



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 06

Text: 2:1-7

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀρνίου ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ ἔτι δεῖ γενέσθαι διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου οἰκτιροῦντος τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, 2 καὶ μαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀρνίου ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀκούσκων καὶ οἱ ἃ ἀκούσας τοὺς λόγους τούτους, ἵνα ἐπιγράσῃ ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ ἡ γεγραμμένα, ἵνα οὐκ ἐπιλάβῃ τὰς πληγὰς τούτων.

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#### 2. What the text means.

## Message to the Ephesians

### Greek NT

2 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράφων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσοῦν· 2 οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ βαστάσαι κακοὺς, καὶ ἐπέειπας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, 3 καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφήκες. 5 μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανόησῃς. 6 ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ.

7 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.

### Gute Nachricht Bibel

2.1 »Schreibe an den Engel\* der Gemeinde in Ephesus:

So spricht Er, der die sieben Sterne in seiner rechten Hand hält und zwischen den sieben goldenen Leuchtern einhergeht: 2 Ich weiß von all dem Guten, das ihr tut: von eurem Einsatz und eurer Ausdauer. Von eurem Einsatz: Ihr duldet niemand unter euch, der Böses tut; und die Leute, die sich als Apostel\* ausgeben, aber keine sind, habt ihr geprüft und als Lügner entlarvt. 3 Und von eurer Ausdauer: Um meinetwillen habt ihr gelitten und doch nicht aufgegeben. 4 Aber etwas habe ich an euch auszusetzen: Eure Liebe ist nicht mehr so wie am Anfang. 5 Bedenkt, von welcher Höhe ihr herabgestürzt seid! Kehrt um und handelt wieder so wie zu Beginn! Wenn ihr euch nicht ändert, werde ich zu euch kommen und euren Leuchter von seinem Platz stoßen. 6 Doch eins spricht für euch: Ihr hasst das Treiben der Nikolaiten\* genauso wie ich.

7 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist\* den Gemeinden sagt! Allen, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen, gebe ich vom Baum des Lebens zu essen, der im Garten Gottes steht.«

### NRSV

2.1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

### NLT

1 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus.

This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands: 2 "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. 4 But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! 5 Look how far you have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again and work as you did at first. If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. 6 But there is this about you that is good: You hate the deeds of the immoral Nicolaitans, just as I do.

7 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

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## INTRODUCTION

With 2:1-7, we encounter the first of seven messages written by John to each of the churches of Asia at the end of the first Christian century. The genre 'letter,' as often used in reference to these messages, takes on a different meaning than it has for the twenty-one documents of the New Testament grouped together as letters. These are genuine forms but stand as a mixture of ancient elements and collectively come across more as a royal decree. Consequently each church ended up receiving all seven messages plus the big vision of chapters four through twenty-two. This, even though just one of the messages was addressed to each church directly. No privacy in that world! All the spiritual blemishes on the face of each congregation were paraded before all the churches, not to mention the millions of readers of this document in subsequent centuries.<sup>1</sup> Divine judgment is a public matter, never a private concern! A lesson we should never overlook.

Each of these messages will pick up on elements of the apocalyptic vision in 1:9-20 as the authority basis for the demands and warnings made by the risen Christ upon each congregation. Thus what John introduced in chapter one plays an important foundational role in undergirding the content of each of these messages.

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Here the historical and literary aspects of this passage play a critical role for proper understanding of the content of this letter.

One perspective very important to always keep in mind is the narrative angle being followed here. It is the risen Christ in the realm of apocalyptic vision who is speaking to a historical congregation functioning on earth. The flow of communication begins with Christ in the Heavenly sphere commanding John while in this trance vision to write down the contents of each message. But he is to address the message **Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ, to the angel**, of each church who probably is a heavenly personage with responsibility to communicate it directly to the congregation. When the message is then read to each church (cf. ὁ ἀναγινώσκων, 1:3), these words become the words that the Holy Spirit is saying to each church: **τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, what the Spirit**

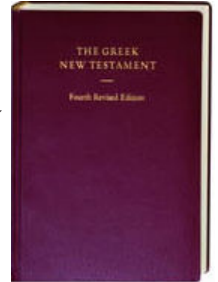
<sup>1</sup>When this reality of public judgment is measured against the cultural social standards of honor and shame that dominated life in the ancient Roman world, such public shaming of these churches takes on a level of intensity that few people in western society can comprehend. One needs to have grown up in Asian and rural African cultures in order to properly understand the impact of such public shaming. These two modern cultural traditions have much more in common with the ancient Roman world than does modern western society.

**says to the churches** (2:7 etc.).<sup>2</sup> Is this a normal, even typically biblical way of God communicating with His people? Not by any stretch of the imagination! Instead, this is apocalyptic means of divine communication. One can easily imagine a Roman guard on Patmos checking through this document as it was being sent out and scratching his head in utter 'dumbfoundedness' over what was being claimed here. A lot of meaningless giggly-goop would have been the conclusion he would have drawn.<sup>3</sup>

### Historical Aspects:

The historical aspects, particularly, the internal time-place markers inside the message, become important to the interpretation of this passage.

**External History.** In the history of the hand copying of this passage, only one variation in wording surfaces that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered significant enough to impact the translation of the text. At the end of verse seven some manuscripts add μου, **my**, to τοῦ θεοῦ, of God.<sup>4</sup> Only a few manuscripts make this addition and they are late. The actual impact on meaning is very minor.<sup>5</sup>



The more inclusive textual apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (UBS, 27th rev. ed.) lists some seventeen places where variations in the wording of this passage surfaces.<sup>6</sup> But as is usually the case,

<sup>2</sup>With the plural ἐκκλησίαις, **churches**, the words of each letter become the words of the Holy Spirit to all the churches, and not just to each individual congregation.

<sup>3</sup>One only has to try to read through a lot of the ancient magical - mystery religious texts in order to realize how much of this kind of seemingly meaningless writings (on the surface at least) existed in the world of John.

<sup>4</sup>{A} θεοῦ κ A C P 205 209 1854 2329 syr<sup>ph</sup> arm Andrew // θεοῦ μου 1006 1611 1841 2050 2053 2344 2351 Byz [046] it<sup>ar</sup>, g<sup>ig</sup>, t<sup>†</sup> vg syr<sup>h</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> eth Origen<sup>lat</sup>; Cyprian (Victorinus-Pettau) Gregory-Elvira Chromatius Varimadum Apringius Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>5</sup>“A number of minuscules, influenced by the use of θεοῦ μου in 3:2 and four instances of the expression in 3:12, have added the pronoun μου (of me) in 2:7. The variant reading will have little or no significance in some languages since a possessive pronoun will be required with the noun ‘God’.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 528.]

<sup>6</sup>**Offenbarung 2,1**

\* τῷ A C 1854 pc (τῆς is replaced with τῷ)

these variations are mainly stylistic attempts to update the Greek expression to a more contemporary form, or else careless mistakes that inserted words occurring elsewhere in the passage in the wrong place.

We can exegete the adopted reading of the text in full confidence that it reflects the original wording written by John.



**Internal History.** A substantial number of time and place markers in reference to the historical situation of the church at Ephesus surface. But they can be more effectively treated in the exegesis of the text, since none represent unique background concerns to the passage.

### Literary Aspects:

\* δεξ. αυτου χειρι κ\* (δεξιᾶ αὐτοῦ is re-written in several different ways for greater clarity)

| δεξ. χ. 1678 pc  
| χειρι αυτου sy<sup>ph</sup>

\* χρυσεων A C (2050) (χρυσῶν is replaced by χρυσέων)

#### Offenbarung 2,2

\* σου κ M vg<sup>ms</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup> (σου is repeated after κόπον)

| txt A C P 1854. 2053 pc lat sy<sup>h</sup>

\* A t (σου is omitted after ὑπομονήν)

\* -αξαι 1611 M<sup>A</sup> (βαστάσαι is replaced with βάσταξαι)

\* ειναι κ<sup>2</sup> M it vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>ph,h\*\*</sup>; Vic Prim (εἶναι is inserted after ἀποστόλους)

| txt κ\* A C P 2053. 2329 pc ar vg

#### Offenbarung 2,3

\* 4 3 1 2 M<sup>A</sup> (ὑπομονήν ἔχεις και ἐβάστασας is either re-sequenced or modified with additions)

| ut txt sed εχεις και θλιψεις πασας κ\*, sed εβαπτισας 1 pc

\* 2 pc (οὐ κεκοπίακες is replaced with οὐκ ἐκοπίασας)

| ουκ εκοπιασας κ M  
| txt A C pc

#### Offenbarung 2,4

\* 4 2 1 A (ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην is re-sequenced)

#### Offenbarung 2,5

\* εκπεπ- M<sup>A</sup> (πέπτωκας is replaced with ἐκπέπτωκας)

\* (2,16; 3,11) ταχυ M (ar) t vg<sup>ms</sup> sy<sup>h</sup>; Aug<sup>pt</sup> Prim (ταχύ is inserted after σοι)

| txt κ A C P 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329 al gig vg sy<sup>ph</sup>

#### Offenbarung 2,6

\* A (ἄ is omitted)

#### Offenbarung 2,7

\* επτα A (C) (ἐπτὰ is added either before or after ἐκκλησίας)

\* κ al it vg<sup>cl</sup>; Bea (αὐτῷ is omitted)

\* μεσω τ. π. κ<sup>2</sup> P gig (τῷ παραδείσῳ is replaced with one of these two alternative readings)

| μεσω του π-σου M<sup>A</sup> co

\* μου 1006. 1611. 1841. 2050. 2053. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> latt sy<sup>h</sup> co (μου is inserted after θεοῦ)

| txt κ A C 1854. 2329 M<sup>A</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup>

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 634-35.]

The literary aspects pose some critically important interpretive issues to understanding this text. Some of them are simple and easy to determine, while others are highly complex and challenging to understand clearly.

**Genre:** Here is where the complexity explodes regarding this passage, and the remaining six letters as well.<sup>7</sup> We will try to unpack the issue here with relevant applications to the remaining six messages as well.

One should remember that these seven messages never had an independent existence apart from the book of Revelation. This means that they cannot be considered ancient letters in the traditional sense of that term. They, instead, are messages which are embedded inside a larger document and intended as an integral part of that larger document.<sup>8</sup> Clearly the format of these messages is dramatically different from the standard ancient Greek letter form, which is adopted elsewhere inside the New Testament.

As David Aune clearly illustrates and documents from ancient sources, these messages contain a mixture of ancient forms, some associated with letters but others not.

<sup>7</sup>“The form or genre of the proclamations to the seven churches has been a subject of extensive scholarly discussion. The analysis of their form has two closely related aspects, the determination of their internal literary structure and the determination of the external literary form or genre to which they have the closest generic relationship. In recent years a number of literary forms have been proposed as genres to which the seven proclamations have the closest phenomenological relationship: (1) the revelatory letter (Berger, ZNW65 [1974] 212–19; Müller, “Apokalyptik,” 601 n. 6a), (2) prophetic speech forms (Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt*, 47–107), (3) the covenant suzerainty treaty (Shea, AUSS 21 [1983] 71–84), or (4) one of the types of Greek oratory (Kirby, NTS34 [1988] 197–207). The view preferred in this commentary, however, is that the seven proclamations constitute a mixed genre created by the author. The primary literary genre to which the seven proclamations belong is that of the royal or imperial edict, while the secondary literary genre or mode (a term proposed by A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982] 106–11) is that of a prophetic speech form that maybe designated the parenetic salvation-judgment oracle (Aune, *Prophecy*, 326).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 119.]

<sup>8</sup>For other NT examples of this sort of thing, note the two letters embedded inside the book of Acts at 15:23-29 and 23:26-30. The first is James’ letter to the church at Antioch in Syria, and the second one is the Roman tribune Claudius Lysias’ letter to the Roman governor Felix outlining the charges against Paul.

Unlike these seven messages in Revelation two and three, these two letters in Acts are exemplary models of ancient Greek letter writing forms. Also the context makes it clear that both of these letters had an independent existence from the book of Acts, but at least the essence of them is reproduced by Luke in his historical narrative.



Eight identifiable form elements surface consistently through these seven letters, and merit consideration.

**First** is the **Adscriptio** that introduces each message: *Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν ----- ἐκκλησίας, To the angel of the church in -----*. The identical formula is repeated seven times, but with the appropriate city name inserted in the blank. The formula appears to imitate the Hebrew / Aramaic letter by beginning with the Adscriptio rather than with the Superscriptio. But six of the seven modify this slightly with *Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν ----- ἐκκλησίας, And to the angel of the church in -----*. At first glance this would seem to be influenced by the common tendency of Hebrew to begin sentences with the I (waw consecutive) usually meaning ‘and.’ But this pattern prevails only in chapters two and three, and isn’t followed subsequently with consistency.<sup>9</sup> In all likelihood, John considered this form to be somewhat more eloquent than the standard patterns, and thus they are stylistic in nature. Plus, the pattern of *εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν* in 1:11 probably influenced the pattern as well.

This specification of the destination of each message plays off *ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτειρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν, what you see write in a book and send it to the seven church, in Ephesus and in Smyrna and in Pergamum and in Thyatira and in Sardis and*

<sup>9</sup>“With the exception of 2:1, all the proclamations begin with the conjunction *καί*, ‘and,’ which superficially coheres well with the paratactic Hebraistic style used by the author. Yet there are several stylistic features that clearly set Rev 2–3 apart from the literary framework within which it is set. While 245 (or 73.79 percent) of the 337 sentences in Revelation begin with *καί* (following the punctuation of Nestle-Aland27), only 9 (20.5 percent) of the 44 sentences in Rev 2–3 begin with *καί*. This stylistic difference between Rev 2–3 and the rest of the book is quite remarkable. Similarly, three of the seven occurrences of *δέ*, ‘and, but,’ in Revelation occur in Rev 2–3 (2:5, 16, 24), and of the thirteen occurrences of *ἀλλά*, ‘but,’ in Revelation, eight occur in Rev 2–3 (2:4, 6, 9[2x], 14, 20; 3:4, 9). The concentration of these stylistic features in Rev 2–3 suggests that the author is intentionally trying to write in an elevated style when composing the speeches of the exalted Christ. Admittedly, the occasional use of *δέ* or *ἀλλά* does not at first sight appear to be elevated style when compared with the style of other NT authors, and there is a complete absence in Revelation of the usual contrastive particles *μέν* and *δέ*, which characterize most classical and Hellenistic authors. But when taken on their own, these subtle variations suggest that John considered them to be a more elevated style of diction. Another possibility is that the stylistic differences between Rev 2–3 and the rest of the book may indicate the presence of a later addition to the work, perhaps by one who is not the author of the rest of Revelation.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 120.]

in Philadelphia and in Laodicea (1:11).

**Second is the command** given to John: *γράψον, write*. This is consistently located between the Adscriptio and the *Τάδε λέγει* formula in all seven letters. It is the shortened form of *ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, what you see write in a book and send to the churches* (1:11) and *γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες, therefore write what you have seen* (1:19). The Aorist imperative form adds intensity to the command to write. Also in the background seems to be the Old Testament prophetic “go and tell” formulas.<sup>10</sup> This continues the emphasis on the divine prophecy and visionary orientation of this text.

