

Pergamum
Thyatira
Philadelphia
Ephesus
Sardis
Smyrna
Laodicea



Message to the seven
churches of Revelation

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Thanks to Jesus who by His blood bought for God those of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and to our God He constituted them kingdom and priests to reign on earth. Thanks to the Lord who gave us His revelation through the Holy Spirit poured upon our brothers of the past and, even today, gives us the knowledge of His mysteries, so that we can continue the work that was started by Him.

This book is dedicated to those, coming from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, who by Christ are kings and priests on earth, searching, tirelessly, the knowledge of His word, the understanding of it and His wisdom, helping to build the lives of many other warriors. May the Lord help them in their walk and give them the strength to proclaim His truth.

“Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force... As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (Rev. 1: 12-16; 20)

Introduction

There are certain subjects in the bible that bring to mind many questions, for besides having a very deep content, they are connected to a particular divine revelation that we'll never have through reasoning, human wisdom, logic or intellect, nor as a result of scientific research. Like everything in the bible, the important thing is not to know by heart what it is written, much less to read it as a historical and static book but to have the revealed word to us by the Holy Spirit, so that we can live it and understand that it has important practical applications that enrich us and bring us closer, more and more, to the throne of God. The revelations given to our brothers of the past through visions, dreams or personal revelations were not an exclusive privilege of them, for the Spirit of the Lord is still alive and wants to instruct us nowadays, since we, as His chosen people, must be aware of what is to come, so we need to correct ourselves *today* and be prepared for His coming.

For some time I have been asking the Lord's understanding with regard to the letters sent by the apostle John to the seven churches described in the book of Revelation. They relate to us as the Body of Christ. We have to change some positions in relation to what we have done and what we still think about the gospel.

In *Rev. 1: 12-20* we can read, "Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw *seven golden lampstands*, and in the midst of the *lampstands* I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. *In his right hand he held seven stars*, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. As for the mystery of *the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*'"

In *Rev. 4: 1-5* the apostle John makes another description of God's throne: "After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and *in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God*", that is, the fullness of the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

It's interesting to notice that the bible says that the Lord *is with the seven stars in His right hand*. However, He *is among the seven golden lampstands*. In the first place, it is important to stress that *star*, biblically speaking, means *a spiritual being*, just as *angels* are, therefore, this can mean more than the leader of each church, the *spirit* of each one. We should also pay attention to what is written: "In his right hand he held seven stars", i.e., the right hand is a symbol of honor, power, authority, blessing, might

and privilege, and this means that is the Lord who holds the leadership of the Church under His authority. He holds the power. Another curious point is that in the dictionary, the word *spirit* has many meanings, including:

- 1) The immaterial part of man.
- 2) Supernatural entity as angels and demons.
- 3) Person endowed with intelligence or kindness above the ordinary.
- 4) Imagination, inventive power (cleverness), intelligence and finesse.
- 5) Temper, attitude, disposition
- 6) Grace, mood.
- 7) Predominant idea, meaning, sense.
- 8) Faculty of understanding, knowing and accepting things.
- 9) Idea, thought, mental capacity.

So when we speak of the *seven stars*, that is, the seven “*angels*” of the churches, we can think that, more than the symbol of a leader, they have the meaning of *the predominant spirit in them*, in other words: *the idea, the dominant force, the temper, the tendency, the thought of each one*. Members are always the *mirror* of the leader in any church. If we want to know how the leader is, it’s just watch the sheep. The predominant spirit in that place is what will determine the behavior of that community. We can go further in our argument, saying that the seven stars correspond to *the human part* at the church, held by the power of God and under His government (*Rev. 1: 16: “In his right hand he held seven stars”*), while the *seven spirits of God* correspond to *the divine part* (*Rev. 1: 12-13: “in the midst of the lampstands”*), that is, *the seven anointing bestowed by God on the human part to complete it*, to supply what lacks to it. So Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (*Matt. 5: 14-16*).

This does not mean that the Lord does not want to pour the seven spirits upon each one of us, much less that we should have only a flame lit, however, there is a flame that is predominant on every group of believers that He calls ‘one of the seven churches’, in order that *His Church*, as a *single Body* is cohesive and strong, forming a ‘lampstand of seven lamps.’ The number seven is the perfect number of God, therefore, His perfection should be within each group individually and in the whole, which is *His Body on earth*. In fact, the lampstand which the bible speaks here were separate lampstands, representing the seven Gentile churches of Asia Minor (The Holy Spirit distributed among the Gentiles), while the lampstand of a single shaft and with seven lamps given to Moses in *Ex 25: 31-40; Ex 37: 17-24; Num. 8: 1-4*, and mentioned in *Heb. 9: 1-10*, represented the Spirit of God among the people of Israel (*cf. Rev. 11: 4*). *For practical purposes, it is the same thing, the presence of the Holy Spirit with power, anointing and revival among those who are His chosen (Jews and Gentiles)*.

Before talking about the churches, I’ll summarize the political dominion which was over the people of Israel, especially the Roman dominion. So we’ll understand what was happening in each of the seven churches of Asia Minor in the beginning of the Christian era and why God told John to write letters of encouragement to them. The book of Revelation was written between 90 and 95 AD to the provinces of Asia Minor (now Turkey) in order to warn the believers not to abandon their faith in Christ, ensuring their victory by staying on God’s side. The Greek word *Apocalypse* means: *discovery, revelation*. The Jewish apocalyptic writings used the figurative language and the symbolism to show that evil will be replaced by kindness and peace of the kingdom of

God. John was exiled on the island of Patmos, at the east of Aegean Sea, around 90 AD, during the persecution of the Roman emperor, Domitian (81-96 AD). There, John wrote the Book of Revelation. He died of natural death at Ephesus, in 103 AD, when he was 94 years old, after being released from prison in the government of Nerva, another Roman emperor. An ancient Latin tradition states that he escaped without getting burned, after having been thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. This would have happened in Rome. There is no proof of this. It was the custom of the Roman emperors consider themselves gods, so God condemned too much the imperial cult in the Epistles and in Revelation. Domitian (among many others) made himself a god.

I hope you feel edified by the reading and the Holy Spirit may clarify many doubts about your position as a believer before the world in which we live. Thus, you shall be a *lampstand* within your own community, reminding the brothers about the importance of consecrate and sanctify themselves for the coming of Jesus.

May the Lord's light shine on your life!

Tânia Cristina

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Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [] or parenthesis (), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- NIV = New International Version (it will be used in brackets in some verses to facilitate the readers' understanding).

History

Let's talk first about the *Menorah* mentioned in the introduction. The first reference to the lampstand is in *Ex. 25: 31-40*. Here God was giving orders to Moses to build the tabernacle and commanded him to do it with seven lamps to be placed in the Holy Place of the temple, where priests should be every day. The next reference is in *Ex. 37: 17-24*, when again He talks about the tabernacle. The lampstand was made of pure gold, unlike the table and the ark, which were made of acacia wood covered with gold; the lampstand was carved in gold and, as the bible says, was hammered gold. In *Num. 8: 1-4* we find another reference to the lampstand, when God is speaking to Moses about Aaron and the Levites, which makes us think that the lamps are related to the priesthood. In the NT we find a reference to the lampstand and the tabernacle in *Heb. 9: 1-10*. In summary, here we can speak of the meaning of these symbols: *The Holy Place*, where the table and the lampstand and the loaves are, means a life dedicated to God. The *lampstand* means the presence of the Holy Spirit with us, God's light, a lifestyle that should be part of the Christian life. The *table* speaks of communion and intimacy with God and the *bread* means food and provision; the *altar of incense*, although was placed in the *Holy Place*, is part of the *Holy of Holies*, and is a lifestyle of prayer and the brightness of the Lord; the *ark* is symbol of covenant with God and His presence in us; *manna* is symbol of spiritual food He gives us and the *staff* represents the authority and the anointing that we should have in our spirit. The *stone tablets* are our covenant with God and His commandments. The *Holy Place* represents our soul and the *Holy of Holies (The Most Holy Place, NIV)*, our spirit, where only the high priest, Jesus, has access.



Table with the bread of Presence



Ark of the Covenant



Candlestick



Altar of incense

For us who are born of the Spirit, all this has a meaning. First, let's go to *Prov. 20: 27* where it is written: "The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord, searching every inmost part." This means that our spirit illuminated by the presence of God is able to search our inner selves and transform it into the image of God. In *Isa. 11: 2* it becomes clear to us the meaning of these seven lights. Isaiah prophesies about the qualities of the Messiah, as one would expect of a king, also called 'God's anointed.' Therefore he begins by saying that the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Messiah, bringing also the gifts of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might [in some bible versions is written 'power'], of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. The text says: "The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him [*Jesus*], the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might [NIV, power], the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." The word 'counsel' in Hebrew is `etsah (Strong #6098), meaning advice; by implication, plan; prudence: advice, advisement (deliberation, consideration, weighing or prudence), counsel, counselor, purpose. From God's standpoint, it is good to ask for these seven portions, the seven spirits of God upon us, because we'll know how to lead ourselves properly on our Christian journey. This you can see in *Prov. 8: 1-21*, where the preacher talks about wisdom and where we can perceive the presence of these seven anointing (*The Spirit of the Lord* is not specified in the text). The text [NRSV] says:

"Does not *wisdom* call, and does not *understanding* raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: 'To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. O simple ones, learn *prudence*; acquire *intelligence* [*Understanding – NIV*], you who lack it. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. They are all straight to one who understands and right to those who find *knowledge*. Take my instruction instead of silver, and *knowledge* rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. I, *wisdom*, live with *prudence*, and I attain knowledge and discretion. The *fear of the Lord* is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.¹⁴ I have good *advice* [*counsel – NIV; KJV*] and sound wisdom [*NIV – sound judgment*]; I have *insight* [*understanding – NIV; KJV*], I have *strength* [*Power – NIV*]. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.'" In this text, the words 'prudence' and 'counsel' in Hebrew are different from `etsah (*Isa. 11: 2*). It appears only in verse 14: `etsah (*Prov. 8: 14*).

