

Pergamum  
Thyatira  
Philadelphia  
Ephesus  
Sardis  
Smyrna  
Laodicea



Message to the seven  
churches of Revelation

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Ministério Seara Ágape

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# Message to the seven churches of Revelation



*Ministério Seara Ágape*  
*Estudo Bíblico Evangélico*

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São Paulo – SP – Brazil – 2006

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, just watch the sheep. The predominant spirit in that place is what will determine the behavior of that community.

*Although the seven lampstands represent the seven churches in Asia Minor* to which John wrote the letters, in this book in particular I will write a revelation that I received from the Lord many years ago, at the beginning of my conversion, relating it to the Menorah (מְנוֹרָה – Strong #4501 – noun, feminine of manowr), the lampstand with seven lamps and seven branches), symbol of the Spirit of God for the Jewish people.

So, if we follow this thought, 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 anointings bestowed by God on the human part to complete it*, to supply what it lacks. 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 (Symbolizing 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 make it easier for readers to understand).

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## 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* the meaning of these seven lamps becomes clear to us. 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, Jesus 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 [counsel]*; 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.<sup>14</sup> 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*. 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.

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*), *ʾbhîinâ* (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 of the irresistible fulfillment of what He has in mind. 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 our strength ends, God's resources are released. The Spirit of Might makes us do things that in our nature we cannot, 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 *apokalyptō*, 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, alarm; the object or cause of fear; reverence, respect; to be put in fear; alarm or fright (phobos φόβος – Strong #5401; *Matt. 14: 26; Matt. 28: 4; 8; Mk. 4: 41; Heb. 2: 15* etc. = 47 times in the NT. *b) Deilia* (Greek) = fear, cowardice, timidity (deilia δειλία – Strong #1167, as it in *2 Tm 1: 7* – only once in the NT); *c) Eulabeia* (Greek) = prudence, reverence, caution, fear of God, piety; Strong #2124, eulabeia, εὐλαβείας, as in *Heb. 12: 28; Heb. 5: 7* = only twice in the NT). *d) Pachad*, the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word Phobos (Pachad, Strong #6343; פחד, as in *1 Sam. 11: 7; Ex. 15: 16; Gen. 31: 42; 53; Deut. 2: 25; Deut. 11: 25, Ps. 119: 120*, etc. = 49 times in the OT) = dread, dreadful, fear, great fear, terror; a (sudden) alarm; 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 (*ref.: 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*



But here in *Isa. 11: 2*, there still a Hebrew word for fear (or to fear), which is *yirah*, יִרָא, Strong #3374, and means fear; excessive fear or to fear exceedingly; dreadful, or fearfulness; (morally) reverence. It appears 45 times in the OT, usually referring to God or together with the expressions, ‘fear of the Lord’, ‘fear of God’ or ‘fear of the Almighty’ [*Gen. 20: 11; Ex. 20: 20; 2 Sam. 23: 3; 2 Chr. 19: 9; Neh. 5: 9; Neh. 5: 15; Job 4: 6; Job 6: 14; Job 15: 4; Job 22: 4; Job 28: 28; Ps. 2: 11; Ps. 5: 7; Ps. 19: 9; Ps. 34: 11; Ps. 90: 11; Ps. 111: 10; Ps. 119: 38; Ps. 1: 7; Prov. 1: 29; Prov. 2: 5; Prov. 8: 13; Prov. 9: 10; Prov. 10: 27; Prov. 14: 26-27; Prov. 15: 16; Prov. 15: 33; Prov. 16: 6; Prov. 19: 23; Prov. 22: 4; Prov. 23: 17; Isa. 11: 2-3; Isa. 29: 13; Isa. 33: 6; Isa. 63: 17; Jer. 32: 40; Ezek. 30: 13 (fear throughout the Land of Egypt); Jon. 1: 10; Jon. 1: 16]. Only 3 times, this word appears as a reference to fear or calamities or the enemy (*Deut. 2: 25; Ps. 55: 5; Isa. 7: 25*) and only once (*Ezek. 1: 18*), referring to his fear of the rims of the wheels of the cherubim (KJV: dreadful; NIV: awesome), but anyway, fear of the supernatural.*

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 (1<sup>st</sup> 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> year of the reign of Cyrus in Babylon and stopped until 520 BC – 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Darius I). According to Strong’s Concordance, ‘Darius’, Dārayavahuš (Strong #1867), comes from the Persian origin ‘Dareyavesh’, the title (rather than name) of a Persian king. According to Evandro de Souza Lopes – ‘Os nomes bíblicos e seus significados, CPAD, 8<sup>a</sup> ed. 2002’ – ‘Darius’ comes from the Persian name ‘Dozenda dara’, which in Hebrew means: owner, lord; in Greek: the powerful, rich. Other sources give its meaning as: ‘He who holds, the one who maintains.’