**Third is the *Τάδε λέγει* formula** used in all seven messages to introduce the sender of the message as the Son of Man.<sup>11</sup> By the time of the writing of Revelation, this Greek phrase was an obsolete expression no longer considered to be proper Greek. But with over 250 uses of it in the LXX, John intentionally sought to

<sup>10</sup>“The command to write is part of the “write and send” formula (a variation of the OT ‘go and tell’ formulas; cf. Aune, *Prophecy*, 90,330), though the second part has been suppressed, since the complete formula *γράψον ... καὶ πέμψον*, ‘write ... and send,’ has already been applied to all seven proclamations in 1:11. Since the object of the verb *λέγει*, found in each proclamation, is *τάδε*, the entire message introduced by *τάδε* also functions as the object of the aorist imperative *γράψον*. Though literary accounts of supernatural revealers commanding that people write the substance of their revelations are found in Judaism (see Comment on 1:11), such divine commands are even more frequent in Greco-Roman texts (see Comment on 1:11). The many occurrences of this phenomenon indicate that it is a stock literary device used to legitimate the resultant compositions (J. B. Stearns, *Studies of the Dream as a Technical Device in Latin Epic and Drama* [Lancaster: Lancaster, 1927] 1–7; cf. Menander Rhetor 2.17, where the author recommends that in composing a hymn to Apollo, one should begin with a claim to divine inspiration).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 120–21.]

<sup>11</sup> *ὄδε, ἦδε, τόδε...*

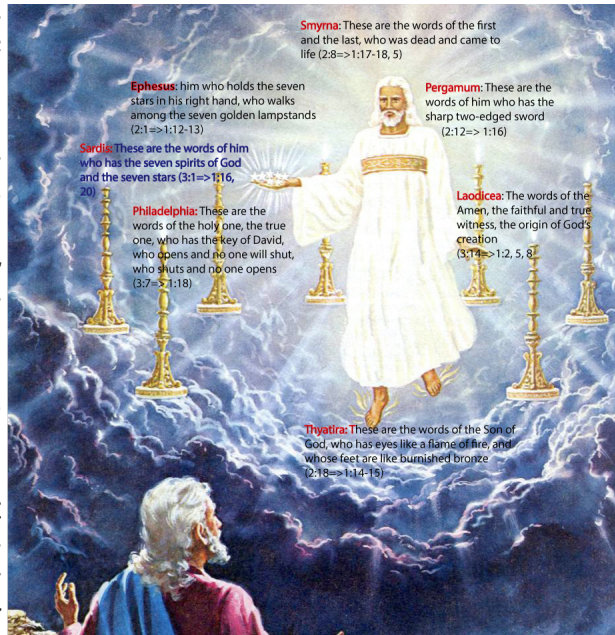
**1. a ref. to an entity viewed as present or near in terms of the narrative context, *this***

**a. w. ref. to what follows (so predom.),** esp. in the formula *τάδε λέγει this is what ... says* (introductory formula in the decrees of the Persian kings: Hdt. 1, 69, 2 al.; IMagnMai 115, 4 [=SIG 22, s. editor’s note]; Ps.-Pla., Alcib. II, 12, 14c τ. λ. Ἄμμων; Jos., Ant. 11, 26. In the OT freq. as an introduction to prophetic utterance [Thackeray p. 11]; so also [after LXX] TestAbr A 8 p. 85, 15 [Stone p. 18]; TestJob 4:3; 7:9; GrBar and ApcMos 22 *τάδε λέγει Κύριος*. Also in wills: PGiss 36, 10 [161 B.C.] *τάδε λέγει γυνή Ἑλληνίς Ἀμμωνία*; GRudberg, *Eranos* 11, 1911, 170–79; Mussies 180. As introd. to a letter Nicol. Dam.: 90 Fgm. 5 p. 336, 22 Jac. Cp. GGerhard, *Unters. z. Gesch. d. gr. Briefes*: I, D. Anfangsformel, diss. Hdlbg 1903) **Ac 21:11; Rv 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; B 6:8; 9:2** (Jer 7:3), 5 (Jer 4:3); cp. IPhld 7:2.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 690.]

link his message to the OT prophetic “Thus saith the Lord.”<sup>12</sup> The words then spoken by the Son of Man carried the same authority of those commissioned by God for the prophets of Israel to speak.

**Fourth, the seven depictions of the Son of Man** function as the subject of the verb expression *Τάδε λέγει*, *This says* ----. As such they function as titles of identification of the Son of Man who is speaking. Each one picks up on some element of the vision presented in chapter one.<sup>13</sup> Thus the introductory role of the materials in chapter one becomes foundational to



the various regional histories of kings and rulers. The objective then of this structural pattern is to highlight the role of the Son of Man as “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5, ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς).

**Fifth, the Narratio section<sup>14</sup> of each letter** begins with οἶδα (2:9, 12) or οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου (2:2, 19, 3:1, 8, 15).<sup>15</sup> The direct objects connected to this verbal introduction will be varied in content and emphasis reflecting the various situations being faced by each congregation. The differing depictions are expressed by both past and present tense verbs indicating

the subsequent contents of the document. John will highlight the most appropriate aspect from chapter one to each of the seven churches. The net impact of this structure is to give each message the tone of a royal edict or decree -- something the ancient world was very familiar with in not just the Roman empire but in

<sup>12</sup>“The *τάδε λέγει* Formula. *τάδε* was an obsolete form in Hellenistic Greek that had archaic associations similar to the obsolete English phrase ‘thus saith.’ This intentional archaism had two associations for the readers of Revelation: (1) as a (prophetic) messenger formula occurring more than 250 times in the LXX (used to translate the Hebrew phrase יהוה אמר כה *kōh .āmar YHWH*, ‘thus says Yahweh’; see Comment on 2:1) and (2) as a proclamation formula characteristic of Persian royal diplomatic letters and edicts (see Comment on 2:1). In either case, D. Fehling (“Funktion,” 61–75) has demonstrated that this third-person formula introduces and provides justification for the use of the first person in the text that follows.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 121.]

<sup>13</sup>“The speaker, i.e., the subject of the verb *λέγει*, is the exalted Christ identified by a series of descriptive titles that are (with the exception of 3:14) connected with the vision in 1:9–20 (2:1, cf. 1:16; 2:8, cf. 1:17–18; 2:12, cf. 1:16; 2:18, cf. 1:14; 3:1, cf. 1:4, 16; 3:7, cf. 1:18; 3:14, cf. 1:5). Four times the attributes of Christ are introduced with the substantival participle ὁ ἔχων, ‘the one having,’ twice belonging to the semantic subdomain of ‘have, possess’ (2:18; 3:1b; cf. Louw-Nida, § 57.1) and twice belonging to the subdomain of ‘grasp, hold’ (2:12b; 3:7b), a meaning shared by the substantival participle ὁ κρατῶν in 2:1 (cf. Louw-Nida, § 18.2). Since each proclamation ends with a proclamation formula (see below) introduced by ὁ ἔχων, this has the effect of framing and therefore introducing a greater degree of symmetry into the structure of the proclamations. Unlike the usual order of royal and imperial edicts, however, the actual name of the exalted Christ is never given. The cumulative effect of these titles is to unify the seven proclamations as pronouncement of the exalted Christ who commissioned John to write in 1:9–20.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 121.]

the Son of Man’s awareness of both their history as well as their present status.

Two repeated expressions surface several times in these seven letters. **1)** σου τὰ ἔργα / τὰ ἔργα σου, *your works*, in 2:19; 3:1, 8, 15 / 2:2. The Son of Man knows everything the churches are doing. **2)** ἀλλ’ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ / ἀλλ’ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, *but I have something / a few things against you* (2:4, 14, 20). The two segments are merged in 3:1, οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ, *I know your works that you have a name that you are alive, and you are dead*. What this pattern affirms strongly is the thorough knowledge of the Son of Man of both their past and their present. And in the negative structure He reflects His substantial disapproval of what is going on in some of the churches. These evaluations of the past and present situation of

<sup>14</sup>These Narratio sections are 2:2–4, 9, 13–15, 19–21; 3:1c, 8, 15.

<sup>15</sup>“The so-called οἶδα clause, ‘I know’ clause, introduces the *narratio*, ‘narrative,’ section of each of the seven proclamations. Like the *dispositio*, ‘arrangement,’ that follows, each *narratio* is extremely varied, using a number of optional elements. This clause is not identical with the central message of each proclamation (contra Hahn, “Sendschreiben,” 370–77) but provides a brief narrative of the situation of each congregation (including the past and present), a sort of diagnosis of the positive and negative behavior of each congregation, which then serves as a basis for the *dispositio*, ‘arrangement,’ that immediately follows. The finite verbs in the *narrationes* are limited to past and present tenses in the indicative, since the content is governed by the semantic significance of οἶδα, ‘I know.’ In Greek literary letters, verbs of perception such as οἶδα, ‘I know,’ ἀκούω, ‘I hear,’ and πυνθάνομαι, ‘I learn about,’ all belonging to the semantic domain of ‘learn and know’ (Louw-Nida, §§ 27.1–26; 28.1–16), are sometimes used to introduce the opening section of a letter (see Comment on 2:2).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 121–22.]



each church form the basis for the following section, the *dispositio*, in each message.

**Sixth, the dispositio sections follow the narratio sections** and contains warnings, instructions etc. from the Son of Man to each congregation based on the individual assessment of each church.<sup>16</sup> Less structured than the other sections, it none the less is clearly defined in each of the seven messages. What is of central importance is that this section serves as the very heart of each message. The demands of the Son of Man come to the forefront here and function to project what is necessary for each church to continue to exist as well as to become pleasing to Him in anticipation of the Day of Judgment.<sup>17</sup> Thus the Son of Man speaks and demands obedience from the churches as ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, **the Ruler of the kings of**

<sup>16</sup>“The term *dispositio* (meaning ‘arrangement’) was used by Quintilian for the effective and unified arrangement of the various parts of a speech (*Institutio oratoria* 3.3.1) but has been derived from its later application to parts of official documents in medieval diplomatics (cf. Fridh, *Terminologie*, 9–10). The *dispositio* is closely connected to the *narratio*, for the *narratio* serves as the basis for assertions made in the *dispositio*. The *dispositio* differs from the other structural elements in the seven proclamations in that it is not formally marked with a stereotypical phrase used consistently throughout. Yet the *dispositio* is marked by the use of verbs in the imperative and future indicative (futuristic presents also occur, such as ἔρχομαι, ‘I come,’ βάλλω, ‘I throw,’ and μέλλω, ‘I am about to’). The following sections of the seven proclamations function as *dispositiones*: (a) 2:5–6; (b) 2:10; (c) 2:16; (d) 2:22–25; (e) 3:2–4; (f) 3:9–11; and (g) 3:16–20. Four are introduced with imperatives: 2:5, μνημόνευε, ‘remember’; 2:10, μηδὲν φοβοῦ, ‘do not fear’; 2:16, μετανόησον, ‘repent’; and 3:2, γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον, ‘be watchful and strengthen,’ while three are introduced with future indicatives or present indicatives functioning as future indicatives: 2:22, ἰδοὺ βάλλω, ‘behold I will cast’ (the future character of βάλλω is demonstrated by the fact that it is parallel to ἀποκτενῶ, ‘I will kill,’ in 2:23); 3:9, ἰδοὺ διδώ ... [digression] ... ἰδοὺ ποιήσω, ‘Behold I will give ... behold I will make’; and 3:16, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι, ‘I will vomit you.’” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 122.]

<sup>17</sup>“The term μνημόνευε, ‘remember,’ occurs twice with μετανόησον, ‘repent’ (2:5; 3:3). This emphasis on remembering the past serves to idealize it, and this nostalgic perspective supports a late first century A.D. date for Revelation. The demand for repentance (μετανοεῖν) is a motif occurring frequently in the *dispositiones*, often found within a conditional context in which the threat of eschatological judgment is introduced as the only alternative: 2:5a, μετανόησον ... εἰ δὲ μή, ‘repent ... but if not’; 2:5b, εἰ μὴ μετανόησῃς, ‘if you do not repent’; 2:16, μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ‘therefore repent; but if not’; 2:22, εἰ μὴ μετανόησωσιν, ‘if they do not repent’; and 3:3, καὶ μετανόησον, εἰ μὴ γρηγορήσῃς ‘and repent. Therefore if you are not watchful.’ The conditional threat of judgment introduced in these ways is identified with negative aspects of the Parousia in the such phrases as ἔρχομαι σοι, ‘I will come to you’ (2:5, 16; 3:3), and ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, ‘I will come as a thief’ (3:3).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 122.]

the earth.

**Seventh, the Proclamation Formula comes next** in each of the seven messages and near the end of each message.<sup>18</sup> The statement is identical in all seven messages: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, **The one having ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches**. The sequential placing of this formula following the *Narratio / Dispositio* sections reflects advice to pay attention to what the Son of Man has decreed in these statements. Whoever is wise will give serious attention to the warnings etc. just issued.<sup>19</sup> Note that the formula states τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, **what the Spirit is saying to the churches** (plural). Thus, although each message is customized to the individual congregation, the collective message of all seven applies to all seven congregations as well. This is an important point. Again the tone of a prophetic oracle is highlighted by this formula expression.

<sup>18</sup>“This third-person formula is found at the end of each of the seven proclamations, either in the penultimate position (2:7, 11, 17) or in the final position (2:29; 3:6, 13, 22): Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, ‘Let the one with an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ (it also occurs in a variant form in 13:9, Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω, ‘If anyone has an ear, let him hear,’ where the formula introduces rather than concludes an oracle). A similar injunction occurs in 13:18: ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω, ‘Let the one with understanding consider.’” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 123.]

<sup>19</sup>“Placed at the conclusion of each of the seven proclamations, this formula functions as a proclamation formula, i.e., as an injunction to an audience to pay very close attention to the message that it accompanies. Dibelius coined the term *Weckformel*, ‘alertness formula,’ for the parallels found in the synoptic Gospels (*Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 6th ed., ed. G. Bornkamm [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1971] 248). This formula has no close verbal parallels in ancient literature with the exception of the parable tradition found in the synoptic Gospels and in some apocryphal gospels. There is, however, a partial model for its use in Ezek 3:27, which contains parallels to the opening and closing sections of each of the proclamations:

But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God”; let those who will hear, hear [ὁ ἀκούων ἀκουέτω] and let those who refuse to hear refuse.

When the proclamation formula concludes an oracle, it functions as a prophetic signature (in early Christian literature, other examples of a prophetic signature are found only in 1 Cor 14:37–38 and Odes Sol. 3:10–11; cf. D. E. Aune, “The Odes of Solomon and Early Christian Prophecy,” *NTS* 28 [1982] 438–39). Proclamation formulas (variously phrased) often introduce OT prophetic oracles with such expressions as ‘Hear the word of Yahweh’ (1 Kgs 22:19; Amos 7:16; Jer 29:20). Originally derived from public announcements in assemblies and courts of law (cf. Mic 6:2; Jer 2:4), proclamation formulas were used to introduce legal instruction (Prov 4:1; Job 13:6; 33:1, 31; 34:2, 16; Isa 49:1; 51:4) and instruction in wisdom (Deut 32:1; Prov 7:24; Ps 49:1; Isa 28:23).”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 123.]

