

## Revelation, Part 2

### Vision of the Son of Man

**Rev 1:10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. 19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches."

With verse 10 we begin with John's vision. This statement "I was in the Spirit" is used three more times in Revelation. This might be better rendered he was filled with the Spirit and in fellowship with God.

"On the Lord's Day" is not a reference to Sunday. No place in Scripture is Sunday ever referred to as the "Lord's Day". We have references to the early church meeting on the first day of the week, Sunday, but it is not called the "Lord's Day". This is more likely a reference to another more common term used in Scripture, "The Day of the Lord," which refers to the Tribulation and the Second Advent.

In the sense this was an inner experience, it suggests John was propelled forward in time to the Tribulation, the Lord's Day. I do not believe he actually time traveled, but the vision he had simulated that as a mental experience. John will be shown future events in human history and will see the seven years of the Tribulation when the Lord will pour out His judgment on an unbelieving world. We will see these events begin to unfold in Revelation chapter 4. John is in some form of a trance and mentally taken to another place and another time and shown things he could never otherwise have seen.

**Rev 1:10** ...and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,"

John hears a very loud voice come from behind him. The "loud voice like a trumpet" is John's way of describing the sound of the risen Christ speaking. It evidently seems profoundly loud like a trumpet blast. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last." This speaks of the eternal nature of Jesus Christ as God and is a term John would have understood.

**Rev 1:11** "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

John is instructed to write down what he sees, which is a word that means to not just visually perceive but to also understand. It suggests that John actually *mentally* sees something and was not just given instructions or a verbal description. "Write" is *grapho* /**graf**-o/, a word that is used extra-biblically by Homer for the tearing of flesh by a lance and engraving letters on a tablet. John will be told to write what he sees 12 times, and one time he will be ordered not to write what he sees.

"Book" is *biblion* /**bib-lee**-on, a Greek word for a scroll. This is not a codex, which is a bound book, but a scroll that is rolled and sealed. We will see scrolls used later during the breaking of the seven seals.

So John is instructed by Jesus Christ that He is going to show him something. He needs to remember it and write it all down in a scroll. Then He tells him He wants him to send it to seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Each of these churches was an autonomous local church. There is no suggestion there

was any over-arching authority over them. And the order of mention is geographical in a half-moon circle, beginning at Ephesus on the coast, proceeding north to Smyrna and Pergamum, then swinging east and south to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Why these seven? There were many other churches in existence at this time? The answer is probably that conditions and situations existed in these seven churches that are symbolic of a number of things. There are four ways of viewing this:

- First - These churches represent a cross section of problems in the church at large in John's day. They were literal churches, and John describes things that are known to have been associated with these particular churches.
- Second - These churches represent types of churches that exist today or anytime in church history. These letters are therefore cautionary for any church in anytime in history.
- Third - These churches represent situations that can exist in any church *or any Christian*. Believers can exhibit the same characteristics we will see in these seven churches.
- Fourth - The seven churches represent a prophetic picture of church history in chronological order from the time of John's writing to today. Each church receiving the letters represents a specific period in church history.

John will be shown issues, both positive and negative, concerning these seven churches and told to write them down and send them to the churches. Based on the fact this is a vision and evidently future, as stated in verse 3, the events in the letters to the seven churches are also to be viewed as future events. Revelation is in itself both a look at the future and a warning to the human race. If you conclude that all that John is being shown is yet future to John's time, as implied by the introduction, then the conclusion that the seven churches represent seven periods of Church history is a reasonable one. Even though the text does not specifically state such as fact, why would this prophetic book dwell on current events, unless those events had prophetic symbolism? It is very common in prophecy for it to have near and far fulfillment. That is the prophecy has fulfillment in a current or near-time context that is also symbolic of a more profound fulfillment in the distant future. The first fulfillment is a "type" or picture of the future ultimate fulfillment. I believe the circumstantial evidence that these seven churches represent seven periods in church

history, if not strong, is at least reasonable. I see no other real purpose for their inclusion in this prophetic book.

**Rev 1:12** Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

John turns to the sound of the voice and sees seven golden lampstands. The word can refer to a single candle holder or more likely the seven candle lamp called the “menorah,” which was part of Jewish worship and seen in the Temple outer room called the “Holy Place”. Matthew 5 says the church is supposed to be the light of the world and we are not to keep our light hidden but let it shine. Jesus is standing among the seven symbols for the seven churches (verse 20), representing not only the churches of John’s day but also all churches in history.

Jesus is described as clothed in a white garment signifying purity and righteousness, and about His chest a golden girdle. The priests wore a band about their chest that had golden threads, but this one is solid gold, signifying His position as high priest and His deity. His head and hair were white as snow, suggesting wisdom of the ages. His face glowed with the brilliance of the sun. This description is similar to one in Daniel chapter 9.

