deterioration of the Church began when they *“left their first love”* (Rev.2:9). Apparently the next generation of believers took their faith for granted. They were not as serious in their love for the Saviour and their hunger for His Word. It is like the saints that

were addressed in Hebrews 5:11-14, where they had become *“Dull of hearing”, and older believers had to be fed with “milk and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.”*

There is nothing wrong with new “baby” believers, but when older ones have to be fed with the basics over and over again when they ought to be vibrant witnesses, they are “carnal.” This is the heartache of the Church today; so caught up in the temporal affairs of this world, and not feeding on the riches of Biblical truth.

Dear, dear brothers and sisters, we should never get over our salvation in Jesus Christ. The strongest witness in the early Church was changed lives and their love for one another. May the Lord’s challenge to Ephesus stir our hearts to *“remember,” “repent,”* and *“return”* to our first (best) love, and allow God to use that witness for His glory. Let’s talk about our Saviour. Let us be teachers, and tell how He gave us ETERNAL LIFE (John 3:16).

*“He that hath an ear (individuals), let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev.2:7).*

The promise, *“I will give to eat of the tree of life”*, is to all the saved in the professing Church. There is always a mixture in the Churches. This is such a practical letter, as well as a prophetic picture of the first stage of Church history – the Apostolic Church of the first century. Now let us move on to the second letter.

### ***The Church at Smyrna - the Pagan Persecutions (Rev 2:8-11)***

This letter is another amazing writing, and though it is prophetic to John, we find in it the historical record of the next stage of Church history: the **suffering** or **persecuted** Church of the second and third centuries.

The name Smyrna, taken from a principal product of this ancient city, actually comes from our Biblical word *“myrrh”*, familiar as one of the gifts to the Christ child from the wisemen of the East (Matt.2:11). It was also used as an anaesthetic, offered to Jesus at His crucifixion (Mark 15:23), as well as a burial perfume, *“a mixture of myrrh and aloes”* (John 19:39) used for the preparation of His body in death. *“Myrrh”* came from a plant that had to be crushed in order to release its sweet fragrance. It is associated with suffering and death.

The question could be asked as to why it was a gift to the baby Jesus at His birth. Could it be that even then it portrayed the precious truth that He was born to die that we might live (John 18:37)?

As we look back at the historical record of this stage of the Church, we see that many believers died a violent death for standing for their faith in Christ. Satan tried his best to crush the Church through the persecutions of the Roman Empire, known for its iron heel that crushed all in its path. The Apostle Peter described the Devil “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8), and this stage in history is so characteristic of this evil plan to destroy the witness of the Church through **ten Roman dictators**.

*“Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and **ye shall have tribulation TEN DAYS**: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev 2:10).*

The ten Roman Emperors responsible for the slaughter of Christians during the Smyrna period of Church history were:

*Nero (AD54-68); Domitian (AD81-96); Trajan (AD98-112); Marcus Aurelius (AD161-180); Severus (AD193-211); Maximinus (AD235-238); Decius (AD240-251); Valerian (AD253-260); Aurelian (AD270-275); Diocletian (AD285-305).*

*Schaff’s Church History* records:

*“At every inundation or drought, or famine, or pestilence, the fanatical populace cried: Away with the atheists! To the lions with the Christians!” (History of the Christian Church, Vol. 2 p.43).*

The Churches of Lyons and Vienne, in the south of France, suffered terribly. Servants of Christians were tortured on the rack to get evidence against their masters. Bishop Pothinus, aged ninety, was abused, thrown into a dungeon and died. A virgin slave girl, Blandina, was cruelly tortured and then thrown to the lions. The streets were littered with the corpses of Christians. Their bodies were mutilated and burned, and the ashes thrown into the river.



The last of the pagan persecutions (AD303-305) was the the most vicious and far exceeded anything experienced before. Diocletian had been surrounded at court by many Christians, or Christian sympathizers, including his own wife Prisca and daughter Valeria. However, he was influenced in his later years by his subordinates to issue four successive decrees, the last of which was dated 30 April AD304. *Schaff’s History of the Christian Church* describes it:

*“Christian Churches were to be destroyed; all copies of the Bible were*

to be burned; all Christians were to be deprived of public office and civil rights; and at last, all were to sacrifice to the gods on pain of death”(Vol II, page 66).

The four edicts were executed throughout the empire with the exception of Gaul, Spain, and Britain, where Constantius, the father of Constantine, protected them. A fifth edict in AD308, after Diocletian’s retirement, required that all families not only sacrifice to the gods but also eat of the offerings. All food in the market place was to be sprinkled with sacrificial wine, which meant that Christians could not buy or sell in the market. Many weakened under the fires of persecution and sacrificed to the gods; but great numbers perished, refusing to deny their Lord.

Yet a sovereign God used the enemy’s efforts for His own glory to purify the Church, and indeed the true Church grew. History has shown that *“the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the Church,”* and Satan’s efforts backfired.

To this point the preaching, teaching, and hope of the Church was the literal return of the Lord Jesus. The believers’ doctrinal position of Scripture was the imminent return of the Saviour, and except for a few heretics like Origen (AD185-254), who allegorized the Scripture, there was little opposition to the *“blessed hope”* (Titus 2:15). This doctrinal position has been held by the remnant of the true Church down through the centuries, and is known today as *“premillennialism.”* Church historians agree that the predominant view of the Church for the first three centuries was the premillennial return of Christ. This view maintains that one day Jesus Christ will return literally, physically, **for** His own *“in the air”* (1 Thess 4:17), then **with** His own to the earth (Rev 19:14), to set up a literal kingdom of righteousness on earth for 1,000 years.

It was during the Smyrna period of fierce persecution that the premillennial hope of the Church burned brightly. Schaff’s History of the Christian Church reads:

*“The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age (before AD325) is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is, the belief of a visible reign of Christ on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years.....It was indeed.....a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas (end of 1st century), Papias (a disciple of John), Justin Martyr (born about AD100), Irenaeus(AD120-202, the disciple of Polycarp who in turn was the disciple of John), Tertullian(AD150-220), Methodius(3rd*

century), and Lactantius (end of 3rd and beginning of 4th century) "(Vol II, page 614).