**Eighth, the Promise-to-the-Victor Formula is attached to each to the seven messages**, although in different sequential places: before the Proclamation Formula: 2:26-27; 3:5, 12, 21 and after it: 2:7b, 11b, 17b. Three different stylistic variations of the wording surface in these seven instances: 1) τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ, *to the one overcoming I will give to him...* (2:7, 17), 2) ὁ νικῶν, *the one overcoming...*(2:11, 3:5), and 3) ὁ νικῶν, *the one overcoming...*(2:26; 3:12, 21). The difference between these last two patterns is the grammatical function of the same participle ὁ νικῶν. In 2) it is the subject of the verb, while in 3) it serves as a predicate nomination expression.<sup>20</sup> Thus each message ends on a positive note of reassurance of victory over the forces of evil. A wise believer will pay close attention to the instructions and warnings given by the Son of Man. But in doing so, he or she knows that obedience to the risen Christ guarantees ultimate victory over evil and its power in this world.

These eight distinctive qualities, that both frame each message and define so much of the content of each one, become signals of clarity in writing strategy and also puzzlement as to literary form over all.

For many centuries these seven sections of Revelation have been labeled 'letters.' But they don't fit traditional letter forms in the ancient world.<sup>21</sup> Has John

<sup>20</sup>"*The Promise-to-the-Victor Formula*. This formula exhibits variety in form and structure and placement. It is placed after the proclamation formula in the first three proclamations (2:7b, 11b, 17b), but before it in the last four (2:26-27; 3:5, 12, 21), suggesting that the two formulas are closely related. John was intent on including a present substantival participle from the verb νικᾶν, 'to conquer,' at the beginning of the promise-of-victory formula, though he used three very different syntactical constructions to do so: (a) In the phrase τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ, literally, 'to the one who conquers I will give to him,' in 2:7, 17, the substantival participle τῷ νικῶντι, 'to the one who conquers,' is a dative of respect, while αὐτῷ, 'to him,' is the indirect object of δώσω. (b) In 2:11; 3:5, ὁ νικῶν, 'the one who conquers,' is the subject of a verb. (c) In 2:26; 3:12, 21, ὁ νικῶν, 'the one who conquers,' is a pendent nominative, a construction functionally parallel to (a)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 124.]

<sup>21</sup>"Whatever genre or genres the seven proclamations represent, they exhibit few features derived from the Hellenistic epistolary tradition (contra Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, 54; Ramsay, *Letters*, 38-39; Kirby, *NTS* 34 [1988] 200). Unlike the Paulinelike epistolary framework of Revelation (1:4-5; 22:21), the seven proclamations exhibit not a single characteristic feature of the early Christian epistolary tradition, a fact that must have been the result of deliberate choice. The seven proclamations do use the *τάδε λέγει* formula, which can be understood as an ancient Near Eastern epistolary prescript. In general, however, the seven proclamations do not rigidly replicate the generic features of any known ancient literary form (Hartmann, "Form," 142; Karrer, *Brief*, 159-60). Though John was certainly not without literary models, he chose not to follow them rigidly." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated,

created his own distinctive genre here by creatively combining well established sub-elements from other forms in the ancient world?

What does emerge from detailed comparisons to extent literary forms out of the ancient world is some affinity of these seven 'letters' in Revelation with what is loosely defined as a 'prophetic letter.'<sup>22</sup> Additionally

1998), 124-25.]

<sup>22</sup>"Since letters were often used in the ancient world to communicate divine revelation (Aune, *Prophecy*, 72-73; Dijkstra, *VT* 33 [1983] 319-22), there is some justification in speaking of 'oracular letters' or 'prophetic letters.' The royal archives of the kingdom of Mari contain cuneiform letters containing advice to king Zimri-Lin from the gods of Mari sent to him by 'prophets' (for a bibliography and some translations see Beyerlin, *Texts*, 122-28). An interesting collection of five texts written on potsherds has survived from Hellenistic Egypt, ca. 168 B.C. (TC Skeat and E.G. Turner, "An Oracle of Hermes Trismegistos at Saqqara," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 54 [1968] 199-208; cf. *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Agypten* 10 [1969] 159-60, no. 10574). The texts include rough and final drafts of a letter to the king of Egypt. One copy of the rough draft (text B) reads as follows:

Regarding the matters disclosed to me by the thrice-great god Hermes concerning oracles for the sovereign, I wish to announce that [the insurgent] Egyptians will quickly be defeated and that the king is to advance immediately to the Thebaid.

"The final draft (text E) is framed as a letter:

To King Ptolemy and to King Ptolemy the Brother and to Queen Cleopatra the Sister, greetings. Horus the priest of Isis at the sanctuary of Sebenutos in the city of Isis wishes to make an announcement about certain oracles to the sovereigns, that [the insurgent] Egyptians will be defeated quickly and that the king is to advance immediately to the Thebaid.

"The texts from both Mari and Egypt prove only that prophetic or oracular revelations could be communicated in epistolary as well as oral form without the epistolary format influencing the form and content of the message itself.

"Prophetic letters are found embedded in the OT and early Jewish literature as well (Berger, *ZNW* 65 [1974] 221-19). 2 Chr 21:12-15 (cf. the parallel in Jos., *Ant.* 9.99-101) is a letter attributed to Elijah the prophet with an announcement of judgment introduced with the customary prophetic messenger formula 'thus says Yahweh.' Most of these prophetic letters are connected with Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch (Jer 29:4-23[LXX 36:4-23], 24-28[LXX 36:4-28], 30-32[LXX 36:30-32]; Dijkstra considers Jer 29:24-32 a single letter; 2 Apoc. Bar. 77:17-19; 78-87; Epistle of Jeremiah; Paral. Jer. 6:15-7:4; 7:24-35). The letters in Jer 29, like that in 2 Chr 21:12-15, are introduced with prophetic rather than epistolary formulas (D. Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters* [Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982] 175-78, 181). The prophetic book of Nahum may originally have been a prophetic letter (van der Woude, *OTS* 20 [1977] 108-26). 1 Enoch 91-108, the so-called Epistle of Enoch, is also a prophetic letter (the Greek text of 1 Enoch 100:6 refers to the entire composition as Ἐπιστολή Ἐνώχ, 'The Letter of Enoch' (Milik, *Enoch*, 47-57, though see M. Black, *Enoch*, 283, for qualifications).

"After discussing the prophetic letter as a form embedded in longer compositions, K. Berger (*ZNW*65 [1974] 214) observes that 'The letters of Revelation are therefore primarily to be regarded as exemplars of the genre of the prophetic letter which never died out

these possess noticeable affinity with basic literary form elements in the *Imperial Edict* form used by the Roman emperors, as well as by the local Roman magistrates and by Persian kings. The combined use of the *Τάδε λέγει* formula, the title designation of the verb subject, followed by both the *Narratio* and *Dispositio* structures, points strongly in this direction of intentional literary form by John. To be sure, not all the standard elements of the Imperial Edict form surface here in Revelation. And John borrows elements from the prophetic tradition of his Jewish heritage as well.

Thus what John does with the individual message expressions is to shape them mainly in the form of an imperial decree with heavy tones of the Israelite prophetic expression.<sup>23</sup> This provides the literary vehicle for the source of these letters, the Son of Man, so that He can speak to His people as the final authority above all others.<sup>24</sup>

The symbolism of seven messages to seven churches but sent collectively to all the churches is significant. Not only did it imitate to some extent the tradition of imperial edicts, which centered on regional issues individually but were issued collectively for all to read, it played off the religious symbolism of the number seven inside the Jewish religious world as an

completely.<sup>25</sup> However, the diversity in form and content found in prophetic letters ascribed to Elijah, Jeremiah, Baruch, and 1 Enoch argues against the notion of a unified prophet letter tradition in early Judaism (Karrer, Brief, 49–59).<sup>26</sup>

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 125–26.]

<sup>23</sup>When one looks at the seven letters as a single collection of seven proclamations bundled together as one proclamation, virtually no literary antecedent for such exists in the ancient world. It is, perhaps, here that the distinctiveness of Revelation in these two chapters comes to the surface most dramatically.

<sup>24</sup>“The author’s use of the royal/imperial edict form is part of his strategy to polarize God/Jesus and the Roman emperor, who is but a pale and diabolical imitation of God. In his role as the eternal sovereign and king of kings, Jesus is presented as issuing solemn and authoritative edicts befitting his status. One oracular deity, Zeus at Heliopolis, replied in the form of rescripta, ‘written replies,’ to written consultations transmitted in sealed diplomata, folded tablets with written instructions, or *codicilli*, written responses (Macrobius Sat. 1.23.14–16, referring to a consultation of Trajan). The seven proclamations share a similar structure, which consists of (1) an introduction, (2) a central section (introduced by οἶδα, ‘I know’), and (3) a double conclusion, containing (a) a call for vigilance and (b) a victory saying. This structure is adapted from that of the royal or imperial edict discussed above. Yet, into this relatively rigid formal structure, the author introduces a great deal of variation. The reason for including seven separate proclamations (making it possible for each community to read the divine edict of each of the other communities) is that imperial edicts did not have universal application but were valid only for the region and people for whom they were promulgated (Sherwin-White, Letters, 651).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 129–30.]

expression of completeness.<sup>25</sup> What we have here is a seven fold message with individualized emphases that together form a complete message to the Christian communities of the entire province of Asia at the end of the first Christian century.<sup>26</sup>

The choice of these particular seven churches, when there were numerous other congregations in the province, likely has a pragmatic motive behind it. Some indications from archaeological discoveries points toward Roman roads radiating out from Ephesus in the directions of these seven cities making a circular route to these seven cities relatively easy. John’s knowledge of the spiritual situation in each of these churches suggests his having visited them most likely very often in an itinerant ministry, as is frequently described in the various church father traditions. From all indications Anatolia including the province of Asia had become the center of Christian activity following the destruction of Jerusalem with the first Jewish revolt of 66–73 AD. Whether or not there were the eighty plus thou-

<sup>25</sup>“Early Christianity knew several collections of seven, (1) an early collection of ten Pauline letters addressed to seven churches (even Jerome Ep. 53, could state: ‘The Apostle Paul wrote to seven churches’), (2) the seven genuine letters of Ignatius of Antioch, and (3) the canonical collection of seven catholic letters. E. J. Goodspeed proposed that a collection of seven Pauline letters (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, and Philemon), with Ephesians as a pseudonymous ‘cover letter’ provided a model for John’s collection of seven letters introduced by the ‘cover letter’ of Rev 1:4–20 (*New Solutions*, 21–28). Goodspeed thought that the salutation in Rev 1:4 showed Pauline influence (*New Solutions*, 24), and that the composition of Revelation ca. A.D. 90 established the *terminus ad quem*, i.e., the latest date, for the formation for the Pauline corpus of seven letters (*New Solutions*, 87). Similarly, Mitton (*Formation*, 33) argues that the sevenletter Pauline corpus served as a model for both Rev 2–3 and Ignatius.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 130.]

<sup>26</sup>This understanding was commonplace in early patristic interpretation of Revelation.

In the ancient church, seven churches addressed by John were widely regarded as a symbol of the universal church. According to the Muratorian Canon (ca. A.D. 180), “John also, though he wrote in the Apocalypse to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to them all.” Similarly, Victorinus (Comm. in Apoc. 1.7 [Haussleiter, Victorinus, 28–29]) observes, *sed quia quod uni dicit, omnibus dicit*, “but what he says to one, he says to all.” Victorinus also claims that Paul taught that the churches are structured by the number seven and that he wrote to seven churches (Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, Philippians, and Colossians). In addition, he claims that Paul wrote to some individuals in order not to exceed the total number of seven churches (Comm. in Apoc. 1.7 [Haussleiter, Victorinus, 28]). That may reflect the author’s original intention. Lohmeyer (42) says, “As a whole [the seven letters] form parts of a book intended for the entire early Christian community.” Ezek 25–32 is addressed to seven nations (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt), perhaps representing all Gentiles.

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 130–31.]



sand Christians in Asia by this time as suggested by Bo Reicke (*New Testament Era*, 303) is not for certain. But Christianity was thriving in this region and would gradually become the location of most Christians in the ancient world.

**Literary Setting:** The determination of the literary context for 2:1-7 is easy. It stands as the first of the seven messages in chapters two and three of Revelation. This was logical since Ephesus was the provincial capital of Asia as well as the largest city. Christianity had been first planted there by Paul, with the help of Priscilla and Aquila, in the early 50s toward the end of the second missionary journey. Paul's approximate three year stay in the city during the mid 50s on the third missionary journey had seen substantial exten-

sion of the Gospel throughout the entire province: τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο, ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου, Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας, *This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord* (Acts 19:10).

As the first of the seven proclamations, 2:1-7 naturally follows the introduction in chapter one, and especially the apocalyptic vision of 1:9-20, that sets up not only these seven proclamations but the vision for chapters four through twenty-two as well.

**Literary Structure:** The block diagram below, which reflects the Greek grammar structure primarily, highlights the internal arrangement of ideas inside the passage.

24 <sup>2.1</sup> **To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:**

25 **These things says the One holding the seven stars in His right hand,  
the One walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;**

26 <sup>2</sup> **I know your works  
and  
your labor  
and  
your endurance  
and  
that you do not tolerate evil doers,  
and**

27 **you have tested those calling themselves apostles  
and**

28 **they are not  
and**

29 **you have found them to be false,  
and**

30 <sup>3</sup> **you have endurance  
and**

31 **you have held up  
because of my name  
and**

32 **you have not become weary.**

33 <sup>4</sup> **I have (something)  
against you  
because you have left your first love.**

34 <sup>5</sup> **Therefore  
remember  
where you fell from,  
and**

35 **repent  
and**

36 **the first works do;  
but  
if not**

37 **I will come to you  
and**

38 I will remove your lampstand  
from its place  
if you do not repent.

6 But  
39 this you have  
that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans,  
which I also hate.

7 The one having ears  
40 let him hear  
what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

To the one overcoming  
41 I will give to him  
to eat  
from the tree of life  
which is  
in the paradise of God.

### Analysis of Literary Structure:

The arrangement of ideas is impacted both by the grammar structure and the extensive use of established literary forms through out the content, not only of this letter but in all seven messages. The above diagram seeks to visually emphasize these aspects.

The 'header' (statement 24) sets up the material with the command to write. The contents of this are then specified in the following statements. But these follow a natural grouping via the distinctive literary genre forms used.

Statements 25 through 39 come together to form the two part *narratio* (#s 26-33) and the *dispositio* (#s 34-39) segments. The 'header' for these two sections is statement 25.

Attached as ending declarations are the admonition to listen (#40) and the promise of victory (#41) statements.

Given the adherence by John to this rather rigid form, the same structure will prevail for all seven letters. The alteration of content from message to message will take place primarily in the middle *narratio* and *dispositio* sections.

