

Newsletter August 2017

In our newsletter of April 2017, we began a series of studies in the book of the “Revelation of Jesus Christ,” beginning with an exposition of the text contained within Chapter 1. In that chapter, we saw a vision of the glorified Christ as He stood in the midst of seven candlesticks representing a totality of his Church on earth. The Church was represented in the Apostle John’s day (near the end of the first century AD) by seven churches existing in what is present-day Asia minor (cf. Re.1:13,20). In our newsletters of May and June 2017 we discussed Jesus’ messages to the first three of these seven churches, which were located in the port cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos. In our July 2017 newsletter, we



moved eastward and inland from Pergamos to discuss Jesus’ messages to two of the four remaining churches, which were located within the cities of Thyatira and Sardis. In this newsletter we shall discuss the messages given to the churches established in the last two of the seven cities: Philadelphia and Laodicea (See map at left),

The city of Philadelphia was founded by Attalus II Philadelphus (159-138 BC). The city got its name as a consequence of Attalus’ love for his brother Eumenes, the king of Pergamum. The name Philadelphia, meaning “the city of brotherly love,” was given to the city by Attalus out of loyalty to his brother. In its early days, it served as a Greek outpost in greater Anatolia.

The city was built in a deep valley surrounded by four hills on the Cogamos River, a tributary of the Hermus River, where it later served as a fortress to protect the greater cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, from inland invasions. Philadelphia rested upon a serious geological fault in which there is considerable seismic activity. So much so that in A.D. 17, the city had been reduced to ruins – as was Sardis. The Roman Emperor Tiberius authorized a considerable sum of money to restore the city. In gratitude, the city was renamed *Neocaesarea* (i.e. New Caesarea).

Although later overrun by many Muslim invasions, Philadelphia maintained a Christian witness throughout medieval and even into modern times. Today, what remains of Philadelphia is a flourishing Turkish town known as *Alaşehir*.

Having discussed the history of Philadelphia, we now turn our attention to Jesus’ message to the Christian church located in the city at the end of the first century AD:

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;” (Re.3:7)

Here Jesus identifies himself to the messenger as He that is holy and true (cf. Re.6:10). He also has a master key like that of David in the days when he was king of Israel. Like David of old, the greater Son of David, the Messiah, has the power to open and shut a door of Christian witness that no one can keep closed or open again against his will.

“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” (Re.3:8)

Jesus said to them that He was aware of their activities, and as a consequence had set before them an open door that no one could shut. Though weakened by persecution, they still had a little strength left which they used to witness of the Gospel to others. They had kept his Word and had never denied his name inasmuch as they openly declared that they were Christians.

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” (Re.3:9)

Here Jesus calls those that profess to be Jews satanic. They are not truly Jews because they had denied Him who is the king of the Jews, and persecuted those who had accepted Him. This is quite similar to the language that Jesus used concerning the Jews at Smyrna. Once the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed a generation

earlier, unbelieving Jews had wandered off into meaningless rabbinical debate that had led them increasingly farther astray from their Jewish roots.

Jesus expresses his love for them such that He would make the apostate Jews come and worship at their feet.

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” (Re.3:10,11)

The church at Philadelphia had patiently guarded the purity of the Gospel and had kept all the words of truth that the apostles had delivered. As a consequence, they would not need to be tested as will many others who had not solidly held to the Truth. Nevertheless, He warns that He will come very suddenly; “hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Re. 3:12,13)

He who holds fast to the Truth shall be as a “pillar in the temple of my God” — not merely a white stone within the walls, but a pillar standing alone, which supports the very cap of the roof. Furthermore, the overcomer’s name will be engraved upon the “new Jerusalem”, a “new name” that Jesus will give him that he alone will know. That new name suggests a special intimacy and familiarity between the believer and Jesus Christ. Even in their human weakness God gave them strength so that they had “kept his word, and hast not denied his name.” As with the suffering church in Smyrna, Jesus found no fault at all with this church. To them, Jesus has opened a door to spiritual Truth, and to those that believe and remain faithful in disseminating the Gospel of redemption, He promised never to shut it. (We shall discuss the prophetic aspect of the Philadelphia church at the end of this article).

Having discussed the loyal church located in the city of Philadelphia, we now turn to consider its exact opposite, the church of Laodicea, which is the very last of the seven churches addressed by Jesus in the book of Revelation. This ancient city was originally called Diospolis or "City of Zeus" and was afterwards referred to as Rhodas. Still later around 260 BC, the city of Laodicea was founded on this same site by Antiochus II; the city of Laodicea was so named for his beloved wife, Laodice. Laodicea was located on the Lycus River about 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia (See map above) and because it was also situated on a much-traveled Asian trade route, its residents soon became quite wealthy. Great camel caravans came out of the east through the “Gate of Phrygia” and then through Laodicea on their way westward to Ephesus and Miletus on the coast of the Aegean Sea. In 133 BC, Laodicea came under Roman domination and rule, during which time it also became a great center of industry. Along with its prosperity, a large banking system also developed.