The true believers in Smyrna were perfect examples of being "*faithful unto death*", and were promised "*a crown of life*" (Rev.2:10). They were, in the eyes of the world, a people of "*poverty*," but in the eyes of God they were "*rich*" (Rev.2:9). The Apostle Paul uses a fitting description: they were "*as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*" (2 Cor.6:10).

Genuine "born again" believers today are truly rich; many of God's children who have little of the materialism of this world are blessed with abundant treasure of eternal value.

This letter to the Church at Smyrna, though prophetic to John, is now factual history, portraying the second stage of God's programme in the "*things which are*" (Rev.1:19) - this present Church Age. The hope for every believer today is to know that the best is yet to come, and to stand strong in the storm.

*"Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor.15:58).*

## **Chapter 2**

### ***The State Church (AD313-600) and the Papacy (AD 600 onward)***

**Let us** look into the detail of the third and fourth letters to **Pergamos** and **Thyatira** to see how these two fit together to parallel the next two stages of Christendom. Though these were infiltrated with a deceitful and counterfeit system, they included the **saved remnant, described as "overcomers"**.

During two centuries of persecution by Imperial Rome Satan failed to destroy the Church; it grew and continued to look for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as the hope of the believer. But now we see a drastic change in Satan's tactics with the evil thought, "If you can't beat them, join them." Satan's plan now was to infiltrate the Church, and the letter to Pergamos pictures the foundation of evil, while Thyatira becomes the force of that evil throughout the remainder of the Church Age. This influence will carry right on into the future Tribulation. Let us consider the third and fourth letters, one at a time.

### ***The Church at Pergamos - State Church (Rev.2:12-17)***



The etymology of the word "*Pergamos*" comes from two words, "*married*" and "*elevated*," which clearly picture a time in Church history when the Church was married to the world and elevated to a position of power and prestige. Pergamos itself was known as a religious centre and boasted of four main temples committed to pagan worship. The temples of Athena, Asclepius, Dionysis (or Bacchus), and Zeus were all built on towering hills overlooking the city. The Lord Jesus described Pergamos as a city "*where Satan's seat is*" (Rev 2:13). This city pictures the prophetic stage, now historic, when compromise was sown in the Church and the definition of the Christian faith took on a whole new meaning as it became engrained with counterfeit doctrine.

The prophetic picture moved into historical fact in AD312, when the powerful Constantine claimed the throne of the Roman Empire after a vision of a flaming cross with the inscription: "*By this conquer.*" Observing that Christians were better citizens, he issued the *Edict of Toleration* in AD313 and declared himself a convert, proclaiming the Roman Empire as Christian.

The Church and the State were allied, allowing the Church and the world to join hands in the "unholy marriage" of compromise, the first step to apostasy. Constantine appointed bishops and it became popular to be called a "Christian". Everyone was becoming part of the Church, apart from the "new birth" (John 3:3).

One of the most effective attacks on the true Christian testimony was the watering down of the Word of God and compromise with Satan and the world system. Compromise was the downfall of Old Testament Israel, and so it was with the New Testament Church. Even today the individual believer begins his backslidden, carnal life with the same compromise. Christ commands His children, "*Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*" (2 Cor.6:17,18).

And again,

*"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"* (2 Cor.6:14).

In spite of the popularity of the State Church, the Lord speaks of "*Antipas my faithful martyr*" (Rev 2:13). Antipas means "*against father*", and is a picture of that faithful remnant that opposed the

new State system and suffered. In spite of the apostasy in the world, even today there is a born-again remnant who will not compromise the rich faith we are blessed with “*in Christ Jesus*”.

Concerning this third stage of Church history, when they held “*the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I (Christ) hate*”(Rev3:15), Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes:

“Corrupt doctrinal changes continued to be developed in this era. Fourth century theologians like Origen and Augustine began to spiritualize the great truths that had been taken literally until this time. The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was now rationalized into figurative interpretation.”

R K Campbell states:

“As the church gained in numbers, power and popularity in this outward way, the Bishops said, ‘We have been looking for Christ’s reign, but we have been wrong. Constantine’s empire is Christ’s kingdom.’ Thus the hope and truth of Christ’s coming was given up by the Church at this time, and it no longer looked for His promised coming and reign”.<sup>2</sup>

So excited were many of the bishops, however, at the Imperial support, that they came to believe that the kingdom of God had arrived on earth.

Schaff, who was strongly opposed to the truth of the pre-millennial return of Christ, and who, in his *History of the Christian Church* incredibly places the Tribulation at AD70, nevertheless admits:

“After Christianity triumphed in the Roman Empire, .....the millennial reign, instead of being anxiously waited and prayed for, began to be dated either from the first appearance of Christ, or from the conversion of Constantine and the downfall of paganism, and to be realized in the glory of the dominant Imperial State-Church. Augustine, who himself had formally entertained chiliastic (millennial) hopes, framed the new theory which reflected the social change, and was generally accepted. The apocalyptic millennium he understood to be the present reign of Christ in the Catholic Church.”

This confusion brought other false doctrines into the Church, such as baptismal regeneration, Mary-worship, and praying for the dead, all of which developed the foundation for the next stage of history. Pergamos could be dated historically from AD313 through AD600 and is known as the State Church, which prepared the groundwork for the powerful fourth stage – Thyatira - the Papacy.

***The Church at Thyatira - Papal Church (Revelation 2:18-29)***

The fourth letter was directed to the Church at Thyatira and is a most enlightening study. The meaning of the word "Thyatira" is "continual sacrifice", and as we go back to Church history books we find the birth of the Papacy and the Roman Church coming into focus and growing into one of the most powerful institutions on earth. It dominated the hearts of men with "works" theology for a thousand years, from AD600 to AD1517; secular history calls this age appropriately "the Dark Ages." It has been referred to as the "Devil's Millennium", and with the confusion of truth that it established the description is indeed proper.