### Exegesis of the Text:

With the above assessment of the literary structure of 2:1-7, the proper way to approach exegesis is to frame the analysis around the clearly existing structure built into the text by John himself. The threefold grouping of these elements pulls together a combination of forms in the second and third sections that have a natural linkage to one another conceptually due to their literary genre.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Highly questionable is the tendency of some commentators and preachers to improperly elevate the single criticism of the Ephesian congregation in the statement "you have abandoned the love you had at first." By falsely elevating it to a thematic status

### A. Command to write, v. 1a

Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψων·  
To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The question of who is τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, to the angel of the church, has been raised above under Genre as well as addressed in detail in the preceding study 05 on 1:17-20.<sup>28</sup> Building off those insights I simply want to call attention here to how thoroughly τῷ ἀγγέλῳ is equated with τῆς ἐκκλησίας throughout the proclamation. Uniformly in vv. 1b-6 τῷ ἀγγέλῳ is addressed by the exclusive use of the second person singular forms (οἶδα, σου, σου, δύνῃ, ἐπέειπας, εὔρες, ἔχεις, ἐβάστασας, κεκοπίακες, σοῦ, σου, ἀφήκες, μνημόνευε, πέπτωκας, μετανόησον, ποιήσον, σοι, σου, μετανοήσης, ἔχεις, μισεῖς). Yet it is obviously clear that Jesus is addressing the church with these words, and not some spiritual leader in the church. This clearly points to an identification of the angel as the heavenly expression of the church, which also functions as a lampstand as well. The functional working out of the command clear-

defining the entire proclamation, a huge twisting both of Jesus' words to the church as well as the spiritual condition of the church has been perpetrated on the congregation at Ephesus. They had a lot going for them positively which the much larger number of compliments both before and following this criticism make very clear.

<sup>28</sup>"Instead of 'to the angel of the (τῆς) church in Ephesus,' some manuscripts read 'to the angel of the church who (τοῦ) [is] in Ephesus' (A C 1854 pc), which locates the angel actually in the church.<sup>21</sup> This variant occurs in the introduction to each letter (2:8, 12, 18; 3:1) except those to Philadelphia and Laodicea (3:7, 14). Perhaps the change was motivated by an attempt to identify the 'angel' as a bishop, pastor, or elder in the church. The genitive reading is more probable because of external manuscript evidence and because it places the angel in a position over the church (as its guardian angel)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 230.]



ly followed this understanding. Christ commands John to write down His words to the church and then send them to the congregation (cf. 1:1-2, 11).

This first proclamation was to go to the city of Ephesus.<sup>29</sup> This was the provincial capital of the province of Asia, and served as home base first for Paul's lengthy three year ministry in the city in the mid 50s and toward the end of the first Christian century for the apostle John. Commercially powerful, the city exerted considerable influence in the ancient world.<sup>30</sup> During

<sup>29</sup>Ἐφεσός, οὐ, ἡ *Ephesus* (s. prec. entry; Hdt. et al.; oft. in ins; Joseph., SibOr; Ath. 17, 3), a seaport of Asia Minor in the plain of the Cayster River. Famous for its temple of Artemis (s. Ἄρτεμις). The Christian congregation at Ephesus was either founded by Paul, or its numbers greatly increased by his ministry (GDuncan, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry* 1929). **Ac 18:19, 21, 24, 27 D; 19:1, 17, 26; 20:16f** (on Ephesian setting of Paul's speech **Ac 20:17-38**, s. DWatson, in *Persuasive Artistry* [GAKennedy Festschr.] '91, 185-86, n. 3); **1 Cor 15:32; 16:8**; subscr. v.l.; **Eph 1:1** (here it is lacking in P<sup>46</sup> Sin. B Marcion [who has instead: to the Laodiceans]; s. Harnack, SBBerlAk 1910, 696ff; JSchmid, D. Eph des Ap. Pls 1928; Goodsp., Probs. 171-73); **1 Ti 1:3; 2 Ti 1:18; 4:12; Rv 1:11** (the order Eph., Smyrna, Perg., Sardis also in an official ins, fr. Miletus [56-50 B.C.]: TWiegand, Milet Heft 2 [city hall] p. 101f); **2:1**.—OBenndorf, Z. Ortskunde u. Stadtgesch. von Eph. 1905; LBürchner, *Ephesos: Pauly-W.* V 1905, 2773-822; Österr. Archäol. Institut: *Forschungen in Ephesos* Iff, 1906ff, preliminary reports in the 'Jahreshefte' 1922ff; JKeil, *Ephesos* 1930; WRamsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170* 1912, 135-39; JBakhuizenvdBrink, *De oudchristelijke monumenten van Ephesus* 1923; VSchultze, *Altchr. Städte u. Landsch.* II/2, 1926, 86-120; Dssm., D. Ausgrabungen in Eph. 1926: ThBl 6, 1927, 17-19, *The Excav. in Eph.*: *Biblical Review* 15, 1930, 332-46; RTonneau, E. au temps de S. Paul: RB 38, 1929, 5-34; 321-63; PAntoine, *Dict. de la Bible*, Suppl. II '34, 1076-1104; FRienecker, *Der Eph.* (w. illustrated supplement) '34; BA 8, '45, 61-80; FMiltner, E., *Stadt d. Artemis u. d. Joh.* '54; HKoester, *Ephesos, Metropolis of Asia* '66; SFriesen, *Bar* 19, '93, 24-37. S. Δημήτριος 2.—OEANE II 252-55. *Die Inschriften von Ephesos*, 8 vols. '79-84. GHorsley, *NovT* 34, '92, 105-68.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 418.]

<sup>30</sup>“Strabo (Geog. 641-42) was correct in noting the significance of Ephesus' location as one of the many reasons for its commercial growth. In addition to its propitious littoral situation, it was also part of a principal trans-Anatolian highway system that had been in use for centuries (Birmingham 1961). In Strabo's words it was a 'common road constantly used by all who travel from Ephesus toward the East' (Geog. 663). The fact that Republican period milestones from Asia used Ephesus as the point of origin for measuring distances portrays the continuing significance of this site as a travel hub at the period contemporary with nascent Christianity. Furthermore, the city was also the hub of regional urban development. Ephesus had successfully annexed several adjacent suburban areas; NW to Metropolis, S toward Magnesia and Priene, and E 40 km into the Cayster valley. However, unlike other Ionian cities such as Miletus (Boardman 1980: 238-55), Ephesus is not known to have established colonies in other regions, though Hecataeus



Remaining Front Fascade of the Library of Celsus

the first centuries of the Roman empire, the city enjoyed special favor from the Roman emperors.<sup>31</sup> Thus by the time of the writing of Revelation in the 90s of the first century the Christian community in the city

notes an island in the Nile river named Ephesus.” [Richard E. Oster, Jr., “Ephesus (Place)” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 543.]

<sup>31</sup>“Beginning immediately with Augustus' ascendancy, Ephesus entered into an era of prominence and prosperity. It served as the capital of the Roman province of Asia and received the coveted title 'First and Greatest Metropolis of Asia.' The elevation of Ephesus in the dramatic urbanization policies of Augustus is revealed in its architecture. This revitalization included construction of aqueducts, repavement of streets, and Hellenization, including at times enlargement of agoras. As the political centerpiece of the province of Asia, Ephesus' burgeoning architectural program also encompassed triumphal monuments honoring C. Memmius, son-in-law of the Roman general Sulla, and M. Vipsanius Agrippa, adopted son and ally of Augustus. The new political realities of the early Empire were strikingly evident in the comprehensive romanization of the civic space in the State Agora (58 × 160 m). This 'strategy of incorporating the emperor into the public space' (Price 1984: 143) is reflected in the juxtaposition of the Royal Basilica, the temple of Roma and Julius Caesar, the temple of the Flavians (= 'Domitian's temple'), and the temple of Augustus with the city's pre-Roman Prytaneion, Bouleterion, and agora.

“Beginning in the late 1st century A.D., Ephesus received its first of four imperial Neocorate temples. On a rotating basis Ephesus also served as the seat for the long-standing and very influential provincial institution known as the *Koinon of Asia*. The office of high priest of Asia in the Ephesian imperial cult was filled by both men and women of Ephesus, demonstrating anew that women of the period held public office (Magie 1950: 1518, n. 50). Reexamination of inscriptional evidence vitiates the traditional view that the high priestesses of the imperial cult in Asia held that title only because of their marriage to the high priest of the imperial cult. Recent investigations of the numismatic and epigraphic evidence are also calling into question the older majority view that the office of provincial high priest was identical with that of the Asiarch (cf. Acts 19:31; Kearsley 1986: 183-92; 1987; see ASIARCHS).” [Richard E. Oster, Jr., “Ephesus (Place)” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 543-44.]

was substantial and composed of numerous house church groups scattered across this city of perhaps<sup>32</sup> almost half a million residents, although this number could have been less than half that amount.<sup>33</sup> Not too many years after Revelation was written, construction work began on the library of Celsus (115 - 125 AD), of which portions still exist today and reflect the tremendous affluence of the city in the ancient world.<sup>34</sup> The

<sup>32</sup>“The determination of the populations of ancient cities is problematic. First, ancient cities consisted not only of those who lived within the city walls but also those who lived within the territory controlled by the city. Second, there are very few explicit indications of the population of ancient cities, and even these are problematic (Duncan-Jones, *Economy*, 260–61). Third, there is no reliable way of determining population density, or the population that a water supply or agricultural produce will support. Most modern estimates of the population of Ephesus during the Roman empire are based on the notion that the city had at least 40,000 male citizens, apart from minors, women, and slaves, which if included would make an estimated total population of ca. 225,000. This was the conclusion of Beloch (*Bevölkerung*, 230–31), accepted by Broughton (“Roman Asia Minor,” in *An Economic Survey*, ed. T. Frank, 4:812–16), but slightly reduced (to 200,000) by Magie (*Roman Rule* 1:585; 2:1446 n. 50). This view has also been maintained by Duncan-Jones (*Economy*, 260–61 n. 4). Warden and Bagnall (CP 83 [1988] 220–23), however, have shown that Broughton confirmed Beloch’s estimate by incorrectly reading an inscription (I. Eph. 951). The inscription states that Aurelius Barenus entertained, in addition to magistrates, *πολείτας χειλίους τεσσαράκοντα*, a figure that means not 40,000 citizens but 1,040 citizens (though the editors of I. Eph. 951 erroneously understand the phrase to refer to “40,000 Bürger”). In a relevant passage in Ep. 10.116 (LCL tr.), Pliny writes to Trajan about the practice of people celebrating various occasions by throwing a party for magistrates and common people. ‘My own feeling,’ writes Pliny, ‘is that invitations of this kind may sometimes be permissible, especially on ceremonial occasions, but the practice of issuing a thousand or even more seems to go beyond all reasonable limits, and could be regarded as a form of corrupt practice.’ This indicates the impossibility of reading 40,000 rather than 1,040. This means that the figures of 225,000 or 200,000, while not impossibly large, are speculative and not based on any kind of objective estimate from antiquity.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 136–37.]

<sup>33</sup>Some huge homes have been excavated in and around the city in modern times that date back to the ancient era. One of these homes measures 47 meters (southward) by 54 meters (eastward) by 75 meters (westward) by 50 meters (northward). Several courtyards were located at different levels of this sloping home on the side of a hill. It contained at least a second level on top of the ground floor. A second home contained seven separate living quarters on two levels, each with about 700 to 900 square meters of living space. From the standing walls, it is clear that each apartment was very opulently decorated. Frescoes with scenes from the works of Menander and Euripides among others decorate the walls.

<sup>34</sup>“The Celsus Library at Ephesus is one of the visual highlights of the restored city; the approximate dates of construction are A.D. 115–125. It is ‘thought to represent the standard monumental form of the Roman library’ (Johnson 1984: 11). Its facade

Christian community at Ephesus during the second half of the first century emerged in an atmosphere of affluence and material wealth that prevailed over the rapidly growing city. Additionally it became well known across the empire for its loyalty to Rome and the Roman traditions, particularly the religious aspects.<sup>35</sup>

The risen Christ thus commands John to write down His words to be sent to the Christian community at Ephesus.<sup>36</sup> Both His evaluation of the situation and

(21 m long and 16 m high) is over 80 percent original stone. It lay to the S of the Square Agora and E of the Serapis temple. Its facade was oriented toward the E, probably for better lighting (Vitruvius, 6.7.3 *ad orientem autem bybliotecas*). The interior area of the library was 17 × 20 m. Estimates of the Celsus collection at less than 15,000 rolls are small when compared to the hundreds of thousands of rolls collected in the libraries of the Ptolemies and Attalids (Kl. Pauly 1: 892–96).

“The library was dedicated to Tiberius Julius Celsus Ptolemaeanus, proconsul of Asia, by his son Tiberius Julius Aquila. Aquila’s largess paid for the construction of the library (concluded by his relatives after his death), an operations budget for library staff and new acquisitions, and, in addition, annual choral performances in his father’s behalf. Impressive statuary was also part of the original dedication. The function of the library as a memorial to Celsus is highlighted by the fact that his sarcophagus was located under the apse (Pliny *Epist.* 10.81.7). In the late 4th–early 5th century it was filled in with debris, while the magnificent facade became the backdrop for a monumental fountain. This remodeling was accomplished under the Christian proconsul Stephanus (IvEph 5115).”

[Richard E. Oster, Jr., “Ephesus (Place)” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 546.]

<sup>35</sup>“Religion was of paramount significance to the city of Ephesus. The city was the cult center of the worship of the Ephesian Artemis. When called upon to do so, the city would vigorously defend the goddess against impious detractors. The origins of the Ephesian goddess are lost in the undocumented centuries of early contacts between the Greeks and their Anatolian neighbors.” [Richard E. Oster, Jr., “Ephesus (Place)” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 548.]

<sup>36</sup>From the biblical sources we actually know very little about the Christian community at Ephesus during the first century. The data, however, begins to surface in growing amounts in the early decades of the second century.

At the beginning of the second century, several varieties of Christianity appear to have co-existed in Ephesus (Koester, “GNOMAI DIARHOPOI,” 154–55): (1) the church established by Paul, (2) a Jewish-Christian “school” (e.g., Cerinthus, Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 1.21; 3.3.4), (3) a heretical sect called the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6), and (4) a Jewish-Christian group led by John of Patmos.

Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus while he was on a forced march through the province of Asia on his way to Rome, ca. A.D. 110. Onesimus was the bishop of Ephesus (Ign. *Eph.* 1:3; 6:2), whom John Knox rather speculatively identified with the runaway slave of the same name in Philem 10, and who became an associate of Paul (Col 4:9). However, the name is a relatively common one, particularly for slaves, since it means “useful.” Onesimus was accompanied by Burrhus, a deacon, and several other Ephesian Christians, including Crocus, Euplous, and Fronto (Eph. 2.1). Ignati-



the set of warnings and admonitions will carry the formal tone of an imperial edict addressed to this Christian community by the Ruler of the kings of the earth (cf. 1:5, ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς).

### B. *Situation of the church*, vv. 1b-6

Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν· 2 οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοὺς, καὶ ἐπίερασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὐρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, 3 καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφήκες. 5 μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποίησον· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης. 6 ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ.

2 I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fall-

us warns the Ephesians about false teachers who call themselves Christians and who are itinerants (Eph. 7:1; cf. Did. 11–13; Schoedel, Ignatius, 59).

