

Article of the Month
July, 2019

***The Seven
Churches, Seals, and Trumpets
of Revelation***
(Part 2)

The June article provided an overview of the Churches, Seals, and Trumpets. This July article will look more specifically at the Seven Churches (Revelation Chapters 2 & 3). A review of the previous article will be helpful before considering this material.

SOME FEATURES TO CONSIDER

Throughout the Bible, prophetic passages contain names. The Lord has arranged that these names have prophetic significance. It is, therefore, always enlightening to *translate* names. The names of the Seven Churches tell us much about their character. The names *within* the messages also tell us much.

Each Church begins by having Jesus address the particular “angel” (messenger) to that Church. When we have studied sufficiently to determine when each Church has its beginning, it seems relatively easy to identify the man who is the “angel” to that Church. We will not in this article go into all of the identification details, but we will suggest in each case the person who is likely the Lord’s messenger to that stage of the Church.

Jesus identifies himself at the beginning of each Church message with a little identifying phrase describing himself. These little identifiers are usually particularly significant as related to the experiences of each of the historical periods.

Every Church description ends with a very similar closing. There is in each case a *promise* “to him that overcometh” — meaning that the individual has not let the adverse circumstances of the period dilute his spiritual growth and zeal. The overcomers receive a *promise* which is especially meaningful to those who have lived at that time. There is also an admonition to listen carefully to the message. These admonitions always contain the phrase, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the Churches.” While each Church has a specific lesson of its own to “hear,” it is clear that, as the age progresses, Jesus wants each successive Church to learn from the *previous* Churches also. Hence, he says for us to hear what is said to the “Churches” (plural) — not just the message to our own stage of Church history.

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As we go through each of these historical periods called Churches, it is good to remember that, even while there were cities that carried the names of these Churches, Revelation is a book of **symbols**. The names of these Churches are given in order to help us identify their characteristics. They are not about literal Churches in these literal cities.

CHURCH #1 — EPHESUS (Revelation 2:1-7)

Because this Church begins at Pentecost (AD 33), its messenger (“angel”) is certainly one of the Apostles. Seeing that the Apostle Paul wrote the vast majority of the letters to the Church during that period, he is the person of choice as the messenger to the first Church. Thus he functions not only as a very prominent Apostle, but also as the man who directed the spiritual thinking of the spreading Christianity during the time prior to the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). His teachings to this day form the bulk of Christian New Testament doctrine.

“Ephesus” has as its etymology (its word-meaning) the thought of “Desirable” (or, possibly, “First”). This period of the Church is significantly “desirable” in that the presence of the Apostles was a guarantee that the Church would get off to a secure beginning with the *inspired* words of these men selected by God and instructed by Jesus.

Jesus introduces himself in a manner consistent with the thought of the RELIABILITY of the “angels” (messengers). He says (verse 1) that he holds all seven of them in his right hand! The right hand symbolizes FAVOR. The men, themselves, are symbolized as “stars” — light-bearers, or men who carry truths to the Seven Churches. Thus Jesus is virtually saying, “Even though I have departed from you now, I am giving you seven teachers throughout the age that will be guided by my right hand. Don’t feel lonely!”

The MESSAGE to Ephesus has both plusses and minuses. The brethren of the period:

- are commended for their patience and their hard work.
- are praised for not putting up with evildoers or with false teachers.
- are scolded for losing their first love. The period began with the exuberance of joy in the message: “We have found Messiah!” But they soon deteriorated into squabbling over issues of the Law.
- are praised because they hated power-grabbers. (“Nicolaitans” has the etymology of “Those who lord it over others.”)

Verse 7 admonishes that we ALL (of ANY Church period) learn from what the Holy Spirit taught the Ephesian period of the Church. Then it says that the brethren of the time who were strong enough in their faith to overcome the prevalent testings would gain their reward in the end in eating (absorbing) the LIFE that will be given in God’s

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garden — “paradise.” The text doesn’t specify it, but the kind of “life” promised was Divine Life — the same kind of life held by God and by Jesus: immortality.

CHURCH #2 — SMYRNA (Revelation 2:8-11)

When “Smyrna” begins (at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70), the last surviving Apostle (John) was still to be around for over twenty years. He is almost certainly the “angel” to this period of Church history. Heresies (such as Gnosticism) were becoming rampant. The Apostle John’s writings are in part clearly meant as warnings and arguments against this spreading denial of the identity of Jesus. John is given the honor of writing the last book of the New Testament.