Let us now explain what it means these *seven spirits of God*, based on the text of *Isa. 11: 2*:

1) *The Spirit of the Lord*: is the very *Spirit of God within us*, keeping His flame of life in our spirit, causing us to exist and do His work on earth. With the Holy Spirit we can do what Jesus did: to preach good news, heal the sick of soul and body, set free the captives of the devil and bring joy. We receive it at the moment of our conversion. *Isa. 61: 1-3* says, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to

provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.” Jesus refers to the subject in *Lk. 4: 18-19*. It makes us feel courage as well as the strength and the power of God in action of miracles, deliverance and healing.

2) *The Spirit of Wisdom*: In Greek is *sophias*; in Hebrew, the word used for wisdom is *hokhmâ*, although other words are also sometimes used as synonyms: *bînâ* (understanding – *Job 39: 26; Prov. 23: 4*), *t^ébhünâ* (discernment – *Ps. 136: 5*) and *sekhel* (prudence – *Prov. 12: 8; Prov. 23: 9*). Wisdom is intensely practical, not theoretical. Its seat is the heart, the center of intellectual and moral decision. Basically, wisdom is the art of being successful, to form a correct plan to achieve the desired results. It also means: to have skill, prudence, grace; to learn to apply knowledge and understanding of the word; full of intelligence, knowledge of different subjects and the act of interpreting dreams. There is also the human or worldly wisdom that is based on intuition and experience, without the aid of revelation, so it is limited. In the NT, it has the same intensely practical nature that we find in wisdom of the OT. The wisdom in its broadest sense belongs exclusively to God and consists not only in the complete knowledge about all aspects of life but also in the knowledge of what He has in mind to be fulfilled. Wisdom puts us in direct contact with the divine mind, making us think as He thinks.

3) *The Spirit of Understanding*: intelligence, discernment. It is the comprehension that we acquire after having the knowledge (revelation) of God’s Word. It puts us in contact with the divine truth contained in the Word, bringing us the security about what we believe and giving us the ability to resist evil and everything that tries to prevent His will for our lives, as well as false teaching.

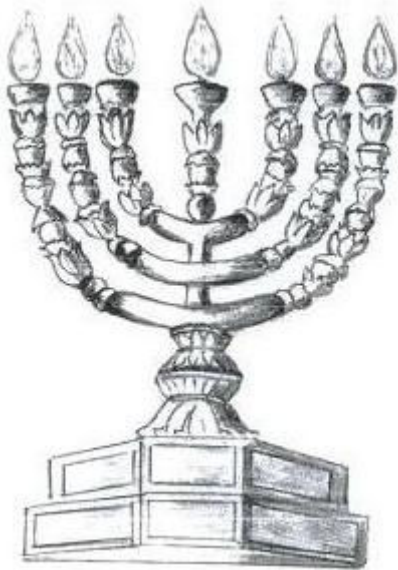
4) *The Spirit of Counsel*: it means *planning and strategy, solution for a purpose*. Being on a council table is to be together with authorities who come to discuss something important and to plan strategies and solutions (*Isa. 40: 13-14; Jer. 23: 18*). Thus, being in a meeting with God in prayer gives us the spiritual insight to receive strategies from Him to overcome any situation. In this verse of Isaiah, the word ‘counsel’ in Hebrew is `etsah (Strong #6098), meaning advice; by implication, plan; prudence: advice, advisement (deliberation, consideration, weighing or prudence), counsel, counselor, purpose. Prudence (or Counsel) leads us to plan the right strategy in each situation and to wait for the right moment to make decisions; it also teaches us how everything must be done. Through it we acquire the certainty that everything has a solution.

5) *The Spirit of Might [NIV, Power]*: it gives us dominion and conviction of victory. Where my strength ends, God’s resources are released. The Spirit of Might makes us do things that in our nature we can not, big and bold things. It involves us like a protective shield and that firms us on ‘the Rock’, like someone plants firmly on the ground a tree with strong roots. It gives us determination, security and certainty to follow our goals.

6) *The Spirit of Knowledge*: it means to have the right understanding of things, *the revealed information of the word of God*, and to know what we have at our disposal through it. In Greek, *gnōseōs* means: knowledge (in general), intelligence and understanding, knowledge of Christian religion. For the Greeks, knowledge was a contemplation of reality in its static and permanent state; to the Hebrews, something dynamic linked to the understanding and the will, and related to the daily events. *It is related to revelation and experience, dreams and visions*. In the OT the Hebrew word used is *gālâ* and the Greek word (NT) is *apokalypṓs*, which has the idea of *revealing*

something hidden so that it can be seen and known as it really is. The New Testament has other words that express the idea of revelation: *phaneroō* (to manifest, to let clear), *epiphainō* (to expose; *epiphaneia*, noun, event, manifestation), *deiknuō* (to show), *exegeomai* (to unfold, to explain by narration), *chrematizō* (to instruct, to admonish, to warn; *chrematismos*, noun, God's response). *The word of wisdom is more related to teaching, while the word of knowledge is more related to the prophetic ministry.* Knowledge brings light, clarity, revelation and manifestation of what is hidden, whether good or bad. It makes us know the secrets of the heart of God and the mysteries of the spiritual world. It fills us with the truth so we can overcome the false prophecies.

7) The Spirit of Fear of the Lord: it means reverence, priority, respect and devotion to God, acknowledgement for who He is and not to use His name in vain. The fear of the Lord lifts us up to the throne and puts us in contact with His holiness. It puts us in a position of separation from worldly chores in order to give reverence and priority to the person of God. Through it, we know His Love and the strength of the praise and worship of the angels around the throne. Before it, all irreverence, idolatry and disturbance of the peace fall down. It's interesting to notice that in the bible the word fear or dread (or awe) comes from several Hebrew and Greek roots, such as: a) Phobos (Greek) = rapture, fear, terror. b) Deilia (Greek) = fear, cowardice, timidity, as it is in *2 Tim. 1: 7*. c) Eulabeia (Greek) = prudence, reverence. d) Pachad (Hebrew OT) = to fear, to be anxious or terrified; a helper or a companion for life (referring to death), until Jesus came to free us from fear of it (*Heb. 2: 15*).



Lampstand or Candlestick:

Menorâh or Menorath (Hebrew) *Ex. 25: 31-39*

Nebhrashtâ' or Nebrsha' (Aramaic) *Dan. 5: 5*

Luchnos (candle, lamp) or Lychnia or Luchnia (lampstand, candlestick) *Mt 5: 15*

Next, I put the period between Malachi and Christ, which comprises nearly four hundred years, when Israel was dominated by pagans and when the Lord stopped speaking to His people through the prophets:

1) Persian Period (539–333 BC):

For about one hundred years after Nehemiah's time (450-333 BC) the Persians dominated Judah, but the Jews were allowed to proceed to the religious observances

without facing any opposition. During this period, the land of Judah was ruled by high priests. The Persian kings after the fall of Babylon, were:

- Cyrus the Persian emperor (Cyrus II or Cyrus the Great) who ordered the return of the Jews in 538 BC (1st return of the exiles), by invading Babylon. He reigned from 559 to 530 BC (as king of the Persians, Medes, Lydians and Babylonians).
- Cambyses II (son of Cyrus): 530-522 BC.
- Darius I (brother-in-law of Cambyses II): 522-486 BC. In his reign the temple began to be rebuilt (520-516 BC). It had begun in 536 BC (2nd year of the reign of Cyrus in Babylon and stopped until 520 BC – 2nd year Darius I).
- Xerxes I (Ahasuerus): 486-465 BC (son of Darius I). Xerxes is a Greek transliteration of his Persian name after his ascension, Jshāyār Shah, meaning ‘ruler of heroes.’ In the bible he is called Ahasuerus (in Hebrew – שְׂרֹשָׁא), being written as Ahashuerus, in Chaldean. Axashverosh is the Greek transliteration of this last name.
- Artaxerxes I: 465-424 BC (son of Xerxes I, but not the firstborn). There was a 2nd return of the exiles to Jerusalem with Ezra in 458 BC to minister in the rebuilt temple. Rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, 445-443 BC (3rd return with Nehemiah).
- Xerxes II (son of Artaxerxes I) and reigned one month and a half; He was murdered by his brother Secydianus or Sogdianus (the form of the name is uncertain). In his turn, he was killed by Ochus, satrap of Hyrcania (region southeast of Caspian Sea, modern Iran), who rose to power and adopted the name of Darius II.
- Darius II (Neh. 12: 22) ruled Babylon and Persia from 424 to 404 BC; called Darius the Persian. His birth name was Ochus; then he adopted the name of Darius II (Persian: Dārayavahuš; that’s why the Greek sources call him Darius Nothos, ‘Bastard’).
- Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-358 BC), meaning: ‘whose reign is through truth.’ He was son of Darius II.
- Artaxerxes III or Ochus (3rd son of Artaxerxes II) – 358–338 BC.
- Artaxerxes IV or Arses (youngest son of Artaxerxes III) – 338-336 BC
- Darius III (great grandson of Darius II and cousin of Arses): 336-330 BC, when Alexander the Great defeated him in Macedonia. Originally, He was called Artashata, and by the Greeks, Codomannus, was the last king of Achaemenid Dynasty of Persia.