By the late second century, it was believed that the apostle John spent his declining years in Ephesus and survived to the reign of Trajan, A.D. 98–117 (Irenaeus 3.3.4; Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.1). At Ephesus he reportedly wrote the Gospel bearing his name (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.8.4) and was eventually buried there (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.5–6; 5.24.3). The Basilica of St. John was erected on the traditional site of his tomb during the reign of Justinian (A.D. 527–65). Later tradition also placed Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Ephesus, which is the location of the traditional site of her grave, though the place where she reportedly died is now a sixth- or seventh-century Byzantine chapel (Elliger, Ephesos, 200). Since archeological evidence makes it clear that the Church of Mary was not constructed under after A.D. 431, the Council of Ephesus, which convened on 22 June 431, could not have met there (Karwiese, *Marienkirche*, 27–28, contra M. Simonetti, “Ephesus,” *EEC* 1:275). Nevertheless, the tradition that the Council met there may be an anachronistic statement based on the fact that the Council met in the Roman stoa south of the Olympeion, constructed by Hadrian but destroyed ca. A.D. 400; the Roman stoa was the basis for the earliest construction of the Church of Mary, ca. A.D. 511 (Karwiese, *Marienkirche*, 42–44). The presence of Mary at Ephesus, however, was opposed by Epiphanius (Pan. 11.24), who claimed that “we do not know if she died and if she was buried” (Pan. 78.11). Ephesus was the traditional residence, in later life, of John the Apostle (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.1). Timothy is remembered as the first bishop of Ephesus (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.4.5, a tradition based on 1 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:5). Ephesus is also the site for Justin’s dialogue with Trypho the Jew (*Dial.* 2–8; Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 4.18.6).

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 140–41.]

en; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Both the *narratio* (vv.1b-4) and the *dispositio* (vv. 5-6) are contained in this section. This because they are formally introduced by Τάδε λέγει formula at the beginning (v. 1b) and are inner connected via cause and effect linkage here directly expressed by the inferential conjunction οὖν, *therefore*, in v. 5. The first section assesses both the past and present situation of the church. The second section gives admonitions and warnings based on this beginning assessment.

**Who judged the church?** The beginning Τάδε λέγει, *These things says...*, opens this section with the tone of a royal emperor speaking to the congregation. The voice of this Ruler far outweighs the voice of the ruler in Rome and, even more, his representative in Ephesus.

Just who is the powerful person speaking? The Son of Man is here described with two appositional images: ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν, the One holding the seven stars in His right hand, the One walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Both images are taken from the original portrait in 1:12-16 (stars--1:16; midst of lampstands--1:12). They stress the absolute control of the Son of Man over the churches, as well as His detailed awareness of what is going on inside the churches. Note that the picture includes all the churches and not just Ephesus alone. This further signals that the message to each church was ultimately intended for all of them.

**What was the condition of the church?** With the formula introduction of οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου, *I know your works*, the *narratio* section begins by providing a detailed assessment of the past and present situation of the Christian community at Ephesus. The extension of the direct object of οἶδα beyond τὰ ἔργα σου amplifies the deeds of the church known to the Son of Man.<sup>37</sup> These include καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοὺς, *and your intense labor and your endurance and that you cannot tolerate evil doers*. These are commendable traits of sincere dedication to Christ and to the Gospel.

Although cognitively not much difference in meaning exists between ἔργα (ἔργον) and κόπον (κόπος),

<sup>37</sup>“The translation ‘your deeds, namely, your effort and endurance,’ reflects the view that the first καὶ is expegetical and that the two nouns that follow, τὸν κόπον, ‘effort,’ and τὴν ὑπομονὴν, ‘endurance,’ are both qualified by the possessive pronoun σου, ‘your,’ and therefore are two aspects of the ἔργα, ‘deeds,’ of the Ephesian Christians (Bousset [1906] 203; Lohmeyer, 21–22).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 143.]

connotatively ἔργον specifies deeds or actions generally, while κόπος designates actions as hard work or intense labor.<sup>38</sup> Mentioned only in Rev. 2:2 and 14:13,<sup>39</sup> the term κόπος clearly signals an important aspect of the Christian life: *living faithfully to Christ is hard, demanding effort.*

The next term τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, *your endurance*, stresses consistency and faithfulness to Christ. The noun ὑπομονή is used to compliment the consistency of believers several times in Revelation: 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12. The idea of both the noun ὑπομονή and the verb ὑπομένω is ‘holding up under a heavy load.’ Thus the ideas of endurance, steadfastness, consistency etc. are derived from this core meaning.

Note a grammatical pattern present in the Greek text: τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου. The possessive genitive form of the personal pronoun, σου, brackets these three nouns thus enclosing them into a triad type of expression: works, labor, endurance.<sup>40</sup> Apostolic Christianity clearly understood that the Christian life was by nature a daily living made up of deeds, hard work, and faithful endurance. Being a believer in Christ was no ‘bed of roses,’ but rather a life characterized by profound commitment to Christ and the values taught in the Gospel. The old hymn, “We’ll Work till Jesus Comes,” captures the essence of this point:

O land of rest, for thee I sigh!  
When will the moment come  
When I shall lay my armor by

<sup>38</sup>“**42.47 κοπιάω<sup>a</sup>; κόπος<sup>a</sup>, ου m:** to engage in hard work, implying difficulties and trouble—‘hard work, toil, to work hard, to toil, to labor.’ κοπιάω : δι ὅλης νυκτὸς κοπιᾶσαντες οὐδὲν ἐλάβομεν ‘we worked hard all night long and caught nothing’ Lk 5:5. κόπος: ἐν κόπῳ καὶ μόθῳ ‘in hard work and toil’ 2 Th 3:8.” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 514.]

<sup>39</sup>Rev. 14:13. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from *their labors*, for *their deeds* follow them.”

Καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λεγούσης· γράψον· μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκοντες ἀπ’ ἄρτι. ναί, λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα, ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτῶν, τὰ γὰρ ἔργα αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖ μετ’ αὐτῶν.

<sup>40</sup>“There is a close parallel between the triad of virtues here and those in 1 Thess 1:3: ‘remembering before our God and Father your work of faith [τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως] and labor of love [τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης] and steadfastness of hope [τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος] in our Lord Jesus Christ.’ This close association of the three nouns ἔργα, κόπος, and ὑπομονή in two different literary contexts suggests a traditional formulation, despite the fact that in 1 Thess 1:3 these nouns are linked with πίστις, ἐλπίς and ἀγάπη in the genitive.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 142.]

And dwell in peace at home?

Refrain

We’ll work till Jesus comes,  
We’ll work till Jesus comes,  
We’ll work till Jesus comes,  
And we’ll be gathered home.

Additional compliments come in the next phrase: καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοὺς, *and that you cannot tolerate evil workers.*<sup>41</sup> The evil workers are the false apostles mentioned in the next expression: καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους<sup>42</sup> καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὔρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, *and you have tested those calling themselves apostles and they are not and you have discovered them to be false.*<sup>43</sup> Approximately half a century earlier the apostle Paul had delivered a stern warning to the leaders of this church about such people (Acts 20:29-31):

29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 There-

<sup>41</sup>“The author again uses paronomasia or a pun, for the two aorist verbs βαστάσαι and ἐβάστασας (v 3) occur in close proximity (L. L. Thompson, *Revelation*, 49); in both instances the verb has the same meaning, but the first occurrence is used negatively, the second positively: that the Ephesians cannot ‘endure’ wicked people, while they are ‘enduring’ for the sake of Christ.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 143.]

<sup>42</sup>“The term ἀπόστολος occurs three times in Revelation (2:2; 18:20; 21:14) and is used with three different meanings (see Comments on 18:20; 21:14).

Brief summary of the three different meanings: (1) In anticipation of the discussion below, in 2:2 ‘apostle’ is a term for a special messenger, an itinerant missionary, whose legitimacy could be confirmed or disconfirmed by certain unstated criteria (as in Did. 11). (2) In 18:20 ‘saints and apostles and prophets’ are explicitly victims of ‘Babylon’ who (at least metaphorically) witness her destruction from heaven, so ‘apostles’ refers to a restricted group of special messengers, including but not necessarily limited to the Twelve. (3) In 21:14, in the phrase ‘the Twelve Apostles,’ the technical term ‘the Twelve’ is used to qualify the vaguer expression ‘apostles’ (as in 18:20), and therefore implicitly excludes Paul.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 144.

<sup>43</sup>“This sentence contains a distinctive rhetorical pattern found elsewhere in 2:1–3:22. It consists of three polysyndetic clauses (i.e., each clause is introduced with καί, ‘and’): (1) ‘and so [καί] have tested those who call themselves ‘apostles,’ (2) ‘but [καί] who really are not,’ (3) ‘for [καί] you found them liars.’ In 2:9 the author again uses three similar polysyndetic clauses: (1) ‘and [καί] the slander of those who call themselves Jews,’ (2) ‘but [καί] are not,’ (3) ‘but [καί] are in fact a synagogue of Satan.’ A variation in the same pattern recurs in 3:9: (1) ‘Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan who call themselves Jews,’ (2) ‘but [καί] are not,’ (3) ‘for [καί] they are lying.’ The same structure might be expected in 2:20, where (1) ‘that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess [but is not],’ (2) ‘and who teaches and misleads my servants.’” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 145-46.]



fore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

29 ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι εἰσελεύσονται μετὰ τὴν ἀφίξιν μου λύκοι βαρεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς μὴ φοιδόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου, 30 καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἀναστήσονται ἄνδρες λαλοῦντες διεστραμμένα τοῦ ἀποσπᾶν τοὺς μαθητὰς ὀπίσω αὐτῶν. 31 διὸ γρηγορεῖτε μνημονεύοντες ὅτι τριετίαν νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν οὐκ ἔπαυσάμην μετὰ δακρύων νοουθετῶν ἓνα ἕκαστον.<sup>44</sup>

These ψευδεῖς ἀποστόλους, *false apostles*, were the κακοῦς, *evil workers*, that Paul had anticipated would try to lead the church away from the Gospel. Now some fifty years later the risen Christ commends the church for having consistently resisted such false teachers wrongly claiming authority from God. Paul's admonition to these leaders had been taken to heart and followed faithfully.

The procedure followed by the church was to put such individuals to a test in order to determine whether they were legitimate or not. When such people failed to measure up, they were rejected and not allowed to function in the Christian community of Ephesus. Although the exact method of testing is not spelled out, the language here is reflected in the Old Testament for testing prophets, and elsewhere in the New Testament and early second century writings for testing spiritual leaders generally.<sup>45</sup> Central to such testing would have been determining whether the individual truly represented God's message in the Gospel both in their teaching and in their living.<sup>46</sup> The risen Christ strongly

<sup>44</sup>Note Acts 20:28–32; 1 Tim. 1:3–11; 4:1–8; 6:2–7, 20–21; 2 Tim. 3:1–17 for the collective picture of Paul's admonitions against false teachers at Ephesus from the early 50s to the mid 60s.

<sup>45</sup>“The Ephesian Christians have apparently ‘tested’ (ἐπείρασας) the so-called apostles and found them to be charlatans. The notion that it is necessary to test or examine various types of Christian leaders to determine whether they are legitimate is probably based ultimately on the motif of testing prophets in the OT (Aune, Prophecy, 87–88). In the NT and early Christian literature, it is primarily prophets who are tested (1 Cor 14:29; 1 John 4:1–3; Did. 11:7–12; see Aune, Prophecy, 217–29), and perhaps by analogy or extension the notion of testing was applied to other early Christian leaders such as apostles (1 Thess 5:21; Rev 2:2; Did. 11:3–6), teachers (Did. 11:1–2), or just ordinary Christians (Did. 12:1–5).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 144.]

<sup>46</sup>In the early decades of the second century, detailed instructions for examining spiritual teachers were laid out in the *Didache* 11:7–12. These may well reflect some of the procedures in place by the end of the first century when Revelation was written:

(7) Also, do not test or evaluate any prophet who speaks in the spirit, for every sin will be forgiven, but this sin will not be forgiven.<sup>35</sup> (8) However, not everyone who speaks in the spirit is a prophet, but only if he exhibits the Lord's ways. By his conduct, therefore, will the false prophet and the prophet be recognized. (9) Furthermore, any prophet who orders a meal in the spirit shall not partake of it; if he does, he is a false prophet. (10) If any prophet teaches the truth, yet does not practice what he teaches, he is a

commends the Ephesian church for carefully screening out any out-of-town preacher who passed through desiring to have influence on the church.

More commendations follow in verse three: καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες, *you have endurance and you have born up for my name's sake and do not grow weary*. Again in triplicate form the Son of Man commends the Ephesian church for its loyalty and consistency of devotion to Christ. The subtle role of verb tenses is significant to the meaning of the set.<sup>47</sup> The time frame moves from present to past with the perfect tense in third place building a conceptual bridge between the past and present. ὑπομονὴν is the positive and κεκοπίακες its negative opposite with the negating adverb οὐ underscore in emphatic terms their faithfulness and consistency of commitment. Then in the middle is the overtly religious ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου, *you have born up for the sake of My name*. Their loyalty has been for the sake of the Name. Remember that in ancient Jewish thought the name of a person equals the person him/her self. Thus their loyalty as been to Christ Himself. And it has been consistently high without any slacking off over time as οὐ κεκοπίακες stresses.

When viewed collectively, this series of compli-  
*false prophet. (11) But any prophet proven to be genuine who does something with a view to portraying in a worldly manner the symbolic meaning of the church<sup>36</sup> (provided that he does not teach you to do all that he himself does) is not to be judged by you, for his judgment is with God. Besides, the ancient prophets also acted in a similar manner. (12) But if anyone should say in the spirit, “Give me money,” or anything else, do not listen to him. But if he tells you to give on behalf of others who are in need, let no one judge him.*

(7) Καὶ πάντα προφήτην λαλοῦντα ἐν πνεύματι οὐ πειράσετε οὐδὲ διακρινεῖτε· πᾶσα γὰρ ἁμαρτία ἀφεθήσεται, αὕτη δὲ ἡ ἁμαρτία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται. (8) οὐ πᾶς δὲ ὁ λαλῶν ἐν πνεύματι προφήτης ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐὰν ἔχη τοὺς τρόπους κυρίου. ἀπὸ οὗ τῶν τρόπων γνωσθήσεται ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης καὶ ὁ προφήτης. (9) καὶ πᾶς προφήτης ὀρίζων τράπεζαν ἐν πνεύματι οὐ φάγεται ἀπ' αὐτῆς· εἰ δὲ μήγε, ψευδοπροφήτης ἐστίν. (10) πᾶς δὲ προφήτης διδάσκων τὴν ἀλήθειαν εἰ ἂν διδάσκει οὐ ποιεῖ, ψευδοπροφήτης ἐστίν. (11) πᾶς δὲ προφήτης δεδοκιμασμένος ἀληθινός ποιῶν εἰς μυστήριον κοσμικὸν ἐκκλησίας, μὴ διδάσκων δὲ ποιεῖν ὅσα αὐτὸς ποιεῖ, οὐ κριθήσεται ἐφ' ὑμῶν· μετὰ θεοῦ γὰρ ἔχει τὴν κρίσιν. ὡσαύτως γὰρ ἐποίησαν καὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι προφῆται. (12) ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ ἐν πνεύματι· δός μοι ἀργύρια, ἢ ἕτερα τίνα, οὐκ ἀκούσεσθε αὐτοῦ· ἐὰν δὲ περὶ ἄλλων ὑστερούντων εἴπῃ δοῦναι, μηδεὶς αὐτὸν κρινέτω.

[Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 264–265.]

<sup>47</sup>Rhetorically, this polysyndetic sentence consists of three short parallel clauses, each with a finite verb, the first in the present tense indicating their current situation, the second in the aorist indicating their past behavior, and the third in the perfect indicating that they have been faithful up to the present time.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 146.]

ments is an impressive affirmation of a congregation's spiritual vitality. Most of us in today's world would be glad to belong to such a devoted group of believers.