- Xerxes I (Ahasuerus – אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ): 465–486 BC (son of Darius I). Xerxes (great warrior, warlike, bellicose, lion) is a Greek transliteration of his Persian name after his ascension, Jshāyār Shah, meaning ‘ruler of heroes.’ In the bible his name is mentioned as Ahasuerus (Achashverosh אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ or Achshrush, in Hebrew – אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ = prince, head, chief, lion); Hebrew equivalent of Persian ‘Khshayarshan’ = king lion; written as Ahashuerus, in Chaldean; or Axashverosh, in Greek. According to Strong’s Concordance (Strong #325), Ahasuerus or Achshrush is the title (rather than name) of a Persian king.

- Artaxerxes I: 465-424 BC (son of Xerxes I, but not the firstborn). There was a 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 conglomerate 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 Hasmon, 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 guard. 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 make it easier to understand:

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 – 26-27 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)  Sergius Paulus, proconsul 47 AD	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			Conference in Jerusalem 50-51 AD Paul's second

	Nero 54-68 AD	Felix – 52-60 AD	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 – 65-68 AD?
70 AD	Vespasian – 69-79 AD  Titus – 79-81 AD Domitian – 81-96 AD Nerva – 96-98 AD Trajan – 98-117 AD		Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple – 70 AD  Death of John – 100 or 103 AD?

\* 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, cultural and religious center of Asia, which currently corresponds to Turkey. The city had an excellent port, which served as an export center and as a natural stopover for travelers to the Empire’s capital, Rome. It is now uninhabited and in ruins; remains excavated and is probably the largest and most impressive ruin in Asia Minor. The main part of the city had a theater, public baths, libraries, a market, and marble-paved streets. The initial settlement of Anatolia (present-day Turkey), where Ephesus was located in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, began many centuries ago, but was expanded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC by the Ionic settlers (Greeks). The ancient goddess of Ephesus acquired the name Artemis, but retained her primitive characteristics of fertility (hence always represented as a figure endowed with many breasts). The goddess Artemis (in Greek) was also the goddess of the moon and hunting.

In 560 BC, Ephesus was conquered by Croesus (king of Lydia); but in 547 BC it passed into the hands of the Persians. In 365 BC the temple of Diana suffered a great fire, but it was rebuilt. It was destroyed by the Goths in 260 AD.

The city did not have a great history until 133 BC, when it became part of the kingdom of Pergamum, which Attalus III ended up handing over to Rome. Pergamum continued to be the capital of the Roman Province of Asia, but Ephesus also continued to be the most important city with a population of about 333,000.

There, the most common religious practice was the cult of *Artemis* (in Greek), also known as *Diana* by the Romans, the Latin name for the *Queen of Heaven* (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 18; 19; 25) or *Isis* (by the Egyptians, also called *Astarte* or *Asherah* by the Phoenicians).

There was a large Jewish colony in Ephesus, and Jews enjoyed a privileged position during the early Empire. Christianity probably reached Ephesus through Aquila and Priscilla in 52 AD, when Paul made a brief visit there on his second missionary journey (*Acts 18: 18-19*), leaving them there. In *Acts 19: 10*, on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, Paul spent two years teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (an inhabitant of Ephesus, probably a rhetorician), and it was there that the turmoil between Paul, Demetrius and the Greek people of the city arose (*Acts 19: 23-40*). The miracles that God performed through them made an impact on idolatrous people, causing them to confess their sins and publicly denounce their works; and those who practiced magical arts gathered their books and burned them in the public square, the word of the Lord spread and grew in Asia (*Acts 19: 18-20*). Paul sent Timothy there to lead the church (*1 Tim. 1: 3*) and wrote to them during his imprisonment in Rome, telling them about faith and love. Soon after, the apostle John exercised jurisdiction there over the seven main churches of Asia Minor.