“Smyrna” has as its etymology the meaning of “Bitter.” It is very appropriate. The young new religion of Christianity became the victim of bitter persecutions both from Jews (who had just been driven out of their homeland) and from Romans (whose Pagan religions were threatened by the rapid rise of this “Jewish heresy” called “Christians.” It reached its zenith of persecution under the heinous emperor, Diocletian. He ruled for ten treacherous and terroristic years (ending in AD 313) which have gone down in history for their vile ferocities. The Revelation 2:10 text symbolizes these ten years as “you will have tribulation ten days.” (Prophetic time uses a day to represent a year.)

Jesus introduces himself to this period of Christianity by saying that he “was dead, and has come to life.” It is a description with deep-seated meaning for the saints of Smyrna. They were often being slain in vulgar ways. Jesus is reminding them that his own vulgar death resulted in his eternal life. They, too, could expect the same reward if faithful.

The MESSAGE to Smyrna does not condemn them at all. They were too busy being condemned by Rome and by the Jews to need any more condemnation! Jesus simply:

- acknowledges his awareness of and sympathy for what they were experiencing.
- tells them that their temporal “poverty” is not comparable to their richness in faith.
- says that he is aware that an apostasy is arising in their midst. “Jews” in verse 9 is a symbolism for false Christians. Jesus tells that these apostates are a part of a new “synagogue” (place of worship) that Satan, himself, was organizing — an apostate Christianity. This is the time of the beginning of the growth of the “tares” that Jesus had predicted in Matthew 13. Or, as John said, the “antichrist” movement had already begun.
- admonishes against fear — even in the midst of their terror!

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- characterizes the civil power as “the devil” which will imprison (restrain) their efforts and, for ten notable years, subject them to the worst kind of “tribulation.” (The tribulum was a Roman machine designed for separating wheat from its husk. Thus Jesus is promising that their experiences would separate their fleshly thinking from their spiritual victories.)

The promises to these dear persecuted saints was that they would receive “the crown of life (immortality),” and that their overcoming would exempt them in their resurrection from any threat of ever dying again.

CHURCH #3 — PERGAMOS (Revelation 2:12-17)

“Pergamos” means “Earthly Elevation.” The actual town of that name was aptly named since it stood high on a bluff. But the spiritual significance is much greater. This Church begins its history in AD 313 when the persecution ends and when the new emperor, Constantine, “accepts” Christianity and then makes it the official religion of the realm! What a change! What an “earthly elevation!” What a threat to spiritual health! An “officially sanctioned” religion has no chance of retaining any kind of liberty or accuracy. The state-church was constantly being elevated in power and influence during this entire period.

We have seen that the Apostle John had preached and written against the emerging errors of Gnosticism and related heresies all of which had put the *very nature and identity of Jesus* into question. By the time Pergamos begins, all kinds of extremes were being preached. Some claimed that Jesus was only an ordinary man. Some preached that he was THE VERY GOD of the universe. When the Pergamos period of the Church had come, those errors had come fully into fruitage. The emperor called a council (AD 325) of Church leaders together to find a remedy or a correct answer to the questions. The council can hardly be called successful; but it DID help us to identify the “angel” to the Pergamos period of Church history. Bishop Athanasius argued for the early trinitarian concepts. But a very humble and brave soldier of the cross by the name of Arius argued for the correct answer: Jesus was a perfect man, and he was the Son of God, now exalted to the Divine Nature. Arius is considered probably the greatest of heretics of all time by the apostate Roman church. That speaks quite well for him! He is certainly the messenger to this third stage of the Church. His Scriptural defense of Jesus’ true identity has stood the test of time. “Arian” positions on Jesus’ identity have been Scripturally defended even down to our day.

The Pergamos period of Church history — the time when earthly-minded “tares” rather than spiritually-minded saints began totally to control religion — was a time of enormous changes in Christianity. The growth (“elevation”) of the apostate church was accomplished by [1] Constantine’s making Christianity the religion of the empire, [2] the

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Emperor Justinian's making the Pope "Chief Religious Ruler" (Pontifex Maximus) in the 530's, [3] the formation of the "Papal States" (AD 754), [4] the Pope's crowning of the Emperor Charlemagne (AD 800), [5] the formation of "The Holy Roman Empire" (AD 962), and [6] the dividing of the church into Eastern and Western branches (1054) — which greatly strengthened the power of the Pope.

