

Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ. 10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν ὄεκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζῆς.

11 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἔκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

gel* der Gemeinde in Smyrna:

So spricht Er, der der Erste und der Letzte ist, der tot war und wieder lebt: 9 Ich weiß, dass ihr unterdrückt werdet und dass ihr arm seid. Aber in Wirklichkeit seid ihr reich! Ich kenne auch die üblen Nachreden, die von Leuten über euch verbreitet werden, die sich als Angehörige des Gottesvolkes ausgeben. Aber das sind sie nicht, sondern sie gehören zur Synagoge des Satans. 10 Habt keine Angst wegen der Dinge, die ihr noch erleiden müsst. Der Teufel wird einige von euch ins Gefängnis werfen, um euch auf die Probe zu stellen. Zehn Tage lang werden sie euch verfolgen. Haltet in Treue durch, auch wenn es euch das Leben kostet. Dann werde ich euch als Siegespreis ewiges Leben schenken.

11 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist* den Gemeinden sagt! Allen, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen, wird der zweite und endgültige Tod nichts anhaben.«

know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

8 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna.

This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who died and is alive: 9 "I know about your suffering and your poverty -- but you are rich! I know the slander of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they really aren't because theirs is a synagogue of Satan. 10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The Devil will throw some of you into prison and put you to the test. You will be persecuted for 'ten days.' Remain faithful even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be hurt by the second death.

INTRODUCTION

The seven messages that follow the introduction of chapter one are contained in chapters two and three of Revelation. They are often labeled 'letters' but in truth they bear little resemblance of any of the different forms of ancient letters. Instead, as we will demonstrate in the studies, they reflect most of the qualities of an imperial edict issued by a Roman governor and/or emperor. As such -- just like the Roman edict -- they set forth the basic operating guidelines and assessments of individual churches. The King of kings declares His mandates to the individual churches through these messages. The nature of these messages is both customized to fit the particular historical situation of each of the churches, and at the same time universalized in stating timeless spiritual principles by which Christ expects every church to operate under, no matter where the church is nor when it exists. Given the edict nature of these messages and their coming from the One who stands in the throne room of the universe, what is affirmed in the message needs to be seriously followed by every congregation.

When one examines closely the content of these seven messages, the discovery is made regarding a formula structure the defines how each message is presented. The same structural elements is repeated in each message, and often virtually the same wording is a part of this structural design. These elements are:

a) **Adscriptio with the command to write**, that introduces each message. It is the same wording for each message except for the designation of the city: Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν . . . ἐκκλησίας γράψων, [to the angel of the church in ... write](#).

b) **The Τάδε λέγει, these things says...**, **formula** begins the second section in every message. This is followed by title listing of Christ that is appropriate to the general theme of the message, and usually is drawn from the depiction of Christ in chapter one. This title functions as the subject of the verb λέγει.

c) **The Narratio section** begins the defining of the demonstrative pronoun Τάδε. Here the content varies according to the historical situation of each church.

But the common structure of giving an evaluation of the spiritual condition of each church prevails in each message. It is this critique of each church that forms the basis of the evaluative pronouncements that follow in the next segment.

d) The Dispositio segment contains both praise for the good qualities in each church, and stern warnings to change the bad traits existing in each church. And to be expected, variation of content surfaces in these seven segments, although some common themes emerge with some of the messages. Only two of the seven churches contain just praises and no warnings: Smyrna and Philadelphia. The final message to Laocidea only contains warnings with no praise of any good trait.

e) The Command to Listen segment begins the last two elements of each message. Here is a formula statement that 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.* Note the extension of application of each message to all the churches with the use of the plural ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Here we sense the wider significance of each message that is to reach beyond each individual congregation in the Roman province of Asia.

f) The Victory Promise formula is the final segment in each letter. Common introductory terminology is what binds these seven segments together. The pattern is either Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω, *To the one overcoming I will give* (2:7, 17), or else Ὁ νικῶν, *The one overcoming...* (2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The core link for all of these is the present participle from νικάω either in the dative case spelling (νικῶντι) or the nominative case spelling (νικῶν). The content of the promise is typically defined in terms appropriate to the general theme of each message. The spiritual thrust is directed to the believer who remains faithful to Christ in his/her spiritual journey and thus overcomes temptation and persecution, as the extended expression in 2:26 makes clear: ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, *the one overcoming and keeping deeds to me until the end.* The nature of each victory promise is Christ's promise of entering Heaven at death. The overcoming one is promised Heaven upon his or her death!

Additionally, some variation in the sequence of segments e) The Command to Listen and f) The Victory Promise occur. In the first three messages (2:7, 11, 17), segment e) is followed by segment f). But in the last four messages (2:26-29; 3:5-6, 12-13, 21-22), segment f) comes before segment e).

In summary, each message addresses specific issues connected to each of the seven congregations. But although each church had individualized issues taking place inside the church and in their particular

city, several common themes surface across most all of them. For example, persecution from the local Jewish synagogue existed at Smyrna and Philadelphia, but at Pergamum is came from more general sources in the city. Corruption of the Gospel by false insider teachers with a common core of teachings surfaced at Ephesus, Permamum, and Thyatira.

The overarching picture that emerges is one that would be concluded from any careful observation of a collection of churches anywhere in the world today. There are some problems that vitually every congregation is going to have to deal with. Some of them come from outside the church and some from inside the church. But a careful comparison of these churches will also indicate that some problems will be distinct to each congregation. This will come about because of both the distinct personality of each congregation as well as distinct social dynamics for the city or town where each church is located.

Thus as Christ signals to us as readers in each of the Commands to Listen, there is a vitally important message for us in whatever church we are a part of from each of these seven messages. We need to hear that message in the biblical sense of 'hearing' which means to obey what we hear.

These patterns are clearly noticeable when a listing in parallel columns of these seven message is presented. This follows in the next three pages. These are color coded in order to highlight each of these six component elements along with some subdivision elements inside each of these six core segments. Read through these with the Greek text in the left column and the English translation in the parallel right column.

Adscriptio:	<i>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:</i>
Τάδε λέγει:	<i>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.</i>
Narratio:	<i>7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.</i>
Dispositio:	<i>To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.</i>
Listen:	
Victory:	

MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The Message to Ephesus

2.1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

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 ἐπείρασας 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 ποίησον·** εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανόησης. 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.

The Message to Smyrna

8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·

9 **οἶδά σου** τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλοῦσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ. 10 **μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν·** ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

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

Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

The Message to Pergamum

12 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν·

13 **οἶδα** ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστὸς μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. 14 **ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα** ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλάκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι. 15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως. 16 **μετανόησον οὖν·** εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.

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

Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον

The Message to Ephesus

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.

The Message to Smyrna

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

9 **I know your** affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 **Do not fear what you are about to suffer.** Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**

Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

The Message to Pergamum

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword:

13 **I know** where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. 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. 16 **Repent then.** If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**

To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone

ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

The Message to Thyatira

18 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·

19 **οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα** καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων. 20 **ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ** ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφητιν καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἔμοιους δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα. 21 καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. 22 **ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς,** 23 **καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ.** καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἔραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν. 24 ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις, ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν· οὐ βάλλω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος, 25 **πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὗ ἂν ἦξω.**

26 Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν 27 καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκευὴ τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται, 28 ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν.

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

The Message to Sardis

3.1 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον· **Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας·**

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 **γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὐρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου.** 3 **μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον.** ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 **ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.**

5 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.

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

The Message to Philadelphia

7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

The Message to Thyatira

18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira **write:** **These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze:**

19 **I know your works**—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. 20 **But I have this against you:** you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. 22 **Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings;** 23 **and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.** 24 **But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call 'the deep things of Satan,' to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden;** 25 **only hold fast to what you have until I come.**

26 To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end,

I will give authority over the nations;
27 to rule them with an iron rod,
as when clay pots are shattered—
28 even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star.

29 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**

The Message to Sardis

3.1 And to the angel of the church in Sardis **write:** **These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:**

I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 **Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God.** 3 **Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.** 4 **Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.**

5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels.

6 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**

The Message to Philadelphia

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia **write:** **These are the words of the holy one, the true one,**

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει·

8 *οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα*, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλείσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. 9 *ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γινώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.* 10 *ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.* 11 *ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὁ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.*

12 **Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.**

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

=====

The Message to Laodicea

14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας **γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·**

15 *οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα* ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός, ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢς ἢ ζεστός. 16 *οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.* 17 *ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός,* 18 *συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ’ ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγχρίσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς.* 19 *ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον.* 20 *Ἰδοὺ ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐὰν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ.*

21 **Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσει μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.**

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

who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:

8 *I know your works.* Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 *I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.* 10 *Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.* 11 *I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*

12 **If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.**

13 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**

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The Message to Laodicea

14 And to the angel of the church in Laodicea **write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:**

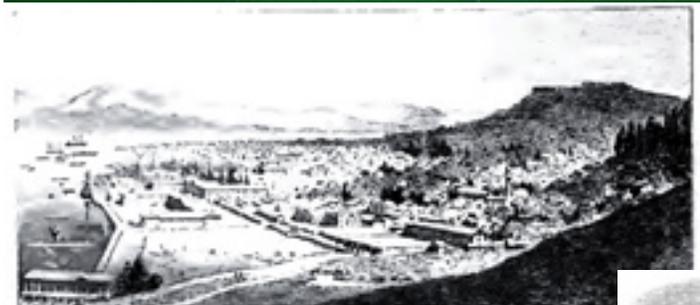
15 *I know your works;* you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.* 17 *For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* 18 *Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.* 19 *I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.* 20 *Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*

21 **To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.**

22 **Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”**



<==Ephesus (1)
(4) Thyatira==>



<==Smyrna (2)
(5) Sardis==>



OVERVIEW
of SARDIS



<==Pergamum (3)



(6) Philadelphia
==>
<==Laodicea (7)



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.¹ 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**

¹When 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.).² 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.³

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.⁴ Only a few manuscripts make this addition and they are late. The actual impact on meaning is very minor.⁵

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.⁶ But as is usually the case,

²With 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.

³One 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.

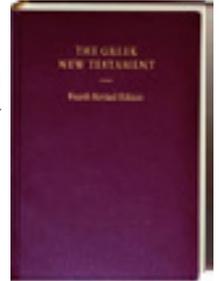
⁴{A} θεοῦ κ A C P 205 209 1854 2329 syr^{ph} arm Andrew // θεοῦ μου 1006 1611 1841 2050 2053 2344 2351 Byz [046] it^{ar}, g^{ig}, t[†] vg syr^h cop^{sa, bo} eth Origen^{lat}; Cyprian (Victorinus-Pettau) Gregory-Elvira Chromatius Varimadum Apringius Primasius Beatus

[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).]

⁵"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.]

⁶**Offenbarung 2,1**

* τῶ 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^{ph}

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

Offenbarung 2,2

* σου κ M vg^{ms} sy^{ph} (σου is repeated after κόπον)

| txt A C P 1854. 2053 pc lat sy^h

* A t (σου is omitted after ὑπομονήν)

* -αξαι 1611 M^A (βαστάσαι is replaced with βάσταξαι)

* ειναι κ² M it vg^{cl} sy^{ph,h**}; 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^A (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^A (πέπτωκας is replaced with ἐκπέπτωκας)

* (2,16; 3,11) ταχυ M (ar) t vg^{ms} sy^h; Aug^{pt} Prim (ταχύ is inserted after σοι)

| txt κ A C P 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329 al gig vg sy^{ph}

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^{cl}; Bea (αὐτῷ is omitted)

* μεσω τ. π. κ² P gig (τῷ παραδείσῳ is replaced with one of these two alternative readings)

| μεσω του π-σου M^A co

* μου 1006. 1611. 1841. 2050. 2053. 2351 M^K latt sy^h co (μου is inserted after θεοῦ)

| txt κ A C 1854. 2329 M^A sy^{ph}

[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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.

⁷“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.]

⁸For 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.⁹ 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*

⁹“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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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

¹⁰“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 legitimize 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.]

¹¹ *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 γυνὴ 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.”¹² 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.¹³ Thus the introductory role of the materials in chapter one becomes foundational to



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 ἀρχων τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς).

Fifth, the Narratio section¹⁴ of each letter begins with οἶδα (2:9, 12) or οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου (2:2, 19, 3:1, 8, 15).¹⁵ 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 the

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

¹²“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 *kōh* -*amar 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.]

¹³“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.]

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

¹⁵“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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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*

¹⁶“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.]

¹⁷“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, εἰδὲν μετανόησῃς, ‘if you do not repent’; 2:16, μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ‘therefore repent; but if not’; 2:22, εἰδὲν μετανόησωσιν, ‘if they do not repent’; and 3:3, καὶ μετανόησον, εἰδὲν οὖν 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.

¹⁸“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.]

¹⁹“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.²⁰ 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.²¹ Has John

²⁰"*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.]

²¹"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 τὰδε 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.'²² Additionally

1998), 124-25.]

²²"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.²³ 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.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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).²⁶

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

²³When 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.

²⁴“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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

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-

²⁵“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.]

²⁶This 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 ^{2.1} **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 ² **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 ³ **you have endurance
and**

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

32 **you have not become weary.**

33 ⁴ **But
I have (something)
against you
because you have left your first love.**

34 ⁵ **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.²⁷

²⁷Highly 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 1:17-20.²⁸ 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.

²⁸"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.²¹ 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ During

²⁹Ἐφεσος, 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 P⁴⁶ 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.]

³⁰“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.³¹ 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.]

³¹“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 perhaps³² almost half a million residents, although this number could have been less than half that amount.³³ 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.³⁴ The

³²“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.]

³³Some 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.

³⁴“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.³⁵

The risen Christ thus commands John to write down His words to be sent to the Christian community at Ephesus.³⁶ 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.]

³⁵“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.]

³⁶From 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 ἐπείρασας 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.³⁷ 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),

³⁷“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.³⁸ Mentioned only in Rev. 2:2 and 14:13,³⁹ the term κόπος clearly signals an important aspect of the Christian life: *living faithfully to Christ is hard, demanding effort.*

The next term τὴν ὑπομονὴν 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 ὑπομονὴν 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.⁴⁰ 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

³⁸“**42.47 κοπιάω^a; κόπος^a, 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. κόποσα: 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.]

³⁹Rev. 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.

⁴⁰“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.*⁴¹ The evil workers are the false apostles mentioned in the next expression: καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους⁴² 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.*⁴³ 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-

⁴¹“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.]

⁴²“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.

⁴³“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.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ The risen Christ strongly

⁴⁴Note 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.

⁴⁵“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.]

⁴⁶In 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.³⁵ (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.⁴⁷ 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 church³⁶ (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 οὖν 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.]

⁴⁷Rhetorically, 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.*⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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-

⁴⁸“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.]

⁴⁹“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.⁵⁰ 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-

⁵⁰“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.⁵¹ 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.*”⁵² 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,*

⁵¹The 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.”²⁴ This explains the loss of love as unfaithfulness to the covenantal task of enduring in preaching the gospel “for a witness.”²⁵ 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.]

⁵²John’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.⁵³ That is, a major break

⁵³“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.⁵⁴ These actions became deeply connected to worship liturgies as spelled out in many of the prophetic books of the OT.⁵⁵

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.]

⁵⁴“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,¹⁹ and sat in ashes or strewed them on their heads.²⁰ 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.]