Located in the city of Laodicea was an Anatolian temple to the Phrygian god, *Men Karou*. Like Pergamum, Laodicea had a highly acclaimed pagan medical school. A much sought after salve for the eyes was developed there, which was made from clay taken from the hills about to which spikenard was added. Although the salve actually had little or no genuine medicinal value, it was widely sold throughout the Roman Empire.

A large number of Laodicea’s inhabitants were *Jews*, which had been transported into the region of Phrygia out of Babylonia. While there is no direct record in Scripture of the Apostle Paul ever visiting Laodicea, he may have passed through there on his third journey while en-route to Ephesus. We do know that he wrote an epistle to the Laodicean church that is no longer extant (cf. Col. 4:16), and that he was greatly concerned for the church’s spiritual well being (cf. Col. 2:1).

The entire area of the sub-Asian continent suffered from frequent earthquakes as we have noted in our previous discussions of the six other cities. A great earthquake occurred during the reign of the debased emperor *Nero* in 60 AD in which the town was completely destroyed. The prideful inhabitants of the city declined Rome’s aid to rebuild the city, choosing instead to restore it out of their own rather extensive wealth.

The ruins of what was once Laodicea are now located near the modern Turkish city of Denizli. The site has been well preserved and has been considerably renovated. Many streets once crisscrossed over the city, which were flanked by colonnades and numerous pedestals. Its many buildings included a stadium built on two opposing hillsides, bath houses fed through an aqueduct originating at a spring some distance away, a

gymnasium, several pagan temples, various indoor theaters, and a building where a local Roman senate had once regularly met. On the eastern side of the city, the outline of an ancient wall is in evidence, along with the remains of a gate opening toward the road to Ephesus. On the north side is a cemetery containing the stone sarcophagus graves of its past affluent residents, which had long ago been opened and pillaged of their valuables.

Having briefly discussed the city of Laodicea, we must now consider the harsh message that Jesus sent to the church located there:

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;” (Re.3:14)

Here Jesus identifies himself to the messenger as the faithful and true witness. He is both the Amen (the perfect will of God) and the Alpha (the beginning) of the creation of God (Re.1:11).

“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 spew thee out of my mouth.” (Re.3:15,16)

Like barely-warm soup, Jesus said He would “spew them out of his mouth.” From this we cannot conclude that Jesus would prefer the church to be cold, but only that the fact that they were lukewarm was a miserable situation in which a genuine church should find itself. They just did not much care about their tepid faith at all.

“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: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.” (Re.3:17,18)

Laodicea suffered from spiritual blindness and could not see Truth. All of this spiritual blindness in a city that claimed to have a salve to treat ailments of the eye. Jesus admonished them to buy with their gold spiritual ointment for their eyes that they may see their lost condition. Impoverished of spiritual insight, they rooted it out of all others as well. They took no stand for Christ, but they did not particularly care to spoil the enjoyment that they found in their meaningless religious activity. Being rich and satisfied in their material wealth, they saw no need to be involved in spiritual matters.

They were wretched because they were still wallowing in their sins. They were miserable because they lacked hope. They were poor because they had no treasure stored in heaven. They were blind because they had no faith with which to see spiritual things. They were naked, because they were not clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Jesus counseled them to exchange their worldly gold for heavenly things. They should “buy of Him gold tried in the fire” that they may have true riches, and to buy of him “white raiment” that they not be spiritually naked and ashamed when He returns.

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Re.3:19)

They should not think that they were favored of God because of their riches and health, since God regularly chastens and rebukes those that He loves rather than indulge and spoil them.

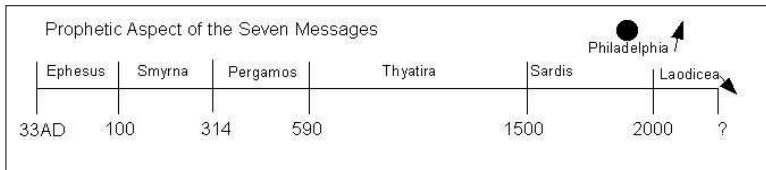
“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Re.3:20)

They had not only locked Him out of their churches but also out of their hearts. He stands at the church door and knocks, but they do not even hear Him nor would they admit Him into their sanctuary if they did.