But after 40 years the initial generation was no longer in the leadership of the church. Thus, the church suffered the influence of many false teaching and was disturbed by many false teachers; not to mention Domitian, who was the Emperor at that time and harshly persecuted the Christians. Thus, the Early Church in Ephesus, under many pagan influences and almost without the spiritual strength to break with the old Greek habits, was gradually losing its 'first love', i.e., the initial flame of the revival was cooling down.

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 (they have tested those who claim to be apostles but were not, and have found them to be false), their endurance 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.

In short: Ephesus valued the true doctrine, did not tolerate the sin of its members, endured adversity, had work and perseverance, but there was no more love for Jesus in what they did; the church has lost its love for its Redeemer. And God told them to repent and do the works it did at first, otherwise, He would remove the lampstand from there. The church defended the intellectual truth of doctrine, but without association with practical life; there was no more piety in what it did. It was barren. Jesus only asked His children to associate the doctrine with love, so He said: "Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first", that is, 'remember the past, where you had more intimacy with me and where you started to cool down'. "Do the works you did at first" meant: not to discourage and to go back in the direction of restoration.

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 situation that was occurring in the community would be *to eat from the tree of life* that is in the Paradise of God, symbolizing not only the eternal life, but also in the present, *the truth of Jesus* in contrast to the false teaching and idolatry, legalism, perfectionism and religiosity. Acting the right way, Ephesus would be desirable for Him again.

The church in Ephesus, however, did not change its attitude, could not revive the fervor of the beginning and ceased to exist.

Our motivation for work must be the love of Jesus. Otherwise, doctrinal orthodoxy is worth nothing. Excessive rationality and desire to serve God with rigidity and perfectionism block emotions, and logically love, cool the flame of the Spirit, bring spiritual death.

How can we bring this to our days?

Unfortunately, many churches begin under the spiritual revival, but along their walk they let many things 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 opposing the unclean practices mixed with the gospel, enduring the tests and oppositions patiently and bearing up, doing social work and putting to the test the false teachers and the false prophets, although striving to remain in the original doctrine, seeking holiness and not getting involved with the fads of the world, they can no longer resume their original purity, because the love that moved their hearts to do the work was defiled by external influences, for the fear of developing spiritually and experiencing something new from God; or by the perfectionism of the flesh, wanting to please God by their own strength; or else, by religiosity and the willingness to walk in righteousness and apply God's Word to the letter. Perhaps for fear of the spiritual manifestations of the Holy Spirit, they were taken for rationality, without allowing Him to touch hearts deeply; Or because excessive struggle and resistance to evil ended up taking away motivation and led to accommodation. Afraid to change, to recycle and renew the anointing; Afraid of falling into the sinful and licentious extremity, the church opts for stagnation and orthodoxy. Whatever the pretext, God is not pleased with the sad religious routine that prevents His Spirit from acting. In fact, radicalism is an impediment to the novelties of God and also does not take the community anywhere. However, what God means is that it is no use walking through the extremisms of morality, when the heart no longer feels gladness in being, in fact, in the presence of the Lord.

Activism of flesh gives a false impression of movement, productivity, correct exercise of spirituality, thinking that it pleases God.

Anything that occupies the 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, Adam and Eve were permitted to eat from the fruit of the tree of life, in contrast to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was forbidden to them. This means that those who turn to the sound practices of the gospel, such as 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', which is Jesus; thus, they resume the learning of the Word based on divine truth in a practical way, motivated and full of life.

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)*. 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 fifty-five kilometers north of Ephesus. It was one of the most prosperous cities in Asia, the most beautiful and the second after Ephesus, and loyal ally of Rome, with great splendor and magnificence of its public buildings. It had helped Rome even before it was an empire; therefore, it was the biggest center of emperor worship. The temple of Tiberius Caesar was in *Smyrna*. Currently, it is a city in Turkey called Izmir.