⁵⁵“A chief feature of the fast, however, is calling on Yahweh for help. usually with an appropriate confession of sin.²² 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.²³ Prophetic reproductions of such liturgies may be found in Hos. 6:1 ff.; 14:2 ff.; Jer. 3:21–4:2 etc.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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,²⁶ 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.⁵⁶

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-

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.]

⁵⁶“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.³⁸ 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.’³⁹ 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.⁵⁷ 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 practicing⁵⁸ the kinds of commitments to others as an expression of their love of God which typified their early experiences as believers.⁵⁹

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.'⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ Both εἰ μή, if

⁵⁷It 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.

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

⁵⁹Note 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.

⁶⁰The 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.**

⁶¹Verbs 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' (נֵר) 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.⁶² 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.⁶³ Thus

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.]

⁶²**Rev. 2:14-15.** 14 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν 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.**

⁶³The 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.⁶⁴ 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.]

⁶⁴**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.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁵“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.]

⁶⁶“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.]

⁶⁷One 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 13:9.⁶⁸ The admonition is made up of three distinct elements: 1) *the participle phrase*, Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, *the one possessing an ear*,⁶⁹ serving as the subject of the

⁶⁸Rev. 13:9. *Let anyone who has an ear listen:*

Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω.

⁶⁹Curiously 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 play 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.⁷⁰ Admonitions

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

⁷⁰This 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.⁷¹

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.]

⁷¹One 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.⁷²

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.]

⁷²In 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.⁷³ 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,

⁷³Arndt, 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 ἐστὶν 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.⁷⁴ The roots of

⁷⁴“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.⁷⁵ 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

⁷⁵Rev. 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 ἄρνιου. 2 ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ζύλον ζωῆς ποιοῦν καρποὺς δώδεκα, κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδίδουσαν 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.



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 07

Text: Rev. 2:8-11

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QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.
Historical Aspects:
 External History
 Internal History
Literary Aspects:
 Genre
 Literary Setting
 Literary Structure

Exegesis of the Text:
 A. Command to write, v. 8a
 B. Situation of the church, vv. 8b-10
 C. Admonition and promise, v. 11

2. What the text means.

Message to Smyrna

Greek NT
 8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψων· Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·
 9 οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ.
 10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοὶ τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.
 11 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἔκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

Gute Nachricht Bibel
 8 »Schreibe an den Engel der Gemeinde in Smyrna: So spricht Er, der der Erste und der Letzte ist, der tot war und wieder lebt:
 9 Ich weiß, dass ihr unterdrückt werdet und dass ihr arm seid. Aber in Wirklichkeit seid ihr reich! Ich kenne auch die üblen Nachreden, die von Leuten über euch verbreitet werden, die sich als Angehörige des Gottesvolkes ausgeben. Aber das sind sie nicht, sondern sie gehören zur Synagoge des Satans. 10 Habt keine Angst wegen der Dinge, die ihr noch erleiden müsst. Der Teufel wird einige von euch ins Gefängnis werfen, um euch auf die Probe zu stellen. Zehn Tage lang werden sie euch verfolgen. Haltet in Treue durch, auch wenn es euch das Leben kostet. Dann werde ich euch als Siegespreis ewiges Leben schenken.
 11 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist den Gemeinden sagt! Allen, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen und den zweiten und endgültigen Tod nichts anhaben.«

NRSV
 8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:
 9 I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 11 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

NLT
 8 Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who died and is alive:
 9 I know about your suffering and your poverty -- but you are rich! I know the slander of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they really aren't because theirs is a synagogue of Satan. 10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The Devil will throw some of you into prison and put you to the test. You will be persecuted for 'ten days.' Remain faithful even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 11 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be hurt by the second death.

INTRODUCTION

In this second message, the pattern established in the first message to Ephesus is continued. The genre elements are reproduced in exactly the same way and in the same position inside the message. Thus the

structure of the message remains the same, but the content of the message is distinctive to the situation of the Christian community at Smyrna. This city of about 100,000 residents was located north of Ephesus about 35 miles, also it was on the coast. It functioned as a



port city at the mouth of the Hermus / Melas river on the south shore of the Gulf of Izmir and is now named Izmir in modern times. With unusually great wealth and cultural diversity, the city enjoyed a rich history in Greek tradition, initially beginning around 1,000 BCE in the Aeolian Greek heritage but for several centuries at the time of Revelation in the Ionian Greek heritage. The city had 'died' in the sixth century BCE when Alyattes, king of Lydia, destroyed it in battle. Although it languished as a small backwater village for several centuries, it was 'brought back to life' in a massive rebuilding program sponsored by Alexander the Great but actually implemented many years later by Lysimachus, the general who took over control of Asia at Alexander's death in 323 BCE. The new city grew rapidly and prospered greatly. Numerous famous people came from Smyrna, including Homer. In modern times, the Turkish government completely purged the city of its Greek residents in 1923.

A strong but persecuted church in a large, wealthy city -- this is the situation at Smyrna. The risen Christ had a message for the believing community in the city that contained encouragement and warning. A message that still needs to be heard in the twenty-first century.

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

Again both historical and literary aspects will be

considered. The literary genre features remain the same as for the first message to the Ephesians in 2:1-7, and so these aspects will be summarized rather than analyzed in detail. See the previous study on 2:1-7 for the detailed analysis.

Historical Aspects:

As per the standard procedure, the external history will focus on the history of the hand copying of this passage during the second through the eighth centuries. The internal history centers on time and place markers inside the passage.

External History.

As for the hand copying of 2:8-11, the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) did not feel that any of the existing variations in wording were significant enough to impact the translation of this scripture passage. Thus no variant readings are listed in their text apparatus.

But the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (UBS 27th rev. ed.) lists some thirteen places where different wording exists in the known manuscripts of this passage.¹

¹Offenbarung 2,8

* τω Α ρε (τῷ is added before τῆς in some mss)

* πρωτοτοκος Α (πρωτότοκος replaces πρώτος)

* 1006. 1841 *M*^K (the relative pronoun ὃς is omitted)

Offenbarung 2,9

* (2,2) τα εργα και η *M* sy^{h**} (τὰ ἔργα και inserted between σου and τὴν)

| txt A C P 1611. 1854. 2053. 2329 ρε latt sy^{ph} co

* την η (1611) (τὴν inserted after βλασφημίαν)

* 1854. 2053. 2329*. 2351 *M*^A (ἐκ is omitted)

*¹ 2329 (συναγωγή is omitted)

Offenbarung 2,10

* †μη Α C 046. 2050 ρε (μηδὲν is replaced with μη)

| txt η *M* sy

* παθειν 1006. 1841. 1854. 2050. 2329. 2351 *M*^K (πάσχειν is replaced with παθεῖν)

| txt η Α C 1611. 2053 *M*^A

* δη 2351 *M*^K (either δὴ or γάρ is inserted before μέλλει)

| γαρ 2050

*¹ λαβειν 2351 (βάλλειν is either omitted or replaced with βαλεῖν or λαβεῖν)

| βαλειν 1006. 1611. 1841. 2050. (2329) *M*^K

| – 1854

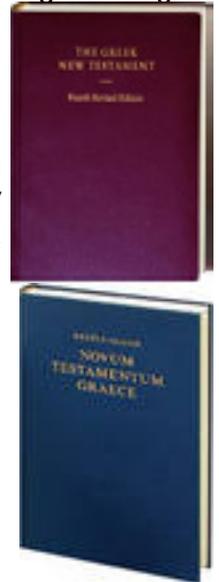
| txt η(*) Α C 2053 *M*^A co

*² εχητε Α P 1854. 2344 ρε; Prim (ἔχετε is replaced either with ἔχητε or ἔχετε)

| εχετε C (2053) *M*^A sa

*³ –ρας 1006. 1611. 1841. 2351 *M*^K (ἡμερῶν is replaced with ἡμέρας)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibel-Page 145



Careful examination of each of these instances clearly confirms the position of the UBS 4th ed. editors, for each of these reflects either obvious careless copying errors or attempts at stylistic improvements on the original text. No real meaning change is found.

Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of this passage in the original Greek with full confidence that it represents the original wording of the text.

Internal History. Quite a number of place markers surface in this passage: 'synagogue of Satan,' 'prison,' 'crown,' and a few others. Time markers include 'ten days,' 'about to suffer / throw.' But most of these focus more on exegetical issues rather than background concerns.

Two of the place markers lend themselves to the background matters that can help increase understanding of the text, and thus some treatment of them will be given here: synagogue (συναγωγή) and prison (φυλακή).

The term συναγωγή can be either a people designation or a place designation. That is, it will refer either to people gathered in religious meeting or will specify the building where such meetings take place. Inside the New Testament in the 56 uses of the term all but one (Jas. 2:2) refer to a Jewish gathering or place of gathering. The majority of the 55 NT references seem to refer to the place of gathering, more than to the gathering of Jewish people (cf. Acts 6:9; 9:2; 13:43). But distinguishing between 'gathering of people' and 'place of gathering' is not always easy to do. The etymology of the term συναγωγή is an important starting point: συν + αγω + γή. συν is the preposition meaning 'together.' ἄγω is the verb that means to lead, or to bring. The frequently used compound verb συνάγω, **gather together**, is in the background here. The -γή comes off the spelling of a perfect tense participle form of ἄγω with the idea of 'having been brought together' or 'gathered together.'

In ancient Greek outside the Jewish and Christian traditions, συναγωγή could refer to a collection of books, an assembly of people, or a wide variety of references. But the noun also played an important role in referencing the meetings of various Greek and Roman social groups, and especially was this so in the Doric isles, Asia, and Egypt.² All kinds of social groups func-

²“In view of the gt. importance of συνάγω in Gk. societies it is not surprising that the verbal noun is also common in this sphere, esp. in many inscr.,⁴ rarely in relation to the founding or naming of a society,⁵ more commonly in the sense of the gathering or periodic meeting, esp. in the Doric isles, Asia Minor and Egypt, e.g., the well-known Testament of Epicteta from Thera in Crete (between 210 and 195 B.C.) ὥστε γίνεσθαι τὴν συναγωγὴν ἐπ’ ἡμέρας τρεῖς ἐν τῷ Μουσειῷ, IG, 12, 3, No. 330, 118 f., cf. also line 22, 115, 127 f., 131f. The society itself, which meets to worship he-

tions ranging from religious to sports to political and well

roes, is called τὸ κοινὸν τοῦ ἀνδρείου τῶν συγγενῶν and has 25 members; women and children are admitted to the συναγωγή (also σύνοδος, σύλλογος). From there we also have the inscr. which mentions a συναγωγή of the κοινὸν τοῦ Ἀνθι[τῆ]ρος, IG, 12, 3, No. 329, 15 f. We find [ς]υνλόγους καὶ συναγωγὰς in the draft of statutes for a cultic guild of Zeus Hypsistos of οἱ ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Διὸς Ὑψίστου συνόδου (between 69 and 57 B.C.? from Philadelphia in Fayyum?), *Preisigke Sammelb.*, V, 7835, 12.⁶

The use is similar in a clan society of Diomedes in Cos in Asia Minor, Ditt. Syll.3, III, 1106, 93 f. (c. 300 B.C.), which meets to worship Heracles and the hero who founded the family, though sacrifices are also made to Aphrodite and the Μοῖραι. All members of the family take part in the συναγωγή. Use of the τέμενος for other purposes is explicitly forbidden. Another example is found among the Neoi of Cyzicus, Ditt. Or., II, 748, 15 (3rd cent. B.C.). On a Ptolemaic decree in honour of the πολίτευμα of the Idumeans in Memphis we find the expression ἐπὶ συναγωγῆς τῆς γενηθείσης ἐν τῷ ἄνω Ἀπολλ[ω]νιεῖω, Ditt. Or., II, 737, 1 f. (2nd cent. B.C.).⁷ In BGU, IV, 1137, 1 ff. (6 B.C.) συναγωγή is used with ref. to the imperial cult and denotes a gathering of the Alexandrian σύνοδος Σεβαστῆ τοῦ θεοῦ Ἀυτοκράτορος Καίσαρος which took place ἐν τῷ Παρατόμῳ. As on the two previous inscr., the place of meeting is mentioned on one in honour of the board of a guild, ἐπὶ τῆς γενηθείσης συναγωγῆς ἐν τῷ Ἀριστίωνος Κλεοπατρειῷ, *Preisigke Sammelb.*, V, 8267, 3 (5 B.C.) from Kôm Truga in the Nile delta, cf. also the resolution from Kôm Tukala, *ibid.*, IV, 7457, 2 f.; also the resolution (104 B.C.) of a union which calls itself: κοινὸν (sc. ἐκ τοῦ γυμνασίου),⁸ where we find the phrase ἐπὶ τῆς γενηθείσης συναγωγῆς, *ibid.*, V, 8031, 16. Whether συναγωγή has this sense among the thiasites of Nicaea in Bithynia too is contested. The ref. is to a Cybele inscr. acc. to which the priestesses of Cybele and Apollo are to be crowned ἐν τῇ τοῦ Διὸς συναγωγῇ, *ibid.*, I, 4981, 6 (2nd cent. B.C.). If συναγωγή is used metonymically here for the place or site of assembly⁹ this is an exception in the non-Jewish and non-Chr. sphere, though it is not impossible (cf. ἀγορά, ἐκκλησία, προσευχή, → II, 808, 10 ff.). συναγωγή is also used for a pagan cultic gathering in Ps.-Philo, *Eus. Praep. Ev.*, I, 10, 52 (GCS, 43, 1 [1954], 53): Ζωροάστρης δὲ ὁ μάγος ἐν τῇ Ἰερᾷ Συναγωγῇ τῶν Περσικῶν φησι. On the burial inscr. in Cos which King Antiochus I of Commagene set up for himself (1st cent. B.C.) συναγωγαί, πανηγύρεις 'festal gatherings' and θυσίαι are mentioned together in annual celebration of his birthday and accession, Ditt. Or., I, 383, 94 f. In gen. συναγωγή is used predominantly for the festive assembly or meeting, whether cultic or not; this is esp. so outside Egypt. συναγωγή is close here to συναγωγήιον 'picnic,' 'feast,' cf. *Athen.*, 8, 68 (365c). In *Diog. L.*, II, 129 it is used (par. ἑορτή) for a feast in the court of Nicocreon.10 Acc. to the statutes of the guild of Zeus Hypsistos (→ 800, 11 ff.) the ἡγούμενος was to arrange a πόσις for the members monthly ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς ἱερῷ ἐν αἷς ἐν ἀνδ[ρῶν] κοινῷ σπένδοντες εὐχέσθωισαν, *Preisigke Sammelb.*, V, 7835, 8 f. and cf. the regulations for the feast of the κοινόν in the Testament of Epicteta: The συναγωγή includes the banquet δεῖπνον, drinking, crowns, perfumes μύρον, sacrifices. The same applies to the societies of Anthister, Diomedon, and the Neoi.11 Cf. also *Cl. Al. Paed.*, II, 4, 4: ταῖς μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ τῇ εὐφροσύνῃ συναγωγαῖς ἐγκαταλέγομεν ἄν' καὶ αὐτοὶ δειπνάρια τε καὶ ἄριστα καὶ δοχὰς εἰκότως ἂν καλοῖμεν τὴν συνήλυσιν ταύτην."

[*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 7:800-01.]

beyond. The collective oriented society fostered and nourished powerfully the need to 'belong' to organized groups. Additionally, the extreme status consciousness of this world made 'networking' absolutely essential and the only way this could be done was through belonging to different 'social groups' that would foster advancement. Add to this the deeply held Greek philosophy that one's identity and worth depended solely on the group connections he or she possessed. Then layer on top of all this the very complex but profoundly important system of patronage in the Roman world.