2) The Hellenistic period (333–167 BC):

In 333 BC the Persian armies concentrated in Macedonia were defeated by Alexander the Great. For him, with no doubt, the Greek culture was the only force to congregate the world. He allowed the Jews to keep their laws and even assured them the exemption of taxes and levies in the sabbatical year. When in 323 BC, Alexander died at 33 years old his empire began to fall and was divided among his generals. Two of them remained with the eastern part: Talmi (Aramaic name of Ptolemy I Soter) founder of the *Ptolemaic dynasty*, with Egypt; and Salvacus (To Hebrew historians, Salvacus is the name of Seleucus I or Seleucus I Nicator) founder of the *Seleucid dynasty*, with the region of Syria, Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of India. Thus, Israel was subjected to pagan rulers several times. During the first hundred years, it stood under Egyptian rule (323-198 BC), and in the end of the second century BC it went to Seleucid rule (198-167 BC), against which the Jews would undertake a riot. While Israel was under the control of Ptolemy II, Jews were permitted to live according to their faith. The king himself considered the Torah (Book of the Law of Moses) a cultural heritage and forced 72 Jewish sages (around 250 BC) to translate it into Greek (*Septuagint or Version of the Seventy*).

3) *The Hasmonean period (167–163 BC):*

In the beginning of this period of History, Jews were subjected to a very heavy yoke. The Ptolemies had been lenient toward the Jews, allowing their religious practices, but the Seleucids (in the person of King Antiochus IV) struggled tenaciously to foist them Hellenism (Greek culture). It was instituted as law the destruction of the copies of the Scriptures, and this decree was carried out with extreme ruthlessness. The monarch was determined to force the people who showed unbending in not accepting the Greek culture. The oppressed Jews revolted under the leadership of Judas Maccabee (Judas ben Mattathias). His family name was Hasmom, therefore they were known as Hasmonean, and lived in a village called Modiín. The leader was Mattathias, father of five children: Simon, Judas (Maccabee), Eleazar, John and Jonathan. The riot erupted when a group of Greeks gathered the villagers in the square where it had been erected an altar to idols. The Greek general demanded that John made offerings there. He, however, refused vehemently and his attitude provoked the revolt. During the war, Mattathias died, quite old, and his son, Judas Maccabee was appointed general. He adopted the strategy of guerrilla, taking the enemy in surprise attacks. Judas wanted to retake Jerusalem to cleanse the temple. But by reaching the holy temple, he found only desolation, ruins, statues and idols everywhere. Jesus refers to this fact, when Antiochus IV committed sacrilege by killing a pig (unclean animal) at the altar, with the words: “So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand).” (*Matt. 24: 15; Mk. 13: 14, taken from Dan. 9: 27; Dan. 11: 31; Dan. 12: 11*), a fact that would be repeated with the destruction of Temple by the Romans in 70 AD.

4) *The Roman period (63 BC– 476 AD):*

In 63 BC, the Roman general **Pompey** (Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus) conquered Jerusalem, and the provinces of Palestine were subjugated to Roman rule. Being Pompey slain in Egypt in 49 BC, **Gaius Julius Caesar** (49-44 BC) rose to power of the Roman Republic. He was killed and thereafter there was a power struggle between **Mark Antony** (a famous Roman politician and soldier) and **Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus**, known as **Caesar Augustus**. The Battle of Actium in 31 BC, near Actium in Greece, between Antony and Octavian, was won by the latter and marked the date of the end of the Republic and the beginning of Roman Empire. **Caesar Augustus** reigned as emperor from 29 BC to 14 AD. The government of each region was part of the time in charge of princes, and in the rest, under the responsibility of procurators appointed by the emperor. **Augustus** appointed **Herod the Great**, governor of Palestine at the time of Christ’s birth.

The emperors who followed were: **Tiberius** (*Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar*, 14-37 AD), **Caligula** (37-41 AD), **Claudius** (41-54 AD), **Nero** (54-68 AD), **Galba, Otto, Vitellius and Vespasian** (in the so-called ‘troubled year of four emperors’ – 69 AD), and the latter ruled until 79 AD. The first Jewish-Roman war (66-70 AD), sometimes called *the great Jewish revolt*, was the first of three major rebellions of the Jews of Judea against the Roman Empire and occurred in the government of Vespasian. It ended when the Roman legions under the command of Titus (son of Vespasian) laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the center of rebel resistance, with the destruction of the temple, as prophesied by Jesus. After Vespasian, his two sons rose to power, **Titus** (79-81 AD) and **Domitian** (81-96 AD). His successors were **Nerva** (96-98 AD) and **Trajan** (98-117 AD, when John the Apostle died). Since then, many emperors followed until

the fall of the Roman Empire. In general, the term *fall of the Roman Empire* refers to the end of the Western Roman Empire, occurred in 476 AD, with the taking of Rome by Heruli, since the Eastern Empire, which later, the historians denominated the Byzantine Empire, continued to exist for nearly a thousand years, until 1453, when there was the Fall of Constantinople. The fall of the Western Roman Empire was caused by a series of factors, including the barbarian invasions that led to the final overthrow of the State.

It was custom of the Roman emperors consider themselves gods, so God condemned so much the imperial cult in the Epistles and in Revelation. **Gaius Julius Caesar** (49-44 BC), in life, in the year 44 BC, consented in the construction of a statue of himself where the inscription *Deo invicto* ('To the Invincible God') could be read. In the same year he appointed himself dictator for life. After the political power struggle and the transition from Republic to Empire (44 to 31 BC), the heir of Julius Caesar, **Caesar Augustus** (*Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus* – 29 BC-14 AD), ordered that was built a temple in Rome dedicated to the 'Divine Julius'. The adoptive son of Augustus was **Tiberius** (*Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar* – 14-37 AD). Both allowed to be erected a single temple in their honor during their lifetimes. These temples contained not only the statues of the ruling emperor at the time and who could be worshiped in the manner of a god, but also were devoted to Rome (the city of Rome, in the case of Augustus, and to the senate, in the case of Tiberius). Both temples were located on the Asian side of the Roman Empire. The temple of Caesar Augustus was located in **Pergamum**, while Tiberius' was in Izmir (**Smyrna**) and he did not allow another temple or statue in his honor anywhere else. He assured before the Senate that he would rather be remembered for his deeds more than for stones. But he permitted the construction of a temple in honor of his predecessor and adoptive father, the 'Divine Augustus', in Tarragona (current Catalonia, Spain), in 15 AD.

Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, also known as *Gaius Caesar* or **Caligula**, ruled from 37 to 41 AD. He was known by his extravagant and cruel nature and by his sexual perversities. He granted territories to **Herod Agrippa I** and ordered that was erected *a statue in his honor* in the temple of Jerusalem. He became the first emperor to present himself before the people as a god; not through statues, but openly in his own body. He was murdered and on the same day of his death, his uncle *Claudius* (*Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*) was declared emperor by the Praetorian guards. The many temples and statues dedicated to Caligula (at his command) were all destroyed immediately after the violent death of this emperor. Apparently, Claudius allowed the construction of only one temple in his honor, continuing the example of Caesar Augustus and Tiberius Caesar. **Claudius** ruled 41-54 AD and died poisoned. **Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus** ascended the throne after the death of his uncle Claudius, who appointed him as his successor. The reign of Nero is usually associated with tyranny and extravagance. He is remembered by a series of systematic executions, including his own mother, his wife Claudia Octavia (murdered in exile at his command) and his half-brother Britannicus and especially by the widespread belief that while Rome burned (he set fire to Rome and accused the Christians), he was composing with his lyre. It was a **relentless persecutor of Christians**. He reined 54-68 AD and committed suicide.

Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasian came to power in 69 AD, shortly after the suicide of Nero and the troubled reign of three emperors: *Galba, Otto and Vitellius* in the same year (68-69 AD). His period of reign was 69-79 AD. During his reign occurred the first Jewish-Roman war (66-70 AD), as said above. Vespasian's successors were two of his sons, Titus and Domitian. *Titus Flavius Domitian* was Roman emperor between 81 and 96 AD. The classical sources describe him as a cruel and paranoid tyrant, locating him

among the most hated emperors, by comparing his vileness with *Caligula's and Nero's*. He was the responsible for ***the persecution of Christians in Asia Minor*** (including *John the Apostle*). He also proclaimed himself a God, openly. Although since 64 AD (when Nero ordered to torture Christians in Rome) there was persecution to Christianity, they were irregular. The ***organized persecutions against Christians*** emerge from Trajan on. *Marcus Ulpius Nerva Trajan* was a Roman Emperor from 98 to 117 AD. In 112 AD he established the procedures against the Christians. The Christians were accused of superstition and hatred to mankind. If they were Roman citizens they were beheaded; and if not, they could be thrown to wild beasts or sent to work in mines. After him, the ***main persecutions*** were ordered by the emperors *Marcus Aurelius* (*Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus* – 161-180 AD), *Decius* (*Gaius Messius Quintus Trajan Decius* – 249-251 AD), *Valerian* (*Publius Licinius Valerian* – 253-260 AD) and *Diocletian* (*Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletian* – 284-305 AD).