The *narratio* ends, however, on a negative note in verse four: ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες, *but I have something against you, because you have left your first love.*<sup>48</sup> What is this? Consistent commitment, sustained over a lengthy period of time, has been abundantly commended prior to this point. So what is it that the church has abandoned that prompts this negative evaluation?

This verbal expression, although untranslatable literally in English, is relatively common in ancient Greek: ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ. The same phrase with modifications surfaces again in 2:14, 20 with the same essential meaning.<sup>49</sup> The tone of the expression is mildly critical, but not overbearing. But as the subsequent admonition makes clear, this was a serious gap in the spiritual life of the congregation, and one that could be corrected relatively easily.

What was the gap? ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες, *that/because you have left your first love.* Grammatically the dependent ὅτι clause can supply the 'missing' direct object of ἔχω as appositional to the assumed object, or -- more likely -- provide the rea-

<sup>48</sup>“ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες, ‘But I hold this against you that you have lost your first love.’ The adversative particle ἀλλά occurs frequently in Hellenistic Greek literature but just thirteen times in Revelation, and eight of these instances occur in Rev 2–3 (2:4, 6, 9 [2x], 14, 20; 3:4, 9). The common connective particle δέ also occurs more frequently in Rev 2–3 than in the rest of Revelation (see Comment on 2:5). These two stylistic features suggest that the author is providing the words of the exalted Christ with what he regarded as a dignified style; see J. A. L. Lee, “Some Features of the Speech of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel,” *NovT* 27 (1985) 1–26. It is worth observing that 73.89 percent of the 337 sentences in Revelation begin with καί. In Rev 2–3, however, which contains 44 sentences, only 9 begin with καί, i.e., 20.5 percent. Not a single sentence begins with καί in the proclamation to the Ephesians, and the other occurrences of καί occur only at the beginning of each proclamation (2:8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), with the exception of the proclamation to Thyatira, where καί is used at the beginning of three of the eight sentences in the proclamation (2:21, 23, 26).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 146.]

<sup>49</sup>“The stereotyped phrase ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ [ὀλίγα] ὅτι occurs as part of the *narratio* here and in 2:14, 20. The phrase ἔχειν τι κατὰ τινός, ‘to have something against someone,’ occurs in Matt 5:23; Mark 11:25 (see Acts 24:19, where the synonymous phrase τι ἔχειν πρὸς τινά occurs; see also Acts 19:38; 25:19; 1 Cor 6:1), while ἔχειν κατὰ τινός, ‘to have [something] against someone,’ i.e., without the object, occurs in Hermas Man. 2.2; Sim. 9.23.2. In Rev 2:4, ὅτι introduces a clause that is the object of the ἔχω but that must be translated in English as an object clause in apposition to an unexpressed object of ἔχω (such as τι or τοῦτο), i.e., “I have [something] against you, [namely,] that.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 146.]

son for the negative critique of the church in ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ. Either understanding comes out close to the same meaning.

The missing gap is τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες. The church had stepped away from τὴν ἀγάπην which they had possessed in the beginning of their existence, i.e., τὴν πρώτην. They are admonished to remember πόθεν πέπτωκας, *from where they have fallen.*

Some of the things that ‘first love’ does not mean center on enthusiastic worship services.<sup>50</sup> Christian ἀγάπη is never an emotion, but rather a self sacrificing commitment to both God and others. Clearly from the commendations poured out in abundance on them in vv. 2-3, they have not stepped away from their commitment to Christ. Their devotion to Him had remained strong since their beginning.

What was missing was a caring love for others -- something that was strong at the beginning. Just a few years earlier the apostle John had felt compelled to focus on this in his first letter written to Christians in the same province of Asia, who were struggling with a Christianity that cared little for the spiritual and physical needs of others (1 Jhn. 2:9-11):

9 Ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι. 10 Ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν. 11 Ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.

9 Whoever says, “I am in the light,” while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

The Ephesian believers had made the mistake of severing the twin foundation of the Christian religion set forth by Jesus on the basis of the Jewish religious her-

<sup>50</sup>“The Ephesian church receives blame because it has abandoned the love it had at first (2:4). This does not mean that their ‘enthusiasm’ had waned. John is not speaking of enthusiastic worship services, which seem to have continued among the Ephesians and John’s other churches. The reputation of Sardis as a ‘live’ church (3:1) and the Laodiceans’ view of themselves as ‘rich’ (3:17) probably refer to the charismatic enthusiasm of their realized eschatology (cf. Paul’s ironic comments to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 4:8; 2 Cor. 4:12). Like Paul earlier, John acknowledges that his churches were well supplied with charismatic phenomena, but charges them with abandoning the love that had characterized their Christian lives earlier. Other, more spectacular manifestations of what they supposed was the spiritual life had become more important than the commonplace, selfless care for others represented by love in its Christian meaning.” [M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 96-97.]

itage: the vertical relationship with God does not genuinely exist without the corresponding horizontal relationship of caring for others.<sup>51</sup> This was basic principle both in ancient Judaism and especially true for Jesus and the apostles (1 Jhn 3:11): "Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."<sup>52</sup> Although doctrinally sound and devoted to Christ, the Ephesian Christians had lost sight of the critical importance of this vertical/horizontal aspect of authentic Christianity. Jesus bluntly calls them back to this principle.

That the Ephesians' Christian commitment could diminish the importance of brotherly love is easy to understand sociologically. The church increasingly moved away from its Jewish heritage over time with less and less Jewish converts. The pagan religious heritage of a growing majority of the members of the church placed no importance on building positive relationships with other people as a part of one's religious commitments. Thus the Jewish heritage of the vertical / horizontal nature of religious commitment fell further and further into the background. Combine this with the rapidly increasing affluence of the region during the second half of the first century, which itself promotes selfish, egotistical focus rather than self-sacrifice, and there was a recipe for opting to ignore this responsibility of believers to others.

**What was needed in the church?** The *dispositio* section in vv. 5-6 centers on two areas: a very stern warning to repent (v. 5) and a compliment (v. 6).

**First comes the demand** that is expressed in very stern words: *μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μή,*

<sup>51</sup>The view of Beale (NIGTC) that first love is failure to be consistent witnesses to the Gospel is highly questionable and is based on a very questionable linkage of Matt. 24:10-11, 23-26 to this text in Revelation two. Plus he overlooks the fundamental definition of Christian ἀγάπη.

That losing their "first love" was tantamount to becoming unzealous witnesses is suggested further as we see a link with Matt. 24:12-14, which shows such an end-time expectation: "Most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."<sup>24</sup> This explains the loss of love as unfaithfulness to the covenantal task of enduring in preaching the gospel "for a witness."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this is to occur together with an increase in "false prophets" who will "mislead" (Matt. 24:10-11, 23-26), just as was occurring in Ephesus.

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 230-31.]

<sup>52</sup>John's emphasis on this becomes even more emphatic in this larger pericope of 1 John 3:11-22.

*ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης, Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.* The coordinate conjunction οὖν, then, creates a direct link of the three imperative verbs -- *μνημόνευε*, *μετανόησον*, and *ποιήσον* (remember, repent and do) -- back to the *narratio* section that precedes them. These actions are the natural implication of the evaluation, particularly that of the negative assessment in verse four.

**μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας.** The present tense imperative verb *μνημόνευε* demands a continual jogging of memory so that recollection remains constant in the minds of the Ephesian Christians. The *μνημονεύω* is used in this exact same form and context with the church at Sardis, and in the Aorist tense in 18:5 (*ἔμνημόνευσεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ ἀδικήματα αὐτῆς*) where God has remembered the sins of Babylon just before He brings about her destruction.

What the Ephesian church is to remember is defined as *πόθεν πέπτωκας*, *from where you have fallen*. The relative adverb *πόθεν* clearly links this back to *τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην*, *your first love*, in the preceding statement in verse four. During the lengthy ministry of the apostle Paul at Ephesus half a century earlier the preaching of the Word of God by Paul was affirmed by the occurrence of miracles of healing (cf. Acts 19:10-12) reflecting deep concern for the physical needs of folks in the city growing out of the Gospel message. In Paul's cover letter, first designated for the Ephesians in the late 50s, Paul compliments the Ephesians for their love for the brothers (Eph. 1:15-16). He encourages them toward greater brotherly love (Eph. 4:2-3). A long list of interaction traits are admonished to the Ephesians in Eph. 4:25-5:2. By the mid 60s with the writing of First and Second Timothy to the missionary Timothy who is now helping the church at Ephesus, one senses strains on interpersonal relationships inside the church beginning to emerge (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:3-11). False teachers were making inroads into some aspects of the life of the Christian community at Ephesus by this point.

Thus by the end of the first century the risen Christ demands by formal edict that the church return to its first commitment of loving both God and others as foundational to its Christian commitment.

**καὶ μετανόησον.** In order to get back to that first love, the church had to repent.<sup>53</sup> That is, a major break

<sup>53</sup>Some churches are commended for their conduct in the face of crisis, their 'works' (Ephesus, 2:2; Thyatira, 2:19; Philadelphia, 3:8), while others are reproved (Sardis, 3:1-2; Laodicea, 3:15). All except Smyrna and Philadelphia are called to repentance. Repentance is not a once-and-for-all act that brings one into the Christian community but is the constant challenge to the community. It is not a matter of feeling sorry in a religious mood about past misdeeds



with present patterns and a return to beginning patterns was required. The verb μετανοέω literally specifies a change of thinking about an issue, along with the noun μετάνοια. While both terms were relatively rare in ancient Greek literature, both are rather commonly used in the New Testament (V: 34x; N: 22x). The Old Testament emphasis on repentance centered more on “cultic and ritual” forms of repentance than on individual acknowledgment of wrong action. Fasting and other public displays of penitence became the central focus by the end of the Old Testament era.<sup>54</sup> These actions became deeply connected to worship liturgies as spelled out in many of the prophetic books of the OT.<sup>55</sup>

but reorientation to a new model of life based on the gospel, the good news that God has already acted in Jesus for our salvation. The call to repentance is thus not chiding but opportunity. Even the Laodicean Christians can repent and sit with Christ on his throne, rejoicing with all God’s people at the messianic banquet (3:20–21).” [M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 95-96.]

<sup>54</sup>“Along with fasting, which is the most important element and gave its name to the whole practice, other external forms characterise the day of penitence. The people clothed themselves in the garb of mourning, i.e., sackcloth,<sup>19</sup> and sat in ashes or strewed them on their heads.<sup>20</sup> Hos. 7:1421 speaks not only of crying and wailing before Yahweh but also of the people scratching themselves ‘for corn and wine.’ Once in this connection there is a ref. to pouring out water before Yahweh—a rite whose meaning is not clear (1 S. 7:6). Later even greater significance was attached to the external signs of repentance. Thus the author of Jonah says that not only the people but also the cattle of Nineveh fasted and wore mourning (3:7f.). In Est. 4:16 there is a fast of three days and nights. In Jdt. 4:10 ff. men, women, children, cattle, aliens, day labourers and slaves all wear sackcloth, and the altar of the burnt offering is also draped in it.” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 4:981.]

<sup>55</sup>“A chief feature of the fast, however, is calling on Yahweh for help. usually with an appropriate confession of sin.<sup>22</sup> It is likely that there developed quite soon a fixed penitential liturgy in which the congregation could present its petition and receive God’s answer.<sup>23</sup> Prophetic reproductions of such liturgies may be found in Hos. 6:1 ff.; 14:2 ff.; Jer. 3:21–4:2 etc.<sup>24</sup> In view of the close similarity between Neh. 9; Da. 9:4–19; Bar. 1:15–3:8 there can be little doubt that the prayers were fixed, for these passages derive from a common source.<sup>25</sup> In the passages mentioned there is a strong sense of sinning against Yahweh (Da. 9:8–11). though in Neh. 9 the offences are those of the fathers rather than the present generation. In the moving penitential liturgy of Is. 63:7–64:12 this sense of guilt takes the bold form: ‘Yahweh. why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?’ (Is. 63:17), Cf. Ezr. 9:6 ff.; Neh. 1:5 ff., which also express a strong conviction of sin. Other prayers, which perhaps go back to special fasts on specific occasions,<sup>26</sup> in many cases do not contain the motif expressed in confession of sin. Especially in psalms probably dating from the Maccabean period, e.g., Ps. 44, there emerges a strong religious sense which calls on God for help in the boldest expressions. These national laments, as they have been called, were probably used at special fasts. If so, they show how often, esp. later, the motif of

But the phoniness in the practicing of the ritual patterns is soundly condemned by the prophets who demand genuine acknowledgment of sin reflected in outward, visible change of actions. Not the rituals but the hypocrisy of the people was the target of their denunciations.<sup>56</sup>

Out of the Jewish linking of confession of sin with outward expressions of authentic changed thinking and revised commitments to God came the early Christian understanding of repentance both individually and collectively.

Thus the demand of the Son of Man on the church at Ephesus to repent is largely defined by the demand to remember their first love and to return to it as a collective commitment of the entire church. That is, a genuine change in current thinking and commitments must take place. They must come back to both the understanding and the practicing of ἀγάπη as love both of God and of others as an inseparable connection to each other. In other terms, they must return to the roots of the Chris-

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genuine penitence deriving from a sense of guilt had retreated into the background in favour of a protestation of innocence. One gains this impression from the prayer in 2 Ch. 20:3 ff., which was supposedly uttered at a fast summoned because of enemy threats, and which certainly shows acquaintance with the liturgical style customary on such occasions. Here, too, one misses the profound penitence expressed in confession of sin.” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 4:981-82.]

<sup>56</sup>“Prophetic criticism did not ask for a repudiation of all external forms in favour of the inner attitude. All prophetic criticism is agreed that the penitence of the people lacks the one thing that matters, namely, that in penitence one is before the God of unconditional requirement, that one has to take Him with full seriousness, that it is not enough to be sorry for past sins and to pray for their remission or for the aversion of calamity, that what counts is a turning from the sinful nature as such. If the external form is severed from what it is designed to express, if it becomes autonomous, it sinks to the level of magic and acquires a significance which the prophets could never accord it. The fact that specific emergencies are the occasion of penitence can easily give rise to the view that the main goal is dealing with the emergency rather than establishing a new relation to Yahweh. Thus David fasts and weeps so long in the hope that, who knows, Yahweh might have mercy and keep the child alive, but once the child is dead he stops, because he can no longer bring it back to life.<sup>38</sup> This shows that penitence was obviously thought of in this way in many circles. Finally the general or public character of penitence can easily mean that the individual, though he participates, is not fully and personally involved. ‘The very custom carries with it the danger that in distress the lips make confession ... but there is no forsaking of the old ungodly nature.’<sup>39</sup> In the last resort, then, the prophets frequently perceive in this kind of penitence a veiling of the seriousness of the relationship between God and man, and so they are forced to protest against it.” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 4:983.]

tian faith commitment at conversion.<sup>57</sup> One should note the Aorist imperative verb form μετανόησον which emphatically demands a decisive action of repentance.

**καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον.** The triad of demands is completed with the parallel demand to begin practicing<sup>58</sup> the kinds of commitments to others as an expression of their love of God which typified their early experiences as believers.<sup>59</sup>

The significance of the threefold set of demands in their sequencing is important. The first, μνημόνευε, calls for continual recalling of the first love principle; the second, μετανόησον, demands a return to this first love principle; and the third, ποιήσον, requires concrete actions reflecting a genuine return to the first love principle.