One should note that the use of συναγωγή for an overtly religious group was not common in the ancient world, although it could be so used as Ps.-Philo indicates as quoted by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.52.³ Neither is συναγωγή commonly used to refer to a trade union guild. The instances of such meaning are rare in the ancient world but do occur, e.g., συναγωγ[γ]ῆ [κ]ωποπωλῶν, a *rower's union*, in an inscription on a temple altar in Perinthus.⁴

The Greek label συναγωγή functioned as a significant label for designating these organized groups of people (= Latin *synagogæ*). And thus focused mostly on the 'gathering of people' level of meaning and with little reference to the physical place of meeting, which often was a temple of some god or goddess serving as the patron deities of the group.

The gathering of Jewish people for religious purposes outside of the Jerusalem temple came to be designated a συναγωγή.⁵ The specific origins of the Jewish

³Also, one should note that the term ἐκκλησία in secular Greek designated an assembly of 'free citizens' of a city in meeting to take some kind of governmental action. Thus ἐκκλησία is virtually never used in ancient Greek to designate any of these social societies or trade unions guilds, since non citizens were sometimes members of these groups.

⁴*Jahreshefte d. Österreichischen Archäol. Instituts in Wien*, 23 (1926), Beibatt, 172.

⁵"By the 1st century C.E. the synagogue had become so important and central an institution to Jewish life in Palestine that the Talmud of Palestine refers to 480 of them existing in Jerusalem in the time of Vespasian (Kloner 1981:12). One scholar has recently proposed that in Jerusalem alone there were 365 synagogues in the late Second Temple period (Wilkinson 1976:76–77). A Greek inscription from Jerusalem dating to the 1st century C.E., found in the excavations of 1913–14, describes the varied function of the synagogue at that time (quoted in Levine 1987:17):

Theodotus, son of Vettenos, the priest and archisynagogos, son of a archisynagogos and grandson of a archisynagogos, who built the synagogue for purposes of reciting the Law and studying the commandments, and as a hotel with chambers and water installations to provide for the needs of itinerants from abroad, which his fathers, the elders and Simonides founded.

"Josephus also emphasizes the centrality of the reading of Scripture and the importance of study found in the Second Temple synagogue (AgAp 2.175). The NT corroborates such a picture in reporting Jesus' and Paul's frequent visitations to synagogues.

synagogue lie mostly hidden in the mist of intertestamental Judaism.⁶ But the loss of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem with the Babylonian invasions of the early 500s played a central role in the emergence of the synagogue, especially in the Exile of the Jews in Babylonia.

The place of meeting is the more interesting aspect of this topic. Increasingly modern Jewish and Christian scholarship are concluding from growing data out of archaeology and literary discoveries that private homes were the main location of meeting until well after the destruction of Herod's temple in Jerusalem in the early 70s. Only a small number of 'synagogue' buildings dating earlier than the second century AD have been uncovered by archaeologists, while large numbers with origins in the late second through fifth centuries have been unearthed not just in Palestine but also in the northeastern Mediterranean world.⁷ The very oldest synagogue building, known to have existed, is located on the Aegean island of Delos and is dated in the second century BCE. But then one jumps to the second to the fourth centuries AD for the next oldest buildings located at Priene in Asia Minor and elsewhere in this Roman province. Clearly, the largest Jewish synagogue building known to have existed in the ancient

During those times they would invariably read or expound Scripture, either the Pentateuch or Prophets (e.g., Luke 4:16–22; Acts 13:13–16)."

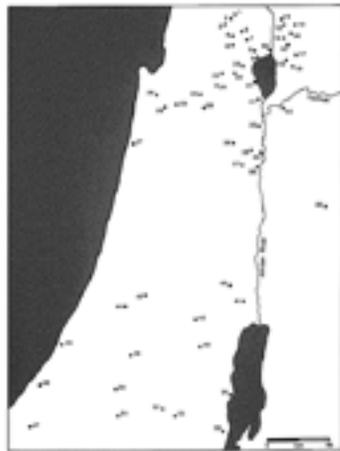
[Eric M. Meyers, "Synagogue: Introductory Survey" In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 252.]

⁶"The terms employed to designate the synagogue reflect the variety of its functions. The earliest terms come from the Second Temple period and are Greek: *synagogue* and *proseuche* (Hengel 1975:39–41; Levine 1987:20–23), the former meaning 'house of assembly,' the latter 'house of prayer.' Despite the fact that the status and full extent of the development of private prayer in the Second Temple period is much debated and in doubt, some scholars feel that *proseuche* is the older term, popular since the 3d century B.C.E. In any case, *synagogue* was in use by the turn of the era and came to replace *proseuche* by the 2d century C.E. Hengel has suggested that *proseuche* carries with it the special connotation of Diaspora synagogue, while *synagogue* carries with it the nuance of 'Palestinian' in the NT, Josephus, and rabbinic sources (Hengel 1975:41–54). Others have suggested a distinction in meaning between the terms that derives from a difference in architecture and ornamentation, but there seems to be little merit to such a view." [Eric M. Meyers, "Synagogue: Introductory Survey" In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 252–53.]

⁷"If one of the surprising aspects of recent research has been that more synagogues have been identified as being "late," another is that few have been found that are 'early.' Thus far only three synagogue buildings within Israel/Palestine have been securely dated to the Second Temple period: Gamla, Masada, and Herodium." [Eric M. Meyers, "Synagogue: Introductory Survey" In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 255.]



Jewish synagogue at Sardis



world is located at Sardis and it dates back to either the second or third century AD.⁸ Extensive analysis of the remains have been conducted over the past century of archaeological investigation. Some 100 meters long and 10 meters wide, the central hall of the building could hold several hundred people.⁹ One

ogue was built as part of the Roman complex, later turned over to the Jewish community and then sealed off from the rest of the complex. The synagogue was in use from the 3d century on and was remodeled several times (Seager and Kraabel 1981). The later synagogue (now reconstructed) from the 4th century is the largest Diaspora synagogue found to date. It consists of an atrium forecourt with 3 entrances and a main hall ending in an apse with benches on the W. On the E wall of the hall two Torah shrines flank the central entrance. Six piers are built on the N and S walls. In the center of the hall, a platform was built, and close to the apse an 'eagle table' stood flanked by two stone Lydian lions in second use.

"Mosaic floors with geometric and floral designs decorated the hall and court. Inscriptions were incorporated into various sections of the mosaic. The walls were decorated with marble pieces and the ceiling was painted. Many inscriptions were found, mainly donations inscribed in Greek. The synagogue had several stages of building alterations between the 3d and 4th centuries, and the last synagogue was abandoned and destroyed with the rest of the town in 616 C.E. (Seager and Kraabel 1981:172-74)."

[Rachel Hachlili, "Synagogue: Diaspora Synagogues" In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 260-61.]

⁹"An extensive literature exists on this synagogue site and its excavations. The distance from apse to front steps is 100 m, and its width is 10 m. Over eighty inscriptions have been recovered from the building (Kraabel 1987; Meyers and Kraabel 1986:191-92)." [Eric M. Meyers, "Synagogue: Introductory Survey" In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New

York: Doubleday, 1992), 253.] should note that no universal architectural plan for building a synagogue existed in the ancient world. From the 1967 beginning of extensive Israeli documentation of known ancient synagogue sites, large numbers of building sites have emerged dating from the second century onward, as the figure charts out. Diaspora synagogue buildings are themselves very diverse in style and design, and bear almost no similarity to those in Palestine.¹⁰ This in part grew out of the multi-functional use of the building. It served as the place of meeting for the Friday evening study of the Torah, but also as the school building for young Jewish boys, a social gathering place for Jews especially important in Diaspora Judaism, as well as other uses.



York: Doubleday, 1992), 253.]

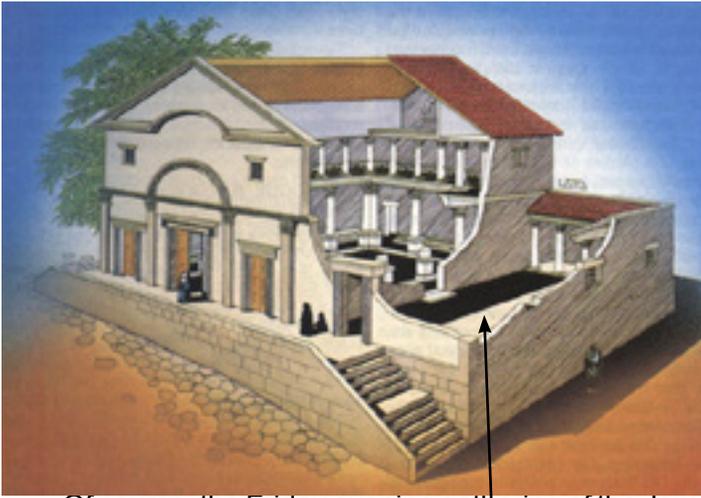
¹⁰"The most important feature of the research of Diaspora art and architecture have been the archaeological discoveries of synagogue buildings surveyed or excavated in Syria, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, N Africa, Bulgaria, and Spain. These synagogues do not have much in common architecturally; in fact, they rarely have similar features either with one another or with synagogues in Palestine.

"The plans seem to be local and not part of established types. However, there were two factors that determined the architectural plan of each of the Diaspora synagogues. The first was the local artistic and architectural traditions and fashions. But secondly, several circumstances peculiar to the Diaspora synagogues seem to have exerted some influences that ultimately determined their plans. For example, some synagogues were regular houses which were subsequently converted into assembly halls (e.g., Dura Europos). Some synagogues were built as part of a public complex in a prominent site in the city (e.g., the Sardis synagogue, which was part of the monumental Roman bath and gymnasium complex). A very important fact in the fragmentary architectural survival of some Diaspora synagogues was the intentional converting of the synagogue into a church (probably in the 4th-5th century C.E.; e.g., Apamea). Also, many of the Diaspora synagogues had two phases of buildings.

"However there do appear to have been some characteristic features of the Diaspora synagogue. Some of them had a forecourt. Their facades were not usually decorated and had either triple entrances (Sardis, Ostia) or a single entrance (Priene). Dura Europos had two entrances leading from the courtyard to the assembly hall. A unique feature was the main hall, which was not divided by columns; it was usually a hall with a Torah shrine, elders' seat, and sometimes benches. In the Sardis synagogue the pillars were built so close to the walls that the hall was not divided into a main and side aisles (as was customary in many synagogues in Palestine).

"The main feature and focal point of the Diaspora synagogues was the Torah shrine (see Hachlili 1988: chap. 8), which consisted of three forms: (1) an aedicula (Sardis, Ostia); (2) a niche (Apamea and Priene); or (3) an apse (Aegina). The Torah shrine was built on whichever wall happened to be oriented towards Jerusalem."

[Rachel Hachlili, "Synagogue: Diaspora Synagogues" In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 261-62.]



Of course, the Friday evening gathering of the Jewish men was central because it centered on the reading of the Torah, a discussion of its meaning and application, along with the offering of prescribed prayers at the beginning and ending of the meeting. As becomes clear from Luke's Acts narrative accounts of Paul's appearance in the Jewish synagogues in several cities, non-Jews, even including women, were permitted to attend but not in the central hall where only Jewish men were allowed. The non-Jewish individuals along with the Jewish women, seated in a side room, could only listen to the discussions about interpretation of the Torah, but from this limited access they could learn the content of the Torah and the 'proper' interpretation of it. A very loose organizational structure of leaders provided guidance over the activities of the synagogue.¹¹

When John labeled the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna as συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ, *the synagogue of Satan*

¹¹“**RULERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE** [Gk archisynagōgos (ἀρχισυναγωγός)]. A title of honor for one of several synagogue officials attested in ancient Jewish, Christian, and pagan literary sources and in inscriptions. ‘Ruler of the synagogue’ is the most common Jewish title associated with the synagogue in antiquity. Other titles include ‘ruler’ (archōn), ‘elder’ (presbyteros), ‘mother of the synagogue’ (*mater synagogae*), and ‘father of the synagogue’ (*pater synagogae*).

“Although we have no catalogue of the functions of the ‘ruler of the synagogue,’ his or her duties seem to have spanned a range of practical and spiritual leadership roles. The ‘ruler of the synagogue’ chose Torah readers and prayer leaders, invited others to preach, contributed to the building and restoration of the synagogue, and represented the congregation to the outside world. Several inscriptions cite women as ‘rulers of the synagogue.’ Children are occasionally called ‘rulers of the synagogue,’ which may mean the title was sometimes hereditary.

“The sources show no consensus on the practice of selecting an *archisynagōgos*. Some ‘rulers of the synagogue’ were appointed, some elected, and some inherited the office. Some served for one or more terms, while some held the office for life. Certain synagogues had more than one ruler.”

[Claudia J. Setzer, “Rulers of the Synagogue” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 841-42.]

tan, the most intense insult possible was thrown at the Jewish community in the city. The Jewish people who met at the facility no longer were serving God, as their public objectives claimed, but instead it had become a vehicle for the Devil himself to oppose the true people of God in the city located in the ἐκκλησία, the Christian assembly of believers.

The second place marker of background importance is the reference in v. 10: ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν, *Indeed, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison*.¹² The term φυλακή has a wide variety of meanings connected to the act of ‘watching.’ This core idea generates a wide range of derivative ideas: the person doing the watching, a ‘guard’; the time of the watching, guard duty time slots; the place of the watching, a prison etc. In the NT with 47 uses of this term, all but about six or so uses carry the meaning of prison, either literally or figuratively.¹³ From a western cultural perspective, the modern difference between ‘jail’ and ‘prison’ did not exist in the ancient world.¹⁴ The Roman φυλακή primarily served as a hold-

¹²“7.24 δεσμοτήριον, ου n; φυλακήα, ἡς f; τήρησις^b, εως f: *a place of detention—‘jail, prison.’*

“δεσμοτήριον: τὸ δεσμοτήριον εὔρομεν κεκλεισμένον ἐν πάσῃ ἀσφαλείᾳ ‘we found the prison locked most securely’ Ac 5:23.

“φυλακή^a: ἀπεκεφάλισεν τὸν Ἰωάννην ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ ‘he had John beheaded in prison’ Mt 14:10. τήρησις^b: ἔθεντο αὐτοὺς ἐν τήρησει δημοσίᾳ ‘they placed them in the common prison’ Ac 5:18.

“Practically all languages have terms for a jail or a prison, though in some instances a descriptive phrase is employed, ‘a place where people are tied up’ or ‘a place to be chained.’ In some instances, highly idiomatic expressions are used, ‘a place for eating iron’ or ‘a room with rats.’” [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), 84.]

¹³“The word has this common meaning [of prison] in relation to the rebel and murderer Barabbas in Lk. 23:19, 25. Acc. to Mk. 6:17 and par., cf. v. 27 and par., John the Baptist was cast into prison. The apostles in Ac. 5:18–25, Peter in Ac. 12:4–17, and Paul in Ac. 16:23–40 experience a miraculous deliverance when in prison, → III, 175, 4 ff. Several unnamed Christians are also put in ‘prison’ by Paul acc. to Ac. 8:3, cf. 22:4; 26:10, also φυλακίζω in 22:19. Suffering imprisonment is a common fate of the righteous of the OT (Hb. 11:36 ff.) as well as the disciples of Jesus, Rev. 2:10.15, 16 Peter is ready to accept it, Lk. 22:33, and Jesus predicts it for His followers, Lk. 21:12. It is part of the suffering experienced by Paul acc. to what is almost a formula in 2 C. 6:5; 11:23. In these circumstances it is a duty for Christians to visit those imprisoned ‘in gaol,’ Mt. 25:36–44.” [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 9:244.]