The city was important because of its commerce, for it had a natural port with an old trade route that crosses the Valley of Hermus River, and its interior was very fertile. It supported athletic games and had a large sports center. In addition, it was important because of its cultural influence, as it had the highest concentration of libraries, theaters, palaces and luxurious buildings, bold and pompous, rich and beautiful architecture. There was at the place of Smyrna a Greek colony from very ancient times, perhaps around 1000 BC, but it was captured and destroyed by the Lydians in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC; it was re-founded in its present location by Philip Lysimachus (360-281 BC), one of the four generals of Alexander the Great, in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. From there it developed into one of the most prosperous cities in Asia Minor. Many Jews were concentrated there and strongly opposed to the Christian church. Here, the presbyter Polycarp, a disciple of John, was martyred in AD 155, at the age of 86, forced to deny Jesus. And they threatened him with wild beasts and, then, burned at the stake. He was burned alive, and then stabbed when the fire failed to consume his body, but died singing.

No one knows who founded the Christian church there, whether it was Paul (*Acts 19: 10*) after being in Ephesus. What is known is that it was a church that was going through tribulation, adverse circumstances, and a hostile and dangerous environment. For the most part, it was composed of slaves, therefore, even deprived of their own freedom, not only goods; and the free Christians who were there had their goods confiscated. They were taken to Roman prisons and many died there of hunger, infections and despair.

Around 303 AD, there was Diocletian Persecution (284-305AD) or ‘Great Persecution.’ It was the last and perhaps the bloodiest persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, also known as ‘the age of martyrs.’ Diocletian and his colleagues Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius Chlorus issued a series of edicts requiring Christians to comply with the traditional religious practices of the Roman Empire, namely, performing sacrifices to their deities. The first imperial edict of 303 AD ordered the general destruction of churches, objects of Christian worship (burning Christian books and their meeting places), and the dismissal of officials who were proselytes of the new religion; a second edict ordered the general imprisonment of the clergy (the leaders of the Christian church were threatened and forced to worship the

gods of Rome). A third edict provided for the release of Christians in case of apostasy, and the fourth and last edict in 304 AD, ordered the entire population of the empire to sacrifice to the gods on penalty of death or forced labor in mines. Christians went to the quarries and got sick there. Diocletian's wife and daughter, who were Christians, also suffered persecution, but were killed later, under Licinius (308-324 AD). They were beheaded, and their bodies were thrown into the sea.

Jesus now introduces Himself to the church in Smyrna saying: "These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life." Because there the citizens gave priority to the emperor, Jesus told the oppressed church that in Him everything makes sense; He was the center, not Caesar. "Who was dead and came to life" – the Lord told this because if the church was facing persecution and martyrdom His children should know that He is the conqueror of death, He died and won. It was a word of encouragement for the church. They would not feel alone in passing through death; He would be with them. It would not be by human daring, but by divine strength.

The church in Smyrna faced the opposition on the part of the Jews, as well as the church in Philadelphia (*Rev. 2: 9; Rev. 3: 9*). They allied with Rome to destroy the Christians. Therefore, the Smyrna believers would be put to the test. Thus, we can see that the Lord knew the tribulation of His church, its poverty in confrontation with material wealth and the opposition of the Jews who blasphemed against the true teaching, because they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But for Jesus, they were spiritually rich.

Jesus did not need to rebuke this church. He knew what it was going through ("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").

"I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich" – Jesus saw that they were rich despite what they lacked materially.

"I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" – it took at least ten people to start a synagogue. It is not known, exactly, if these Jews who persecuted them gathered in a synagogue, but in any case, they considered themselves faithful to God and thought that they were the ones who were right for following the law and, therefore, would be saved. But Jesus called them the synagogue of Satan because they gathered to persecute Christians. "A person is a Jew who is one inwardly" (*Rom. 2: 29*), not by the law but by faith.

"Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison" – Satan is an agent that activates forces; he was the instrument to mobilize the Roman emperors against the church.

Symbolically, God's children would have to carry their cross, that is, to experience the physical death because of their loyalty to the Lord, but they were also being comforted with the promise of the resurrection on the Last Day. The test would be as bitter as myrrh, but it would make them overcome 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 the ones 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 separation from God for 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, but brief; the first number of a major beginning*, which is the biblical meaning of *number ten*. Thus, the church of Smyrna would be put to test in its covenant and in its fidelity to Christ.

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” means, be faithful even if it costs your life. This church did not back down in the face of poverty, persecution or death.