Jesus introduces himself to the saints of the time by saying, "The one who has the sharp, two-edged sword." The New Testament books were all finally assembled some time after the death of the Apostle John who had written the final book in the New Testament. The SCRIPTURES (the "sword") were the ONLY source of truth — even though the apostate church was already claiming that its pronouncements had more force than Scripture. Jesus was showing that the only sustenance during this time would be The Word of God. The lies of the apostate church would vigorously try to countermand that authority. The arguments presented before the emperor's council by Arius were Scripture-based. Athanasius argued using human reasoning.

The MESSAGE to Pergamos (2:12-17) has Jesus telling the saints that:

- he was aware that they were dwelling in the midst of the Roman religious power. "Satan" represents this Roman civil enforcement of the doctrinal dictates now coming from the ever-growing power of the apostate "Christendom."
- he appreciates their faithfulness under this terrible duress.
- he appreciates that they maintain the truths brought forth through Arius. "Antipas" means "against the father". Arius had stressed that Jesus WAS NOT THE FATHER, but the Son. "Antipas" becomes the spiritual "nickname" for Arius. The text shows that Arius was "slain" among them — where Satan dwells. This is not about a literal killing. The emperor had "slain" or killed all spiritual authority coming from Arius by siding with Athanasius. After all, who will defy the decree of the emperor?
- he, nevertheless, DOES have some viable criticisms against the saints during this time. Some of the saints were "eating" (absorbing) the unclean doctrines coming out of the mouth of the apostasy. Apparently the Lord's objection was that BY EXAMPLE, the giving-in by some saints to the errors of the time, was causing other saints to have a weakened faith — "to stumble."
- he notices also that some were accepting the concept of a clergy class — the teaching of the "Nicolaitans" (whose name means "lord it over others"). This was the beginning of the congregation's losing its authority to a priesthood.
- he "will make war against them (the apostates and their teachings) with the sword of my mouth."

We need to recall that Jesus introduced himself to this Church by emphasizing the Bible as the authority — "the sharp, two-edged sword." When this message is closing, we see

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that Jesus will send someone who will PROMOTE Scripture (verse 16) instead of the man-made teachings which were now dominating the Church. THIS little promise opens the way for the next messenger (to Thyatira), Peter Waldo. But we may also wish to note that the separation of the church into eastern and western branches was because the better-educated eastern part of the empire actually, even though insufficiently, used Scripture (the “sword”) against the western concepts of a “Pope” and against other practices.

To those who “overcome” the problems of this period of Church history, Jesus promises the symbol of true and faithful friendship. The Roman church was persecuting those who defied its dictates. Jesus virtually promises to erase the shame perpetuated against the faithful ones by giving them a “new name” when they are glorified. This symbolism is very dear. The promise is that they will be SECURED. The name which had been smeared by the false church will be gone!

CHURCH #4 — THYATIRA (Revelation 2:18-29)

“Thyatira” means “Sweet Perfume of Sacrifice.” Because this Church exists during the worst of times spiritually (“The Dark Ages”), all attempts at meaningful sacrifice for the Lord come at a great cost, and are, therefore, very precious in the sight of God — a perfume to Him.

The “angel” (messenger to this Church) is a man named Peter Waldo. This Church period begins with his excommunication (1160). As was hinted at in Revelation 2:16, this messenger to the Church was nearly single-handedly responsible for the effort of getting Scripture (the “sword”) into the hands of any who might want it. He knew that ONLY the Biblical truths could sustain the faithful. He translated parts of the Bible into French — the dominant language for that part of Europe in which he functioned — so that the common man could read and understand it.

Waldo was a wealthy merchant. He and his followers would sew copies of Scripture passages into their bulky garments. As they travelled and sold their wares, they would clandestinely offer the precious Bible fragments to any who might be demonstrating a true faith. The practice was dangerous. The apostate church was afraid of Scripture, and they persecuted to extremes any and all who would dare to distribute Scripture.