¹⁴“In ancient Israel, mere imprisonment was not recognized as a formal punishment. When a convict was sentenced to prison (Ezra 7:26), he was to make good his offense by carrying out dull



The Jail at Philippi: outside - top; interior - bottom

ing place while the prisoner waited for an appearance between the governmental magistrate or higher official. Sentences for law violations did not contain required confinement for long periods of time in a 'prison,' since neither the Jews nor the Romans had such places. There were hard labor camps such as Patmos where banishment was the sentence handed down, primarily the so-called 'debtor prisons.' Most of the time, however, prisoners simply faced execution if placed under arrest by the Roman authorities. But awaiting one's trial before a magistrate or provincial governor could take a lengthy period of time, as Paul discovered with his two year plus confinement at Caesarea (cf. Acts 24:27). Normally, conditions in such prisons were very harsh.¹⁵

and heavy labor. The modern idea of a prison as a penitentiary, where criminals are to be reformed into decent citizens, was foreign to ANE conceptions. For various other reasons, however, prisons played an important role in the penal system of the ancients." [Karel van der Toorn, "Prison" In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 468.]

¹⁵"Despite various efforts to promote reforms, conditions in ancient prisons were often harsh. Most prisoners wore chains; their feet might be shackled, their hands manacled or even attached to

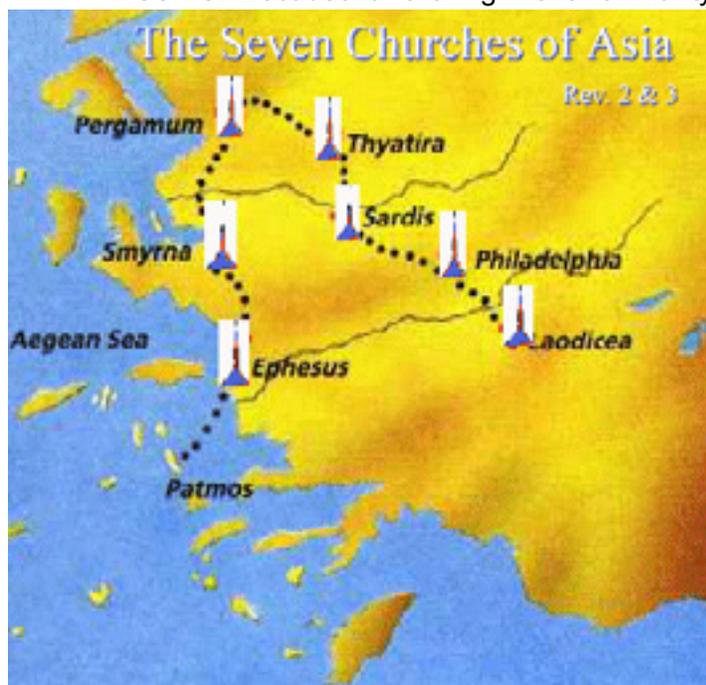
Thus for one to be placed in one of the φυλακή, even for a short period of time, presented severe hardships and dangers to the individual.

The statement in v. 10, ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα, indeed, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction, possesses all kinds of interesting implications that we will examine in the exegesis section below.

Literary Aspects:

As always the literary aspects are essential for proper interpretation.

Genre: Because of the high level similarity



their neck by another chain, and their movements further restricted by a chain fastened to a post. The existence of laws prohibiting chains that were too short or too restrictive indicates that jailers sometimes employed such practices. The very word 'chains' became a synonym for imprisonment. Some prisoners were also kept in wooden stocks, devices to restrain the feet, hands, or even the neck of an individual (see Acts 16:24). Prisons often were very dark (see Isa. 42:7); the inner area of the prison mentioned in Acts 16:24 was probably without windows. Although solitary confinement was known, prisoners generally were kept grouped together, accused and condemned, men and women alike. Overcrowding was not infrequent (Isa. 24:22). Prisons often had poor air circulation, a lack of hygienic facilities, rats and vermin, and food of poor quality. Unscrupulous guards might at times use the withholding of food or even outright torture to extort money from prisoners or their relatives. Although various rulers, especially in Roman Imperial times, struggled to prevent such abuses, the quality of prison life largely remained the responsibility of local officials, and conditions undoubtedly varied considerably from place to place." [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 824.]

in literary form among all seven messages in chapters two and three, the discussion in the previous study on 2:1-7 should be consulted for detailed understanding.

Literary Setting: The literary context here is simple. Rev. 2:8-11 constitutes the second message of the seven and is addressed to the Christian community at Smyrna. The listing of this message in the second slot comes primarily from the circular route that John will track out among the seven cities. Such a route with excellent existing Roman roads connecting all of them

made for a circuit ministry for John during his days in Ephesus prior to being banished to Patmos which led to the writing of these messages.

Literary Structure: The block diagram of the Greek text in very literal English translation below highlights the internal arrangement of ideas. Again because of the heavy use of established literary sub-genres both the literary sub-forms and the grammar structure dictate how the ideas are interconnected.

⁸ And
42 to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:
43 These things says the First and the Last,
who became dead and came back to life:
44 ⁹ I know your affliction and your poverty,
but
45 you are rich,
and
46 (I know) the slander
from those calling themselves Jews
and
47 they are not
but
48 (they are) the synagogue of Satan.
49 ¹⁰ don't be afraid of anything
which you are about to suffer.
Indeed
50 the Devil is about to throw some of you
into prison
so that you may be tested,
and
51 you will have affliction
for ten days.
52 Become faithful
unto death,
and
53 I will give you the crown
which is life
¹¹
54 The one having an ear
let him hear
what the Spirit is saying to the churches.
The one overcoming
55 will never be harmed
by the second death.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure

The internal arrangement of ideas flows around the distinctive literary forms: the write formula, the *Τάδε λέγει* introduction with titles, the Narratio and Dispositio sections, with the Hearing and Victory formulas at the end.

Statement 42 introduces the command to write this message to the angel of the church at Smyrna. The *Τάδε λέγει* introduces the narratio (#s 44-48) and the dispositio (#s 49-53) sections. The hearing formula is statement 54 and is followed by the victory formula in statement 55.

Exegesis of the Text:

The natural arrangement of the exegesis should be determined by the internal structure of the scripture text. The threefold grouping of those elements is repeated here as was the case in 2:1-7, since they remain exactly the same structurally.

A. Command to write, v. 8a

8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·
8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

As we noted in the first message in 2:1-7, the same pattern holds true here as well. Although the message is addressed to the τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας, the message contained in the *narratio* and *dispositio* sections is uniformly in the second person singular going back to τῷ ἀγγέλῳ but it describes the situation of the church generally. This argues strongly that τῷ ἀγγέλῳ actually is the ἐκκλησία at Smyrna.



The city of Smyrna (Ancient Greek: Σμύρνη or Σμύρνα),¹⁶ with an estimated population of about 100,000 people at this point in time, enjoyed some of the greatest wealth and affluence of any of the larger cities in the province of Asia.¹⁷ Economically and politically Smyrna and Ephesus (about 35 miles to the south) were intense rivals competing sometimes bitterly for dominance in the region.¹⁸ From the available data out of this period, Smyrna seems to have dominated economically while Ephesus was dominate administratively and politically. The Gulf of Izmir provided a safe environment

¹⁶Of the two spellings found in ancient Greek literature, Σμύρνη or Σμύρνα, the later form is what is used in the NT. Additionally, a resident of the city was called a Smyrnian, derived from the adjective Σμυρναῖος, -α, -ον in a substantial usage. Another alternative spelling, often preferred in the secular Greek literature, is Ζμύρνα. One should also note that the same noun, σμύρνα can also mean ‘myrrh,’ although no connection between the city and the fragrance is known to have existed. Likewise the verb σμυρνίζω means ‘to mix with myrrh’ (cf. Mk. 15:23).

¹⁷“The area in which the city is located was one of the most ancient places of Greek settlement in Asia Minor, and remained so from the first establishment of the community in the 10th century B.C. until the destruction of the Greek population by the Turkish government in 1923.” [D. S. Potter, “Smyrna (Place)” In , vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 73.]

¹⁸“Under the Roman empire, Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamon were the three greatest cities in the Roman province of Asia. Two of the three, Ephesus and Smyrna, were bitter rivals (Dio Chrysostom Or 34.48). Though Ephesus was a great harbor city, she was of much greater importance administratively than commercially (Rougé, *Recherches*, 85–93, 126–33).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 136.]

for the port city to develop commercially; major trade routes from the interior converged at Smyrna -- these and other factors contributed to the economic success and growth of the city. “The geographer Strabo, writing at the end of Augustus’ reign (31 B.C.–A.D. 14) and early in the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) called it the ‘most beautiful city of all’ (14.1.37).”¹⁹

The establishment of the Christian community most likely dates back to the mid 50s during the lengthy three year plus ministry of the apostle Paul in Ephesus described in Acts 19. The city is mentioned by name only twice in the NT at Rev. 1:11 and 2:8, and implies an existing Christian community in the city at the time of the writing of Revelation. Not much information from the founding until into the second century surfaces. But from the second century onward substantial records of the Christian movement in the city exist.²⁰ Numerous Christian leaders either called Smyrna their home town or else spent time serving the Christian community in the city, e.g., Polycarp, and Ignatius of Antioch.²¹ Thus by the middle of the second Christian century it had become a major center of Christian activity in Asia.

B. Situation of the church, vv. 8b-10

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·

9 οἶδ᾽ σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ

¹⁹D. S. Potter, “Smyrna (Place)” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 74.

²⁰“Other texts from Smyrna illustrate conflict in a very different context. Two of the most important early martyrologies, the *Acts of Polycarp* and the *Acts of Pionius and his Companions*, illustrate the tension between the growing Christian community (founded in the mid-1st century) and its neighbors, especially the very powerful local Jewish community. Polycarp was executed in 155, Pionius in 250; the former in a bitter local persecution in which the members of the synagogue played a prominent role, the latter after the edict of the emperor Decius (249–251) ordering all inhabitants of the empire to sacrifice. Both works appear to be authentic transcriptions of the trials and therefore cast essential light on conflicts within the city, not only between Christian and non-Christian, but also between rich and poor, and between local and imperial authorities (Delehaye 1921:11–59; Cadoux 1938:343–400; Lane Fox 1987:462–92).” [D. S. Potter, “Smyrna (Place)” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 75.]

²¹Evidently the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* contained an account of a visit by Paul to Smyrna in the original document, but the section containing this is lost. But the *Acts of John* contains numerous fictional accounts of the activity of the apostle John at Ephesus, Smyrna and other cities in the province of Asia. Allusions to a visit to Smyrna by John are found in paragraphs 37 and 45.

Although coming later in history at the middle of the third century, the Acts of Pionius and His Companions throws additional light on the persecution that Christians often faced at Smyrna.

τοῦ σατανᾶ. 10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

9 I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

First comes **the Τάδε λέγει pronouncement** from ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν, **the first and the last, who became dead and came back to life.**

The beginning title, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, occurs three times in Revelation: 1:17; 2:8; 22:13. It is uniformly a reference to Christ, and is drawn from the divine title found in the LXX of Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12.²² There seems to be a deliberate play off of the death and resurrection of Christ and the early history of the city that literally ‘died’ as a result of wars with the Lydians in 600 BCE and then ‘was reborn’ in 290 BCE on a new location just two miles south of the old city under the support of Antigonos and Lysimachus. This was regularly celebrated in the city.²³ If this is accurate, then the Christians in Smyrna lived in a city that ‘came back to life,’ but far more importantly they worshiped Christ who was raised from the dead and continues to live in Heaven. The ‘resurrection’ of the city fails to compare with the resurrection of Christ.

²²Isa. 41:4. I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last. ἐγὼ θεὸς πρῶτος, καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐγὼ εἰμι.

Isa. 44:6. Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: **I am the first and I am the last;** besides me there is no god.

Οὕτως λέγει ὁ θεὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ὁ ῥυσάμενος αὐτὸν θεὸς σαβαωθ **Ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγὼ μετὰ ταῦτα**, πλὴν ἐμοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν θεός.

Isa. 48:12. Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called: **I am He; I am the first, and I am the last.**

Ἄκουέ μου, Ἰακωβ καὶ Ἰσραὴλ ὃν ἐγὼ καλῶ· **ἐγὼ εἰμι πρῶτος, καὶ ἐγὼ εἰμι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα,**

²³Ramsay (Letters, 269–70), followed more cautiously by Hemer (Letters, 61–64), speculated that the Smyrnaeans would recognize a striking analogy between the physical renewal of their city and the phrase ‘the one who died and came to life,’ because of the destruction of Smyrna by the Lydians in 600 B.C., followed by three centuries of relative desolation concluded by the refounding of Smyrna as a polis two miles south of the ancient site in 290 B.C. (at the modern site of Izmir) by Antigonos and Lysimachus (cf. Strabo 14.1.37; Pausanias 7.5.1–3). Aelius Aristides (Or 21) celebrated the second restoration of Smyrna by Marcus Aurelius and Commodus after the earthquake of A.D. 178 and compares Smyrna with the legendary phoenix. It is striking that the usual verbs used in connection with statements about the resurrection of Jesus (ἐγείρειν, ἀνίστημι) never occur in Revelation.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 161.]

The second qualifier, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν, stands as an adjectival relative clause linked to these first two terms. The role here is to define more precisely the significance of the divine title, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, in specific reference to Christ Himself, rather than to God as is found in the prophets of the Old Testament. There this title affirms the eternal existence of God. At creation, God already is; after everything is gone, God remains. But in regard to the meaning of this title concerning Christ, its meaning is defined in terms of His death and resurrection.

The use of the verb ζᾶν with the sense of ‘to live again’ is not the common NT reference for the resurrection of Christ: ἐγείρειν and ἀνίστημι. But on some occasions it does take on this meaning as in 1:18, on which this reference depends, as well as Mark 16:11; Luke 24:5, 23; Acts 1:3; Rom 14:9a; 2 Cor 13:4a. Note also Rev. 20:4 in reference to the believers coming back to life.

The narratio section in v. 9 is introduced by the formula expression οἶδά with the two direct objects σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν: **I know your affliction and your poverty.**²⁴ The first term, τὴν θλίψιν from θλίψις,²⁵

²⁴Actually οἶδά contains three direct objects: τὴν θλίψιν, τὴν πτωχείαν, and τὴν βλασφημίαν. The combination of σου with the definite article τὴν linked to each of the three nouns highlights the personal experiencing of these three things by the church at Smyrna.

²⁵θλίψις, εὖως, ἦ (s. θλίβω; on the accent s. B-D-F §13; W-S. §6, 3c; Mlt-H. 57.—KLipsius, Grammat. Untersuchungen über d. bibl. Gr̄z. 1863, 34f, prefers to write θλίψις; so also W-H.) rare in extra-Biblical Gk., and there lit., ‘pressing, pressure’ (Aristot., Meteorol. 4, 4, 383a, 13; Epicurus p. 45, 9 Us.; Ps.-Aristot., De Mundo 4, 394a, 29; Strabo, Galen).