The table below will ease the understanding:

400 BC	Alexander the Great rules Palestine; Macedonian dominion – 333-323 BC Dominion of the Ptolemies on Palestine – 323-198 BC.
200 BC	Dominion of the Seleucids on Palestine – 198-167 BC. Revolt of Judah Maccabee and dominion of Judas' family and his descendants, the Hasmonean on Palestine – 167-63 BC. Conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey, Roman general, annexing Palestine to the Roman Empire – 63 BC. Reign of Herod the Great, on Palestine, appointed by Rome – 37-4 BC.

Chronology of the New Testament

Date	Roman Emperors	Governors and kings of Judea	Events of the New Testament
1 AD	Augustus (29 BC-14 AD) Tiberius (14-37 AD)	Herod the Great (37-4 BC) Archelaus (4 BC-6 AD) Pontius Pilate (26-36 AD) was governor of Judea and Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee (6-41 AD)	Birth of Jesus (6 BC) Beginning of Jesus' Ministry – 28 AD Death and Resurrection of Jesus – 30 AD

The period of the apostles

30 AD	Caligula (Gaius) – 37-41 AD		Day of Pentecost – 30 AD Conversion of Paul – 35 AD
40 AD	Claudius 41-54 AD	Herod Agrippa I – 41-44 AD (nephew of Herod Antipas and father of Agrippa, Bernice and Drusilla, who married Festus)	Start date of Paul's ministry (45 AD) Death of James son of Zebedee (44 AD) Death of Herod Agrippa I – 44 AD Famine in the days of Claudius – 46 AD First missionary journey of Paul – 46-48 AD Edict of Claudius – 49 or 50 AD *
50 AD	Nero 54-68 AD	Sergius Paulus, proconsul 50 AD Felix – 52-60 AD	Conference in Jerusalem 50-51 AD Paul's second missionary journey – 50-53 AD Paul in Corinth – 50-52 AD Paul's third missionary journey – 53-57 AD Paul in Ephesus – 54-57 AD Paul arrested in Jerusalem – 58 AD Paul in prison in Caesarea – 58-60 AD
60 AD	Galba – 68-69 AD Otto – 69 AD Vitellius – 69 AD	Porcius Festus – 60-62 AD	Paul in prison in Rome – 61-63 AD Death of Paul in Rome – 63 AD Death of Peter in Rome – 65 AD?
70 AD	Vespasian – 69-79 AD		Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple – 70 AD

	Titus – 79-81 AD Domitian – 81-96 AD Nerva – 96-98 AD Trajan – 98-117 AD		Death of John – 98 or 100 or 103 AD?
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* Edict of Claudius – 49 or 50 AD = Jews were expelled from Rome

Roman Empire in the time of Christ



New Testament – The churches in Asia Minor



Map of nowadays - where would be the churches today



The Seven Churches



EPHESUS



The Spirit of the Lord

Revelation 2: 1-7: “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 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. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 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. Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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.’”

Ephesus means *desirable*. It was a great commercial and religious center of Asia, which currently corresponds to Turkey. There, the most common religious practice was the cult of *Artemis* (in Greek), the goddess of moon and hunting, known as *Diana*, the Latin name of the *Queen of Heaven or Isis* (also known to the Phoenicians as Astarte or Asherah), and there, there was turmoil between Paul, Demetrius and the Greek people of the city (*Acts 19: 23-40*). Thus, the church suffered the influence of many false teaching and was disturbed by many false teachers. After Paul, the apostle John exercised jurisdiction in that place, on the seven main churches of Asia Minor. Thus, the Early Church in Ephesus, under many pagan influences and without the spiritual strength to break with the old Greek habits, was gradually losing its ‘first love’, i.e., the initial flame of revival was growing cold, despite the efforts of the apostles, especially Paul.

When John wrote his letter to Ephesus by God’s order he said that the Lord recognized in them the work, perseverance, their opposition to *Nicolaitans*, their justice in relation to leadership in the church, their resistance in the face of persecution and trials; however, He asked of His people the sincere repentance and the return to the revival, otherwise He would remove the *lampstand*, that is, the anointing of the Holy Spirit; in other words, His very presence among them. The term “*Nicolaitans*” has controversial origin. It is assumed that Nicholas of Antioch (*Acts 6: 5* – chosen in the beginning of the Church as a deacon), presumably, would have given his name to a group inside the church that tried to get commitment to paganism in order to allow Christians to participate without embarrassment in some social and religious activities of the pagan society in which they were. The guidance of the sect would be similar to that of Balaam the corrupter of Israel in the Old Testament (*Numbers chapters 22, 23 and 24*): to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication or sexual laxity in the Church. So, God mentions not only His disapproval about this practice, as He praises the church of Ephesus for having opposed the sect as well. Besides the divine exhortation to the return to the Christian practices of the beginning, He says that the prize for those who managed to overcome this type of test that was occurring in the community would be *to eat from the tree of life* that is in the Paradise of God, *symbolizing the truth of Jesus* in contrast to the false teaching and idolatry. Acting rightly, Ephesus would be *desirable* for Him again.

How can we bring this to our days?

Unfortunately, many churches begin under the spiritual revival, but along their walk they leave aside the vigilance, making room for the works of the flesh and the false teaching that begin to undermine the flame of the ‘first love’. Both members and leaders transform the church service and the prayers in a sad routine, ceasing the true communion with the Holy Spirit. Although aware of the unclean practices mixed with

the gospel, although to oppose them, they can no longer resume their original purity, because the love that moved their hearts to do the work was defiled by external influences. God is not pleased with our lack of commitment to His truth, of self-indulgence neither the sad religious routine that prevents His Spirit from acting, much less with our complacency with certain carnal attitudes that open gaps to the fads and the distortion of the Word to human convenience, with the excuse that we can not be radical. Indeed, radicalism is an impediment to the novelties of God and also does not lead the community anywhere. However, what God means is that it is no use to wander through the extremisms of moral, when the heart no longer feels gladness in being, in fact, in the presence of the Lord.

The several demands of modern life lead us often to fall into some snares of the devil, diverting our attention from what is really important, for example: unexpected 'diseases', precisely at the time when the Spirit moves us to sow and invest in His work, making God's money being diverted unnecessarily to the pharmacy, as well as the desire to pray and seek His direction on the throne stays in background. Another example: those phone calls completely meaningless and without a fair reason, exactly at the time of prayer or praise in which God will begin to give an important spiritual revelation. We leave the 'connection' with Him to respond quickly to the connection with the world. If we are not connected to the Spirit, we will not realize the strategies used by the enemy. Besides these demands already mentioned, it occurs the same that happened with the case of 'Nicolaitans', in which not only human teaching are introduced assuming air of truth, but sex within the Church becomes to be treated with certain negligence. Explaining better: leaving aside the moral sense that serves only to judge and condemn the errors of the past, leaders fail in addressing this issue more openly, leaving the members in ignorance; these, in turn, omit of the leader, during a counseling, for example, the real situation of the couple and life goes on carelessly, thinking that God will approve the situation and bless what in itself is already cursed. Anything that occupies the prior place of Jesus in our lives is a reason to extinguish the flame of the 'first love' in the hearts, so He directs His people to repent of what made them cool down spiritually, otherwise, the anointing can be removed from among that community.

In Ephesus, the prize for those who resisted this kind of temptation was to eat from the tree of life that was in the paradise of God. In Eden, the tree of life was in the center of the garden, in contrast to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was in another part of it. This means that those who turn to the sound practices of the gospel like seeking the Lord with righteous heart, abandoning completely sin and the old works of the flesh, and loving their fellow man, come to have a renewed intimacy with the 'tree of life', Jesus; thus, they resume the learning of the Word based on divine truth, no longer in the disguised human lies and, thereby, they close the gaps for false teachings. Today, even within the evangelical churches, is occurring what happened in Ephesus: the influence of the *Queen of Heaven* (Asherah, Diana and all the other names she has used over the centuries), bringing rebellion, human idolatry, lack of control on the flesh, worldly customs with makeup of holiness; permissiveness with many attitudes that are not pleasing to God, irreverence, lack of awe, family breakdown etc. These things go infiltrating slowly, including in the leadership, by excess of emotional and spiritual pressure or for lack of sufficient preparation to occupy certain positions, even for lack of knowledge of the word itself ("My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge says the Lord"); not necessarily the knowledge of what is written, but the lack of real spiritual experience with God's word, which only the Holy Spirit can give. This makes us think of many things we are doing and need to be changed so that the flame of 'first

love' can be lit once again. Everything has a basic ingredient that is the simplicity of the gospel that there was at the beginning of the Early Church, accepting the things of God like children do.

Lampstand:

As we said in the introduction, each church has its human component that makes it act and react in a certain way, however, God bestowed one of His seven spirits for each of them so that they receive the spiritual strength to stand up again and reach perfection, playing their part on earth as a member of the Body of Christ.

For the church of Ephesus, which had lost the first love, the flame that was extinguished and had to be rekindled was *The Spirit of the Lord (Isa. 11: 2)*. It is first flame being lit in our spirit when we convert to Jesus and makes us realize His miracles and works. The Spirit of the Lord is the very *Spirit of God within us*, keeping His flame of life in our spirit, causing us to exist and do His work on earth. With the Holy Spirit we can do what Jesus did: to preach good news, heal the sick of soul and body, set free the captives of the devil and bring joy. We receive it at the moment of our conversion. *Isa. 61: 1-3* says, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory." The Spirit of the Lord makes us feel courage as well as the strength and the power of God in action of miracles, deliverance and healing.