"Continual sacrifice" so clearly describes this stage of Roman Catholicism when the sacrifice of the mass became a continual offering for sin. The teaching of the Church is that the wafer becomes the literal body of Christ and the wine offered becomes the literal blood of Christ, thus the term



"continual sacrifice!" Campbell points out:

"The continued or oft repeated sacrifice of the mass is Satan's insult to the one perfect and complete offering of Christ for sin, and is a denial of the finished work of the Saviour for sinners."<sup>3</sup>

Scripture teaches that the work of atonement was complete when the Lord Jesus uttered the words "It is finished" on Calvary's cross (John 19:30).

*"We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all.... by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"* (Heb 10:10,14). Glory!!!

Even with the common display of the crucifix, Christ on the cross, the continual sacrifice is also emphasized. We thank God for the Saviour's death on that cross for our sin, for the precious blood that washes away our sin; but He died and was taken off the cross, "He was buried, and....rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1Cor.15:4). Our victory is in the resurrection! **He is alive** in resurrection power. Thank God for His death on that cross, but our Saviour is no longer on the cross! He is risen! Don't let the false doctrine of Thyatira keep you from victory.

We also see Jezebel introduced in this context (Rev.2:20). John MacArthur writes:

“That does not mean that her real name was Jezebel; she may have become known by that name because her works so closely paralleled those of Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16:31; 18:1-21:29). That Jezebel caused Israel to be wed to Baal. When Ahab, the king of Israel married her, he married the world and paganism because she brought Baal worship into the nation. That is exactly what Jezebel of Thyatira did – she married the Church to the world and brought in paganism, which resulted in immorality and idolatry. Both Jezebels succeeded in corrupting God’s assembly by initiating a marriage to paganism.”<sup>4</sup>

Campbell gives a descriptive summary of the historical stage of Thyatira:

“This is what the Roman system has done according to God’s indictment. She has turned the great mass of professing Christians from Christ to Mary; from Christ to the Pope; from the one offering of Christ to the continual sacrifice of the mass; from the Word of God and its certainty to the uncertainty of the traditions of men; in a word, from Christianity to Christianized and Judaized paganism.”<sup>5</sup>

This stage in history continues on to dominate Christendom and will go right into the future time of the Tribulation, after the true Church, the bride of Christ, has been caught up to be with the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Thess.4:16-17).

*“I will cast her.....and them that commit adultery with her....into great tribulation....and I will kill her children with death” (Rev 2:22).*

This clearly shows that the prophetic interpretation of the Church at Thyatira continues to the Last Days. The Great Tribulation is a short period of seven years after the Rapture and immediately before the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. The Papal Church will therefore not be raptured, but will be cast into that time of Tribulation.

In Revelation chapter 17 we see this same harlot woman identified with the beast during the Tribulation, but the ten kings of Antichrist’s kingdom suddenly turn against her and *“burn her with fire”* (Rev.17:16). This world-shaking event is described in great detail in Revelation chapter 18. It is important to realize that Thyatira is **the first** of all the stages of Church history that continue to the coming of the Lord. However, to the remnant of born-again believers in that apostate Church, that *“have not this doctrine”*, the Lord says:

*“But that which ye have already hold fast **till I come**” (Rev.2:25).*

This saved remnant are the overcomers to whom the Lord says, “*To him will I give power over the nations*” (Rev.2:26). The papacy has always endeavoured to exercise **political power** over the nations. In Constantine’s Church the State appointed bishops in the Church, but in the papal era the popes appointed kings and emperors.

Today the papacy is riding the beast and setting up the EU known to Muslims as the “Christian Club”. Scripture describes her as “*sitting upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication.....and....the waters....where the whore sitteth, are peoples and multitudes, and tongues*”(Rev.17:2,15). The saved remnant, therefore, will achieve in Christ’s kingdom what the harlot Church has lusted after for centuries.

We beg you to make sure your faith and trust is in **HIM**, and not in any religious Church system.

1 Ariel Ministries Newsletter, October 1995

2 *The Prophetic History of Christendom*, R.K. Campbell, p. 33

3 R.K. Campbell, p. 37

4 *The Church in Prophetic Perspective*, John MacArthur, Jr., p. 66

5 R.K. Campbell, p 36

## ***Chapter 3***

### ***The Reformation Church (1517 onward)***

We will now move on to the third chapter of Revelation, continuing the prophetic chronology of “*this present age...*” We will consider another amazing picture that was prophetic to the Apostle John, but is again confirmed by historical facts.

#### ***The Church at Sardis - Reformation Church (Rev.3:1-6)***

The etymology of the word “Sardis” is without question “*the remnant*” or “*the escaped ones,*” an obvious picture of the 16<sup>th</sup> century **Reformation Church** as recorded in our history books today. After a thousand years of papal domination we see a major change taking place in Christendom as the Bible, the Word of God, comes back into consideration.

This was a great victory for doctrinal truth, but verse one also reveals the negative conclusion:

*“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead”*  
(Rev.3:1).

As we study the facts of the Reformation we see that indeed the return to the Bible brought men out of the “Thytira” darkness, yet

they never completely separated themselves from the traditions of the false Church. This stage of Sardis in history pictures the Reformation, but also portrays the sad conditions which resulted after Protestantism fell into the trap of “dead” theology, not depending on the Spirit of God.

### *The Life of Martin Luther*

Perhaps a most basic understanding of this fifth stage in context is to examine the life of the historical Martin Luther. Luther, a brilliant academic of law, who had a heart to know God, left his practice and entered the monastery to become a man of God. But his desire and his efforts to satisfy a holy God by religious works could not comfort his soul. The more he tried to please God in the rituals of Catholicism, the more he knew that he was building a wall between himself and God. He prayed and fasted, and chastised himself beyond the strictest rules to earn his salvation. He came to the point, in the confusion of works’ theology, where he began to hate God.