1. in our lit. (as in LXX, En, Test12Patr, JosAs cod. A; Just., D. 116, 2; Mel.) freq. and in the metaph. sense **trouble that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction, tribulation** (so Vett. Val. 71, 16; Cat. Cod. Astr. VIII/3 p. 175, 5; 178, 8; pl. 169, 2 [s. Boll 134f]; OGI 444, 15 [II or I B.C.] διὰ τὰς τ. πόλεων θλίψεις; BGU 1139, 4 [I B.C.]; POxy 939, 13; PAmh 144, 18). Of distress that is brought about by outward circumstances (Jos., Ant. 4, 108; En, PsSol, Mel.; Did., Gen. 116, 10), in sg. and pl. **Ac 11:19; Ro 5:3b; 12:12; 2 Cor 1:8; 6:4; 8:2; Rv 1:9; 2:9, 22; 1 Cl 22:7** (Ps 33:18); 59:4; 2 Cl 11:4 (quot. of unknown orig.); Hs 7:4ff. ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θ. ἡμῶν **2 Cor 1:4a; 7:4; 1 Th 3:7; ἐν πάσῃ θ. (TestGad 4:4) 2 Cor 1:4b; ἐν (τ.) θ. Ro 5:3a; Eph 3:13; 1 Th 1:6; 3:3. ἐν πολλαῖς θ. καὶ ποικίλαις Hs 7, 4. θ. μεγάλη great tribulation (SibOr 3, 186) Mt 24:21** (1 Macc 9:27); **Ac 7:11; Hn 4, 2, 4. Plural Hn 3, 2, 1. ἡ θ. ἡ μεγάλη the great tribulation Rv 7:14; τὸ ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θ. slight affliction 2 Cor 4:17. ἀνταποδοῦναί τινα θλίψιν repay someone w. affliction 2 Th 1:6. W. ἀνάγκη (q.v. 2) 1 Th 3:7. W. διωγμὸς Mt 13:21; Mk 4:17; Ac 8:1 D; 13:50 D; pl. 2 Th 1:4. W. δεσμά (TestJos 2:4) Ac 20:23. W. ὀνειδισμὸς Hb 10:33. W. στενοχωρία (q.v.) Ro 2:9. W. στενοχωρία and διωγμὸς 8:35 (w. λιμὸς and στενοχωρία Hippol., Ref. 5, 26, 12).—On the catalogue of hardships (peristasis) cp. **1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 4:8f; 6:4–10; 11:23–28; 12:10; Phil 4:11;** s. FDanker, Augsburg Comm. 2 Cor ’89, 89–91; 180f; idem, The Endangered Benefactor in Luke-Acts: SBLSP ’81, Page 153**

clearly alludes to religious persecution of the Christians, while the second term, τὴν πτωχείαν from πτωχεῖα²⁶ alludes to deep material poverty. Closely related to the noun πτωχεῖα are the verb, πτωχεύω (I become a beggar), and the adjective, πτωχός, ἢ, ὄν, forms which are much more commonly used in the New Testament.²⁷ The third object, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν, highlights slandering of the church from the Jewish synagogue.

The first object τὴν θλίψιν, affliction, clearly references hardship and suffering due to persecution, and is addressed with greater detail in the *dispositio* section in verse ten.

The second and third objects are expanded with qualifying comments added. The Son of Man indicates that He is fully aware of their τὴν πτωχείαν, but He adds

39–48; JFitzgerald, Cracks in an Earthen Vessel '88; MFerrari, Die Sprache des Leids in den paulinischen Persistenzen-katalogen '91; MEbner, Leidenslisten u. Apostelbrief '91.—ἡμέρα θλίψεως day of affliction (Gen 35:3; 2 Km 22:19; cp. En 103:9; TestLevi 5:5) 1 Cl 52:3 (Ps 49:15).—Of the tribulations of the last days (as Da 12:1) **Mt 24:21, 29; Mk 13:19, 24.** ἡ θ. ἡ ἐρχομένη ἡ μεγάλη the great tribulation to come Hv 2, 2, 7; cp. 2, 3, 4; 4, 1, 1; 4, 2, 5; 4, 3, 6.—Distress caused by war 1 Cl 57:4 (Pr 1:27). θ. θανάτου affliction of death B 12:5. Difficult circumstances **2 Cor 8:13; Js 1:27;** συγκοινωνεῖν τῇ θ. show an interest in (someone's) distress **Phil 4:14.** Of a woman's birth-pangs **J 16:21.**—ὅταν γένηται θ. when persecution comes Hv 3, 6, 5. θλίψιν ἀκούειν hear of persecution Hs 9, 21, 3. θλίψιν ἔχειν **J 16:33; 1 Cor 7:28; Rv 2:10;** Hv 2, 3, 1; Hs 7:3. εἰν ὑπενέγκη τὰς θλίψεις τὰς ἐπερχομένας αὐτῷ Hs 7:4; cp. 7:6. ἐξείλατο αὐτὸν ἐκ πασῶν τῶν θλίψεων αὐτοῦ **Ac 7:10.** διὰ πολλῶν θ. εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τ. βασιλείαν **14:22.** τότε παραδώσουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς θλίψιν **Mt 24:9;** cp. B 12:5. ἀποστήσεται πᾶσα θ. ἀπὸ σοῦ ... ἀπὸ πάντων ἀποστήσεται ἡ θ. Hs 7, 7.—Of the sufferings of Christ θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ **Col 1:24** (s. on ἀνταναπληρῶ and πάθημα 1).

2. inward experience of distress, affliction, trouble (Gen 35:3; 42:21 θ. τῆς ψυχῆς) θ. καὶ συνοχή καρδίας trouble and anguish of heart **2 Cor 2:4.** θλίψιν ἐγείρειν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου cause trouble for me in my imprisonment **Phil 1:17.** Ἄννα ... περιεἶλατο πᾶσαν θλίψιν ἀπ' αὐτῆς GJs 2:4 (cod. A, not pap; s. περιαιρέω 1).—DELG s.v. θλίβω. M-M. TW.

[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), 457.]

²⁶**πτωχεῖα, ας, ἡ** (πτωχεύω; Hdt., Aristoph. et al.; PGen 14, 23; LXX, Test12Patr; prim.: 'beggarliness') **state of being deficient in means of support, poverty**, lit., w. θλίψις **Rv 2:9.** ἡ κατὰ βάθους πτ. (βάθος 2) extreme poverty **2 Cor 8:2.** Paradoxically τῇ πτ. τινὸς πλουτῆσαι become rich through someone's poverty vs. **9.** In Ox 1 recto, 1 the word πτωχεῖα occurs, but the context is lost.—DELG s.v. πτήσσω III. M-M. TW.

[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), 896.]

²⁷πτωχεῖα is more an abstract noun, while πτωχεύω and πτωχός, ἡ, ὄν focus more on the harsh reality of hunger and starvation due to lack of means.

ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, but you are rich. The contrastive play on poor / rich with shifts between the literal and figurative meanings of both terms was commonplace in the ancient world.²⁸ Here it moves from literal material poverty to spiritual riches (figurative meaning).²⁹ In the midst of exceptionally high material affluence, the Christian community was struggling with material poverty. Living in poverty is a huge challenge within itself, but the difficulties are compounded when that poverty is surrounded by extreme wealth, and you are cut off from access to it, except by renouncing your religious values and commitments.³⁰ The temptation to deny

²⁸“This is an obvious example of paradox. The situation of this community and their eventual triumph (v 10) is paralleled in 4QpPsa 1–10 ii 10–11: ‘the congregation of the poor ones, who will accept the appointed time of affliction, and they will be delivered from all the traps of Belial’ (tr. Horgan, Pesharim, 196). The ‘poverty’ of the Smyrnaean Christians is apparently literal poverty (TDNT 6:911; EDNT 3:195), but it is used in opposition to πλούσιος, ‘rich,’ understood figuratively, probably in terms of eschatological wealth (Luke 6:20 = Matt 5:3; Matt 6:19–21 = Luke 12:33–34; Luke 12:21; 2 Cor 6:10; Jas 2:5). The Stoics also used the Greek and Latin terms for ‘wealth’ figuratively (Seneca Ep. 62.3). Philo was dependent on the Stoic paradox that only the wise and virtuous person was really ‘rich’ (Philo, Praem. 104; Som. 1.179; Plant. 69 [here he uses παραδοξολογεῖν, ‘paradox’]; Sob. 56; Fuga. 17; Quod Omn. Prob. 8, ‘You call those rich [πλουσίους] who are utterly destitute’; Arim, SVF 1, § 220; 3, § 589–603). The term πτωχοί, ‘poor,’ is used literally in 13:16 (in opposition to πλούσιοι, ‘rich’) but figuratively in 3:17. The fact that no mention is made of the economic poverty of the other six Christian communities suggests that the situation of this congregation is unusual. Their ‘poverty’ can be construed in several ways (Hemer, *Letters*, 68): (1) They represent the lowest classes of society (1 Cor 1:26; Jas 2:5). (2) They had their property confiscated or stolen by their hostile pagan neighbors. (3) They had been reduced to penury, through the liberality of their giving (2 Cor 2:8). (4) Uncompromising Christians found it difficult to make a living in a pagan environment (Bousset [1906] 242–43; Charles, 1:56; Caird, 35; Roloff, *Revelation*, 48). The first suggestion is problematic since it is now recognized that early Christianity was not a movement restricted to the lower classes; it encompassed the social spectrum (Grant, *Society*, 79–95; Malherbe, *Social*, 29–59; Holmberg, *Sociology*, 21–76), though no generalization can reveal the social and economic status of the Christians in Smyrna. The second and third suggestions are improbable, while the last is regarded by many commentators as the basis for Smyrnaean poverty.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 161–62.]

²⁹Elsewhere in Revelation the meaning patterns shift: In 13:16 both πτωχεῖα and πλούσιος are literal while standing in contrast with one another. But in 3:17 the shift between literal and figurative is reversed: literal πλούσιος but spiritual (figurative) πτωχεῖα.

³⁰The older I have become (now at 71 years of age) -- and hopefully the wiser and more sensitive to the situations of people around me I have become, -- the more I have come to appreciate the enormous challenges of extreme poverty. Having grown up in moderate poverty, I had some feel for it as a child and teenager. But most of my adult life has been lived in a comfortable middle class economic level that can dull one's senses to the destructive forces

your Christianity becomes very strong in such a situation. Raising children in this kind of atmosphere becomes even more daunting.

Thirdly, the Son of Man knows about τὴν βλασφημίαν, **the slander**, that the believers are receiving in Smyrna. The noun βλασφημία used here, along with the verb βλασφημέω, center on demeaning and denigrating speech uttered either against deity or other people. Note that in English such language is labeled blaspheming God but slandering people; most other modern western languages do not make such distinctions and thus can translate these Greek words with the same translation patterns whether they target God or other people.³¹

The seriousness of such actions is heightened when religious commitment to God enters the picture. James (3:9-10) makes this dramatically clear:

9 With it [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

9 ἐν αὐτῇ εὐλογοῦμεν τὸν κύριον καὶ πατέρα καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας, 10 ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ στόματος ἐξέρχεται εὐλογία καὶ κατάρα. οὐ χρή, ἀδελφοί μου, ταῦτα οὕτως γίνεσθαι.

Such actions reflect religious hypocrisy signaling the worthlessness of any claimed commitment to God. The slandering of the Christians in Smyrna came from the Jewish synagogue, made up of people claiming commitment to God. This Jewish religious community John instead labels as the συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ, **the synagogue of Satan**. The Jewish leaders and others in this religious community were serving the Devil rather than God.

This opposition to Christianity was most likely

at work in the lives of those on the bottom of the economic scale. Having done extensive reading about global poverty in both the modern and ancient worlds, and especially more recently having been pastor to many non-European immigrants living in very deep poverty at the English language church in Cologne Germany, has served to sharpen my sensitivities into the struggles that life at this level of existence presents. Sadly I have also observed that very few middle and upper class individuals have any understanding of poverty at all. Most content themselves by writing off poverty as a sign of laziness and lack of diligence. But this phantasy world that such people live in will come crashing down in devastating destruction on the Day of Judgment with the discovery of God's exceptional care and concern for the poor in this world and His stern demand that those claiming to be His people share that same compassion and concern in both action and word. Only a causal reading of Matthew 25 underscores this dramatically, not to speak of a careful study of Jesus' public ministry in the gospels.

³¹For example, the NRSV translates βλασφημία as blasphemy / blasphemous in Rev. 13:1, 5, 6, 17:3 because the target is God, but as slander in 2:9 where people are being targeted.

made worse because of the large numbers of Jews living in the city and the surrounding region. Records indicate that early Jewish migration into nearby Sardis began in 586 BCE. Substantial documentation strongly suggests huge numbers of Jewish people living in the region by the end of the first Christian century.³² If the modern estimate is even only reasonably close to correct, the count of one million Jews in Asia and Phrygia at this point in time is a large influence. An inscription discovered in Smyrna suggests that Jewish migration into this region continued well into the second century AD.³³

³²“Among the first Jewish expatriates to Asia Minor were those who fled to Sardis after the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., for Obad 20 mentions exiles from Jerusalem in Sepharad, an Aramaic name for Sardis, as a bilingual Lydian-Aramaic inscription indicates (S. A. Cook, “A Lydian-Aramaic Bilingual,” JHS 37 [1917] 77–87). Josephus has preserved a letter from Antiochus III to Zeuxis, governor of Lydia, containing instructions concerning the settlement of two thousand Jewish families who had been moved from Mesopotamia and resettled in Phrygia (Jos., Ant. 148–53). Philo observed that the Jews were numerous in both Asia Minor and Syria (Leg. 245).

By the first century A.D., the Jewish communities in Asia Minor had become large and influential (Jos., Ant. 14.259–61; 16.171, 235), and there is evidence for several dozen flourishing synagogues in the Roman province of Asia. There is inscriptional evidence for organized Jewish communities in Caria, at Myndus (CIJ 756), Hyllarima (A. Laumonier, BCH 58 [1934] 379, 516–17), and Aphrodisias; in Phrygia at Acmonia (MAMA 6:264 = CIJ 766; this Julia Severa inscription dates to the late first century A.D., so this location is the earliest synagogue in Asia Minor attested (an inscription), Apamea (CIJ 774), Synnada (MAMA 4:90), and Hierapolis (CIJ 775 = IGRom 4:834), in Lydia at Hypaepa (CIJ 755), Philadelphia (CIJ 754), and Sardis (Robert, Sardes, passim), and on the coast at Smyrna (CIJ 741), Miletus (CIJ 748; Jos., Ant. 14.244–46), Teos (CIJ 744), Phocaea (CIJ 738), and Ephesus (IBM 3:676–677; Acts 18:19, 26; 19:8). Acts refers to four specific synagogues in Pisidian Antioch (13:14), Iconium (14:1), Philippi (16:13), and Ephesus (18:19, 26; 19:8). John refers to “synagogues of Satan” at Smyrna (Rev 2:9) and Philadelphia (Rev 3:9). The discovery and excavation of the synagogue at Sardis — the largest ancient synagogue yet discovered — indicates the presence in Sardis of a very large, wealthy, and influential Jewish synagogue (Kraabel, “Impact,” 178–90). Though it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the number of Jews who resided in the cities of Asia Minor, P. W. van der Horst has suggested that it may have been as high as one million by the first century A.D. (NedTTs 43 [1989] 106–7).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 169–70.]