The word ‘crown’ here in Greek is *stephanos* (στέφανος – Strong #4735), which means ‘crown, garland, honor, glory’, more specifically, a chaplet (as a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor generally; but more conspicuous and elaborate than the simple fillet, diadem). This crown that John is talking about here was like those that people received at special times, like the crown given to victors at games (*1 Cor. 9: 25; 2 Tim. 2: 5*). The Christian life is like an athlete’s race. “I have finished the race,” Paul said (*2 Tim. 4: 7*). ‘Stephanos’ (crown) was also given at a feast; then they will receive it at the wedding supper of the Lamb. People also received such a crown when they entered the temples of the gods; therefore, Jesus spoke to the believers in Smyrna about the joy of entering the presence of God in the New Jerusalem.

What does this mean for us?

There are many churches of Christ in dangerous places on the planet, where being a Christian is forbidden, places where secular powers do not allow freedom of worship, because Satan works there instigating the rulers. Many believers suffer serious persecution and even face physical death because of their faithfulness to Jesus. But as the strength does not come from man but from God, He enables them for this. And despite this kind of adversity, He always finds ways for more people to hear His voice, receive Him as Lord, so that His church does not die. That’s why, many times, He asks us to intercede for lives that we don’t even know personally, but are our brothers in faith.

In the East of the planet the persecutions are more physical; This does not mean, however, that we should belittle the persecutions and struggles faced by the church in the West, with many subtleties of false teaching, false prophecies, unrestrained technology, media, science, money and other subtle and invisible forces, but that oppress the path of those who do not want to play Satan’s game or worldly Babylon. The situation is worse when the money is withheld, because it makes it very difficult for the true church to move strongly to preach and evangelize. God’s work cannot be done in the world’s extravagant way, but in God’s simple way, for it can often be done without spending money, avoiding the consumerist, competitive and corrupt behavior of the world.

While the world sees the appearance, the Lord sees the heart. The world likes wealth, and unfortunately, it attracts the church to live by His parameters. Only those who are firm in the Word of God have the conscience to know that His values are different and resist oppressions and external trials. Ungodly people are used by Satan to criticize, condemn, speak evil and even act violently against God’s children who seek to live under His truth. But the Lord has power to give strength and supply those who belong to Him in all circumstances and in all ways.

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:*

The church of Smyrna needed to cry out to the Lord for the Spirit of understanding to know how to remain strong in trials and not fall into the errors and blasphemies of the wicked. The correct understanding of God's revelations would lead it to experience the true strength of the Spirit and leave the old allegiances of the flesh, as the city had been a faithful ally of Rome, to be faithful to Christ. Understanding the revelation of Jesus as Son of God and Savior of the world and as the only true God would lead Smyrna to better understand what He wants for those who have an encounter with Him: to leave the past, in order to live a new life (true conversion), and have another kind of wealth and strength. Smyrna, being loyal to Jesus rather than Rome, would overthrow the idolatry of money within the church and achieve the Lord's right thinking for its members.



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 in 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* (in Greek: Πέργαμος) 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. The city was built on a promontory twenty-six kilometers off the coast of the Aegean Sea, on the northern edge of the Kaikos or Caicus River Plain (present-day Bakırçay) and northwest of the modern city of Bergama (now the territory of Turkey) since ancient times. During the Hellenistic period, under the Attalid dynasty (281-133 BC), it was the capital of the Kingdom of Pergamum, and one of the main cultural centers of the Greek world. The Pergamum massif, composed mainly of volcanic rock, is three hundred and thirty-five meters above sea level. Therefore, it was considered a fortress (citadel, burgh). The Attalid dynasty was a Greek lineage that ruled in the city of Pergamum after the death of Philip Lysimachus of Thrace (360-281 BC), one of the generals and successors of Alexander the Great. Philetaerus was one of Lysimachus’ officers, and took power in the city in 282 BC, reigning until 263 BC. His descendants continued to rule it: Eumenes I (263-241 BC), Attalus I Soter (241-197 BC), Eumenes II (197-160 BC), Attalus II Philadelphus (160-138 BC), Attalus III (138-133 BC) and Eumenes III Aristonicus (133-128 BC – pretender to the throne, for he was the illegitimate son of Attalus II, but his revolt failed). In 133 BC Attalus III bequeathed the Kingdom of Pergamum to the Roman Republic, for he didn’t have heirs.

Pergamum surpassed Ephesus and Smyrna, for in that city there was the largest library in the world in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, after Alexandria. Pergamum had 200,000 scrolls and was built by Eumenes II between 220 and 159 BC at the northern end of the Acropolis.