One day, in his study of the book of Romans, he came across the truth that *“the just shall live by faith”* (Rom 1:17). This writer feels that was the day Luther came to genuine spiritual birth (John 3:3), accepting the reality that Christ Jesus had paid the total price for the redemption of mankind, and all that was now required was to put his trust in Him...not by works, but by faith...faith alone. After years of darkness and confusion, Martin Luther had a peace that rested on the Scriptures, not on his own human merits.

Luther’s insight into the Bible began to shed light on the corruption of the papacy, as well as the Church. His decision to stand for Scripture rather than the dogma and tradition of the Church of Rome was the genesis of the Reformation Movement. At noon on October 31, 1517, by nailing the ninety-five theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg, he challenged the teaching of indulgences promoted by the Catholic Church; and for the first time in over a thousand years the power and fear of Rome was beginning to break down.



Martin Luther was pronounced a heretic by the Catholic Church, but God was at work. In 1521 his life was in danger and he was secretly hidden by his friends for nearly a year, during which time he began

to translate the Bible into the German language; the language of his people. Here we see the sovereignty of God as society now began to move beyond the “Dark Ages.”

The Reformation placed salvation on the solid foundation of the Word of God. By 1533 fifty-eight editions of the New Testament had been printed. By 1534 the whole Old Testament had been translated and published by Luther, with the help of Melanchthon and other friends. Now the complete Word of God was in the hands of the people in their own tongue, and God Himself could thus speak to the hearts and consciences of men. <sup>1</sup>

***“A name that thou livest, and art dead” (v3:1)***

In spite of new light that the Bible shed on “justification by faith”, the movement continued clinging to the old traditions of Rome regarding infant baptism, union of Church and State, and a clerical hierarchy. The Sardis stage of the Church continues through to this present time, and can be identified with current liberal Protestant theology and amillennial interpretation of future events. It is becoming ecumenical and even seeking reunion with Rome.

The theology of Sardis makes no room for God’s plan for Israel, nor any acceptance of the great truth of the return of the Lord Jesus for His own. The Sardis Church will move right into the Tribulation Age with Thyatira, except for those

*“few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy” (Rev.3:4).*

There are those few overcomers who, though caught in the dead Church, do love the Lord Jesus Christ and have been “born again” (John 3:3).

This plea from the heart of Jesus Christ goes out:

*“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life” (Rev.3:5).*

God, in His great love for sinners, has placed all men’s names in the Book of Life; only those who reject the mercy of God have their names blotted out. There is still hope for those who might be religious, or even consider themselves Christian, but have never been genuinely born again, but are caught up in confused and “dead” religion.

The eschatology of the Reformation Church is mostly amillennial, and it opposes the Scriptural teaching of the imminent premillennial return of Christ at the Rapture to receive His Bride, before He deals with Israel during the Great Tribulation. It is no wonder the Lord



says to this Church,

*“If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Rev.3:3).*

***Protestantism largely accepts replacement theology, sees no future for Israel, and opposes the thought of the Rapture. No wonder she will be taken by surprise when the trumpet sounds!***

In closing:

*“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”  
( Rev.3:6).*

Allow me to quote a potent challenge penned by John MacArthur:

“If I was ever invited to speak at a dead church, I know what text I would use, Rev.3:1-6. I would divide the congregation into three parts and say, I have two things to say to those of you who are dead and don’t know Jesus Christ.

One, watch, because the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. God is coming in judgment, particularly on those who have feigned a love for Christ and have no such love. Second, repent of your sin, and turn to Jesus Christ and His grace before it’s too late.

To those of you who are carnal, sleeping Christians, repent of the sin in your life. Also, remember what you had when you came to Christ.

To the few of you who have remained faithful to Christ, strengthen those who are on the edge, and hold fast to sound doctrine. That is the three-fold message I would deliver to a dead church, addressing each kind of member.”<sup>2</sup>

1 (*The Prophetic History of Christendom*, R.K. Campbell, p. 56).

2 (*The Church in Prophetic Perspective*, p. 89.)

## **Chapter 4**

### ***The Missionary Church (AD1700 onward)***

After nearly 1600 hundred years of darkness and confusion in “Christianity,” we come to another letter from the Lord Jesus Christ through the Apostle John. Here we find a bright spot of hope, a spiritual awakening, a letter addressed to the Church at Philadelphia.

### ***The Church: A Mystery***

The **true Church** has been, and will continue to be a “mystery” to the world, as well as to the counterfeit Christian Church system. The Church began in Acts 2, ten days after the Saviour Himself gave

the great commission of Acts 1:8, declaring the coming power of the Holy Spirit. The risen Lord Jesus then ascended (Acts 1:10) into a cloud of shekinah glory as the disciples watched. As He ascended it was announced that His return to the earth would be *"in like manner"* (Acts 1:10), to set up the anticipated kingdom on earth.

The Church remains a *"mystery"* today, as explained by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:26-27:

*"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory..."*

The mystery of the Church is detailed by the Apostle Paul in Eph.3:1-12. He then explains that the true Church will also depart (be raptured) from the earth as *"a mystery"*. Both 1 Cor.15:51-57 and 1Thess.4:13-17 so clearly fit chronologically into Rev.4:1. The *"overcomers"* are the true Church existing within the professing Church, or Christendom, with all its apostasy.

#### ***The Church at Philadelphia - Missionary Church (Rev.7-13)***

Now we come to a bright spot of hope, a spiritual awakening, in the next letter addressed to the Church of Philadelphia. The etymology of the word is *"brotherly love,"* a name well-suited to the character of this sixth stage with its testimony of genuine love for the Saviour, the Word of God, and those *"born again"* in the faith.

This stage in history can be dated back to the great awakenings throughout Western culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when hearts of men were stirred to study the Bible as the Word of God.

Tens of thousands began leaving the established Church and denominational Christianity and turning to the exaltation of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Biblical truth brought great conviction, and the necessity of the new birth was preached across the lands.