Thus, Ephesus needed to remember everything that it felt when the church began the work of God, when its members experienced the true revival; they should resume this posture again.



The Spirit of understanding

Revelation 2: 8-11: “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*: ‘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. 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. 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.’”

Smyrna means *myrrh* or *bitterness*, which reminds us the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; maybe because of this it is written in verse 8, “These are the words of *the first and the last, who was dead and came to life*.” Smyrna was a city of the Roman province of Asia at the beach in the Aegean Sea, within the current Asiatic Turkey, like other churches described in these letters of John. It was one of the most prosperous cities and loyal ally of Rome, with great splendor and magnificence of its public buildings. The temple of Tiberius Caesar was in Izmir (*Smyrna*), do you remember? The church of Smyrna faced the opposition on the part of the Jews, as well as Philadelphia church (*Rev. 2: 9; Rev. 3: 9*). They were probably converted Jews [By the fact that the Lord mentions His resurrection on the first verse of this text (*Rev. 2: 8*)], but after some time under the misleading influences of paganism, they began to question the resurrection of Christ, undermining the faith of their brothers.

When I asked the Holy Spirit for discernment what kind of Jews the bible was talking about, whether traditional or newly converted Jews, He gave me the text of *1 Cor. 15: 12-19*, confirming the opposition between the own church members. Therefore, they had not been converted indeed; they did not know the truth deeply in their hearts, so they were easy targets for Satan, who claimed them before God to put them to the test. Thus, we can read that the Lord knew the tribulation of His church, its spiritual poverty in comparison with the material wealth, and the opposition of the Jews who blasphemed against the true teaching. These Jews would be put to the test to see if they really had converted to the gospel and if they would exert their free will in the most correct way. Symbolically, they would have to carry their *cross*, that is, to experience the death generated by their sin, and the resurrection by Christ forgiveness. The test would be as bitter as myrrh, but it would purge them of the confusions and blasphemies there. Those who resisted until the end would be saved and would receive the crown of life, symbol of victory for those who ran, as Paul says, to achieve the incorruptible crown. Spiritually speaking, they would not see the harm of second death, that is, they would attain salvation. The first death was the sin of Adam (*Rom. 5: 12; 14; 17*); the second death, symbolized by the *lake of fire* (*Rev. 20:14*), means the ultimate death of those who abandon Christ for the sake of Satan (eternal death). The bible speaks of a tribulation of ten days that need not necessarily to be this chronological time, but a symbol of *fidelity, of something complete, the first number of a major beginning*, which is the biblical meaning of *number ten*. The number ten could also be the number 1 increased by the zero. *1* conveys the concept of *unity and of the unparalleled character of God, as well the unity between Christ and the Father, the unity between believers and God, and the unity that exists among believers*. Thus, *the church of Smyrna would be put to test in its covenant and in its fidelity to Christ*.

What does this mean for us?

Some who are within the church are not truly converts, because they were not called at the right time by God’s Spirit. They may be there because they were brought by a family member, because they heard that God is good and blesses or because they are interested in Jesus for whatever reason that is not, necessarily, to seek salvation or to

obey His will. Then they keep within them a distorted view of the gospel, leading some unsuspecting brothers, sooner or later, to the fall in faith. So that the church does not perish, then the Lord puts it to the test to know who are those that truly believe and those who are not ready to 'pay the price' for the work of God. Hence, many times, Jesus places the community at a level of separation, in a move of sanctification, in order that the revival is not lost. Some pastors just do not understand why, suddenly, the church is empty and it seems that God turned things upside down. It is necessary that there be a renewal and other members more sincere can find a clean place to gather together, without the distortion and deceits that undermine their faith.

If we look at the life of the faithful believer, there will always be a period of trial, sooner or later, to see on which side he will continue, because this is a way of God to perfect salvation in His people. Those who overcome it prove to be true children of God and confirm to be worthy of receiving *the crown of life*, namely, *eternal life*. *They tasted the myrrh*, the cross, leaving in it their wills and their particular desires, in order to resurrect spiritually full of the anointing and the power of God. Now they are ready to be tuned instruments in His hands. Through them, the Lord can accomplish His work on earth.

Lampstand:

Smyrna needed to cry to the Lord for the *Spirit of understanding* in order to know, not only why of being passing through many trials, but lest to repeat their errors and blasphemies. The correct understanding of God's revelations would lead the church to experience the true conversion and leave the old loyalties of the flesh, as it had been faithful ally of Rome, to be faithful to Christ. The understanding of the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world and as the only true God would make Smyrna understand better what He wants for those who have an encounter with Him, i.e., that they leave the past to live a new life (a true conversion). Smyrna, being loyal to Jesus, rather than to Rome, would overthrow idolatry within the church and would reach the correct thinking of the Lord for it.

Pergamum



The Spirit of fear of the Lord

Revelation 2: 12-17: “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him *who has the sharp two-edged sword*: ‘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 [*abbreviation of Antipater – martyr of the church of Pergamum, which according to tradition, was roasted on a bronze receptacle during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD)*] my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives [NIV: I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. You yet remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives]. 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. So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth. 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 is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.’”

Pergamum means *citadel, burgh, village* and it was the administrative capital, the center of the official religion and headquarters of authority and the Roman imperial justice in the province. It was the center of the largest pagan worship: *Zeus* (in Greek) or *Jupiter* (for the Romans), the ruler of the gods, the god of the sky that showed himself in the atmospheric phenomena, linked more closely to *Mercury* (for the Romans) or *Hermes*, for the Greeks, the god of the word (The same *Jupiter* and *Mercury* found in Lystra and Iconium by Paul and Barnabas, *Acts 14: 12*); *Athena* or *Pallas Athena* for the Greeks, or *Minerva* for the Romans, the goddess of civilization, wisdom, handicraft, and warfare, justice and skill; *Dionysus* (for the Greeks) or *Bacchus* (for the Romans), the god of wine; *Asclepius* (*Asklepios*, Greek), or *Aesculapius*, in Latin, the god of healing; *Aphrodite* (in Greek) or *Venus*, for the Romans, the goddess of love, beauty and sexuality. Pergamum appears in Revelation as the place where the throne of Satan is (*Rev. 2: 13*); it was considered as the seat of the power of evil, because in the imperial cult the power given by God belonging to the State had been employed in the blasphemous worship of a man (worship of the emperor). So, what happened was the *perversion of the divine authority* given to the State, being the Roman emperor transformed into a deity [As in the case of Domitian, seen above, who proclaimed himself a god], rather than just occupy his position of secular authority. Christ is the real and final owner of that authority, which is symbolized by *the two-edged sharp sword*.

It was custom of the Roman emperors consider themselves gods, so God condemned so much the imperial cult in the Epistles and in Revelation. *Gaius Julius Caesar* (49-44 BC), in life, in the year 44 BC, consented in the construction of a statue of himself where the inscription *Deo invicto* (‘To the Invincible God’) could be read. In the same year he appointed himself dictator for life. After the political power struggle and the transition from Republic to Empire (44 to 31 BC), the heir of Julius Caesar, *Caesar Augustus* (*Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus* – 29 BC-14 AD), ordered that was built a temple in Rome dedicated to the ‘Divine Julius’. The adoptive son of Augustus was *Tiberius* (*Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar* – 14-37 AD). Both allowed to be erected a single temple in their honor during their lifetimes. These temples contained not only the statues of the ruling emperor at the time and who could be worshiped in the manner of a god, but also were devoted to Rome (the city of Rome, in the case of Augustus, and to the senate, in the case of Tiberius). Both temples were located on the Asian side of the Roman Empire. The temple of Caesar Augustus was located in

Pergamum, while Tiberius' was in Izmir (**Smyrna**) and he did not allow another temple or statue in his honor anywhere else. He assured before the Senate that he would rather be remembered for his deeds more than for stones. But he permitted the construction of a temple in honor of his predecessor and adoptive father, the 'Divine Augustus', in Tarragona (current Catalonia, Spain), in 15 AD. **Caligula** became the first emperor to present himself before the people as a god; not through statues, but openly in his own body.

God knew that the believers in Pergamum kept His name and did not deny the faith despite the oppression of Rome. However, like Ephesus, they held the doctrine of Balaam or the doctrine of Nicolaitans (simultaneous coexistence with paganism, with prostitution and with the false teaching that were snares in the path of the Church). Again the Lord calls His people to repentance; otherwise, they would experience death by the sword, that is, the divine judgment would come to punish disobedience and blasphemy. The prize for being faithful to Christ would be *the hidden manna* (spiritual sustenance of God to those who sought His revelation) and *the white stone*. The little stone mentioned in the text was a small cube (*tessara hospitalis*) used as a ticket to somewhere. For the winners it would represent the entry into the kingdom of God. The two-edged sword of Christ, *the Living Word*, would separate the holy from the profane so that Pergamum could be again *a strong city, a burgh, a citadel*, symbol of the *New Jerusalem*, which is the promise given to those who manage to overcome the tribulation of the Christian life.