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Re. 3:21,22)

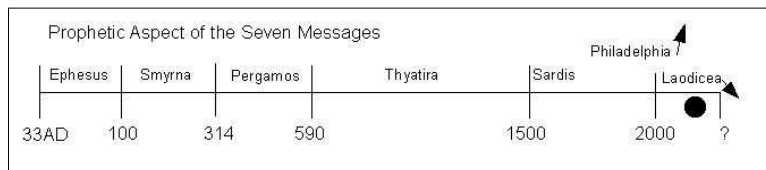
Jesus had no good word to say about this church, only words of condemnation. Even so, there was again a small remnant that will open the door to Truth and commune with Jesus; they will look to the Holy Spirit and hear his voice. Those who do so will be invited to sit at the very throne of God with Christ.

We shall now consider the prophetic aspects of these last two seven first-century churches. We are now living in an age in which the prophetic aspects of both the loyal evangelical church of Philadelphia and the rich liberal church of Laodicea are in evidence as currently overlapping and coexisting. For that reason, we have chosen to consider both of their prophetic aspects together here rather than individually as with previous churches.



The church at Philadelphia, about which Jesus had only cordial words of commendation, is indicative of today’s biblical reformed evangelical church that will one day be caught up to meet Him in the air, when He calls down

for his own to join Him. Jesus’ prophetic message to the loyal reformed evangelical church states the necessity for it to “hold fast to the truth,” “keep his Word,” and never “deny his name.” Having firmly embraced the Truth, these churches are engaged in arduous missionary efforts to reach the lost souls of millions around the world through an “open door” such that every man, woman and child will have the opportunity to clearly hear the Gospel and either embrace Jesus Christ as his elect or reject Him outright as a reprobate. This church exemplifies many biblical reformed evangelical churches today that take full advantage of Jesus’ “open door” to get the Gospel of peace out to a lost and decaying world as their major priority. Today that “open door” has been greatly expanded through various forms of electronic and digital media (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 393). These churches realize the power of embracing Jesus alone for personal salvation apart from the ritualistic doctrinal error established within the institutional church of Rome, which erroneously continues on in many major Protestant denominations today. They fully reject the tyranny of the Roman church’s efforts in keeping the Word of God out of the hands of the laity, seeking instead to get the Bible into the hands of every person in every nation on earth in their very own heart language (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 388). The Philadelphia church can be seen to have had its early beginnings in the Protestant Reformation movement, which further developed within the American fundamentalist movement (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 368) in direct opposition to the American modernist movement (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 331). The church came to fruition within the “great awakening” that took place in the American colonies in the early eighteenth century (cf. *CRC Book III*, pages 291, 303). The Philadelphia church in type will continue to exist on earth to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ until the future Rapture transports it out of this world (cf. *CRC Book III*, Chapter 19.1).



In contrast, we observe many popular, self-satisfied, and worldly churches around us today and can quite accurately compare them to the ancient church of Laodicea, about which Jesus only had words of condemnation. This deluded church also had its beginnings within the

Protestant Reformation movement, but it retained many of the false traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. It came into fruition within the apostate American modernist movement of the twentieth century. Within that century, and even more so as the decades continue to roll by, grows the looming likeness of the ancient Laodicean church. Would that it could recognize its own reflection in the verses of this prophecy and repent, but it is far more interested in social issues, in political activism, in swelling its ranks, and in pursuing the pleasures of the world. It no longer considers Scripture to be authoritative, but instead chooses other literature to prepare flowery speeches from its pulpits that is but psychobabble. Worship has become so overwhelmed with the loud decadent music of the age that the church has become the place for the unsaved to go to be entertained. Church lobbies are filled with fast food venues to fill their stomachs even as their souls starve for the bread of life. They remain hungry because they have no spiritual food to satisfy their great need. They are wretched because they are still wallowing in their sins. They are miserable because they lack genuine hope based upon divine promise. They are poor because they have no spiritual treasure stored up in heaven. They are blind because they have no faith with which to see spiritual things. They are naked, because they are not clothed in the white righteousness of Christ.

This mockery of the true church will eventually deny the true faith altogether, at which time it will readily merge back into an already corrupted Roman Catholic Church. Together as one, they will aid the Antichrist in persecuting the true Church, which is represented by the ancient church of Philadelphia. After Jesus calls down out of heaven for his Church to come up to meet with Him in the heaven above the earth, only this Laodicean parody of the church will remain behind on earth. There it will exist in awful decadent splendor until the angry jealous minions of the Antichrist eventually obliterates it (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 597; Re.17:5-16).