Manuscripts were written on parchment, rolled, and then stored on the shelves. It is true that the word ‘parchment’ is derived from Pergamum (from Latin *pergamenum*, and from French *parchemin*). During the Hellenistic period, Pergamum was a major center of parchment production, but parchment was not invented in Pergamum, as legend has it. Parchment was in use in Anatolia and elsewhere long before the rise of Pergamum. What happens is that parchment helped the Roman Empire not to depend so much on Egyptian papyrus, as it was used in the library of Alexandria, and allowed the spread of knowledge in Europe and Asia.

Pergamum was also 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, strategy and warfare, justice and skill; *Dionysus* (for the Greeks) or *Bacchus* (for the Romans), the god of wine; *Aphrodite* (in Greek) or *Venus*, for the Romans, the goddess of love, beauty and sexuality. *Demeter* (in Greek) and called *Ceres* by the Romans, the goddess of harvest, agriculture, cultivated land and the seasons, propitiator of wheat, a plant symbol of civilization. There was also a great temple of the Egyptian gods *Isis-Serapis*. *Serapis* or *Sarapis*, in Egyptian, was initially called *Aser-hapi* (i.e., *Osiris-Apis*), who became *Serapis*. His symbol was a cross. He was said to be the god *Osiris* in his entirety. *Osiris* ruled the realm of the dead and was linked to *Ra*. *Isis* was his consort. *Apis* (*Hapi-ankh*), the bull of Memphis, was the personification of the earth and the reincarnation of *Osiris*; symbolized the strength of the king (Pharaoh).

*Antipas*, who mentioned in that letter, fits into this context. *Antipas* is the abbreviation of *Antipater*. He was a presbyter, disciple of John and a martyr of the church of Pergamum, who, according to tradition, in 92 AD was roasted in a bronze receptacle (a bronze bull, similar to an incense burner) by the worshipers of *Serapis* during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD). The bronze bull represented the bull god *Apis*. The martyrdom of Antipas is one of the first recorded in Christian history, highlighted by Christian Scripture through the message sent to the Church of Pergamum in the Book of Revelation.

Another important god worshiped there was *Asclepius* (*Asklepios*, Greek) or *Aesculapius* in Latin, the god of healing, whose symbol was a serpent. The sanctuary dedicated to him was considered one of the most famous therapeutic and healing centers in the Roman world. Galen, the most famous physician in Antiquity after Hippocrates, was born in Pergamum and received his initial training at the Asclepeion (the temple of Aesculapius). People from all over came to be healed.

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, who still alive 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*, the sword of His judgment for those who remain in error.

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. There was a period of civil war during the transition from the Republic to the Roman Empire, which began in 29 BC with Octavian, Julius Caesar's nephew and heir. *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 (built in 29 BC) 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* (37-41 AD) became the first emperor to present himself before the people as a god; not through statues, but openly in his own body.

Once a year Roman subjects went to these temples to burn incense to Caesar. Those who refused were persecuted. Here the persecution of the church began, because Christians refused to worship another god as Lord. At the same time, the persecution of the church of Ephesus by Domitian took place.

"I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives" – This means that God knew that the believers in Pergamum kept His name and did not deny the faith, despite the oppressions of Rome and the Greek culture of the city. God knew the evil place where this church was, but He wanted them to understand one thing: Satan's throne was not in a building, in an idolatrous temple like those ones, but in the pagan system that led people to worship many false gods. This was a conspiracy to the true Trinity. They would have to resist the deceit and heresy of this place, the seductive world there. The church took the risk of mixing with the world, of conforming to doctrinal deceit and committing to moral sin. So Jesus goes on saying,

"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" – Some believers of the church in Pergamum held the doctrine of Balaam or the doctrine of Nicolaitans. 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*): eating food sacrificed to idols, simultaneous coexistence with paganism, with prostitution and with the false teaching, which were ties in the path of the Church. It wasn't the whole church that practiced this. Some of them were just delighted by the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and Balaam (son of Beor, who was bought by Balak, king of Moab, son of Zippor, to curse Israel when they entered the Promised Land). However, this was dangerous for the community as a whole. They were subtle attacks of heresy and sin, mixing the gospel with paganism (ecumenism). The moral level was going down.