The zinger comes with the following words that express a warning in very blunt terms: εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανόησης, **But if not, I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place, if you do not repent.**

By 'remove' the Son of Man warns the church that He will 'shake it out of business.'<sup>60</sup> The warning is not projecting eschatological judgment but an immediate judgment to be executed on the temporal church very quickly if it does not heed the warning.<sup>61</sup> Both εἰ μή, if

<sup>57</sup>It is out of this background Jewish heritage that the distinctively Christian understanding of both μετανοέω and μετάνοια leads many Bible translators to use the words 'convert/conversion' rather than 'repent/repentance' when the context specifies an initial commitment to the Gospel.

<sup>58</sup>The function of the Aorist imperative verb here is to Ingressive Aorist, which emphasizes the beginning of a pattern of actions.

<sup>59</sup>Note how Paul expressed similar emphases in **Phil. 2:14-16.**

14 Do all things without murmuring and arguing, 15 so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. 16 It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

14 Πάντα ποιεῖτε χωρὶς γογγυσμῶν καὶ διαλογισμῶν, 15 ἵνα γένησθε ἄμεμπτοι καὶ ἀκέραιοι, τέκνα θεοῦ ἄμωμα μέσον γενεᾶς σκολιάς καὶ διεστραμμένης, ἐν οἷς φαίνεσθε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ, 16 λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες, εἰς καύχημα ἔμοι εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, ὅτι οὐκ εἰς κενὸν ἔδραμον οὐδὲ εἰς κενὸν ἐκοπίασα.

<sup>60</sup>The basic meaning of κινέω is to shake something violently so that it is moved from where it stood, usually into destruction. This core idea of κινέω is made even clearer in its other use in Revelation 6:14, **The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.** καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπεχωρίσθη ὡς βιβλίον ἐλισσόμενον καὶ πᾶν ὄρος καὶ νῆσος ἐκ τῶν τόπων αὐτῶν ἐκινήθησαν.

<sup>61</sup>Verbs meaning 'come' (ἔρχεσθαι and ἦκειν) are used five times in Rev 2-3 (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11). Three times they are used in the negative sense of Christ's coming to judge a community (2:5, 16; 3:3) and twice in the very different and positive sense of the Parousia of Christ (2:25; 3:11). This is nothing less than a threat to obliterate the Ephesian congregation as an empirical Christian community. 1 Kgs 11:36 uses the term 'lamp' (נר) as a metaphor

not, and ἐὰν μὴ μετανόησης, **if you do not repent,** put strong emphasis on the demand in the previous admonition, μετανόησον, **repent.** This admonition, situated in the middle of the triad of demands, encompasses all three demands.

But the *dispositio* set of demands on the Ephesian church ends on a positive note in verse six: ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ καὶ γὰρ μισῶ, **Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.** Note that the 'hating' targets the deeds of these people, rather than the people themselves. The central issue is Who are the Nicolaitans?

In 2:14-15, the text there links the Nicolaitans at Pergamum with 'the teaching of Balaam' which stressed two points: eating food offered to idols and practicing fornication.<sup>62</sup> One assumes a similar emphasis by the same group in Ephesus. On the basis of similar teachings, this group had links to the 'Jezebel' at Thyatira who teaches believers **"to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols"** (2:20-23). Thus three of the Christian communities were being plagued by this teaching: Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira.<sup>63</sup> Thus

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for the tribe of Benjamin, which will always belong to Judah: 'Yet to his son [Rehoboam] I will give one tribe [Benjamin], that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem.' The phrase 'before me' suggests that this is a cultic image drawn from the placement of menorahs (n.b. that there are ten mentioned in 1 Kgs 7:49) before the paroket, 'curtain,' that concealed the Debir or Holy of Holies. This may be the source of the imagery that John employs here. The presence of the connective particle δέ in this verse is one of seven occurrences in Revelation, three of which occur in Rev 2-3 (2:5, 16, 24); this is a subtle indication (along with the more concentrated presence of ἀλλά) that the words of the exalted Christ are presented in a slightly elevated style, at least as far as our author is concerned (see Comment on v 4)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 147.]

<sup>62</sup>**Rev. 2:14-15.** 14 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκειν τῷ Βαλακ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι. 15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως.

14 **But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. 15 So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.**

<sup>63</sup>The Nicolaitans are mentioned explicitly only in 2:6 (in the proclamation to Ephesus) and 2:15 (in the proclamation to Pergamon). In 2:6, it is simply said that the Ephesian Christians hate the works (i.e., the behavior) of the Nicolaitans. In 2:14-15, the "teaching of Balaam" is apparently identical with the 'teaching of the Nicolaitans' and consists of eating meat previously sacrificed to pagan deities and the practice of fornication (Bousset [1906] 213; Caird, 38-39; Räisänen, ANRW II, 26/2:1606). It is likely that 'Jezebel' and her followers, who are devotees of 'the deep things of Satan' (2:20-24), constitute a group of Nicolaitans in Thyatira, since they also are said to practice fornication and eat meat previ-

at Thyatira, a woman is the ringleader of this group. At Pergamum the group is compared to the Old Testament figure of Balaam who tried to lead the Israelites astray at these same two points. At both Pergamum and Ephesus they are labeled the Nicolaitans. At Ephesus the church had strongly resisted the influence of this group and their teachers, but they had had more success at Pergamum and Thyatira in impacting the churches.

A strong tradition among the church fathers seeks to link this group, especially at Ephesus and Pergamum, to one of the seven appointed in Jerusalem to serve widows in the Jerusalem church who was named Nicolaus.<sup>64</sup> But the dominance of obviously leg-

ously sacrificed to pagan deities. The view that ‘those who say that they are Jews’ (2:9; 3:9) should be linked with the Nicolaitans (as is done by Koester, Introduction 2:253) appears extremely doubtful (Janzon, SEÅ 21 [1956] 83–84). In connection with the charge of eating meat devoted to idols, it is not clear whether participation in cultic meals in pagan temples is involved or it is simply a matter of buying meat in temple meat markets. There is disagreement among scholars on whether the charge of sexual immorality should be taken literally. It is likely that the charge of sexual immorality refers to various forms of idolatry, such as eating meat previously sacrificed to pagan gods (Lohmeyer, 29; Kraft, 69–71; Caird, 44; L. L. Thompson, Revelation, 122, 227 n. 23; Räisaänen, ANRW II, 26/2:1616–17). Earlier, scholars argued that the Nicolaitans were Paulinists since they, like Paul, ignored the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 (Hilgenfeld, *Ketzergeschichte*, 220–26; Simon, RHR 193 [1978] 74–75). The Nicolaitans are considered by many modern scholars to have been Gnostics (Harnack, JR 3 [1923] 413–22). However, it is striking that in surviving Gnostic sources, the name ‘Nicolaitans’ does not occur, nor does sexual libertarianism play a significant role. Further, in the Nag Hammadi texts, which represent a spectrum of ancient Gnostic sects and trends, the issue of eating meat sacrificed to pagan deities is not mentioned (Heiligen thai, ZNW 82 [1991] 135–36).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 148–49.]

<sup>64</sup>**Acts 6:1–6.** 6 Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. 2 And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, 4 while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” 5 What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and **Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.** 6 They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

6 Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις πληθυνόντων τῶν μαθητῶν ἐγένετο γογγυσμὸς τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους, ὅτι παρεθεωροῦντο ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ αἱ χῆραι αὐτῶν. 2 προσκαλεσάμενοι δὲ οἱ δώδεκα τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν εἶπαν· οὐκ ἄρεστόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς καταλείψαντας τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διακονεῖν τραπέζαις. 3 ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ

endary materials in this tradition makes such a connection highly unlikely.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, a further link to early forms of Gnosticism that blossomed in the second century is made by some of the church fathers. But again such connections are very doubtful.<sup>66</sup> In fact, all we know about this group is what Revelation two details for us: they were a group seeking influence inside the Christian communities in three of the seven cities; they were known for a ‘libertine’ kind of teaching that disregarded religious scruples over ‘meat offered to idols’ and sexual morality. At Thyatira, a woman, like Jezebel of the Old Testament, was their ring leader who claimed to be a prophetess, προφήτιν.<sup>67</sup> The label may possibly be connected to an individual named Nicolaus, but not

ὁμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἑπτὰ, πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας, οὓς καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης, 4 ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν. 5 καὶ ἤρρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους καὶ ἐξελέξαντο Στέφανον, ἄνδρα πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ Φίλιππον καὶ Πρόχορον καὶ Νικάνορα καὶ Τίμωνα καὶ Παρμενᾶν καὶ **Νικόλαον προσήλυτον Αντιοχέα**, 6 οὓς ἔστησαν ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀποστόλων, καὶ προσευξάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας.

<sup>65</sup>“The Nicolaitans are also discussed by a number of church fathers (see Hilgenfeld, *Ketzergeschichte*, 408–11), though most (if not all) of these references seem to be based on Rev 2:6, 14–15 coupled with the name ‘Nicolaus,’ one of the seven deacons according to Acts 6:5, and a heavy admixture of legend and imagination. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 1.26.3) and Hippolytus, who is dependent on him (*Ref.* 7.36.3; ed. Marcovich, Hippolytus), trace the Nicolaitans back to Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the seven mentioned in Acts 6:1–6; both authors clearly allude to Rev 2:6; 2:1 4–15.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 149.]

<sup>66</sup>“In *Adv. Haer.* 3.11.1, Irenaeus claims that the Gospel of John was written as a response to the errors taught by Cerinthus and the Nicolaitans. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 2.20; 3.4) attributed the heretical movement of the Nicolaitans to the misunderstanding of the followers of Nicolaus of Antioch. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 3.25.526.3 = Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.29.2–4) defends Nicolaus against charges of immorality and sexual indulgence and instead considers him motivated by chastity. Other patristic testimonia regarding the Nicolaitans are found in Tertullian *Praescr.* 33; *Adv. Marc.* 1.29.2; Epiphanius *Pan* 25.1.1–7.3 (entitled “Against Nicolaitans” and containing novelistic elements about Nicolaus’ relationship with his wife); Ps.-Tertullian *Adv. Haer.* 1.6; Theodoret *Haer.* 3.1; Philastrius 33.1; Augustine *Haer.* 5. Brox (VC 19 [1965] 23–30) argues that like other Gnostic sects the Nicolaitans were concerned to demonstrate their apostolic origin and called themselves Nicolaitans after the deacon mentioned in Acts 6:5. Outside of Revelation, the earliest mention of the Nicolaitans is found in Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 1.26.3, and it is not clear there whether he considers the Nicolaitans to be a second-century Gnostic sect or he has simply compiled a catalog of heretical sects and knows of the Nicolaitans from Rev 2:6, 15.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 149.]

<sup>67</sup>One should note that the problem the Son of Man had with this woman at Thyatira was not that she claimed to be a prophetess, but the false teaching that she advocated.



the one in Acts six.

The emphasis of the risen Christ to the Ephesian church is a commendation of their strong resistance to this teaching and influence. The deeds of the Nicolaitans, τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν, grow out of a twisted version of the Gospel that ignored 'first love' commitments to love others in uplifting and spiritually healthy ways. Instead, in order to 'be more inclusive' the standards of morality and religious convictions were substantially lowered to embrace others without genuine conversion to Christ. The posture of the Ephesian believers was μισεῖς, *you hate*, which was identical to that of the risen Christ, κἀγὼ μισῶ, *I also hate*. This common stance brings Christ's strong commendation of the Ephesians.

### C. *Admonition and Promise*, v. 7

7 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.

7 *Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.*

The ending sections of the proclamation to the Ephesians contains two formula statements repeated in virtually the same way in all seven messages: the admonition to hear and the victory promise. The literary function of these two elements is to bring to climax and to application the materials in the *narratio / dispositio* sections. These elements, particularly the first, were common to the prophetic oracles found in both the Old Testament and the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic writings.

**Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.**

This admonition to hear is repeated identically in each of the seven messages, and in a slightly different form at 13:9.<sup>68</sup> The admonition is made up of three distinct elements: 1) *the participle phrase*, Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, *the one possessing an ear*,<sup>69</sup> serving as the subject of the

<sup>68</sup>Rev. 13:9. *Let anyone who has an ear listen:*

Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω.

<sup>69</sup>Curiously in some of the instances of this hearing formula outside of Rev. 2-3, both in the New Testament (cf. Mt. 11:15; 13:9; 13:43 et als) and in the Jewish literature the plural form for ear, ὄτα, will be used rather than the singular, οὖς, on several occasions. The clearest intent of this alternative is defined in the later Gnostic Christian writings where disciples are expected to hear the canonical sayings of Jesus in one ear and at the same time in the other ear they are to hear the gnostic interpretation of the sayings. But elsewhere the meaning between the singular ear, οὖς, and the plural ears, ὄτα, does not seem to differ much at all.

According to M. Marcovich (*Studies in Graeco-Roman Religions and Gnosticism* [Leiden: Brill, 1988] 57–58), disciples of the gnostic Jesus are expected to hear canonical sayings in one ear and their gnostic interpretations in the other.

main clause verb; 2) *the main clause verb* ἀκουσάτω, *let him hear*, in the Aorist imperative thus intensifying the urgency of the admonition; and 3) *the direct object relative clause* τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, *what the Spirit is saying to the churches*, functioning to define the content of what is to be heard. 'If one has an ear' assumes that people have the capacity to listen, and thus should be hearing to these words. The direct object relative clause comes back to define the content of the *narratio* and the *dispositio* statements, vv. 2-6, as the words being spoken by the Holy Spirit to all the churches.

Interestingly, the statements in vv. 2-6 are introduced as the words of the Son of Man, Τάδε λέγει... in v. 1b, but now are defined as the words of the Holy Spirit in v. 7. At the outset these are words directed only to the church at Ephesus (v. 1), but at the end they are words for all seven churches. This double function both as to source and designation of the message highlights the literary role of the proclamation as an imperial edict rather than as a normal letter addressed to one particular individual or group. The main target group for the message is the church at Ephesus, but this message also contains vitally relevant words applicable to all seven churches. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to make the appropriate applications in each of the seven churches.

With its location at the conclusion of the proclamation, the expression functions as a 'proclamation formula,' and sometimes is labeled as a Weckruf or Weckformel or hearing formula. Such expressions in the larger literary materials could function either esoterically or parenthetically. The first signals the presence of a deeper, hidden meaning in what was said, while the latter simply admonishes the listener to pay close attention and to obey what was said. The latter function here in Revelation is clearly the role for this proclamation formula in these seven letters.<sup>70</sup> Admonitions

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 151.