Jesus introduces himself to Thyatira as one who has “eyes like a flame of fire, and ...feet like burnished brass.” The reference might seem obscure. But “eyes” represent wisdom; fire represents righteous judgments; feet represent the “walk” in life which a person pursues; and burnished (polished) brass represents human perfection made to gleam by way of its experiences. Jesus seems to be telling those of Thyatira that, as bad as things are in this period, God’s far-seeing wisdom will make good come out of it. The evils will not escape the righteous judgments in the end — the judgments which will ultimately

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destroy these evil apostate institutions. He also is reminding these saints that his own walk as a perfect man, with all of the “contradiction of sinners” that he experienced, made his own character (even though perfect) shine ever-so-much more brightly than it would have otherwise. He is admonishing patience through the terrible experiences by having them hold the VISION, of what will be, as their continuing strength.

The MESSAGE to Thyatira contains a number of intriguing items. Jesus tells them that:

- he recognizes their strengths despite their terrible experiences — and that, as time goes by, they seem to get even stronger.
- they, unfortunately, have certain weaknesses which they must overcome. Among these are that they are not openly putting up objections to the teachings of the harlot church — here symbolized by the name “Jezebel,” a name which (quite ironically) means “virgin!” Because the saints do not put up a good fight of faith against her, the weaker saints begrudgingly accept her church-state union (“fornication”) and swallow her unclean doctrines.
- he gave the apostates “time” to repent of their illicit union with Rome. It is “curious” that the Pope “showed” his superiority over the civil power when he put the crown on the head of Charlemagne in 800. Thyatira begins 360 years after that event. In Scriptural prophecy a “time” is a symbol of a symbolic “year” of 360 days. Revelation 2:21 thus seems to say that the Lord allowed this 360-year “time” to see if the apostate church would learn the fornicating error of its ways. It did not. (800 plus 360 = 1160 = the beginning of this Church period.)
- he would give three rather specific punishments as a result of her failure to reform. (1) He would (verse 22) provide “a bed of sickness.” This is likely what Catholic historians call “The Babylonian Captivity” — a time when Papacy moved to Avignon. This was a political mistake which cost the Papacy dearly all the way through the 5th stage of Church history. (2) He would “cast her... (and her civil lovers) into great tribulation.” This is apparently “The Hundred Years War.” And, finally, (3) he would “kill her with death.” This is an interesting expression. It is necessitated because “kill” in Revelation is a symbol of disabling — not of literal death. The reference here, however, seems to be to the quite literal death (1334-1354) called “The Black Plague” or “The Black Death” which ended the lives of about half the population of Europe.
- he would NOT add any burdens to the Thyatira saints who would have to live through these things. (It is fascinating to note that the Waldenses — the followers of Waldo — were mainly exempt from the Plague. They tended to live in the mountains rather than in the urban areas where the plague was rampant.)

The overcomers in Thyatira get a very meaningful promise. It was the evil governments which persecuted them by order of the apostate church. The promise to the faithful is that THEY (when the time comes) will be able to destroy the old evil institutions! They

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also were promised “the morning star” — because it is the opposite of “The Dark Ages” through which they had to live. Interestingly, the messenger to the next stage of the Church is historically referred to as “The Morning Star of the Reformation.” Thus, perhaps, Jesus is telling them that he is just about to reverse the trend of darkness which reached its culmination in Thyatira.

CHURCH#5 — SARDIS (Revelation 3:1-6)

The etymology of “Sardis” seems a bit obscure. It is possibly connected to the “sardius stone” (Revelation 4:3) which was red in color and represents (in 4:3) the attribute of love for humanity in God. This would not be inappropriate since the Sardis period (1371-1521) as it begins represents the absolute nadir of the spiritual health of the true Church — a time when “strengthening the things (saints) which remain” (showing great compassion for their plight) is what is recommended (3:2).

The “angel” to this Church is the famous reformer John Wycliffe of England. Like Waldo before him, he was vehemently convinced that ONLY Scripture could keep the true saints from perishing. He was a very educated scholar, and he used his talents to translate the entire Bible into English — a translation which ultimately led to the now-universal King James Bible. The King of England supported Wycliffe’s efforts — but partly because the King didn’t want to keep paying tribute to the Papacy. The spiritual lessons coming through Wycliffe converted a large percentage of the English people to his way of thinking. His efforts transcended borders, and his influences ultimately were significant all the way to Eastern Europe. The Papacy hated him with a zeal! Once Papacy regained control over the Wycliffe “heresies,” the Roman church had his remains dug up, burned, and cast into a river — believing that this would keep him from ever having a resurrection! The persecutions from Rome put an end to the progress which Wycliffe had made. His English followers “gave in” to the Papal threats and renounced their spiritual progress.