Then the Lord comes and says: "Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth." Again He 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. Therefore, He presented Himself to this church as the one who has a sharp two-edged sword, the one who has

authority to judge the ungodly and believers: “These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.” The whole church had to repent; not because everyone had gone astray, but because everyone conformed, they tolerated error. The source of sin was Satan’s throne, his rule in that city, creating mental confusion, lack of light, deception, blindness and sin. But the part of the believers was to resist and keep the flame of the Spirit burning. It was not an easy task, but a necessary one.

“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.” – 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 manna was the bread from heaven, known to the Israelites, and which sustained them in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus came and said that He was that bread of life (*Jn. 6: 31-35; 48-51; 54-55*). Those who did not defile themselves with the banquets of the world would eat the banquet of God, the true manna.

The little stone mentioned in the text was a small cube (*tessara hospitalis*) used as a ticket to somewhere, and also as a password for the big parties in the city. For the conquerors, those who rejected the worldly banquets, it would represent the entry into the kingdom of God and the wedding supper of the Lamb. There is a second hypothesis for the ‘white stone’: in the courts of the ancient world, jurors voted with a white or black stone. If the majority were white, the defendant was acquitted. If it was black, he would be condemned. Therefore, it could indicate that even if the believers were condemned by the courts of earth, they would be acquitted by the court of God.

“And on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.” – the new name can refer to Jesus, the owner and Lord of those who believe in Him and give their lives to Him; or else to ‘His new name’ written in *Rev. 19: 12*: “He has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself.” and *Rev. 3: 12*: “If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name” may be a new name which will only be revealed to us at His second coming, and only those who are inscribed in the Lamb’s Book of Life will know.

There is also a third hypothesis about this white stone if we think about this detail about ‘a new name’ written on it. At the time, there was a custom: when a child was born and the father recognized it as his, he would write the child’s name next to his on a white stone. And this can mean for us that our names are written in the New Jerusalem, for we are recognized by God as His children.


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.

How can we bring this to our days?

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 horoscope 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 true 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 everything 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. Medicine and Dentistry adopted the snake wrapped around a stick, known as the Rod of Asclepius or the Staff of

Aesculapius . *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 –  $\Psi$ ). How many get proud of being able to work psychologically with people!

When John wrote his letter to Pergamum by order of God, he said that the Lord recognized that they kept His name and did not deny the faith, even under persecution, as in the case of Antipas. However, some members in that church followed the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, participating without embarrassment in some social and religious activities of that pagan society, such as eating food sacrificed to idols, prostitution and sexual laxity within the Church and condoning with false teachings. Hence, God mentions His disapproval of this kind of practice. And He knew that even knowing this the rest of the church did not object.

Unfortunately, many churches start under spiritual revival, but along their way they leave vigilance aside, making room for the works of the flesh and false teaching that begin to undermine the flame of the Spirit. God is not pleased with our lack of commitment to His truth, with our self-indulgence or with the sad religious routine that prevents His Spirit from acting, much less with our tolerance with certain carnal attitudes that open a gap for fads and for the adulterous shaping of Word to human convenience, with the excuse that we cannot be radical.

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 moralism that serves only to judge and condemn past mistakes, leaders are unable to approach 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, otherwise, would come and would bring judgment: “Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.”

In addition to the gods already mentioned at the beginning of the text (as they are worshiped today in our midst), even within the evangelical churches, what happened in the church in Ephesus is happening here, for example: the influence of the *Queen of Heaven*, the consort of Baal (or Asherah, Diana and all the other names she used over the centuries, including Isis, the consort of Osiris), bringing rebellion, human idolatry, lack of dominion over the flesh, worldly customs disguised as holiness, permissiveness with many attitudes that do not please God, irreverence, lack of fear of God, family breakdown, etc. These things gradually infiltrate, including the leadership due to excessive emotional and spiritual pressure or lack of sufficient preparation to occupy certain positions, even due to ignorance of the Word itself; not necessarily the lack of knowledge of what is written, but the lack of real spiritual experience with it, which only the Holy Spirit can give.

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 because of the 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 or 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.





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* in ancient Greek was called Pelopia (Πελόπεια) and Semiramis (Σεμίραμις), before it was renamed to Thyateira (Θυάτειρα) in 290 BC by Seleucus I Nicator (323-281 BC). It was destroyed by a great earthquake during the reign of Augustus (29 BC-14 AD), but was rebuilt with the help of the Roman Empire. Today, a larger Turkish city (Akhisar = ‘white castle’) continues to exist on the same site over the ancient city of Lydia.