<sup>70</sup>This formula occurs at the conclusion of each of the seven proclamations (2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) and occurs in a variant form in Rev 13:9. Placed at the conclusion of the seven letters, this expression functions as a proclamation formula, i.e., as an injunction to the audience to pay attention to the message that has (or will be) delivered. This proclamation formula (in German often labeled the Weckruf or Weckformel), or hearing formula (Enroth, *NTS* 36 [1990] 598), can function in at least two ways (Enroth, *NTS* 36 [1990] 598–99): (1) esoteric function, i.e., as an indication that what has (or will) be said has a deeper, hidden meaning (Dibelius, *TSK* 83 [1910] 471; Hahn, "Sendschreiben," 390); (2) parenthetic function, i.e., the hearer or reader is enjoined to hear and obey what has (or will) be proclaimed (H. Räisänen, *Die Parabeltheorie im Markusevangelium* [Helsinki: Finnische Exegetische Gesellschaft, 1973] 85–86). The use of an imperative verb is characteristic. When the proclamation formula concludes an oracle, it functions

to listen with the imperative verb form, especially in the Aorist tense, are particularly common in the prophetic oracles at the beginning of the speech. When they come at the end of the speech or message as here in Revelation, they take on the function of a *prophetic signature* that appeals to the listener to receive the message as a divine revelation from God.<sup>71</sup>

as a prophetic signature and appeals to the hearers to hear and understand divine revelation; cf. 4Q267 = 4QDamascus Documentb frag. 2, lines 5–6 (tr. García Martínez, Dead Sea Scrolls, 49): ‘open their ears and hear profound things and understand [everything that happens when it comes upon them].’ In early Christian literature, other examples of the prophetic signature are found only in 1 Cor 14:37–38 and *Odes Sol.* 3:10–11 (Aune, NTS 28 [1982] 438–39). The phrase ‘open your ears’ functions as an introductory proclamation formula in *Odes Sol.* 9:1. Proclamation formulas often introduce OT prophetic oracles, such as ‘Hear the word of Yahweh’ (1 Kgs 22:19; 1 Chr 18:18; Amos 7:16; Jer 29:20; 42:15), often with the name of the recipient in the vocative (Jer 2:4; 7:2; 19:3; 22:11; Ezek 6:3; 13:2; 21:3). The proclamation formula, probably derived from usage in public assemblies and in courts of law (see Mic 6:2; Jer 2:4), was used to introduce instruction in the law (Prov 4:1; Job 13:6; 33:1, 31; 34:2, 16; Isa 49:1; 51:4) and instruction in wisdom (Deut 32:1; Prov 7:24; Ps 49:1; Isa 28:23).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 150.]

<sup>71</sup>One interesting side issue in Revelation is whether the sayings of Jesus found in the document have their origin in the historical Jesus as mostly reflected in the synoptic gospels, or do they originate from the risen Christ appearing to John in apocalyptic vision.

The most detailed study of the subject is that of L. A. Vos. While all the possible sayings of Jesus in Revelation must be classified as allusions rather than quotations, Vos contends that some uses of the sayings of Jesus in Revelation are more direct than others. He argues that the more direct allusions are located primarily in the first three chapters. He finds eight sayings of Jesus reflected in direct allusions, some used more than once: 1:3a (Luke 11:28); 1:7 (Matt 24:30); 2:7, etc. (7x; Matt 11:15; 13:9; etc.); 3:2–3; 16:15 (Matt 24:42–43 = Luke 12:39–40); 3:5c (Matt 10:32 = Luke 12:8); 3:20 (Mark 13:29; Matt 24:33; cf. Luke 12:35ff.); 3:21 (Luke 22:28–30; Matt 19:28); 13:10b (Matt 26:52b). Vos does not think that John was familiar with a written Gospel or Gospels. Regarding early Christian prophetic activity and the Jesus traditions, Vos does not believe that utterances of the risen Jesus through prophets were assimilated to the sayings tradition. Quite the reverse. John adapted “the current sayings of Jesus as a mediatory means for the expression of his prophecy” (Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 224).

Vos occupies a mediating position in comparison with R. H. Charles and H. B. Swete. Charles, who thinks that John was familiar with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, has perhaps the longest list of possible allusions (twenty-six; see 1:lxvii–lxxxvi). A more conservative list is proposed by H. B. Swete (clvi–clvii), who lists just four certain allusions: 3:3 (Matt 24:43) 3:5 (Matt 10:32); 13:10 (Matt 26:52); 21:6 and 22:17 (John 4:10; 7:37), in addition to the phrase “the one who has an ear, let him hear,” found eight times.

The sayings of the exalted Jesus in Revelation that have the strongest claim for being derived from the tradition of the sayings of Jesus are four in number, found in eleven texts: (1) Rev 1:3; cf. 22:7 (Luke 11:28), (2) the “He who has an ear let him hear” saying, found

Thus the evaluation and admonitions given to the Ephesian congregation in vv. 2–6 should be considered divine revelation to be carefully understood and obeyed since they come directly from God.

**Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.**

As incentive to pay close attention, the proclamation formula is followed by this victory promise. This promise builds off the initial beatitude in 1:3,

Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are *those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.*

The content of this anticipated blessing is now spelled out in more detail in the victory formula at 2:7b.<sup>72</sup>

A victory formula is attached to each of the seven messages, but in slightly varying formulations, with each of them rooted in the structure of the introductory beatitude in 1:3.

**Substantival participle in apposition to indirect object:** Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ..., *To the one overcoming, to him I will give ...: 2:7b (Ephesus) and 2:17b (Pergamum)*

**Substantival participle as verb subject:** Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ, *the one overcoming will never be harmed...: 2:11 (Smyrna). Also Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται, the one overcoming with thusly be clothed...: 3:5 (Sardis).*

**Substantival participle in apposition to indirect**

eight times (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9), (3) Rev 3:3; 16:15 (Matt 24:43–44), (4) Rev 3:5 (Matt 10:32 = Luke 12:28; Mark 8:28 = Luke 9:26). A comparison of these texts with the Synoptic texts they resemble does not indicate that John was personally familiar with written texts of any of the canonical Gospels. Yet that possibility cannot be absolutely excluded, particularly in view of the loose and fluid way in which early Christian authors quoted and alluded to both OT and NT texts during the late first and early second centuries A.D. Drawing together the discussions of each of these texts (see Comment under each text), it appears that John’s intentional allusions to the tradition of the sayings of Jesus presuppose that such traditions had a firm place in the liturgy of the early Christian communities in Anatolia. The authority of these texts was so well established that John was able to use allusions to them to authenticate the written presentation of his own revelatory encounter with the exalted Jesus. However, it is not necessary to suppose that these allusions were primarily the result of a fully conscious literary artifice. Rather, they appear to have been drawn from the distinctive modes of speech that entered into Christian discourse from both the Gospel texts themselves and the oral traditions within which such texts were transmitted.

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 264–65.]

<sup>72</sup>In the more common beatitude form as reflected in Matthew 5:2–8, the ὅτι clause at the end of the beatitude defines the content of the blessing. Instead of giving the content in the initial expression in 1:3, the content of the blessing is defined message by message in the victory formula at the end of each of the seven messages.

*object*: ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ, *The one overcoming and the one keeping my deeds from the beginning, to him I will give...*, (2:26, Thyatira). Also Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ, the one overcoming, to him I will give... (3:21, Laodicea).

*Substantival participle in apposition to verb object*: Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτόν, *the one overcoming, him I will make...* (3:12, Philadelphia).

The participle form of the verb νικάω in the present tense singular participle form is used either in the nominative case spelling Ὁ νικῶν or the dative case spelling Τῷ νικῶντι in all seven instances. The variation in grammatical structure is largely due to the customized expression of the content of the promised blessing (cf. 1:3), which is distinctive to each church. The varying blessings have some connection to the dominate thematic emphasis in the *narratio* and *dispositio* sections of each message. The details of each will be explored in each study.

The basic idea of the verb νικάω is of prevailing in a military battle or sports contest.<sup>73</sup> This is behind the usage in each of these seven messages, along with 15:2 and 21:7 as well. A derivative idea of overcoming someone, i.e., in a wrestling sports contest, lies behind the usage of this verb in Rev. 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 17:14. The difference between these two groups is that the first set use νικάω as an intransitive verb (= without a direct object), while the second set use it as a transitive verb (=with a direct object).

Thus the figurative meaning of this verb, derived from the literal meaning, stresses persevering in faith commitment as an essential part of the Christian life. This idea plays off the required condition of blessing in the beatitude in 1:3, which is defined as οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, *those hearing the words of this prophecy and keeping the things written in it*. To overcome is to hear and obey. Faith surrender to Christ means commitment to persevere in obedience to Christ. If persevering doesn't happen, then faith surrender didn't happen at the outset, just as John had made clear in his first letter a few years earlier (1 John 2:3-6):

3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

3 Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν,

<sup>73</sup>Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. S.V., νικάω.

ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν. 4 ὁ λέγων ὅτι ἐγνώκα αὐτόν καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, ψεύστης ἐστίν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν· 5 ὃς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν. 6 ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν. (cf. also 2:18-20)

The content of the promised Μακάριος, *blessing* (1:3), is spelled out to the Ephesians as φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστίν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ, *to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God*. Eating fruit from the tree of life is a traditional Jewish apocalyptic portrayal of the afterlife with God.<sup>74</sup> The roots of

<sup>74</sup>“This is a traditional Jewish eschatological conception reflected in the later 3 Enoch 23:18 (tr. P. Alexander, in Charlesworth, OTP 1:308), which refers to the ‘the righteous and godly who shall inherit the garden of Eden and the tree of life in the time to come.’ This must be understood as a restoration of God’s original intention for humankind that was frustrated by sin, for Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden to prevent them from eating of the tree of life (Gen 3:24). A number of other Jewish texts use the eating of the fruit of the tree of life as a metaphor for salvation (1 Enoch 25:5; 3 Enoch 23:18; T. Levi 18:11; Apoc. Mos. 28:4; Apoc. Elij. 5:6), and this metaphor continues to be used by Christian authors (T. Jacob 7:24). The tree of life is frequently associated with paradise, its traditional location. The tree of life is first mentioned in the OT in Gen 2:9; 3:23–24 (where the phrase is articular and refers to a well-known concept, and where the Yahwist writer uses it to frame the story of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; see Westermann, Genesis 1:211–14). A more mythological poetic description of the primal garden of God is found in Ezek 31:2–9, in which v 8 specifically refers to trees in the Garden of God. The tree of life is not simply a symbol for eternal life alone but also represents the cosmic center of reality where eternal life is present and available, and where God dwells. The cosmic tree or tree of life represents the sacrality of the world in terms of its creation, fertility, and continuation and, therefore, is a tree of immortality. In ancient Egypt the ‘tree of life’ provided the gods and the dead with wisdom and eternal youth. In Babylonian mythology, two trees are found at the entrance to heaven, the tree of life and the tree of truth. In M. Eliade’s sevenfold classification of tree symbolism (*Patterns in Comparative Religion* [Cleveland; New York: World, 1963] 266–67, 283–90), two major categories are (1) the tree as a symbol of life and (2) the tree as the center of the world. There is evidence that the *menorah*, or seven-branched lampstand, represented the tree of life (Goodenough, *HUCA* 23 [1950–51] 451–52). In Paral. Jer. 9:1, for example, ‘Jeremiah’ refers in prayer to the ‘fragrant aroma of living trees, true light which enlightens me [τὸ θμιάμα τῶν δένδρων τῶν ζώντων, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν τὸ φωτίζον με].’ For this reason the motif of ‘light’ or ‘flame’ is often associated with the tree of life (1QH 6:17–18; Odes Sol. 11:19). The tree or plant of life was a theme familiar in ancient Near Eastern mythology (see Gilgamesh Epic 9.266–95;). Gen 3:22–24 indicates that eating the fruit of the tree of life gives eternal life, yet in ancient Near Eastern folklore, the tree, like immortality itself, was ultimately inaccessible (according to Gen 3:24, cherubim and the flaming sword guarded the tree).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 152.]



the idea reach back to the creation narratives in Gen. 2:9; 3:23-24. Eating the fruit of this tree equals enjoying eternal life with God (cf. 1 Enoch 25:5; 3 Enoch 23:18; T. Levi 18:11; Apoc. Mos. 28:4; Apoc. Elij. 5:6). And because this tree is located ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ, *in the paradise of God*, this eternal life is experienced in Heaven. In addition to here, this concept surfaces three more times, at Rev. 22:2, 14, 19. In 22:2, this tree produces twelve different fruits, one for each month. Additionally, its leaves are good for healing.<sup>75</sup> Thus the blessing of eternal life with God in Heaven is granted to the one who overcomes, i.e., perseveres in faithful commitment to Christ.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

What implications does this message to the Ephesians have for believers in today's world? Actually, quite a few emerge from this royal edict by the Son of Man.

**First**, if we want to stand acceptable to God in final judgment, we had better pay serious attention to what He has to say. The One speaking these words is no ordinary ruler or political power figure. Rather He holds the destinies of the seven churches in His right hand and walks among them thus being fully aware of what they are doing. Both His compliments and His warnings come with the full authority of God Almighty behind them. Therefore, these words are terribly significant.

**Second**, when He pays us a compliment we can know that we have truly been complimented at the highest level possible. From His positive words to the Ephesian Christian community we understand just how terribly important faithfulness in commitment to Him is. He saw in these believers a level of steadfastness and endurance of religious hostility that was highly commendable. From this we should learn just how important such standards are before our God. His praise and affirmation come to those who prove the genuineness of their commitment by how they live day by day. The personal challenge to every modern church is whether Christ would say the same thing to them that He said to the Ephesians.

**Third**, the warning issued to the Ephesian church should raise red flags all over the place in modern

<sup>75</sup>Rev. 22:1-2. 1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

1 Καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρυστάλλον, ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁρνίου. 2 ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ζύλον ζωῆς ποιοῦν καρποὺς δώδεκα, κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδίδόν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὰ φύλλα τοῦ ζύλου εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν.

church life. A church can express deep commitment to Christ, but, if that commitment severs the foundational principle of the Christian Gospel that loving God and loving others are inseparably linked, it puts its very existence into jeopardy. The loss of the Ephesian 'first love' was so serious that Christ threatened to close down the church if it didn't repent and return back to this balanced Christian commitment.

For a church to be spiritually healthy and in the will of God, its profession of love must embrace both self-sacrificing surrender to God and service to others. Take away either of these aspects and the claim to love disappears into phony nothingness. Orthodoxy without orthopraxy is not orthodoxy! And Christ would rather not have any witness than to have one with only a cold orthodoxy.

**Fourth**, certain wayward beliefs and subsequent practices must be thoroughly repudiated by the church. The Nicolaitan mentality of 'inclusiveness' at any compromising cost will become a spiritual cancer that destroys a church. Inevitably this mentality diminishes the importance of correct belief of the basics and subsequently turns into immoral behavior in the name of Christianity. This stance of repudiation was the position of the Ephesian congregation which Christ affirmed as His position as well. It should be the same for every modern church in our world.

**Fifth**, the admonition to hear and the promise of victory are powerful words to modern churches. Grasping not only the correct meaning of this message of Christ but also its application to our contemporary situations is a work of the Holy Spirit. When we come to this text with openness to truly hear Christ speak, the Holy Spirit takes those words and burns them into our awareness with correct understanding of both their meaning and application to today. Thus, it becomes critically important for every church to turn to the Spirit of Christ for help in grasping what the Lord is trying to say through this message to the Ephesians.

In the victory promise stands the central truth of the message. The church that remains genuinely faithful to Christ will be the congregation truly blessed by Him. And the heart of that blessing will be the privilege of its members to freely eat of the tree of life in God's eternal paradise.

Wow! What a message! If you have genuinely heard Christ speak here, you must feel challenged to the limit. Being true to Christ is not easy, nor is it a 'bed of roses.' It demands our full commitment and determination to remain faithful to God in service. And a lasting commitment lived out over a life time. Not a hyped up momentary religious 'experience.' Only in demonstrated faithfulness is there access to the tree of life in Heaven.