³³“A second-century A.D. inscription from Smyrna (IG-Rom4:1431.29; CIJ2:742.29) lists a group of people designated as οἱ ποτὲ Ἰουδαῖοι, which some have understood to mean ‘former Jews,’ who had donated the sum of 10,000 drachmas to the city and received citizenship by abandoning their ancestral religion. Yet A. T. Kraabel has convincingly argued that the phrase should be translated ‘people formerly of Judaea,’ i.e., immigrants from Palestine, since a record of public works, he argues, would be an inappropriate place to record one’s apostasy (“The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions,” JJS 33 [1982] 455). Understood

The Jewish historian Josephus asserts that the Roman government in this region gave the Jews legal authority to live strictly by their own religious traditions. Even though some Roman emperors cracked down heavily on various associations (Greek, *συναγωγαί*; Latin, *collegia*) in Asia, the Jewish synagogues were exempted from this and continued to operate as *collegia licita* (legal associations), rather than being declared *collegia illicita* (illegal associations). But this special privilege granted to the Jews came with a price. The Roman, and especially the Greek, views were that if someone was granted citizenship in the local city they should adopt the gods and goddesses officially worshiped in the city. Of course, the Jews resisted this vigorously and generally were exempted from this requirement. But this created ongoing tensions between the Jews and their Gentile neighbors that frequently flared up into violent conflict on various occasions.³⁴

Another interesting irritation in this pot was the Roman legislation requiring Jews throughout the empire to pay annually a poll tax of two denarii³⁵ for each Jew-

in this way, the inscription provides important evidence that Jewish immigration from Palestine continued into the second century A.D. Similarly, an inscription from Miletus (CIJ 2:748) reveals that Jews had their own reserved seats in the theater in spite of the pagan religious character of the setting. In an inscription from Hypaepa south of Sardis, the phrase Ἰουδαίων νεωτέρων, 'junior Jews,' occurs, i.e., a group of young Jewish boys belonging to the ephobic system of athletic education (CIJ2:755). It is perhaps more likely, however, that the author of Revelation is referring not to apostate Jews but rather to Jews who are opposed to Christianity; see A. Yarbro Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," HTR 79 (1986) 308–20." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 164.]

³⁴"Citizenship in the Roman province of Asia had two levels: residents of the Greek cities could be citizens of their own cities as well as citizens of the Roman empire. However, since citizenship in the local Greek cities of Asia involved participation in city cults, it was problematic for observant Jews. The failure of enfranchised Jews to worship the gods of the cities in which they lived caused friction with local Gentiles (see Jos., Ant. 12.125–25, where the Ionians complained to Marcus Agrippa in 14 B.C. that, if the Jews were to be their equals [συγγενεῖς], they should worship the gods of the Ionians). Though Josephus claims that the Hellenistic kings granted citizenship (πολιτεία) to the Jews in certain cities in Asia Minor, Lower Syria, and Antioch (Ant. 12.119; 16.160; Ag.Ap. 2.39), there are weighty arguments against accepting this claim (Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 329–30; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 167–72). Jews could be citizens of the Greek cities within which they lived as well as Roman citizens." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 170.]

³⁵Although very difficult to calculate with high certainty, two Roman denarii was about the equivalent of \$40 US dollars, using 2005 currency values, according to *answers.yahoo.com*. One denarius was typically a day's wage for an unskilled laborer and a common soldier in the Roman empire. .

ish male between three and sixty years of age.³⁶ Add to this was the annual temple tax (equal to two denarii) collected from every Jewish male ages twenty to fifty that was to be transported yearly back to Jerusalem. This amount was so great that special permission had to be granted to Jewish leaders before the money could be transported out of the province to Jerusalem.³⁷ The non-Jews did not care for this massive exit of funds out of their province.

John also saw a similar situation to Smyrna at Philadelphia and the Son of Man in the *dispositio* section at 3:9 makes this rather astounding promise to the believers at Philadelphia:

I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

³⁶"Like Jews throughout the Roman empire, those in the Roman province of Asia were required to pay a poll tax of two denarii for each Jewish male from three to sixty years of age, deposited in the *fiscus Iudaicus* in Rome, a central treasury for these revenues (see the documents in CPJ, nos. 160–229, and the essays in CPJ1:80–82; 3:111–16; Goodman, JRS 79 [1989] 40–44). The poll tax applied not only to professing Jews but also to Jews who tried to keep their origins secret, apostate Jews, and Jews who converted to other religions, including Christianity (Suetonius Dom. 12.2; cf. Smallwood, *Jews*, 371–76; sixty nine ostraca from Edfu, Egypt, contain receipts for Jews who paid this tax during the *principates* of Vespasian to Domitian [CPJ 2:119–36]). This tax was strictly imposed under Domitian (Pliny Pan. 42; Suetonius Dom. 12.2; Dio Cassius 67.4.6), so that two types of *sestertius* minted in A.D. 96 under Nerva had the inscription FISCHVDAICI CALVMNIA SUBLATA, 'The malicious proceedings with regard to the *fiscus Iudaicus* are abolished' (CAH 11:191; Cayón, CMIR 1:299). A self-imposed temple tax in the amount of a halfshekel, then two denarii, was collected from every male Jew (including freedmen and proselytes) between the ages of twenty and fifty and transported to Jerusalem where it defrayed the expense of public sacrifices and municipal needs (Exod 20:11–16; Jos., Ant. 14.110–13; 18.312–13; J. W. 7.218; Philo, Spec. Leg. 1.77–78; Leg. 1.77–78; Leg. 156; Matt 17:24; see Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 13–16). During the reign of Augustus, a number of Jewish communities in Asia Minor (including Ephesus, Sardis, and the Roman province of Asia) petitioned the emperor and other high officials for permission from Rome to send the temple tax to Jerusalem (Philo, *Legat.* 315–15; Jos., Ant. 16.162–68, 171–73; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 15–16)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 171.]

³⁷"CAIUS NORBANUS FLACCUS, PROCONSUL, TO THE GOVERNORS OF THE EPHESIANS, GREETING.

'Caesar has written word to me, that the Jews, wherever they are, are accustomed to assemble together, in compliance with a peculiar ancient custom of their nation, to contribute money which they send to Jerusalem; and he does not choose that they should have any hindrance offered to them, to prevent them from doing this; therefore I have written to you, that you may know that I command that they shall be allowed to do these things.' " [Philo of Alexandria and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 785.]

ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

Eschatological judgment day will bring some rather publicly embarrassing moments for these Jews at Philadelphia!

Given patterns in the interpretive history of statements like these regarding Jews at both Smyrna and Philadelphia, it should be noted that to be authentically a Jew is a positive matter for John. What he condemns here is not the Jewish people generally but those Jews, especially those in religious leadership roles, who were slandering Christians.³⁸ Such action betrayed the reality that although they were claiming to be Jews, this action revealed that they were not: ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, *from those claiming themselves to be Jews but are not*. In 3:9 the additional assertion of being liars is added: τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται, *of those claiming to be Jews themselves but are not, instead they are lying*. To be a Jew authentically means to be committed to doing the will of God, which these individuals clearly were not.³⁹

Exactly what were these Jews saying about the Christians at Smyrna? No specifics are given and one is left with the conclusion that their actions probably moved along similar patterns of Jewish synagogue hostility to the preaching of the Gospel as illustrated

³⁸“Here it is important to realize that the term ‘Jews’ is used positively (i.e., of those who are committed to do the will of God) but that, according to John, those who call themselves Ἰουδαῖοι do not live up to the standard implied in that designation (see Gutbrod, TDNT 3:382); i.e., here and in 3:9 (where a close parallel occurs) the author is not condemning Jews generally but only those associated with synagogues in Smyrna and Philadelphia. This is analogous to Paul’s claim that to be a Jew means to be circumcised in heart, which can even apply to those who are not physically circumcised, i.e., non-Jews (Rom 2:28–3:1; cf. his figurative use of “Israel” in Gal 6:16; cf. 1 Cor 10:18). It is even possible that the author is implying that none but his own community are true Jews (Tomson, *Bijdragen* 47 [1986] 286).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 162.]

³⁹In Ephesus during the early to mid 50s, Paul had initially experienced a positive reception to the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue there. But after three months the leadership and others turned against the Gospel and Paul’s preaching of it. It forced him to abandon the synagogue in favor of the lecture hall of Tyrannus (cf. Acts 19:8–10). This kind of attitude was typical of Paul’s experience in the Jewish synagogues during his missionary travels, although more often than not the attitude turned sour against the Gospel much quicker than it did at the synagogue in Ephesus.

Having about half a century of both Christians and Jews residing in Smyrna, the synagogue had indeed turned bitterly sour against Christians in the city.

earlier in the missionary ministry of the apostle Paul: Acts 13:45; 14:2; 18:6.⁴⁰ When the silversmith Demetrius created a riot in the city of Ephesus against Paul, the Jewish leaders of the synagogue tried to publicly distance themselves from the Christians to the crowds in the theater, but it backfired on them.⁴¹ At Pisidian Antioch the Jewish leadership had incited the Gentile leaders of the city to banish Paul and Barnabas from the region.⁴² A similar pattern erupted at Iconium after these two missionaries left Pisidian Antioch (cf. 14:1–2), and eventually they fled the city when the Jewish leaders joined but city rulers in a plot to stone them to death.⁴³ Then in Lystra it was the Jews from Antioch and Iconium who incited the Gentile residents

⁴⁰Acts 13:45. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul.

ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τοὺς ὄχλους ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου καὶ ἀντέλεγον τοῖς ὑπὸ Παύλου λαλουμένοις βλασφημοῦντες.

Acts 14:2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

οἱ δὲ ἀπειθήσαντες Ἰουδαῖοι ἐπήγειραν καὶ ἐκάκωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐθνῶν κατὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν.

Acts 18:6. When they [the Jews] opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

ἀντιτασσομένων δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ βλασφημούντων ἐκτιναξάμενος τὰ ἱμάτια εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· τὸ αἷμα ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑμῶν· καθαρὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν εἰς τὰ ἔθνη πορεύσομαι.

⁴¹Acts 19:33–34. 33 Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

33 ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὄχλου συνεβίβασαν Ἀλέξανδρον, προβαλόντων αὐτὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων· ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος κατασεισας τὴν χεῖρα ἠθέλεν ἀπολογεῖσθαι τῷ δήμῳ. 34 ἐπιγνόντες δὲ ὅτι Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν, φωνὴ ἐγένετο μία ἐκ πάντων ὡς ἐπὶ ὥρας δύο κραζόντων· μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων.

⁴²Acts 13:50. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region.

οἱ δὲ Ἰουδαῖοι παρώτρυναν τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας τὰς εὐσχήμονας καὶ τοὺς πρώτους τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐπήγειραν διωγμὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβᾶν καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων αὐτῶν.

⁴³Acts 14:4–6. 4 But the residents of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. 5 And when an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 the apostles learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country;

4 ἔσχισθη δὲ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς πόλεως, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἦσαν σὺν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, οἱ δὲ σὺν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις. 5 ὡς δὲ ἐγένετο ὁρμὴ τῶν ἐθνῶν τε καὶ Ἰουδαίων σὺν τοῖς ἀρχουσιν αὐτῶν ὕβρισαι καὶ λιθοβολῆσαι αὐτούς, 6 συνιδόντες κατέφυγον εἰς τὰς πόλεις τῆς Λυκαονίας Λύστραν καὶ Δέρβην καὶ τὴν περὶχωρον,

of Lystra to stone Paul into unconsciousness and to dump his body outside the city.⁴⁴ Later at Thessalonica in Macedonia, the Jewish synagogue leaders incited a riot against Paul and Silas forcing them to flee the city.⁴⁵ These same Jewish leaders in Thessalonica created problems for Paul at Beroea as well.⁴⁶ The pattern continued against Paul at Corinth, where the Jewish leadership unsuccessfully brought charges against Paul before the Roman authorities.⁴⁷ A few years later at Corinth these Jewish leaders plotted to kill the apostle, thus forcing him to take an alternative route from

Corinth back to Judea.⁴⁸

The uniform pattern of Diaspora Jewish opposition to Paul's preaching of the Gospel establishes inside the New Testament a backdrop against which better understanding of what was going on at Smyrna can take place.⁴⁹ In many of these references Luke uses either βλασφημέω or βλασφημία in describing the verbal abuse directed against the Gospel or Paul.

Important to understanding the situation at Smyrna at the end of the first century is the inner connection between these three direct objects: τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ..., καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν. If their affliction,

⁴⁸**Acts 20:3b.** He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews, and so he decided to return through Macedonia.

γενομένης ἐπιβουλῆς αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων μέλλοντι ἀνάγεσθαι εἰς τὴν Συρίαν, ἐγένετο γνώμης τοῦ ὑποστρέφειν διὰ Μακεδονίας.

⁴⁹Another perspective is the later 'looking back' view of many of the church fathers who unfortunately mix into their recollections a heavy dose of anti-Semitism:

Verbal slander is a less specific understanding of βλασφημία and could involve the spreading of false rumors about Christians by Jews (Justin Dial. 17.1; 108.2; 117.3; Tertullian Ad nat.M 1.14; Origen Contra Celsum 6.27). Christians were accused of various types of criminal or antisocial behavior (Justin I Apol. 26.7; 2 Apol 12; Athenagoras Leg. 3.31; Theophilus Ad Autolyicum 3.4; Tertullian Apol. 4.11). Some Jews were also vulnerable to denunciation, for some apparently avoided the head tax of two drachmas imposed by Titus (Jos. J. W. 7.218; Dio Cassius 65.2) by practicing Judaism privately or by concealing their nationality (Suetonius Dom. 12.2). According to a tradition stemming from the last days of Jesus in Jerusalem, the Jews urged Pilate to execute Jesus (Mark 15:12–14; Matt 27:22–23; Luke 23:20–23; John 19:6–7, 14–15). This tradition has influenced the depiction of Jews in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (ca. A.D. 155), in which they angrily denounce Polycarp publicly (12:2–3), actively call for his execution (13:1), and try to prevent Christians from retrieving his body (17:2; 18:1). This account, however, is historically tendentious as well as strikingly anti-Jewish, consciously formulated in an attempt to replicate the Gospel narratives of the passion of Jesus (Abrahams, *Studies*, 67–68; Musurillo, *Acts*, xiv; Dehandschutter, *Martyrium*, 251 n. 646). Buschmann (*Martyrium*, 156–57) argues that the anti-Judaism in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* functioned as a weapon against Judaizing Christians. Justin Martyr, who moved from Asia Minor to Rome, mentioned that Jews persecuted Christians (Dial. 16.4; 95.4; 110.5; 131.2; 133.6; I Apol. 31.5) and also that they cursed Christians in their synagogues (Dial. 16.4; 47.4; 93.4; 95.4; 96.2; 108.3; 133.6; 137.2; cf. Epiphanius Haer. 29.2; see W. Schrage, TDNT 7:838–39), perhaps referring to the so-called *Birkat ha-Minim*, or curse against the heretics, which was primarily directed against Jewish Christians (see Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim," 226–44). Justin is also of the opinion that Jews have spread false rumors about Christians (Dial. 17.1; 108.2; 117.3). According to Acts 26:11, when Paul persecuted Jewish Christians, he attempted to force them to βλασφημεῖν, i.e., probably to curse Christ (see Justin I Apol. 31). Eusebius (Hist. Eccl. 5.16.12) quotes Apollinarius (latter half of second century A.D.), who affirms the Jewish persecution of Christians in Asia Minor.

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 162–63.]