**Daniel 7:9** ...the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup>A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;

This is Jesus Christ the Judge qualified for the position in every way and not the meek and mild Jesus of the First Advent, who came as the Lamb to be judged in our place. This is the Jesus of the Second Advent come to be the judge. This concept of judgment is further enhanced by the statement, “His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace.” The bronze altar in the temple was related to sacrifice for sin and divine

judgment on it. His voice was compared to the roar of rushing waters. His face glowed with a brilliance like the sun shining.

**Rev 1:16** He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. In his hand He holds seven stars...

The seven stars and seven lamp stands will be explained in verse 20. The sword is a sword of judgment, words that cut and convict with authority. We see this same picture in Rev 19:11.

What does John do? “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead...” (Rev 1:17). I would too! Obviously, the words of John do not adequately convey the magnitude of what he is seeing here. The fact that he fainted away begins to get to the sense of the power of this vision. It overwhelmed John and his ability to take all this in.

**Rev 1:17** ...But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.

Jesus repeats his statement about being the first and the last, and does what he had often done in life, reached out and touched someone He was relating to. He reminded John that though He had died, He was yet alive and will live forever.

**Rev 1:18** ...And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

Jesus Has authority over death and the place of the dead.

**Rev 1:19** Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

John is instructed to write of the things which he *has* seen, which are found in Revelation 1:10-18, the things which *are* as seen in Revelation 2-3, and the things which *are yet future* as depicted in Revelation 4-22. Understanding this division of the book will help with later interpretative issues.

Jesus goes on to explain some of the symbolism.

**Rev 1:20** The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

The seven stars in His right hand are the seven angels who will deliver the messages to the seven churches, and the seven lampstands represent the seven churches. The word “angels” is transliterated from *angelos* and can be a literal supernatural being, but the word really means “messenger” and can refer to a human being, depending on the context. It has been suggested that it would be odd for John to write a letter, Revelation, and then turn it over to seven angelic beings for delivery. It is most likely the messengers are not angels but are humans. And notice how the letters are later addressed “to the *angel* write....” 2:1; 2:8; etc. More likely the “angels” are the pastors of the seven churches to whom the message will be delivered who will, in turn, deliver it to their respective churches. The human pastors are the *angelos* — messengers.

John is being given a vision by Jesus Christ the Righteous Judge. He is going to be shown things about these seven churches and will convey to them commendation or condemnation for their particular spiritual condition. What he has seen so far has caused him to faint dead away, and we will see him later have similar problems. Obviously, this was difficult for John, but he has a lot more to go through before Jesus is through with him.

## Letters to the Churches - Ephesus

**Rev 2:1** “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place

—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

Though each message is different, the letters have some similarities. In each Christ declared that He knows their works. Each one includes a promise to those who overcome. Each one gives an exhortation to those hearing, and each letter has a particular description of Christ that is related to the message which follows. Each letter includes a commendation (except the letter to Laodicea), a rebuke (except the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia), an exhortation, and an encouraging promise to those heeding its message.

In general these letters to the seven churches address the problems inherent in churches throughout church history and are an incisive and comprehensive revelation of how Christ evaluates local churches. Oddly, most teachers turn to the epistles of the NT to find church truths, while these seven letters are ignored even though they came from Christ Himself.

**Rev 2:1** “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

As discussed the word translated “angel” is more likely the pastor or leader of each of these seven churches. The pastor is responsible for the spiritual condition of his congregation and is the logical person such a letter should be written to. To the pastor of the church at Ephesus write...

**Rev 2:1** ...’These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience,

“Know” is a Greek word meaning to have not only knowledge but understanding. “Labor” refers to toil or difficulty, and “Patience” means steadfastness, which is what verse 3 implies. In addition they were commended for enduring hardships and not growing weary in serving God.

**Rev 2:2** ...and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

The word “bear” means they cannot tolerate, in that they are not willing to accept those who “say they are apostles and are not”. “Say” means to make a claim and it is not necessarily true. “Apostle” literally means envoy or sent one and, in this context, means a special messenger of Jesus Christ. False teachers have come among the congregation of this church, and they have been identified as such and rejected. False teachers were present in each of the first four churches. “They were found to be liars,” in the original text means to discover. “Liars” is a Greek word all of us are familiar with, *pseudes /psyoo·dace*. Our English word “pseudo,” which means false or fake or impostor, comes from this Greek word. The church at Ephesus seems to have been a very productive church and was adept at finding out false teachers and exposing them as such. False teaching was common in the early church, as Satan attempted to pervert the truth. A perfect example is found in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

**Rev 2:3** and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.

“Perseverance” and “patience” are two words that mean steadfastness and the ability to bear up. Persevere, steadfastness, is *hupomone*, and is that same word used in verse 2 for “bear” as in not tolerate. They stood their ground firmly rooted in doctrine.