For us, the letter to Pergamum tells us: many churches of the Lord are in places where the State authority has been completely distorted and corrupted, oppressing the people of God to serve a man who, in short, is the symbol of human idolatry. This kind of thing displeases Him totally because a corrupted human being is an evil tool in the hands of Satan. Some, for fear, submit themselves to this 'spiritual prostitution', serving concurrently several gods and denying the true God. Even in cases where a government authority is not worshiped nor requires such a degree of reverence and obedience, spiritually speaking many gods can arise in people's lives as seen in Pergamum: *Zeus (Jupiter)*, the god of the sky that was exhibited in atmospheric phenomena, can still be worshiped in the form of superstitions that see omens in the sun, moon and stars by people who only have their hair cut at the full or new moon; or keep such superstition rooted within them when they neurotically need to read horoscopes before leaving home to make sure that everything will be all right that day. There are also those who link their birthday to certain celestial bodies and think that they behave 'this or that way' because of this (Zodiac signs and astrological chart, for example). Thus, the person doesn't want to amend himself and simply makes of God a 'more eclectic and more indulgent' being with certain human vices that are not simple bad habits, but frank idolatry. As I said, the other god most closely related to Jupiter was *Mercury (Hermes)*, god of the word, which can be seen disguised in the seduction of the word in the mouth of someone more influential, whether a character from the world or from the church. Pretty talking deceits many people. *Athena (Minerva)* was the goddess of wisdom; this means that false wisdom, even within the church can corrupt the children of God, who do not read the bible the right way and go on repeating what they hear like parrots, without judging or reasoning upon which they are hearing and without checking it with the Word. *Dionysus (Bacchus)*, god of wine, is another kind of god who seduces; not necessarily that the church preaches alcoholism, but it means all that *inebriates* an unsuspecting believer, making him as someone unconscious of the biblical truth: sensations, emotions, 'shivers', opulence, beautiful appearances and vices of preaching that become the 'trademark' of the church, removing the reasoning of people, putting

them under a cloak of influence restricted as a primer to be obeyed to the letter. *Asclepius* (*Asklepios*, Greek, or *Aesculapius*, Latin; *Eshmun* or *Esmum* to the Phoenicians), the god of healing, is the other god much revered by the people, personified in a doctor or a man of God who has the gift of healing and, sometimes without knowing, becomes an idol to many people. Neptune was worshiped by sailors as the god of the sea (for us, symbolizing the spiritual world and the human unconscious) and held a trident in his hand (Psychology took the trident to its symbol – ψ , as Medicine and Dentistry adopted a serpent around a staff). How many get proud of being able to work psychologically with people!

The Lord has seen this kind of attitude in some of His children, which saddens His heart deeply; so, He says that sooner or later, they will experience the power of His two-edged sword, that is, His Word of wisdom, knowledge and true understanding, which cuts the blindness caused by the idolatry and perversion of His authority. The bible says that, for believers in Pergamum, the prize for loyalty to Christ would be the *hidden manna* and *white stone*. The Lord desires that we seek our spiritual sustenance and the revelation that we need in Him and nobody else. That's why some believers feel completely helpless when a leader ceases to treat them as babies and encourages them to seek, alone, the solutions to their problems in the Lord. This is not a lack of shepherding but a conscious shepherding, removing the false supports of the sheep so they can be carried by the true Shepherd. The leader is only a channel for the manifestation of God's power, but *he is not God*, and this can never be mistaken so that he does not carry yokes completely unnecessary. Human beings have a huge tendency to idolatry and therefore the Holy Spirit treats some children under certain condition of loneliness, so they can find the right course in life. When our spirit and soul are in this internal willingness of knowing exactly who our true God is, then yes, we can say we are *a strong city*, with the right to receive from Him our 'stone of entry' in the *New Jerusalem*.

Lampstand:

Pergamum had lost the fear of God, coming to worship the Roman Emperor, turning him into a god, besides those already existing in the city. Thus, they had taken Christ out of His place of honor, putting Satan on the throne. This was catastrophic for the church and would lead it to spiritual death. If the church did not repent, the spiritual death would come upon it, that is, it would not receive eternal life neither would enter the New Jerusalem. In *Isa. 42: 8* it is written, "I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols." Whether is graven image or persons, professions or any other god that insists on occupying the heart of man, the LORD will not approve, much less give His glory to this.

Pergamum needed *the Spirit of the fear of God (Is 11: 2)*. The Spirit of Fear of the Lord means reverence, priority, respect and devotion to God, acknowledgement for who He is and not to use His name in vain. The fear of the Lord lifts us up to the throne and puts us in contact with His holiness. It puts us in a position of separation from worldly chores in order to give reverence and priority to the person of God. Before Him, all irreverence, idolatry and disturbance of the peace fall down. It's interesting to notice that in the bible the word *fear* or *dread (or awe)* comes from several Hebrew and Greek roots, such as: a) *Phobos* (Greek) = rapture, fear, terror. b) *Deilia* (Greek) = fear, cowardice, timidity, as it is in *2 Tim. 1: 7*. c) *Eulabeia* (Greek) = prudence, reverence. d) *Pachad* (Hebrew OT) = to fear, to be anxious or terrified; a helper or a companion for life (referring to death), until Jesus came to free us from fear of it (*Heb. 2: 15*).

thyatira



The Spirit of knowledge

Revelation 2: 18-29: “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*: ‘I know your works – your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. 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; 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. 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; only hold fast to what you have until I come. To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with *an iron rod*, as when clay pots are shattered – even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’”

Thyatira means *sacrifice of work*. The city housed a frontier garrison and was an important point of the Roman road system linking Pergamum to Laodicea. It was also an important manufacturing center; there, were done dyeing, garments, pottery and work in bronze. It had a long military story (hence the scepter of authority – *iron rod* – v. 26-27). Jezebel could be the name of a woman accepted in the community of the church, whose teachings contained pagan ideals or an allegory of Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, idolatrous king of Israel in time of the prophet Elijah. She symbolizes: false prophecy and false teaching, deceit, emotional unbalance (She is a demon of high hierarchy that acts on human emotions), prostitution, seduction, sensuality, idolatry and lie. She goes together as the right arm of the Ruler Queen of Heaven, bringing complete spiritual blindness and confusion to the church. Jezebel could then symbolize the spirit of false prophecy in the church of Thyatira.

The church of Thyatira was a hardworking and brave church; it saw the true image of God (the throne, glorified Christ, “These are the words of *the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze*”), it had works, love, faith, service, perseverance, the spiritual works overcoming of the material ones, but kept the tolerance with false prophecies and false teaching, seduction of words leading it to idolatry (To eat food sacrificed to idols), therefore, it lived together with darkness seeming truth. The bible says that there was no repentance of the woman (symbol of the church who sinned), therefore, it would suffer death and the consequences of divine justice. The others (the faithful believers) should keep what they had until the coming of the Lord in order to receive authority over the nations, a rod of iron (*Iron symbolizes the divine strength*) smashing the clay (*the things of the flesh and perishable things*). As a reward, besides they can rule over the nations with a rod of iron, the faithful remnants would receive the *Morning Star* (*Rev. 22: 16* – in this verse in Revelation, the bible says that Jesus is *the Morning Star*). This could mean a light, a glow that remains after a period of darkness. At the end of times, when the period of spiritual darkness pass and the Antichrist, the beast and the devil are defeated, Jesus will prevail; He’ll remain standing despite all the opposition He faced. In *Rev. 22: 5*, it is written, “And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” In *Rev. 21: 23* the same text is repeated in other words, “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is

its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” This prophecy was already in *Isa. 60: 19*, “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.” Therefore, the *Morning Star (Jesus) will be the very glory of God shining upon His victorious children.*

For us, all this has a meaning quite interesting: we can be a brave church, a church that shows spiritual works greater than the material ones, we can see the throne of God, we can have love, faith, service and perseverance, but if we have tolerance with false prophecies and false teaching, we will give place to darkness, hindering the understanding of the Word, undermining our power and our spiritual authority before Satan. Jesus says we are the light of the world, but how can a people emotionally ill and influenced by rulers and powers [*hierarchy of demons*] have authority over the spiritual world and still wanting *the Morning Star*? We can find that this is not true and that we have dominion over the demons that annoy us, but what is our true testimony if we look inside ourselves honestly, seeing countless things of the ‘old self’ that are still present, if we are provoked by someone or some situation? What we have to say about so much strife, division and power struggles inside the very House of God? What we have to say about so much gossip and so many works of the flesh still quite alive and active in believers ‘converted’ years ago? What we have to say about so many people who stray from the gospel because of such pain of the disappointment experienced within the church? What we have to say about our own families, not yet converted after years of prayer, or many church members or their relatives, who say they are converts, but that do not show even a sign of true conversion that is love for God and neighbor? What we have to say about so much ‘anointing’, which actually is not used for anything, because there are few who are willing to pay the price to be a powerful instrument of healing and deliverance in the hands of the Lord? Where do we pour the anointing we received shortly after a church service? What we have to say about believers who after years sitting on the bench are unable to speak by heart a biblical verse (at most, “Jesus wept”)? Worse than that, unable to apply it in their day by day!

It’s no use making of the altar a place of manifestation of demons to say that the power of God exists, but to let our mind under complete submission and dominion of the Holy Spirit of God to judge all things and hold fast to what is good. We must let Him give us daily the strategies for our own lives in order to win individually our personal battles, achieving what was stolen from us or devastated: our relationships, professional honor, financial life, people’s respect for our patience and meekness in the face of situations apparently hopeless, health and so forth. It’s necessary to read too much the Word to know the real contents of it and not let the ‘Jezebels’ enter and make an abode in us. Nowadays, everyone wants to be a prophet, counselor and pastor. They are the most coveted positions, however, the bible says that “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven” – *Jn. 3: 27*. Without vigilance on our part, without consecration to God and without certainty of our call, it is no use wanting to remove the speck from our brother’s eye, having a beam placed in ours. These are the gaps given by pride and arrogance of the flesh that God wants us to cut off from our midst, otherwise all the good that one day we did will go down the drain. We need to wash ourselves thoroughly; then we will have real authority in the spiritual world and will remain standing up after the dark period of our Christian journey. As winners, the *sacrifice of our work* will not have been in vain.