Because of the lethargy and opposition of the organized church, men like the Wesleys and George Whitefield began *"open air"* meetings, attracting the hungry multitudes throughout England, Europe, and America. The simplicity of preaching and dependence on the Holy Spirit brought new enthusiasm to faith in the promises of the Word of God, and great emphasis was again placed on Jesus Christ, bringing men out of moral darkness into eternal light.

R. Campbell wrote in, *A Prophetic History of Christendom*, page 75):  
“These believers were but a feeble remnant amidst the masses in Christendom, but they enjoyed the Lord’s presence, power, and blessing when Philadelphian features were realized and manifested... manifested in the energetic missionary spirit of going forth into the world with the glorious Gospel of Christ and the blessed truth of His Church and His coming again.”

### ***The Bible Re: Evangelism***

The zeal to fulfill the great commission of the Saviour began a world missionary outreach that was unique to this period of Church history, bearing out the truth of the words, “...*I have set before thee an open door*” (Rev.3:8). In his notes on the Church at Philadelphia, pages 29-30, John Ecob wrote:

“Faith Missionary Societies flourished all over the world. There was the China Inland Mission with 1,500 missionaries, the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, Borneo Evangelical Mission, Unevangelized Fields Mission, Egypt General Mission, The Red Sea Mission, Sudan Interior Mission, Puna India Mission, South Seas Evangelical Mission, New Tribes Mission and many, many more. At Missionary Conferences in the 1940s up to thirty faith Missions would display their activities. These organizations worked outside the mainstream denominations and looked to God alone for the supply of their every need. These were part of the Philadelphian Church.”

### ***The Bible Re: Israel***

“...*He that hath the key of David...*” (Rev. 3:7). During this stage in Church history, the insight and theology of the future of Israel was believed and taught for the first time in nearly 1500 years. Masses of believers were putting their faith in the literal reality of the Scriptures.

“They recognized that the Lord Jesus has the ‘*Key of David*’ and one day will reign on David’s throne in Jerusalem. If the nation does not literally return to the land and subsequently to the Lord, how will Christ reign over the house of Jacob forever? James makes it perfectly clear that AFTER God has taken out of the Gentiles ‘*a people for His name,*’ Christ will return and ‘*build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: ...saith the Lord*’ (Acts 15:14-16). Increasingly in the Philadelphian era the Church has understood Israel’s vital role in the end times” (John Ecob, p. 31).

The firm conviction that Israel would return to the land in the Last Days was confirmed in AD1881 when the Zionist Movement began to promote the return of Jews to the land. In AD1897 the First Zionist Federation Conference was held at Basle, Switzerland, and increasing numbers of Jews returned. The numbers became substantial with the fifth wave of Aliyah (“going up”) in the 1930s as persecution of Jews in Europe increased during the lead-up to the Holocaust of WWII.

After WWII there were 565,000 Jews in the land, but that number has grown dramatically till by AD2001 37% of the nearly 14 million Jews world-wide are in their own established nation, and Jewish leaders have stated that Evangelical Christians are among their best friends.

The Philadelphia Church has understood God’s plan for the Jew, and since AD1700 has been proclaiming the truth of Israel’s return in preparation for the day when, after the Rapture, the nation will be brought to repentance in the fires of the Great Tribulation. The *Key of David* has unlocked the mystery of Israel’s return, repentance, and retribution.

### ***The Bible Re: The Tribulation***

As understanding focused clearly on Israel and the literal interpretation of prophecy, systematic theology began to take shape. In “*rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim.2:15), Paul makes an obvious distinction between the “...Jew...the Gentile, and the Church...” (1 Cor.10:32). God had a plan for Israel separate from God’s mystery Church. The Church could not be on earth during the “70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel” (Dan 9:27), when God again would be dealing with His O.T. tool, Israel .

The Old Testament truths, as well as the prophecies of Matthew regarding the gospel of the kingdom to the Jew, agree with Revelation 6-19, which details God’s judgment on man’s wickedness and His restoration of Israel to Himself. Thus the promise to the Church of Philadelphia:

*“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, **I also will keep thee from THE HOUR of temptation** (literally tribulation) which shall come upon **all the world**, to try them that dwell upon the earth”* (Rev.3:10).

The “word of my patience” is the message of the Lord’s return. James wrote:

*“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.....Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”* (James 5:7-8).

It was in the 18th and 19th centuries that men began to boldly proclaim again the premillennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ as Paul taught the mystery departure of the Church, found in 1Thess.4:13 -17 and 1Cor.15:57. This truth also fits into the chronology of John's writing; for after Rev.4:1 we find the Church no more on earth, but around the throne of God in heaven (Rev.4 & 5). During the Philadelphian era God gave prophetic understanding of the Scripture to men like J.N. Darby, William Kelly, Arno C.Gaebelein, Sir Robert Anderson, and C.I. Scofield; and these truths were taken from the Bible by faith.

If these great old men of Biblical faith could see Israel back in the land as we do today, and the growing apostasy of the Last Days' Church, they would be on the housetops shouting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. The message of the Lord's return is the greatest motivating message for evangelism.

### ***Philadelphian Hymnology***

During the Philadelphian era there was an explosion of hymn writing as the liberated saints began to rejoice. Take a few moments with any of the hymn books and observe the dates at which the composers lived.

Count Zinzendorf (1700-1760), who led the Moravian Revival, wrote 2,000 hymns; and it was Moravian missionaries who travelled on the same ship that took the unconverted John Wesley to America. During a storm at sea the Moravians sang Zinzendorf's hymns, and their peace in the midst of fear impressed Wesley greatly. Later it was a Moravian missionary who led John Wesley to the assurance of faith in Christ.

The Wesleys, John and Charles, were prolific hymn writers, penning hymns such as, *"O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise"*.

Philadelphian hymns employed bright tunes, and were full of sound doctrine because it was an era when the Word of God was faithfully preached and men meditated in God's Word. Second Coming hymns were heartily sung as the *"Blessed Hope"* was preached, and there was a heightened anticipation of the Lord's return.