“And they labored for Christ’s name sake.” “Labored” is the same word used in 2:2. “Sake” is *onoma /on·om·ah/* and is translated “name sake”. Their work has been in Christ’s name as His representative and for His glory. They did not become weary, and the word means not discouraged or grow weary to the soul.

At the time of writing, the church at Ephesus, has been a productive church that has stood steadfastly on solid doctrinal grounds and rejected false teaching. This is a powerful commendation! But the Lord does have a complaint about them...

**Rev 2:4** Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.



Christ begins with *alla* (nevertheless), which is a marker of emphatic contrast. What He is about to say conflicts sharply with what He just said. In spite of their production and doctrinal steadfastness, He says He has something against them: They have left their first love. The order of words in the Greek makes the statement emphatic; it could be literally translated, “Your first love you have left.” “Left” means, simply enough, to depart or abandon, and the word “love” is from *agape*.

**Rev 2:5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works,

The word translated “from where you have fallen” is one that refers to a previous position or location — their “first love,” in this case. Satan has succeeded in driving a wedge between them and their first love for the Savior. They have put their service ahead of their love of Christ. They are “laboring” for the sake of laboring but not out of love of Christ. Though they say they are doing this for Christ, the reason is really self-gratification or simply a sense of duty. I believe what Jesus is saying is their labors are wonderful but are done for the wrong reasons. Churches today are full of people doing exactly this.

There is a difference between “laboring” *for* Christ and fellowshiping *with* Him. This rebuke contrasts with what Paul wrote the Ephesians 35 years earlier, that he never stopped giving thanks for them because of their faith in Christ and their love (*agapēn*) for the saints (Eph. 1:15–16). Most of the Ephesian Christians were now second-generation believers, and though they had retained purity of doctrine and life, and had maintained a high level of service, they were lacking in deep devotion to Christ. The church today needs to heed this same warning that orthodoxy and service are not enough. Christ wants believers’ hearts as well as their hands and heads. Christian activity had replaced spiritual fellowship. How much time do you spend alone with Him, in His Word, in prayer. Christian works can rob us of our time alone with Him, and our service can become a source of pride.

“Repent” — the word simply means change your mind — and do “the first works,” which refers back to what they were doing before they had fallen. When first saved they had a burning love of their Savior, but that “first love” has been replaced with works rather than works coming from that love. To be spiritually rooted and grounded has to do with our devotional

life concerning the Person of Christ. Most of us would admire the church at Ephesus because of their activity and defense of the faith, but they were not expending their efforts in devotion to Christ. They were to continue their service not simply because it was right but because they loved Christ.

**Rev 2:5** ...or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

He warned them that if they did not respond, the light of their witness in Ephesus would be extinguished. Christ is saying to them simply, I established you to be a light in the darkness; you once were and now you are not. Change that; return to being a light in the darkness or I will extinguish your light.

We can all name churches we know today who started out as a light unto a darkened world. They prospered and grew, and somewhere they lost that light and they lost their love of Christ and got involved in love of self and works. There are some now long gone radio or TV ministries that started out like this, solid doctrinal institutions that were initially doing the work of Christ, but they became more focused on their success than on Him. He switched off their light when they became a negative witness for Him. As individual believers, we face the same risk.

**Rev 2:6** But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

In spite of this, they hate the works of the Nicolaitans. There has been much speculation concerning the identity of the Nicolaitans, and the Scriptures do not specify who they were. But we do get a very strong hint of what Jesus is referring to in the meaning of the name, “Nicolaitans”. In Scripture, a persons name, or that of a place, often carries great meaning, and this is very likely such a case. The word comes from *nikao*, which means “to conquer,” and *laos*, which means “people”. It is from *laos* that we get our word “laity”. The name means “conquer the people”. If the word is used symbolically in this passage, and I believe it is, then it is a reference to the earliest attempts to force a priestly order or clergy on the Church. This system of priests is a manmade system supplanting Christ as Head of the Church, and the Ephesians hated this division between the brethren and Christ. The Nicolaitans were apostate in that they adopted

error as truth, but it is the “works” that were hated. The word is *ergon* / *er-gon*/ and refers to one’s labor or production and probably refers to this false teaching. Sadly, that which was hated and rejected by the Ephesians was embraced by the church at Pergamum, as we shall see in Revelation 2:15.

**Rev 2:7** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

“He who has an ear” means “listen up!” “Pay attention!” And what is the message? “Overcomers will eat from the Tree of Life which “is in the Paradise of God”.