Lampstand:

The church at Thyatira would have all its work frustrated if it did not bring down of its midst the false prophecies, for this would undermine its strength and would prevent the Holy Spirit from acting through the revelations and knowledge of the truth. Thus, Thyatira needed to cry out for *the Spirit of knowledge of the Lord*, that is, what brings the revelation of the Word and dethrones all sorts of lies and false prophecy. In *Hos. 4: 6* it is written: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.” In the text of Revelation the Lord writes: “But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling [NIV, misleads] my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. 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; 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.” This means that more than the members that were sinning, the leaders were the main responsible for leaving the false teachings corroding the church that had been erected. Therefore, God rebuked them and talked to them about returning to repentance, because this sinful attitude polluted the newest members in faith. By casting out of them the false prophecies that blinded God’s people, the church could once again receive visions, dreams and have again the spiritual experiences that it needed for its growth. Both in the OT and in the NT we saw that the words used for ‘*knowledge*’ bring the idea of, *revelation, to uncover something hidden so that it can be seen and known as it really is; to manifest, to make it clear, to expose, to unfold, to instruct, to admonish, to warn and to have God’s response. The word of knowledge is more related to the prophetic ministry;* hence, the church of Thyatira needed this characteristic of God’s Spirit.



The Spirit of counsel

Revelation 3: 1-6: “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. 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. 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. 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. 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. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’”

Sardis means: *sun, prince of joy*, because of the extreme wealth derived from the alluvial gold from Pactolus, a river flowing through the city. The original city was a fortress city, almost impregnable, towering high above the broad Hermus valley and almost entirely surrounded by cliffs separated by precipices compounded of treacherously loose rocks. The Christian community living there was imbued with the spirit of the city, resting on its past reputation, but without any great achievement in the present; it still failed, as the city had failed twice, for not learning from the previous experiences and for not having an attitude of vigilance (Cyrus the Persian in 549 BC took the city by surprise attack and Antiochus the Great in 214 BC repeated the feat). The main trade of the city was dyeing and manufacturing garments of wool.

Symbolically, Sardis was a church living on the glories and on dead works of the past and without vigilance; it had entered a stagnation that gave gap to the theft (“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”, which means that God’s trial would be sudden). The people who remained faithful would be holy and worthy (white robes) and would reach salvation (name written in *the Book of Life*). They would display the brightness of the Lord (known as the ‘*Sun of Justice*’).

For us, the message is that honors and glories of the past do not sustain us today and the lack of vigilance and stagnation lead only to theft; more than the material theft, there is spiritual theft, what is more serious. It is interesting to meditate a bit about the blessing that this church has lost because of self-indulgence and ‘paralyses’ in relation to the things of God. It was situated, apparently, in a very privileged place, close to an alluvium of gold that allowed it to extract the ore and market it. Furthermore, it was a city practically unassailable, protected by rocks that, when loose, were a real trap for the enemy. The city had other means of survival that was to manufacture garments of wool and even dye them. We can say that it went into shock when there was the first assault by Cyrus, but it didn’t learn from the defeat; it chose to live in a fantasy of wealth and was taken for the second time. From there, it seems that it overlooked its possessions and its protection once for all. *Gold* in the bible, in most cases, refers to things that were placed in the tabernacle or in the temple, precious spoils of war or taxes to be paid to an empire. Therefore, it gives us an idea of *something very precious*, something more directly set apart for God or very important to a nation, as a ransom, for example.

The reprehension of God about watchfulness is that they lost the precious asset that the Lord had given them, which was salvation, their relationship with Him and His protection. The natural blessings (rivers of gold and the fortresses of the rocks) were granted by God and were neglected; hence, He allowed them to be stolen so that there was a new awareness of values. What their flesh produced was very small in comparison to the blessing of God; they produced garments and dyed them, which cost them the sweat of their brow. In other words, everything they could make was dyed

garments, probably from the wool of the sheep and rams, not of linen, because a place like that didn't seem to be a fertile ground for planting. The fabric of linen was rarely made in Palestine; it was commonly imported from Egypt. It is manufactured with the fiber whose scientific name is *Linum usitatissimum*. Once appropriately treated, i.e., after the separation of the fiber from the woody part of the stem, the thread produces the linen, and the seed produces linseed oil. Once the fiber was treated, it was woven by women to become cloth. The use of linen garments by the priests was given as guidance from God to Moses and the people wove them with linen brought from Egypt. Samuel wore a linen ephod (*1 Sam. 2: 18*); David danced before the ark using a linen ephod (*2 Sam. 6: 14*). It seems indeed that the use of linen was associated with special people, holy ones. Linen and fine linen were reputed as precious gifts to a woman loved by a man (*Ezek. 16: 10; 13*, when God compares Jerusalem to His bride). Hence, the bible says that the Lord has set apart for His Church, for His bride, garments of fine linen, bright and pure, because the fine linen is the righteous deeds of saints (*Rev. 19: 8*); therefore, holiness, not to mix with the 'garments of sin' of the world. He told the priests about changing clothes when approaching other people (*Ezek. 44: 19*), that is, we can not talk or discuss the word of God on equal terms with those who do not yet understand it, because they would mock it and would scorn it. It would be like giving finest pearls to pigs. In Ancient times, the sweat was a sign of impurity, so the guidance given to the priests was not to use wool so that they did not sweat (*Ezek. 44: 17-18*). For us, this means that a priest does not need to use 'heavy clothing', that is, knowledge that does not have the wisdom of God, nor impure thoughts and impure feelings of the world, because they bring an unnecessary burden to his life, besides it does not please the Lord. The church of Sardis would be dressed in white linen again when it was faithful and just. The whiteness of its garments would shine like the sunlight or the glow of gold.

As church, when we do not watch what the Lord gives us, which are the spiritual and natural gifts, in addition to the material blessings we have, we pay the price for our neglect, laziness and ingratitude. A new revival is necessary. Tactics used in the past are no longer effective. If demons are 'updated', why not the Church of Christ? It's just look at the traditionalism that surrounds us and we'll see that it hasn't brought novelty of life, much less real liberations. Churches that do not present their children to the Lord! Churches that do not believe in prophecy or spiritual revelation coming from the Spirit! Churches who do not speak of tithes or offerings in public not to 'shock' visitors! What about *Malachi 3: 10*? The Pentecostal movement of other churches also does not seem to be producing the desired fruit. Screams and music at high volume are not synonymous with revival. Lives still chained to the deeds of darkness made many years ago and that generated curses that persist, without an effective cure! It's just ask how many were the achievements in relation to dreams and projects done years ago, and we'll see if the methods used so far has been effective. We need something more than faith, we need real action, passion for the things of God that can inflame our hearts and gives us a real reason to live; more than all this, *the anointing that breaks every yoke*. We do not inherit the glories of our ancestors; it is a mistake to think that. It is easier to inherit the hereditary curses for their sins than the blessings they accumulated to our lives. It's just look at our families and the problems we face today. The answer to this is simpler than we can imagine: each one of us has a throne and a crown with our name and only we can conquer. Jesus says, "The disciple must carry his cross", which means that each of us has a war, a surrender, a victory and a crown to be presented before Him. Another word: "The soul who sins will die" (*NIV – Ezek. 18: 1-32*). Therefore, self-indulgence won't lead us anywhere.

Jesus said many times: “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven” (*Matt. 10: 32-33*). Therefore, a church that accommodates and does not watch, will not be decorated. And ‘to watch’ is not to control the lives of others, but look inside oneself and inspect one’s own soul to see the color of his clothing. God does not want us with the garments of wool dyed by sin, but with fine and shining linen of the acts of justice we practice.

Lampstand:

The church of Sardis was the one that was living on the glories of the past and now needed to be reborn and watch not to be caught by surprise anymore. Hence, it needed to cry out for *the Spirit of counsel*, that is, *to have the right strategies of God* to position itself, to walk, to get out the stagnation where it was and start to experience the *Living Word* of the Lord within itself.

Philadelphia



The Spirit of Might [Power]

Revelation 3: 7-13: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of *the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens*: ‘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. 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. 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. I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 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. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’”

Philadelphia means *brotherly love*. It was founded in the second century BC and was situated on an interior plateau, fertile, which explains its commercial prosperity. However, it was subjected to frequent earthquakes (the one of 17 AD destroyed the city). The people then went to live outside the city in tents outdoors. Roma restored the city (it was renamed *Neokaisareia*). Vespasian changed its name to *Flavia* (for being the first emperor of the Flavian Dynasty). Philadelphia was notable for the number of temples and religious festivals. It is the figure of the church loyal to Christ, because of the loyalty of *Attalos* to the founder of the city (*Eumenes*), king of Pergamum, his brother; so it was called *Philadelphia*. The fertile region of the plateau was an open door to the wealth of the city, as well as this door was given to the Christians, both materially and spiritually speaking. The earthquakes symbolized an unstable life, in contrast with the winners who receive the promise of ultimate stability of being part of the building of God’s temple. Philadelphia faced opposition from the Jews, like Smyrna. The same way that the city had changed the name several times, the winners will receive new names that will denote their permanent participation in the city of God. The Lord also gives the same advice to Philadelphia that He gave to the other churches: to keep what it had and to watch lest to be stolen. There is a reference to a new name of Christ not only in this text as well as in *Rev. 2: 17*; *Rev. 19: 11-12*.