⁴⁴**Acts 14:19.** But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

Ἐπῆλθαν δὲ ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας καὶ Ἰκονίου Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ πείσαντες τοὺς ὄχλους καὶ λιθάσαντες τὸν Παῦλον ἔσυρον ἔξω τῆς πόλεως νομίζοντες αὐτὸν τεθνηκέναι.

⁴⁵**Acts 17:4-5.** 4 Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. 5 But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house.

4 καὶ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπίσθησαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σιλᾷ, τῶν τε σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων πλῆθος πολὺ, γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὀλίγαι. 5 Ζηλώσαντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ προσλαβόμενοι τῶν ἀγοραίων ἄνδρας τινὰς πονηροὺς καὶ ὀχλοποιήσαντες ἐθορύβουν τὴν πόλιν καὶ ἐπιστάντες τῇ οἰκίᾳ Ἰάσονος ἐζήτουν αὐτοὺς προαγαγεῖν εἰς τὸν δῆμον.

⁴⁶**Acts 17:13.** But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Beroea as well, they came there too, to stir up and incite the crowds.

Ὡς δὲ ἔγνωσαν οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης Ἰουδαῖοι ὅτι καὶ ἐν τῇ Βεροῖᾳ κατηγγέλη ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, ἦλθον κακεῖ σαλευόντες καὶ ταράσσοντες τοὺς ὄχλους.

⁴⁷**Acts 18:12-13.** 12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. 13 They said, "This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law."

12 Γαλλίωνος δὲ ἀνθυπάτου ὄντος τῆς Ἀχαΐας κατεπέστησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ ἤγαγον αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα 13 λέγοντες ὅτι παρὰ τὸν νόμον ἀναπειθεῖ οὗτος τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σέβεσθαι τὸν θεόν.

poverty and being slandered are understood as closely connected to one another, then a scenario emerges of physical persecution with an economic focus growing out of the Jewish slandering of the church there. The weight of evidence favors such an understanding, although one cannot dogmatically conclude this. In view of the consistent patterns painted by Luke in Acts, such a conclusion is clearly reasonable and not far fetched.⁵⁰

The following *dispositio* section in verse ten grows out of this scenario painted in verse nine: μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

Two foundational admonitions are given here: μηδὲν φοβοῦ, *fear nothing*, and γίνου πιστὸς, *be faithful*. Both imperative verbs are present imperatives, which stress not being afraid and being faithful as continuing responsibilities, rather than a momentary duty. It is important to note that the risen Christ has no ‘bone to pick’ with the church at Smyrna, as He did with those at Ephesus. Also, both of these admonitions are closely tied to one another in addressing a common issue defined in the preceding *narratio*.

μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν, *don't fear anything that you are going to suffer*. In today's world, the expectation would be for the Lord to find a way to eliminate the suffering. In the ancient world, the reality of suffering was assumed. The question was not how to avoid it, but rather how to survive it. The admonition to not fear is a continuous responsibility. The believers at Smyrna are literally not to ever fear any of the things they are about to suffer. The idea of μέλλεις πάσχειν is physically suffering in the near future and these are certain to happen. Certain reality rather than possibly is being addressed here. The infinitive πάσχειν references the gamut of physical suffering all the way to martyrdom, which is mentioned as the ultimate suffering.

This initial admonition to not fear is followed up with a warning of things to come: ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα, *Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction*. The interjection ἰδοὺ stresses the importance of this warning. The core of the warning is μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν, *the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison*. John cleverly links the Devil (ὁ διάβολος) who is about to press legal charges against Christians before

⁵⁰This is the working hypothesis that I conclude as a basis for understanding what was happening at Smyrna. Further signaling of this comes indirectly from seeing a triplicate, inner connected situation at Smyrna in the *narratio* that is the single focus of admonitions given in the *dispositio* section that follows.

Roman authorities with Satan (τοῦ σατανᾶ) who runs the Jewish synagogue. At nearby Pergamum the Devil had already managed to have a believer named Antipas executed (2:13). John anticipates that some will likely be executed at Smyrna (v. 10b). As the above background study on Roman prisons illustrates, being thrown into φυλακὴν was mainly being taken into custody to await trial which would likely lead to either coercion or more likely execution.⁵¹

One should recognize the basic NT terms for the devil: σατάν (indeclinable word from Hebrew מִשְׁפָּט), σατανᾶς (from Aramaic ܫܬܪܢܐ), and διάβολος. The latter term διάβολος is often used to translate the two Semitically derived terms σατάν and σατανᾶς, even though these terms are occasionally used in the NT as well. All three terms are interchangeable in reference.⁵² Inside

⁵¹“Under the Roman legal system, imprisonment was usually not a punishment in itself; rather it was used either as a means of coercion to compel obedience to an order issued by a magistrate or else as a place to temporarily restrain the prisoner before execution (Berger, Roman Law, 381, 633; Mommsen, Strafrecht, 960–80; for some exceptions, see Jos. J. W. 6.434; Eisenhut, ANRW II, 1/2:268–82). Here it appears that imprisonment, viewed as a period of testing, is primarily for the purpose of coercion. According to Gaius (Digest 48.19.29; tr. Watson, Justinian), ‘Those condemned to the extreme penalty immediately lose their citizenship and their freedom. This fate therefore anticipates their death, sometimes by a long period, as happens in the case of those who are condemned to the beasts. Again, it is often the custom for them to be kept [alive] after their condemnation, so that they may be interrogated under torture against others.’ According to Callistratus (Digest 48.19.35; tr. Watson, Justinian), ‘In the mandates given by the emperors to provincial governors, it is provided that no one is to be condemned to permanent imprisonment; and the deified Hadrian also wrote a rescript to this effect.’ There were, of course, exceptions (Digest 48.19.8.9; tr. Watson, Justinian): ‘Governors are in the habit of condemning men to be kept in prison or in chains, but they ought not to do this; for punishments of this type are forbidden. Prison indeed ought to be employed for confining men, not for punishing them.’” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 166.]

⁵²“DEVIL [Gk *diabolos* (διαβολος)]. The LXX and NT translation of the OT *sātan*. *Sātan* is a judicial term referring to an ‘accuser,’ ‘slanderer,’ ‘calumniator,’ or ‘adversary’ in court (cf. Ps 109:6). The NT also uses the transliteration *satanos*, which is synonymous with *diabolos* (cf. Rev 12:9). *Diabolos* is rare outside the LXX and the NT. It is found in Wis 2:23–24, which identifies the serpent of Genesis 3 with the Devil (see TDNT 2:71–81).

“SATAN as a supernatural accuser of humankind in the heavenly court and working for God occurs three times in the OT. In Zech 3:1–10 Satan stands at God’s right hand to accuse Joshua the High Priest, only to have his accusation spurned. In Job 1–2 Satan questions the sincerity of Job’s righteousness before God in the midst of the heavenly council. Here his office is expanded beyond accuser, for he is given control over sickness, death, and nature in the testing of Job. In 1 Chr 21:1 Satan incites David to sin by taking a census. Here the anarthrous form of *Sātan* becomes a proper name. Also apparent here is the tendency to divorce temptation from God and assign it to Satan, for in the earlier version of the

Revelation, διάβολος is used at 2:10, 12:9,⁵³ 20:2,⁵⁴ 20:10; σατανᾶς is used at 2:9; 2:13 (2x); 2:24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2; 20:7. The indeclinable Hebrew based σατάν is not used in Revelation.

Other terms used in reference to the devil include Βεεξεβούλ, Βεελξεβούλ, Βεελξεβούβ, Βελιάρ, Βελιάλ. The first three are usually translated as Beelzeboul or Beelzeboub, while the last two are Beliar and Belial.⁵⁵

In Revelation, the devil surfaces often throughout the document as the arch enemy of God and the people of God. Although powerful far above that of humans, he has no choice but to submit to the superior power of God that will ultimately banish him into Hell where his power will be limited only to that place. Here at Smyrna, and also at Pergamum and Philadelphia he plays a central role in opposing God's people by working through the Jewish synagogue.

At Smyrna, the devil is going to cause some of the census of David, God, not Satan, is the agent of the temptation (2 Sam 24:1; cf. Jas 1:13).

“The notion of the Devil as an independent evil power no longer in heaven but ruling a demonic kingdom and headed for judgment is absent in the OT. This move from a subordinate accuser to an independent tempter was a development of the intertestamental period and has been attributed to a number of factors. In limited favor in current scholarship is the proposal that the Hebrew notion of Satan was borrowed or heavily influenced by the dualism of Persian Avestan Zoroastrianism, in which Angra Mainyu, the evil god, opposes Ahura Mazda, the good god. However, in Hebrew thought Satan is always subordinate to God and Angra Mainyu does not function as an accuser in Zoroastrianism. Still, a development of Zoroastrian concepts cannot be ruled out.”

[Duane F. Watson, “Devil” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 183.]

⁵³**Rev. 12:9.** The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, *who is called the Devil and Satan*, the deceiver of the whole world — he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him

9 καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν.

⁵⁴**Rev. 20:2.** He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, *who is the Devil and Satan*, and bound him for a thousand years,

2 καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη

⁵⁵“In the NT *diabolos* occurs 37 times, *Satanas* 36 times, *Bee(l)zeboul* 7 times. In addition there are the following names: the → enemy, *echthros*; the evil one, *ho ponēros*; the prince of this world, *ho archōn tou kosmou toutou* (see → Beginning); the adversary, *antidikos*, which is a literal translation of the OT *śāṭān* (1 Pet. 5:8). Mk. uses *satanas* exclusively. Lk. prefers this word in his special material, but no basic difference in meaning from *diabolos* can be established. The latter is never used as a form of address (cf. Matt. 4:10 with 4:1, 5, 8, 11).” [H. Bietenhard and C. Brown, “Satan, Beelzebul, Devil, Exorcism” In vol. 3, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther and Hans Bietenhard (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 469.]

believers to be taken into custody. The stated objective from the view of the Son of Man is ἵνα πειρασθῆτε, *that you may be tested*. Most likely this plays off the often objective of Roman officials for taking individuals into custody: to coerce them into obedience to the demands of the magistrate. After a period of custody, these believers would be given the opportunity to renounce their Christian commitment in order to avoid execution. From Christ's viewpoint, however, this was an examination to determine whether they would be faithful to Him even to the point of dying. This would establish whether they were true Christians or not.

This warning is extended to affirm καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα, *and you will have affliction for ten days*.⁵⁶ Thus these believers will have a period of time in custody in order to decide how to respond to the magistrate in court. The term ἡμερῶν δέκα, *ten days*, specifies a short period of time in which these imprisoned believers experience affliction.⁵⁷ Given the horrible conditions normally experienced in such Roman custody, the pain and suffering endured would be intended to induce coercion, once the day of trial before the magistrate came around. Jesus saw it, however, as opportunity to fortify oneself with deeper resolve to remain true to Him no matter what the outcome of the trial might be.

Thus comes *the second admonition* in the *dispositio*: γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς, *be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown, which is life*. Again the present tense imperative form γίνου admonishes consistent faithfulness (πιστὸς). The limits of such faithfulness are defined as ἄχρι θανάτου, *unto death*. These believers must be prepared to die for their Christian faith! And they must not waver in this commitment.

In the typical Jewish style of command / promise, the admonition is re-enforced with the divine promise of a crown for willingness to die for one's faith. The crown

⁵⁶A few manuscripts (A P 1854. 2344 pc; Prim) insert ἔχητε in place of ἔξετε. The implication of the substitution of the Aorist subjunctive for the future indicative is to make this a second purpose statement in the ἵνα clause: *so that you might have testing and might have affliction for ten days*. But the evidence overwhelmingly favors the future indicative for the second statement implying that this ‘ten day’ affliction is going to happen as a consequence of the devil throwing the believers into prison. Alternatively a few manuscripts (C (2053) M^A sa) replace the future tense ἔξετε with the present tense (futuristic function) ἔχετε to heighten the certainty of the coming affliction.

⁵⁷“The phrase ‘ten days’ is used for an undefined but relatively short period of time, perhaps because it is the sum of the fingers of both hands (Gen 24:55; Num 11:19; Neh 5:18; Jer 42:7; Dan 1:12–15); m. Abot 5:1–6 contains a list of ten things of various kinds. Ten can also function as a number signifying completeness; see Brongers, “Zehnzahl,” 30–45.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 166.]

is a metaphor drawn from the ancient athletic games defining the wreath given to the winners of the games.⁵⁸ The phrase τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς only shows up this same way in James 1:12, and both instances the idea is the crown which is life (the Genitive case ζωῆς is the appositional function).⁵⁹ Thus Christ promises to personally give eternal life to every one who dies in commitment to Him. What a wonderful promise!

Another aspect of this is the posthumous awarding of the crown. As Aune insightfully points out,⁶⁰ this was

⁵⁸“Suffering and dying for one’s beliefs is frequently described using metaphors drawn from athletic contexts (2 Macc 6:10; 9:8; 11:20; 14:4; 17:11–16; T. Job 4:10; 27:3–5; Phil 2:16; 3:14; 2 Tim 2:5; 4:7–8; Heb 12:1–2; 1 Clem 5:1–7 [note the use of the metaphors ἀθληταὶ, ἀθλεῖν βραβεῖον, ὑπομονή]; 6:2; Ign. Pol. 2:3; 3:1; Pol. Phil. 9:2; Mart. Pol. 17:1; 18:3; 19:2; Hermas Man. 12.5.2; Sim. 8.3.6). Similarly, the metaphor of the victory wreath is often used as a metaphor for the heavenly reward awaiting the Christian who suffers and perhaps even dies for his or her faith (Pass. Mont. 14:5; Mart. Lyons 42).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 167.]

⁵⁹“Analogous expressions occur elsewhere in the NT, where ‘crown’ or ‘wreath’ is a metaphor for the eschatological reward of eternal life: ‘imperishable wreath’ (1 Cor 9:25), ‘crown of righteousness’ (2 Tim 4:8), an ‘unfading crown of glory’ (1 Pet 5:4; Asc. Isa. 9:10–11; T. Benj. 4:1; derived from Judaism, see LXX Jer 13:18; LXX Lam 2:15; 1QH 9:25; 1QS 4:7), the ‘crown of immortality’ (Mart. Pot. 17:1; Mart. Lyons 36, 38, 42), or simply ‘crown’ (Rev 3:11; 2 Clem 7:3; Gk Ap. Ezra 6.17; Apoc. Elij. 1:8; 5 Ezra 2:4; Asc. Isa. 9:25). In all these passages, the wreath or crown is a metaphor for the future reward of the righteous, which occurs in early Judaism (see Wis 5:16; 2 Apoc. Bar. 15:8; a ‘crown of glory’ is mentioned in 1QH 9:25 and 1QS 4:7). Aelius Aristides (Or 27.36; see P. W. van der Horst, *Aelius Aristides and the New Testament*, SCHNT 6 [Leiden: Brill, 1980] 82) has a relatively close parallel: ‘These are adorned with the wreath of the immortals [τῶ τῶν ἀθανάτων στεφάνῳ],’ i.e., they share the immortality of the gods. The ‘wreath’ image appears to be derived from athletic language (2 Tim 2:5) and is closely associated with martyrdom. Yet in 4 Maccabees (composed ca. A.D. 50), the imagery of victorious athletes is used of Jewish martyrs (6:10; 11:20; 13:15; 15:29; 16:16; 17:11–16).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 167.]