Evangelistic invitation hymns were used with great power to plead with sinners to repent and seek the Lord. Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871) wrote *"Just as I am"*; William Sleeper (1819-1904), *"Out of my bondage sorrow and night, Jesus I come"*; and Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) wrote *"Only a step to Jesus"*.

Philadelphian hymns replaced liturgical chants and dirges with tunes that communicated solid doctrine, instruction, and challenge. The next and final phase of Christendom before the Rapture, however, marches to a different beat. While Philadelphian believers communicated doctrine in their hymns the apostate final stage of Church history has abandoned the Word of God and become contemporary, worldly and spiritually irrelevant. Repetitious, emotional experience has replaced thoughtful, intelligent worship. Feelings have replaced the mind. We will see this as we study the Laodicean Church period.

### ***A Serious Challenge***

Before his martyrdom, the Apostle Peter warned us:

*“There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Peter 3:3-4).*

Friends, we are in the last days. All the Biblical signs are coming together so rapidly, and they point to the time of the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth. How much closer must we be to the mystery “catching up,” the Rapture of the true Church!

The question could be asked, “Why is the Saviour delaying?” The Bible says,

*“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).*

Let every one of us ask for God to use us as “Philadelphian” believers, with a brotherly love to move through the open door that no man can shut (Rev.3:8). We must be students of the Word and proclaim the truth of a risen, coming Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ! We must “keep the word of his patience”; the truth of His imminent return.

## ***Chapter 5***

### ***The Charismatic-Ecumenical Church (AD 1900 onward)***

Doubtless the tragedy of terrorism on September 11, that all of us have witnessed, depicts the confusion of our world today. Likewise, the tragedy of the Laodicean stage in Church history will only allow the world to move in the direction of “...the days of Noah...” (Matt.24:37). I would suggest that only the serious born-again student of the Bible can grasp what is really happening on planet Earth...and that is only because he has the prophetic word of a sovereign God to study and to put his trust in. Thus, we can have

total confidence as we stand on the unshakable rock of the Bible, that God is indeed in control – total control.

### ***The Church at Laodicea***

This final letter, addressed to the Laodiceans, clearly pictures the closing stage of Church history, and there is little argument that this description parallels the days in which we are living. Why not prayerfully read the text of Revelation 3:14-22, and perhaps refresh your mind with our previous study of the vibrant letter to the Church at Philadelphia; then be open to allow the Spirit of God to stir your heart with the great contrast between these last two letters.

### ***Characteristics of Laodicea***

Here is the clear characteristic of this epistle to Laodicea, as described in verses 15 and 16:

*“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”*

The etymology of the word “Laodicea” itself reflects the meaning, “*the rule of the people*,” and is an apt description of today’s Church, in which we see the rule of a democracy rather than the wisdom of holy men who are mature in the Biblical faith. Israel was a picture of today’s society in the days of the Old Testament Judges, placing human reasoning above God’s; thus “*every man did that which was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 21:25). Though man still has that “spiritual” void, he often fills it with religious tradition and emotionalism.

We should remember that the last four Churches continue to the coming of the Lord and exist side by side; counterfeit Catholicism, dead Protestantism, the remnants of the Philadelphia Church, and now the Laodicean Church.

Prophetically, Laodicea represents the last development within Christendom before the Rapture. It began in 1900 with the commencement of the “tongues” movement, now known as the Charismatic Movement and is closely related to the Contemporary Christian Movement. Its ecumenical influence has permeated every part of Christendom.

The Charismatic and Contemporary Movements thrive on “music-led worship” and have abandoned the hymnology of the Philadelphia Church, replacing doctrinal hymns with repetitious phrases heavily punctuated with the personal pronoun “I”. They are egocentric.



Usually meetings are organized by a “worship team”, with lead singers, spotlights, and the best electronic equipment with the volume turned up. Some choruses are sung again and again till the congregation is mesmerized by the repetitive beat of drums in a form of psychological conditioning, preparing participants to enter into the non-Biblical emotionalism of tongues, and often healing and extra-Biblical revelation.

Such programs are highly organized and require large financial input. Without expensive electronic equipment, lavish auditoriums, and expensive professional promotion, they simply could not function to the same extent. Money is at the heart of the Laodicean Church era, and the Prosperity Gospel is preached to fleece members of their income. To run these programmes they simply don't need God.

The Lord Jesus Christ has been left outside of the door of the Laodicean Church (Rev 3:20), and man continues to follow a “program” or “form” of religion. Laodicea is the age when *“the people rule”*. The focus is on man and emotion, and in this stage of the Church Age the Word of God is no longer central.

The measure of success in the Laodicean Church is the number of adherents, the size of the offerings, the extravagance of the buildings, and the size of the carpark. What is not advertised is that many congregations turn over between 25% and 50% annually, thus testifying to the fact that the programmes do not produce abiding results.

The hunger for knowing and sharing truth made the Philadelphian Church what it was. But today rarely is the message of the necessity of a spiritual new birth (John 3:3) heard in the Churches; nor the message of the imminent return of the Saviour for His bride.

“This master-stroke of the enemy has robbed the people of the Word of God and no longer is the preaching of the Word central in most congregations. The consequence of removing the Word of God from the people is that Christendom is now a ship without an anchor drifting on the oceans of speculation and emotional experience. No longer is it *‘Thus saith the Lord,’* but, is it reasonable to the humanistic mind, or an enjoyable emotional experience; this is the Laodicean Church.” (*The Church of Laodicea*, John Ecob, p. 34)

The assembly at Laodicea was “...lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot”, and sickening to the Saviour who declares, *“I will spue thee out of my mouth”* (Rev.3:16).

*Strong's Concordance* defines the word "*spue*" clearly as the word "*vomit*" in the language of our day. How horrible it is in the sight of the Lord Jesus to be "*lukewarm*" in a faith that can be so rich with resurrection power.