The church in Philadelphia teaches us to be faithful to Jesus like a brother was faithful to another; it makes us think that beyond the loyalty to the Lord, we must also learn to be faithful to the brothers in Christ, rather than distort the word of God giving gaps to the devil by stating the verse: “Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals.” Why not to read the whole verse? “This is what the LORD says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, *who draws strength from mere flesh* and whose heart turns away from the LORD (*Jer. 17: 5*).’” This not only has generated suspicion among believers, exacerbating what they already bring from the world, but also gives room for the enemy to rob and to kill and destroy through hatred, strife, discord, betrayal, frustration and disappointment. God does not command us to put our trust in human flesh, but does not forbid us of being friends, or having true friends. True friendship does not separate us from the Lord. In the book of proverbs it is written that there’s closest friend than a brother (*Prov. 18: 24*). Jonathan loved David as his own soul, and Jesus called Abraham and His disciples friends (*2 Chr. 20: 7*; *Neh. 9: 7*; *Isa. 41: 8*; *Jam. 2: 23*; *Jn. 15: 14-15*). He still left the ordinance: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Where there is true love there is no suspicion, for who has the true Spirit of God’s love in his heart not only cares for his own life, but also cares for others and does not give gap in the flesh for the devil to use it with treason and other thoughts and bad feelings. We are the greatest

destroyers of walls, for it is within the Church where we suffer the major injuries, because even the destroying word and the bad feeling come with ‘anointing’ (here meaning *force* that, instead of being directed to good, is used to evil). Hence, perhaps, the earthquakes suffered by Philadelphia forced its members to have an unstable life, which for us may be quite true from emotional standpoint, because the emotions of man are the main target of Satan to bring destruction. It starts with the meaningless oppositions that we have to suffer without having done anything wrong to deserve them. The believers of Philadelphia faced much opposition from the Jews; I believe, both converts and the traditional Jews, not only by envy of their fertility, which also brought wealth, as well as by their friendly attitude, willing to love and to share. The greatest opposition that Satan makes us is to love, for by stopping this force he stops our lives. In bitterness and curse, in selfishness and greed, in resentment and hatred there is not fertility, let alone God’s presence! It was probably within the very community that the faithful to Christ received more opposition, as much that the Lord’s promise was to bring to them those who had shamed them to admit that He loved them. Jesus knew that, despite their little strength because of such hostility and instability, they never denied His name: “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. 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”. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. Therefore, the Lord speaks that He would bring trial to the world to test the inhabitants of the earth. Without passing through the great test of unconditional love of God will be impossible to be a pillar in His sanctuary. We’re not talking about a transformation from night to day, but an *inner willingness* to love, which requires patience because the act of loving is a constant exercise and puts our ego down so that Jesus prevails.

As I mentioned before, in contrast to the inconstant earthly life, the winners receive the promise of ultimate stability; to be part of the building of God’s temple, from where they will never leave, as well as they will receive new names that will denote their permanent participation in the holy city: *Jerusalem, the city of peace*. When we crucify our flesh through the surrender and love of Jesus, our instability turns into peace and might, because we begin to be edified by God Himself, protected from attacks of the carnal oppositions, in addition to have honor before those who humiliated us.

The church in Philadelphia, unlike the others, was the only one who resisted faithfully without letting the false teaching enter inside it, not being conniving with the spiritual prostitution of its countrymen and contemporaries; it preferred to be injured instead of fighting back or giving up. This gave it the protection of God. It was known by the large number of temples and festivities, but there is no reference to participation of this church in the acts of paganism existing there.

Lampstand:

The Church in Philadelphia had already experienced a lot of instability in all senses because of so many forces contrary to it, however, remained firm in the Lord, so it needed so much *the Spirit of might* to continue standing, in the face of so many struggles. Philadelphia had accomplished great deeds, but needed to walk under God’s strength.

The Spirit of might gives us dominion and conviction of victory. Where our strength ends God’s resources are released. Might (or Power) makes us do things that in our

nature we can not, big and bold things. The might of the Spirit involves us like a protective shield and firms us in 'the Rock' like someone plants firmly on the ground a tree with strong roots. It gives us determination, security and certainty to follow our goals.



The Spirit of wisdom

Revelation 3: 14-22: “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: ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 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. 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 [KJV: eyesalve] to anoint your eyes so that you may see. I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 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. 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. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’”

Laodicea means *justice of the people, righteous people* and it was founded by Antiochus II in the third century BC and received this name because of his wife, Laodice. It was a thriving commercial center and was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD, but for being rich it refused the imperial aid for reconstruction. It was at an important crossroads of roads, so it was an important banking and currency exchange center. It was situated in the wide valley of Lycus River and was surrounded by fertile lands. Its major products were robes of polished black wool and tabloids or medicinal powders. There was no permanent water supply nearby. The water was carried by pipes to the city coming from hot springs that stayed at some distance, and came to it already warm; in other words, despite all its wealth, it could produce neither the healing power of hot water of Hierapolis, a neighboring city, nor the refreshing power of the cold water of Colossae, but could only produce warm water, just useful as emetic. The church thought to have no need of anything, while, in fact, it needed gold refined by fire, whitened garments and salve, more effective than its bankers, tailors and doctors could supply. Similar to citizens not hospitable to a traveler who offers extremely valuable goods, its members had closed their doors and had left outside their real provider.

Laodicea was symbolically a lukewarm church, accommodated, indecisive and proud because it thought that by the wealth it had it did not need anything else; on the contrary, the Lord told it that despite everything, its inhabitant was wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. His lukewarm attitude only served to make God vomit, because for Him this behavior was disgusting. Spiritually speaking, by being pitiable and poor in spirit, it needed the refined gold, the precious gift of God, which was His word of Life, His precious teaching and that pride did not let it to receive. Its sins made it naked and unprotected, so it needed white robes of purity and holiness. Pride made it blind, despite many physicians and many remedies, so it needed the salve from God to remove its spiritual blindness. It was also a church that was being placed before a divine choice: to let Jesus enter or let Him out. It was being reprimanded, so that it could correct itself. The Lord asked of it two basic things: zeal for the Word and repentance for its sins. By letting Him come in for the ego to go out, it would eat what He can provide. As a reward, it could sit on the throne with Him, but for this it had to learn, to fight and to win; only then it could reign. Humility would make it experience the justice of God, His forgiveness and redemption from its sins, with the right to be *heir*.

Here we have another example of what the Lord asks of us as a Body: to throw away the pride and let Him really enter into the deepest places of our being, where only He knows, and pluck out of there the weeds and the false curatives that have been

offered to us, the false robes that we try to produce to cover us, pretending everything is all right; to abandon the idea that our position of saved people by itself entitles us to enter the *New Jerusalem* and a quick prayer covering us with the blood of the Lamb is enough for the devil to respect us. What our soul needs is healing. The ingrained patterns of behavior only the Holy Spirit can change. Therefore, God guides us to truly heal ourselves before the cross, obeying His word that says: “because apart from me you can do nothing (*Jn. 15: 5b*).” Being converts many years ago, having read the bible ten times, being preachers or having any position of leadership do not make us special before God, much less exempt us of His treatment. All His children in the bible were worked and forged by Him until the end of their lives and grew at the pace determined by Him, not the human pace self-imposed, fast, light, without pain and in a careless way. Who is the father that stays impassive, watching his son go astray through wrong ways without reproaching him? If he does nothing, it is more than clear that he does not love him.

Besides proud, Laodicea was a lukewarm, indecisive and accommodated church, which strengthened its pride, at the same time that all this was also a fruit of it. Who thinks that everything is fine and does need nothing, not even to learn and grow, accommodates and becomes lukewarm, for one of the advantages of the wars in which *the Lord puts us* is to make us warmer toward Him and more ‘inflamed’ with the enemy, not letting us fall in the faith or give up being a warrior. The lukewarm state and the self-indulgence cause indecision because the wars also put us before choices, and our ability to decide and exercise our free will becomes more sharpened. When there is nothing to choose, indecision takes hold.

Repeating what was written above: as a reward for its change of attitude, Laodicea could sit on the throne with God, but for this it had to learn, to fight and win; only then it could reign. Humility would make it experience the justice of God, His forgiveness and redemption from its sins, with the right to be *heir*. Remember: *Laodicea* means: *God’s justice, righteous people*. The same thing is for the Church today.

Lampstand:

The Church of Laodicea was the proud church that thought it did not need anything and had wisdom enough to walk without the treatment of God. So, it needed so much the *Spirit of wisdom* of the Lord, leaving aside its worthless human wisdom.

Epilogue

It is not easy to say what God commands, especially when it comes to His church. From a stage of our spiritual growth as Christians, we take the risk of accommodation, pride and many other feelings and attitudes that make us feel that we are faultless. Therefore, the Lord uses someone within His own people to talk to His children, someone as liable to error as the brothers to show them that the Word comes from Him and not from men, because it would be much irresponsibility and much recklessness of our flesh to rebuke some action on someone and that have not yet been worked by Jesus in us. Thus, the Lord's prophets were those who needed more of His mercy to remain firm and those who most needed forces to feel loved by Him, to the point of His love being enough to protect them from the opposition of their own countrymen. May these words given by the Spirit be for edification, not for destruction, because the Word says that godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death (*2 Cor. 7: 10*).

May God bless you and make you meditate on many things, so that you can be an instrument in His hands, straightening tortuous ways and bringing back the fullness and blessedness of the Lord to the repentant hearts.