⁶⁰“There are, it should be noted, several examples of citizens awarded the honor of a wreath posthumously by the demos or a city, frequently with a representation of the wreath on the sepulchral monument encircling the name of the awarding body, usually δήμος (see MAMA 8 [1962] 408.13–14, from Aphrodisias; Horsley. *NewDocs* 2:50), or, particularly in Rhodes, by the particular secular or, cult society (a κοινόν or θίασος) to which the deceased had belonged (Fraser. *Funerary Monuments*, 68). One example is found in the following honorific inscription in honor of Dionysodoros (IG 155; Fraser, *Funerary Monuments*, 62 n. 357): ‘To the account of Dionysodoros, the Benefactor, who was crowned with a golden crown for ever [στεφανωθέντος χρσέωι στεφάνωι εις τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον] (the cost of) the crown that was bought,’ meaning that Dionysodoros would remain a permanent benefactor and would be honored annually with the coronation of the funerary monument.

not something done for athletes in the ancient world. But the awarding of a ceremonial wreath to honored citizens after their death was relatively common place. It would be granted to family members or inscribed on a sepulchral monument in honor of the deceased individual. To the non-believers in Smyrna all they could hope for was a tombstone with the drawing of a crown on it in recognition of honor. But to the faithful believer in Smyrna, death brings the crown that is nothing less than eternal life with Christ in Heaven! Not much comparison!

Martyrdom in the perspective of the New Testament is not the same as is often understood in the modern world.⁶¹ Biblically to die for one’s faith is indeed a

Ramsay (Letters, 256–59) and Hemer (Letters, 59–60) have suggested that the phrase ‘crown of life’ is an allusion to the ‘crown’ metaphor that was frequently applied to Smyrna on coins and inscriptions and by rhetoricians (Philostratus Vita. Apoll. 4.7, though this is not at all persuasive given the ubiquitous nature of the crown metaphor.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 167–68.]

⁶¹“Seeley has related these martyrdom tales to the wider Greco-Roman concept of the ‘Noble Death,’ and shown how the NT materials build in various ways upon such an understanding (Seeley 1990: 84–112). What they lack is the kind of extended polemical defense and praise of voluntary death that one finds in these Jewish materials from Maccabean times. The early Christians simply begin with the presupposition that to die for the faith is thoroughly noble and good. The deaths of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29 = Matt 14:1–12; Luke 9:7–9), Stephen (Acts 7); and James (Acts 12:1–2) are all reported with this presupposition. The book of Acts reports numerous occasions when either mobs or authorities try to kill Paul (10:23–25; 14:5, 19; 17:6–10; 21:30–31; 22:22–23; 23:21) as well as Paul’s own preconversion efforts to imprison and slaughter early Christian believers (8:3; 9:1). Paul confirms the essential points of Luke’s account in his own letters (2 Cor 11:23–33; 1 Cor 15:9; cf. 1 Tim 1:12–15).

“Of course Jesus himself is the preeminent model of the faithful martyr in the NT. He is directly called such twice in Revelation (1:5; 3:14). All four gospels stress that his death was voluntary. ‘No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord’ declares the Jesus of the gospel of John (10:18). Mark places both the necessity of Jesus’ death and his willingness on the lips of Jesus himself (Mark 8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:33–34, 45; 14:36). Both Matthew and Luke follow Mark closely in this regard (e.g., Matt 16:21–23; Luke 9:51), while John makes the same point independently (12:27). Matthew and John place particular stress on Jesus’ freedom to escape, and his willingness to die, at the time of his arrest (Matt 26:53–54; John 14:30; 18:4–8). This emphasis comes up repeatedly in various other ways in all four gospels (Droge and Tabor 1992). Paul’s own understanding of Jesus’ death appears to have close ties with the Maccabean materials surveyed above (Seeley 1990).

“This willingness to choose death in the face of opposition is presented as a necessary and model behavior for the followers of Jesus as well (Mark 8:34–35 = Matt 16:24–25; Luke 9:23–24; John 15:18–20). Predictions that followers will be delivered up and killed, which may reflect social conditions of the post–70 C.E. period, run through all layers of the gospel materials (Mark 13:12–13

noble act and a commendable one. But it does not gain for the individual any special status in Heaven above believers who die a natural death or who are living at the return of Christ. Christ set the example on the cross of a commitment to doing the will of God that He was willing to die for. This is the expectation -- if not divine demand -- of every person who claims to be a follower of Christ.

C. Admonition and promise, v. 11

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

Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἕκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

11 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

The admonition to hear repeats verbatim what was uttered at the end of the first message and will also be repeated in the same form in the subsequent five messages.

It comes naturally as a prophetic call to pay attention to the preceding words, especially in the *narratio* and *expositio* sections (vv. 9-10), of this message. These words spoken by the Son of Man are now the words of the Holy Spirit who takes them and applies them not just to believing community at Smyrna, but to all seven congregations, since they have relevancy to more than just those in Smyrna.

The victory formula that follows promises eternal life to the one remaining consistent in commitment to Christ. The thrust of the promise is the same as in the

= Matt 24:9-10; Luke 21:12-17; Q Luke 12:4-5 = Matt 10:28; John 16:2).

“Paul asserts not only his willingness to die, but even his preference for death over life (Phil 1:19-26). The way he poses his dilemma, and even the language he uses, reflects Greco-Roman philosophical disputes over the appropriateness of suicide (Droge 1988; Daube 1962; Palmer 1975). Such discussions are rooted in a long tradition of evaluations of the death of Socrates (Droge and Tabor 1992). How Paul actually died, whether by execution or by his own hand, or some combination of both, is unknown.

“The book of Revelation refers to martyrs several times (5:9-11; 16:6; 17:6). They are singled out for special reward during the millennial reign of Christ (20:4-6). A specific individual at Pergamum, one Antipas, otherwise unknown, was apparently slain by authorities and is called ‘my witness [Gk martys] my faithful one’ (3:13). Revelation also mentions the ‘two witnesses’ or martyrs who are to appear at the very end of history, be slain, but then be resurrected from the dead after three days (11:4-13). The book of Hebrews exhorts its readers to be willing to die for the faith, like heroes of old, but the writer admits few if any have actually been faced with such choices (11:32-40; 12:3-4).”

[James D. Tabor, “Martyr, Martyrdom” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 577.]

first message, although the grammar construction varies slightly. The dative of indirect object present tense participle τῷ νικῶντι from νικάω now becomes the present tense participle subject, Ὁ νικῶν, to the Aorist passive voice verb ἀδικηθῆ from ἀδικέω that references physical and mental harm from something.⁶² What cannot do harm to the one overcoming is τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου, the second death. This phrase is also found in 20:6 (ὁ δεύτερο θάνατος) and 20:14; 28:8 (ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος). It has the same meaning uniformly in the book of Revelation. The expression is distinctive since it exists nowhere else in the NT, second century Christian literature, or pre-Christian Greek literature.⁶³ But the idea of two kinds of dying, usually

⁶²In Revelation, ἀδικέω is used with several senses as is reflected in the NRSV translation: harm - 2:11; 9:10, 19; 11:5; damage - 6:6; 7:2, 3; 9:4; evildoer - 22:11; evil - 22:11.

⁶³“The concept does not occur in the rest of the NT, in second-century Christian literature, or in pre-Christian Greek literature. The notion appears twice in nearly contemporary Greek literature. First, in Plutarch De facie 942F (who is very familiar with Egyptian myth and ritual; see J. Hani, *La religion Égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque* [Paris: Société d’Édition “Les belles lettres,” 1976]), the phrase ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος occurs in a positive sense for the death of the ψυχή, ‘soul,’ on the moon (preceded by the death of the σῶμα, ‘body,’ on earth), which frees the νοῦς, ‘mind,’ to ascend to a blissful existence on the sun (see G. Soury, *La démonologie de Plutarque* [Paris: Société d’Édition “Les belles lettres,” 1942] 196-203). Second, the conception of two deaths was promulgated by various philosophical traditions; see Macrobius in Comm. in Somn. Scip. 1.11.1 (Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, tr. W. H. Stahl [New York: Columbia UP, 1990]):

[T]he followers of Pythagoras and later those of Plato declared that there are two deaths, one of the soul, the other of the creature, affirming that the creature dies when the soul leaves the body, but that the soul itself dies when it leaves the single and individual source of its origin and is allotted to a mortal body.

“This doctrine of the *commentatio mortis*, i.e., ‘the practice of dying,’ is also referred to in *Macrobius Comm. in Somn. Scip.* 1.11.12; 1.13.5-6; see P. W. van der Horst, “Macrobius and the New Testament,” *NovT* 15 (1973) 220-32. For a more extensive discussion of the theme of *commentatio mortis* or μελέτη θανάτου, see D. E. Aune, “Human Nature and Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions and Paul,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. T. Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 305-12.

“In Epictetus 1.5.4, it is said that while most people fear the deadening of the body, few care about ‘the deadening of the soul [τῆς ψυχῆς δὲ ἀπονεκρουμένης].’ While the ‘deadenning of the soul’ might be construed as a sort of second death (the first being the death of the body), in actuality the ‘deadenning of the soul’ is a metaphor for the person who avoids acknowledging the truth. In *Odyssey* 12.22 the term δισθανής, ‘twice dead,’ is used to refer to Odysseus’ trip to Hades (the so-called Nekuia in *Odyssey* 11) along with his future physical death. In Achilles *Tatius* 7.5.3, the hero Clitophon says of his love Leucippe (tr. J. J. Winkler, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon [Berkeley: University of California, 1989]), ‘But now you have died twice over [τέθνηκας θάνατον διπλοῦν]—soul and body [ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος] both are

one of the body and the other of the soul, did exist in the pre-Christian ancient world, largely due to Egyptian religious teaching that was influential elsewhere in the Roman empire. This thinking had found its way into Jewish thinking as is reflected in the first century BCE writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo. The concept

gone.’ In Lucian *De mort.* 7.2, Menippus, speaking to the ψυχή, ‘soul,’ of Tantalus in Hades, contests the notion of a second Hades or a second death (θάνατος ἐντεῦθεν). In *Bib Ant.* 51:5 (which probably originated during the first century A.D. in Palestine), the first line of the following antithetical couplet might be construed to imply a second death:

And when the wicked have died, then they will perish.

And when the just go to sleep, then they will be freed.

The source of this notion in the Hellenistic world, even though the means of transmission is not known, is the Egyptian conception of the second death (Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 254; Bergman, *Ich bin Isis*, 57). The phrase ‘to die the second death’ (*mt m whm*) occurs frequently in the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead (Zandee, *Death*, 186–88; Faulkner, *Coffin Texts* 1:88 [spell 83]; 1:134 [spell 156]; 1:267 [spell 203]; 2:69 [spell 423]; 2:76 [spell 438]; 2:88 [spell 458]; 2:308 [spell 787]), referring to the total destruction of the *ba*, ‘soul,’ after bodily death (Zandee, *Death*, 14; Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 207), a fate to be avoided at all costs. The ultimate Egyptian origin of this concept in Greek, Christian, and Jewish literature is supported by the pairing of the notions of the second death and the lake of fire in Rev 20:14 and 21:8, which also occurs in Egyptian texts (e.g., Book of the Dead 175.1, 15, 20; Budge, *Book of the Dead*, 184, 186–87) and once in the relatively late Tg. Isa. 65.6.

“Philo (Praem. 70) speaks of two kinds of death, death itself and existence in a continued state of dying. The Hebrew expression for second death is מוֹת שֵׁנִי *māwet šēnī*, first occurring in the ninth-century A.D. work *Pirqe R. El.* 34, while the Aramaic expression מִיָּתָא תַּנְיָנָא , *mītā. tinyaynā.*, ‘second death,’ occurs only in the targums, from which six texts are discussed by McNamara (*Targum*, 118–24; Tg. Jer. 51:39; 51:57; Tg. Deut. 33:6; Tg. Isa. 22:14; 65:6, 15). Tg. Jer. 51:39 and 57 are phrased identically (tr. Hayward, *Targum of Jeremiah*): ‘and they shall die the second death, and shall not live for the world to come, says the Lord.’ McNamara, who does not mention the parallels in Lucian and in Egyptian sources, thinks that ‘the expression must have come from Judaism, unless it was coined by Christianity’ (McNamara, *Targum*, 118), and Bogaert (“La ‘seconde mort,’” 199–207) makes the same assumption. There are two possible meanings for ‘second death’ in Judaism: (1) exclusion from the resurrection, i.e., remaining in the grave, or (2) assignment to eternal damnation (Str-B, 3:830). The Egyptian significance of second death and the lake of fire, i.e., complete and total destruction, cannot be meant in Revelation, as Rev 14:9–11 and 20:10 make clear. Rather, as in Philo and Tg. Isa. 65:6, eternal torment is signified, so that what we have is an adaptation of Egyptian underworld mythology to Judeo-Christian tradition.”

“On the general links between Egyptian religion and Asia Minor, see R. Salditt-Trappmann, *Tempel der ägyptischen Götter in Griechenland und an der Westküste Kleinasiens*, EPRO 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), and G. Höbl, *Zeugnisse ägyptischer Religionsvorstellungen für Ephesus*, EPRO 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1978).”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52C, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1091-93.]

becomes more prominent in Judaism after the second century AD and shows up often in the rabbinical Targums, which are applicational commentaries on the Hebrew Bible written in Aramaic.

Although in the developing thought on the second death (מִיָּתָא תַּנְיָנָא, *mītā. tinyaynā.*) in Judaism it could refer to the destruction of the soul at physical death, more common was the idea of eternal torments of the soul. Clearly in Revelation with ὁ δευτέρο θάνατος linked to the lake of fire etc. in chapter twenty, this latter idea is unquestionably the meaning for John.

What the Son of Man promises to the one overcoming is that the fires of eternal damnation will not be able to harm him in the least. The overcomer is fully protected by God from such injury. This is heightened by the double negative construction οὐ μὴ, **by no possible means**, linked to the Aorist verb ἀδικηθῆ, which here stresses the utter impossibility of one single injury.

Thus far the one overcoming is promised φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ, **to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God** (2:7) and οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου, **absolutely will not be harmed by the second death** (2:11).

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Does the situation at Smyrna have relevance to modern Christianity? Absolutely! At several points!

First, these words are spoken by the eternal Christ whose existence knows no beginning or ending. This is affirmed by His resurrection from physical death. Therefore His message is critically important to be heard. We must pay close attention to how the Holy Spirit takes these words and applies them to our world.

Second, Christianity will inevitably pay a price for consistent, unflinching commitment to Christ. The church at Smyrna experienced affliction, poverty, and slander bundled into a single package because of their faith commitment. This entailed for some of them imprisonment and possible execution. Whoever thinks that genuinely following Christ will not produce hostility and opposition has not read his Bible at all.

Third, religion gone sour becomes a tool in the hands of the devil himself. The Jewish synagogue became the instrument of persecution of God’s people at Smyrna, thinking all the while that it represented the true people of God and that persecuting the Christians was the will of God. When religious folks take their eyes off God and become enslaved to a rigid traditionalism steeped in cultural based religion rather than biblically defined commitment to God through Christ, it serves the purposes of Satan rather than of God. Their religion then becomes an evil force in this world.

Fourth, a Christian commitment true to Christ no matter what the circumstance will bring the promised

blessing of eternal life from the Lord. Even if that commitment produces martyrdom the divine promise holds true. Earthly forces may severely harm the physical body in execution, but they cannot touch the spiritual life of the believer, for his/her life is untouchable by the second death.

These are just some of the possible applications of 2:8-11 to our lives in the modern world. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit many more can be brought to mind. This text is vitally relevant to our day!