Today we also see the denial of a literal six-day creation, and the spiritualizing of the promised kingdom. Many academic theological schools have rejected the verbal inspiration of the Bible. They no longer regard it as the literal Word of God. The great truth of God's "covenant" nation of Israel has also been "spiritualized" away, and Scriptures ignored in an attempt to replace "Israel" in theology with the Church. When people erode the foundation of the Word, then they are on shifting sand.

### ***Condition of Laodicea***

Note the two views of the Church in verse seventeen; how men see their Church in contrast to the Lord's view of its testimony. Their true state could be summed up in two phrases; "*thou sayeth...and knowest not...*"

*"Because **thou sayest**, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and **knowest not** that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev.3:17).*

The security of the Laodiceans was based on **their material wealth** and they were boasting in it; doubtless arrogant in their great worldly possessions.

*"Laodicea says she has need of nothing. This is manifest in the lack of a prayer meeting in the busy schedule of the weekly activities of the average Church of today. Prayer is the expression of felt need and dependence upon God. Where there is no realized need, but self-satisfaction instead, there is little or no real prayer. Even amongst true regenerated Christians today the prayer meetings are poorly attended." (A Prophetic History of Christendom, R.K.Campbell p. 106).*

Do you remember the Church at Smyrna? They were rich in their poverty, but here in Laodicea they were "spiritually" poor in their worldly riches. Their economic wealth had blinded them to their dire spiritual needs. The Lord reveals their true condition: "*...wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" It is interesting that the word "*wretched*" is the same word that the Apostle Paul uses in Rom. 7:24 when he cries out, "*O wretched man that I am!*" When Paul sees the distressed state he is in because of indwelling sin, he cries for deliverance; but sadly, the Laodiceans do not even realize their horrible condition in the Saviour's eyes. They are the "blind leading the blind." This is the typical Church of today.

## ***Challenge of Laodicea***

In spite of all the religious darkness and confusion, there is still hope for the individual as the Saviour reveals in this letter in verses 18-19. One of the greatest verses in all of Scripture is found in Revelation 3:20. Christ is standing outside the Laodicean Church, but He appeals to the individual. This presumes that there are those inside who are not saved and who need to be saved!

These words of the Saviour have been used by multitudes, including this writer, as a promise of assurance. Jesus Christ is standing outside of the individual's heart, seeking entrance with the gift of eternal life (Rom.6:23). As the Saviour knocks, we must hear, recognize our sinful heart before a holy God, repent, and open the door to the One who died for each of us and rose from the dead three days later, proving Himself to be the very Son of God.

Once we open the door, according to this verse, He shares what I believe to be the four greatest words in the Bible, *"I WILL COME IN"* (Rev.3:20). This truth is a fact of Scripture; He will DO what He says, and assurance comes as we believe and accept His Word by faith (See Eph.2:8,9)!

The final two verses reveal the truth of the great remnant and witness that our sovereign God has placed all over this planet. How we ought to thank God for the few remnant Churches still standing strong on the truths of the Bible, the Word of God. Though not numerically strong, brothers and sisters in the faith are found everywhere on earth. This is the ministry and witness of God's true Church.

After these closing verses in chapter three, we will **not find the true Church on earth again throughout the book of Revelation**. Where does the Church go? and how does she get there? What has happened between chapters three and four? It is a mystery that only the Scripture can solve as it gives us a clear understanding of God's plan.

## ***Chapter 6***

### ***The Rapture of the Church***

Let's look back to the Apostle Paul's writing to the Corinthians. In 1Cor.15:51-52 we read:

*"Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."*

## *The BIG Picture of Church History*

Here Paul seeks to give the believers an understanding of what the future holds, an understanding of *“the mystery”*. We shall not all sleep (or physically taste death). There will be a living generation of believers, along with those believers who have died, that will experience a change, a literal bodily change, in a time span quicker than a blink.....in a literal *“twinkle”* (1Cor.15:51-52). Every *“born again”* believer, dead or alive, will be transformed in a micro-fraction of a second; a sudden, literal disappearance.

At the sound of that trumpet the saints who have died, and whose bodies have gone through various stages of corruption, will be transformed into *“incorruption”*. Every living child of God, at that *“moment”*, will be transformed from a mortal state to the state of *“immortality”*.

*“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”* (1Cor.15:54).

At this instant, death has been conquered for the child of God. VICTORY is claimed.

*“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”* (1Cor.15:55).

The Apostle Paul further elaborates on this great truth to the believers at Thessalonica with his inspired epistle of 1Thessalonians. He tells them that they should not be ignorant or confused about this great truth.

*“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”* (1Thess.4:13-14).

Paul speaks of an event that will affect both the saints who will still be living on earth and those who have died. They will be *“caught up”* *“in the clouds”*, *“in the air”* (1Thess.4:17). Note the pattern in these verses.

*“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”* (1Thess.4:16-17).

Please notice that those who are changed or raised are NOT Old Testament saints. Only those *“in Christ”* are changed or raised incorruptible. Only those who *“sleep in Jesus”* will God bring with Him.

What does it mean to be “in Christ”? New Testament saints are many times referred to in the epistles as being “in Christ”. Why? Because only New Testament saints have been baptized by one Spirit into one body (1Cor.12:13). The Church is the Body of Christ, and to be “in Christ” means we have been placed into His body by the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion.

So the sudden disappearance can only apply to those who have been saved since the day of Pentecost, and since all living saints will be changed, that must be the end of the Church on earth! The seven stages of Church history will have run their course; and then, in a moment, the true Church will be transported instantaneously to glory!

The next great event on God’s calendar will be part three of the divine outline of Rev.1:19, “...the things which shall be hereafter,” after the Church Age. When does this future tense begin? Note Revelation 4:1, a clear picture of the “catching up” that the great Apostle Paul details in 1Thess 4:13-18 and I Cor 15:51-58.

Now where does this “catching up” fit into the prophecies of the great book of Revelation?