Let’s deal with that term “Paradise of God” first. “Paradise” is *paradeisos* / *par-ad-i-sos*/ and usually refers to one of the compartments of Hades, which are four: Paradise, Torments, the Abyss, and the Lake of Fire. Torments is across from and separated from Paradise by the “Great Gulf Fixed,” technically a fifth part of Hades. Torments is the place that the wicked dead go to at death. Paradise was where the righteous went at death, at least until sin had been judged and the resurrection of Christ. Jesus told the repentant thief on the Cross he would be with him in Paradise, and the thief would have understood He was referring to the Paradise across the Gulf Fixed from Torments. Luke 16:19-31 speaks of this place in the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Paradise is empty now; its inhabitants have been taken to Heaven when the resurrected Christ ascended. Torments is still occupied and will remain so until the Last Judgment. The abyss and the Lake of Fire will be covered later in this study.

“Overcomes” is a much abused word. The legalists use it to hammer grace into submission to works. They say, “If you don’t overcome (as in remain steadfast to Christ) you don’t get to “eat from the Tree of Life, which is in the Paradise of God.” In other words, any failure will result in the loss of your salvation. That isn’t what the passage is saying. “Overcomes” is the Greek *nikao* and is translated as “conquer” in the ESV, which I think captures its meaning here better. I believe the idea being presented is a reference to a victorious spiritual life, one lived by faith that results in victory over or *conquering* sin (Gal 5:16). In these seven messages, the “overcomers” are not a spiritual elite, but rather the true believers whose

faith has given them victory (1 John 5:4–5). In other words, those in the Ephesian church who were genuine Christians and, thus, had conquered the unbelief and sin of the world and are given the right to eat from the Tree of Life. “Eat” is *phago* /**fag**-o/ and means to eat (consume) a thing, to take food, metaph. to devour, consume. They are given the right to take sustenance from the Tree of Life.

What is the Tree of Life? Revelation 22:2 and the Genesis 3:22-24 passage suggests it is a literal tree giving literal fruit. Then Proverbs 11:30 says, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.” The Hebrew word translated “righteous” is *ṣaddîq* and it means just, lawful or righteous. The root word basically connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard. Literally it means to be morally straight, and it is considered a norm. When you consider the Proverbs 11:30 passage, its association with obedience in Revelation, and its connection with eternal life, I believe we can draw a reasonable and literal interpretation. The Tree of Life is intended to be a metaphor, and the tree is Jesus Christ and the righteous lifestyle He represents, as experienced by a believer “walking by means of the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). If you are walking by means of the Spirit, you are experiencing the fruit of the Spirit, which is the very lifestyle that Christ lived here on earth, and conquering sin, thus you have access to (are experiencing — eating from) the Tree of Life, and I would extend that word “life” into “eternal life” — Tree of Eternal Life, which also happens to be in Paradise, which is Heaven at this point in time. This is a picture of the proper and normal functioning of your eternal life. This is the highest manifestation of the love of Christ.

The fruit of John 15, fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, and of the Tree of Life in Revelation are all related! They are different views of the same thing! If a believer is not obedient to the leading of the Spirit, not doing as he is called to do, both in obedience to the commandments of God and/or his spiritual calling, then he is not eating of the Tree of Life; he is not partaking of that spiritual “food”. And he needs to repent just like Revelation 2:5 says and get back to his first love.

Plain and simple, you do not have to be in heaven to eat of the Tree of Life. We eat from the Tree of Life every time we are obedient to God’s calling and we walk by faith in the leading and power of the Spirit. And such obedience, walking, fruit production, fully functioning eternal life *is* loving God. They are called to return to their “first love”. It is calling for them to

repent and come back to doing what they started out doing. That repentance will result in a victorious overcoming lifestyle, which is the expected norm for a believer. Sadly, not all believers understand this concept much less even begin to practice it. Instead, they are trying to be holy by works. Grace is what the faith-resting believer receives, the very lifestyle of Christ formed in them. These victorious believers eat of the Tree of Life in *this* life. Every time you are walking by means of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit and enjoying the fruit of the Spirit, having Christ formed in you, then you are eating from the Tree of Life.

Jesus tells the Ephesians (to repent of their apostasy) to come back to their first love, and they will have victory and once more have *true* fruit production out of their renewed love of Christ. “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”

How does this describe church history? The church at Ephesus is a good picture of the spiritually powerful apostolic church of the first century. The early churches all began with the truth and an intense love of their Savior, and they were productive. But Satan crept in and deceived many into systems of apostasy as testified by Paul’s Epistles to the churches in Ephesus, Galatia, and Corinth, for example. These churches required correction to get them out of their spiritual apostasy and back to their first love, obedience *in love to Christ* and eating from the Tree of Life.

The church at Ephesus continued and was later the scene of a major church council, but after the 5th century both the church and the city declined. The immediate area has been uninhabited since the 14th century.