Jesus introduces himself to Sardis by saying that he “has the Seven Spirits...and the Seven Stars.” Because of the seeming impossibility of escaping from the tyrannies of the Roman church, Jesus seems to be telling the Sardis brethren that, as futile as things look, there is NO BREAKDOWN in the progress of selecting and developing his Church. The over-rulings of the Holy Spirit in each of the Seven Churches has not failed. The sending of needed messengers (even if they are “doomed to failure”) has in no way been threatened. This Church is at the bottom of spirituality, but it also was the beginning of an upward trend because of Wycliffe’s enormous influences on the spread of truth.

Sardis is a short Church — only 150 years long (as we shall see documented under the 5th Trumpet description.) It began with a flurry; but it progressed and ended in a disappointing lack of commitment.

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The MESSAGE to Sardis is among the most woeful! There seems nothing said that is positive! Jesus reminds them:

- you SAY that you are spiritually alive. You even got all excited when my “angel” taught you well. But most of you have not maintained that spiritual life which I require for faithfulness among those who will be my bride.
- if you want to be faithful, you must “Wake up!” You must try hard to give strength to those who are faltering; their very spiritual existences are at stake!
- your faith and its resulting works can only be characterized as “incomplete.”
- you MUST go back to reconsider and re-imbibe what my “angel” has brought to your attention. Change your course and keep what you’ve been taught!
- there ARE at least a very few among you who are being faithful! They will maintain their spiritual purity; they are most worthy of it, especially considering the lack of support they are receiving from most of you.

Jesus promises the overcomers eternal justification — the “white garments.” The remainder have “soiled their garments.” They have lost their crowns, and will be part of that class elsewhere (Chapter 7) described as a “Great Multitude.” They WILL, indeed, gain a spiritual resurrection; but they will not be part of the “First Resurrection” — the Body of Christ — those who will “reign with him.”

CHURCH#6 — PHILADELPHIA (Revelation 3:7-13)

Neither Waldo nor Wycliffe could provide the mechanism by which it was possible to escape from the orbit of the Roman church. But, by the Lord’s grace and timing, Martin Luther could and did. The Philadelphia stage of the Church begins what is commonly called “The Great Reformation” — or Protestantism.

It is important to note how the Lord provided for the vitality of Protestantism. Not only was Luther’s message appealing, but hatred of the Roman clergy had grown more intense. On top of it all, the German princes were eager and willing to support Luther just so that they could get free from the demands of the Papacy. Protestantism was not just a religious revolution, it was a political one also.

Martin Luther is the “angel” to the 6th Church. His efforts for the reform of Catholicism resulted in his excommunication in 1521 — the beginning of Philadelphia even as the excommunications of his two predecessors marked the beginnings of their respective Churches.

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“Philadelphia” means “Brotherly Love.” It is not, of course, that everyone suddenly loved each other! But Luther’s doctrine that each consecrated Christian was a part of the congregation of believers, forming a “priesthood of believers,” created for the first time since Ephesus a love and respect for each INDIVIDUAL’S relationship with God. Therefore, the love of your Christian brother became the standard — not a love for an institutionalized church. At least in theory, the clergy was now only a help — not an authority. (The liberties were not really to last, unfortunately. Jealous Protestant break-offs continually tried to lock their adherents into their beliefs by the writing of various “creeds.” A jealous “clergy” again began to dominate.)

Luther translated the Bible into German so that all of the German-speaking peoples could read the Scriptures and attempt to study them for their own edification and for the edification of others.

The “Holy Roman Empire” had its seat of power right in the midst of what is now Germany. The German Bible & Luther’s influence nearly killed it! (See Revelation 13:3, 12). The Lord provided a new way for the spread of the Bible. A little more than half-a-century prior to Luther, the printing press had been invented. Nothing would now stop the proliferation of Bibles — except in regions where the Pope still was dominant.

It is important to note that this Reformation DID NOT separate “Wheat” from “Tares” (Matthew 13). Jesus pointed out that that would not happen until the Harvest — until the 7th Church. But there was much separating going on. The spirit of Protestantism allowed the constant separations of little groups from other groups which have now become known as “denominations.”