John, the apostle, wrote:

*“AFTER THIS I looked, and, behold, a door opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter” (Rev.4:1).*

When the trumpet sounds John is immediately caught up through the door into heaven. It is an instantaneous departure to the heavenly realms as he foresaw his own Rapture and said:

*“IMMEDIATELY I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne” (Rev.4:2).*

Then John finds himself in the immediate presence of the Lord Jesus in heaven. Around that throne there is a rainbow symbolizing God’s mercy, and before the throne, on the crystal sea, are saints casting their crowns before the One who sits upon the throne. The holiness of the Trinity defies description, and is likened to every glistening precious jewel.

How different is this heavenly scene to that described in Matthew 25 when all the living nations stand at the earthly throne of His glory. The sheep are divided from the goats and the unsaved of all nations which have followed Antichrist will be cast into hell. The saved nations that have survived the Tribulation are allowed to enter the Lord’s earthly kingdom.

## *The BIG Picture of Church History*

And how different to the scene in heaven at the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth, when the unsaved dead of all ages are resurrected to stand before the Great White Throne. Here they receive recompense for the deeds done in the body, their degree of punishment in the Lake of Fire for all eternity (Rev.20:11-15).

The throne to which John is “*caught up*” is a place of blessing, and glory, and praise to the Lamb upon the throne. Only those who are safe and secure “*in Christ*” will be raptured to this throne, to bask in the wonder of the mercy of God. That is the portion of every member of the Body of Christ. Not one will be missing. All will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air!

*Oh joy, O delight, should we go without dying,  
No sickness, no sadness, no dread and no crying,  
Caught up in the clouds with our Lord into glory,  
When Jesus receives His own.*

We are indeed in the closing stage of the Church Age. Almost 2000 years of prophecy have become historical fact. We have seen:

- 1) The Apostolic stage;
- 2) The Persecuted Church of the 2nd and 3rd centuries;
- 3) The State Church of the 4th to the 6th century;
- 4) The Roman Church beginning at the 7th century;
- 5) The Reformation Church commencing in the 16th centuries;
- 6) The great Missionary Revival Church of Philadelphia commencing in the 18th century;
- 7) And now Laodicea, the Apostate Ecumenical Charismatic Church; the final stage of this present Age.

The next great event is the RAPTURE of the true believers of this present age. Are you born again? Are you ready to meet our Lord Jesus Christ “*in the air?*” (I Thess 4:17).

Friend, in spite of this day of Laodicean apostasy, make sure you know our precious Saviour, and tell the world that HE IS COMING AGAIN! It may be today!

### ***What if you Miss the Rapture?***

While John foresees himself, as a part of the Body of Christ, caught up through the opened door into heaven to the rainbow-encircled throne, the scene on earth will be quite different. There, dark clouds of judgment gather and divine wrath begins to fall. Only seven years remain before the King of Kings appears in glory to establish His millennial kingdom.

Events swiftly. Antichrist, as President of the Revived Roman Empire in Europe, will confirm a seven-year covenant with Israel, and the third Temple will be built on the Temple Mount

Immediately after the Rapture 144,000 Jewish witnesses (Rev.7:1-8), from all over the world, will be protectively sealed by God to preach the gospel of the kingdom to all nations (Matt.24:14); they warn the world that the King will soon be here. Persecution will be intense and millions will die (Rev.7:9-17). Wars, fires, disease, lawlessness, earthquakes and falling stars will devastate the world (Matt.24:7; Luke 21:25-26).

Egypt will push into Israel and will provide Antichrist with reason to occupy the Middle East. First he overruns all of Egypt, and then most of the Arab countries (Dan.11:40-45).

Russia and the Muslims from Iran, Turkey (Togarmah), Libya, and Sudan (Ethiopia) respond (Ezek.38:1-8) with a massive army to wipe out Israel. This will be the moment of truth for Israel. With no way out the nation will finally heed the message of the 144,000 Jewish preachers and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Redeemer (Joel 2:12-20).

Israel's desperate cry will be heard in heaven and the invading armies destroyed on the mountains of Israel (Ezek.38:19-23), but this will be followed by an even greater danger for the believing Jews. Antichrist, now in control of the Middle East and with Muslim power broken, will break his covenant with Israel and halfway through the seven-year treaty period and proclaim himself to be God (Dan.9:27; Matt.24:15; 2Thess.2:4). He will set up his palace in Jerusalem (*"between the seas"* Dan.11:45) and instal his idol in the Temple. He will demand the worship of every living soul. All will have to wear his mark in order to buy or sell (Rev.13:11-16).

Meanwhile, the Asiatic nations will prepare an army of 200,000,000 and move toward Jerusalem for the final battle of Armageddon (Rev.9:13-21), and in the midst of this horrible conflict Christ will suddenly appear in the clouds of heaven in great glory (Zech.14:1-4). The armies of this world will be destroyed, and those surviving will be brought before Him at Jerusalem (Matt.25:32). It is then that the sheep will be separated from the goats, and the sheep (saved) will inherit the kingdom of Christ on earth. Israel will welcome her Messiah, and will be established at the head of the nations under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ.



***A Personal Challenge***

Friend, if you are alive at the Rapture and have not received Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you will have to experience the terrors of the Tribulation. Then you will either trust Christ, and in all probability die a martyr's death, or you will be deceived by Antichrist and be lost eternally. The choice is yours. Christ has died to save you from your sin. You can be saved now and be part of the Rapture, if only you will call on Him.

*"Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"*  
(2 Cor.6:2).

*"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"*  
(Rom.10:13).

*"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Eph.2:8-9).

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"*  
(John3:16).

Why not bow your head right now and pray a simple prayer like this:

*"Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for all my sin, and I thank you for taking my punishment on the cross. Please forgive me and make me a child of God. I here and now accept you as my Lord and Saviour. Help me to live for you. Amen."*

If you have sincerely prayed this prayer, then God has heard and you can believe His promise that *"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God....."*(John1:12).

# SEQUENCE OF EVENTS AFTER THE RAPTURE