Probably the most significant secular event late in the period (with important spiritual implications) was the French Revolution. This great “earthquake” broke the power of Papacy to persecute as it had done for centuries. Even with the Pope present, things changed. Napoleon, at his coronation, grabbed the crown from the hands of the Pope and placed it on his own head! The power of Papacy was quickly being eroded! The Pope had also been taken prisoner by Napoleon — an embarrassment singularly new!

Immediately following the French Revolution, Bible Societies sprang up, flooding the earth with copious copies now in a multitude of languages and translations. It was an exciting time. The world of Christianity was forever changed. Free Bible study spread and blossomed — eliminating much of the doctrinal “filth” which the Roman church had perpetuated.

Jesus introduces himself to Philadelphia with a multi-faceted description. (After all, this WAS a complicated period needing much in the way of explanation.) He says (1) that he is Holy. This is quite wonderful. The “holiness” of Jesus had become quite beclouded during the unspiritual and unholy reign of Papacy. (2) Jesus continues his introduction of himself with the word “True.” Now that Scripture was genuinely more

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available, the TRUTH could begin to be dragged out of the mire where it had been hidden by the darkness of the Roman church. (3) Until the Reformation, the Roman church claimed to have all the “keys of the kingdom.” When Jesus says that HE has the “Key of David,” he opens up the understanding of Isaiah 22 which is a prophecy of the Reformation period. Among other things, Jesus shows that he has now opened the door for religious liberties, and no man will be able ever to shut it again. And he would also shut the door of Papal persecutions which, likewise, no man will ever again be able to open.

The MESSAGE to Philadelphia contains these things:

- The Lord LIKES Philadelphia. He “knows” their works, and obviously approves. Freedom of thought is a hallmark of true Christianity.
- He ensures them that the process of growth in spiritual things has begun, and that that “open door” to spiritual understanding will never again be closed.
- He encourages them that they have spiritual strength (at least “a little”), and by it they have followed his directions and have not denied his character.
- Significantly, he promises that the “Synagogue of Satan” (the apostate Roman church which began in Smyrna in 2:9) will have to acknowledge those who have obtained religious freedom — Protestantism.
- Jesus is pleased that the saints of this period have been patient during all of the denominational upheavals of the time. He promises that they will be spared from the great social upheavals to come during the 7th stage of the Church — upheavals which will turn the whole world (not only the nominal church) upside down.
- For the first time, Jesus could promise that his return would be imminent. (Indeed, the great “Second-Advent Movement” began during Philadelphia.) He encourages steadfastness so that in their victories they don’t become slack and lose the crown they long for.

The promise to the overcomers is that they would become stable — pillars in a structure — unlike the persistent instability of Philadelphia which had undergone constant changes of doctrine as more and more denominations appeared on the scene. He also promises that they will be a part of the REAL ruling city: The New Jerusalem — NOT Rome!

CHURCH #7 — LAODICEA (Revelation 3:14-22)

We now live in this period. It began in the autumn of 1874 when mankind had finished 6000 years of existence since the fall of man in Eden. That date thus marks the “Sabbath Day” of prophecy — the beginning of the 7th millennium — at which time the Lord promised an invisible return to restore everything that was lost.

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“Laodicea” means “Judgment of the People.” Its meaning as related to the 7th Church is somewhat subject to interpretation. The 7th Millennium, of course, is the time for the great “Judgment Day” of Scripture. II Peter 3 details that this Day of Judgment — as far as events in the world are concerned — begins with the destruction of old institutions. Once that is accomplished, judgment (a period of restoring) for the individuals of this world can begin. But, since the name Laodicea is used for the 7th Church and not for the world, it seems that its Biblical meaning is more likely to relate to the fact that the Gospel-Age judgment as to whom actually will constitute the Lord’s “little Flock” (the true Church) is coming to a conclusion. The Lord will finally separate the “Wise Virgins” from the “Foolish Virgins” (Matthew 25), the “Wheat” from the “Tares” (Matthew 13), and then the “Bride of Christ” will have been selected. Much “Judgment of the People” is going on!

The Church of Laodicea has no closing date foretold. It continues until the Church is complete, at which time (in Jesus’ colorful symbolisms) “heaven and Earth will pass away” — the current society and religions will fall apart. (Matthew 24:35) This is the time when the old order is destroyed, and the Peaceable Kingdom begins its rule. It is the time (Psalm 46) when the Father steps in to calm earth’s horrors with the command, “BE STILL, and know the I AM GOD!” But Jesus is careful to let us know that THAT date remains in his Father’s confidence. As Jesus said (Matthew 24), “But of THAT day and that hour knows no man, nor the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but my Father ONLY.” However, Jesus had just previously suggested “a window of time” for the event. He had said that the generation which saw the establishment of Israel (“The Fig Tree”) would not pass before the peace comes. We are near!

It is interesting to note that Jesus states that EVEN HE was not privileged to know that date — but his Father ONLY. This is one of those multitude of evidences that Arius was correct (back in the Pergamos period) when he defended that Jesus and his Father were not the same being. Clearly, there are two separate minds at work here! One KNOWS, and the other KNOWS NOT when the date for the Peaceable Kingdom is to arrive. (NOTE: The King James Bible inadvertently *omits* “nor the Son” from this verse. The Greek manuscripts DO contain it, and most newer translations acknowledge that fact.)

This very fact of Jesus’ identity becomes one of the items with which he introduces himself to Laodicea. He calls himself “The beginning of the creation of God.” Jesus (unlike the Father) is a created being. He also introduces himself as “The Amen.” Amen means “Truth.” Jesus began so many of his statements with “TRULY (or VERILY — or AMEN) I say unto you...” Because the Seventh Church is to be the time when the Scriptural “mysteries” would be ended (Revelation 10:7; Daniel 12:4, 12), Jesus is letting Laodicea know that it is the time for him to reveal all the available truths to the saints of this time. He chooses to reveal these truths *through* the “angel” to Laodicea — a faithful and wise servant. (Matthew 24:44-47)

The “angel” to this Church needs to meet the requirements. He needs to be someone who in the last decades of the 19th Century was extremely well-known all over the

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Christian world (as were Paul, John, Arius, Waldo, Wycliffe, and Luther) and who did, indeed, proclaim the long-hidden truths which make the heart of each faithful Christian jump with joy. He needs to have announced the chronology and circumstances of Jesus' return. (Revelation 11:15) That man was Charles Taze Russell — in his day one of the most widely-known evangelists of *all time*. As maligned as he has become (because his revealings of truth were so powerful and so destructive of the erroneous traditions of the tare-ridden institutions of Christendom), his writings stand the test of time and of Scripture. Because his name has been mistakenly connected to the sect known as “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” most will immediately choose to refrain from even considering what he said — which has nearly no similarity in spirit or in doctrine to the message offered by that sect. His set of *Studies in the Scriptures* has had a circulation so universal and so great as to be record-breaking. Today, however, this set resides in virtual obscurity except in the lives of those who yet perpetuate their use.

The MESSAGE to Laodicea is disturbing. Jesus states the following:

- This Church period seems not to get excited about the truths it has been granted. They accept, but with a warmth rather than with a zeal. They NEED to be “hot” about what they believe; they need to give a distinctly “cold shoulder” against all forms of unrighteousness.
- Those who do not gain these extremes of character will not be permitted to be his spokesmen.
- Their casual acceptance of great truths is disgusting. They claim to be rich in truths and to need no more instruction. But they do not realize that truth without application is poverty!
- The Divine Nature will be yours only if you “buy” the promises by enduring the heat of this evil day.
- Laodicea’s faith (as with all the Churches) will be its justification. It will not come from boasting in knowledge which will only leave it unclothed.
- Laodicea needs “eye salve” — the ability to “see” that success will come through application, not from information.
- Nevertheless, Jesus will give the opportunity to turn around — to overcome these natural tendencies of the fallen nature. JESUS WILL instruct this Church if it be willing to accept it.
- Above all, the need to recognize his secret presence is paramount. If Laodiceans DO, and if they open their hearts and understandings as a result, Jesus promises a feast with truths beyond imagination.

The “overcomers” are promised that they will be whisked away to reigning with Jesus — sitting in his throne with him. As Paul had pointed out, it is not until the 7th Trumpet (the “last trump”) that the Church could experience its immediate change — “in the twinkling of an eye!”

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The history of the Church — both nominal and true — has been a long road. But Revelation has guided us through about 2000 years of it with remarkable symbolisms which match historical fact with uncanny accuracy. As we next look at the Seven Seals, Revelation will further enhance our faith in the interpretations of these wonderful symbols which Jesus has prepared for our spiritual strength.