*Thyatira* means ‘*sacrifice of work*.’ In the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the city housed city housed a border garrison and was an important point of the Roman road system, one of which came from the provincial capital, which was Pergamum, to Laodicea and continuing to the eastern provinces, to Byzantium (Constantinople); today Istanbul. It was also an important manufacturing center; dyeing, garments, pottery and work in bronze were done there. It had a long military story (hence the ‘*iron rod*’ mentioned by Jesus to John – v. 26-27, symbolizing authority). Among the ancient ruins of the city, inscriptions related to the guild (syndicate, suntechuia, συντεχνία) of dyers of the city were found. Inscriptions mention: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers, and bronze-smiths.

Lydia, the woman Paul met in Philippi (Acts 16: 14) was probably trading purple-dyed wool in this city, for she was from Thyatira.

The city was home to a Christian community from the apostolic period, which continued until 1922, when the Orthodox Christian population was deported.

The text of Revelation mentions the name of a prophetess accepted into the church community, who taught and seduced the Christians of Thyatira to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. This fictitious name of the woman could be related to Jezebel, wife of Ahab, the idolatrous king of Israel in the time of the prophet Elijah. Some commentators such as Benson and Doddridge have concluded that what was practiced in Thyatira was the same apostasy promoted in Israel by Jezebel as mentioned in the Books of Kings (*1 Kin. 16: 31-33; 1 Kin. 18: 18-19*). Jezebel, Ahab’s wife, had priests who were in charge of the worship of Baal-Melcart, the official protective deity of Tyre, which was connected to nature; and his consort Asherah (Astarte or Ashtoreth, goddess of fertility of the Canaanites, later called the Queen of Heaven by the prophet Jeremiah). This Jezebel accepted in the community of the church

was a seductive prophetess who encouraged immorality and idolatry using religion as a subterfuge. Her teaching probably condoned with pagan activities, associated with the social clubs or guilds or corporations that organized the various businesses in the city (trade in wool, leather, linen, ceramics and bronze works, etc.). They were trade associations for the purpose of protection, benefit, and recreation.

It was practically impossible to pursue a commercial activity without belonging to one of these corporations; however, their meetings were associated with acts of pagan worship and immorality, for each had its main deity. After these pagan religious meetings there were parties and food was dedicated to the gods, to idols, and they ended up in immorality.

But there is an interesting detail to comment if we place our vision on the spiritual side of the symbolism of this name. Jezebel is a name used to designate a demon of high hierarchy that acts on human emotions (an 'Authority', mentioned by Paul in *Eph. 1: 21* or *1 Co 15: 24* – NRSV; NIV) that is like the 'right arm' of the principality 'Queen of Heaven' (Paul calls 'Ruler'; 'Queen of Heaven' is used in the book of Jeremiah, worshiped and called by other names in Antiquity and today too, but with other name). This Authority acts on human emotions, therefore, bringing false prophecy and false teaching, deception, emotional imbalance, prostitution, seduction, sensuality, idolatry and lies.

Thus, the name used by John for this woman seems to be pertinent. She would be a symbol of apostasy and false prophecy in the church of Thyatira. The Lord addresses her using a figure of speech that can be compared to the professional activity of the city: "These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze." This meant that He was searching what was going on in His church in that city and that He would trample all these evil works and the people who practiced them as a way of making His judgment.

This false prophetess brought a 'solution' to believers. She taught 'the deep things of Satan' (*Rev. 2: 24*), that is, she taught believers that they should be part of these corporations, participate in sin and then, yes, they would be able to overcome it, because they had experienced it.

Then Jesus says: "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." This means that the church of Thyatira was a hardworking and brave church, it had works, love, faith, service, perseverance, the last works greater than the first (which indicated maturity and growth), but kept the tolerance with false prophecies and false teaching, seduction of words taking it to idolatry (To eat food sacrificed to idols); therefore, it lived together with darkness pretending to be truth. At those parties, things were happening that were incompatible with the gospel. The church tolerated the false prophetess Jezebel, even under Jesus' rebuke. This behavior undermined the church from the inside out. This false prophetess induced people to seek a deep knowledge of Satan, that is, by participating in the guilds, believers did not risk their financial lives; however, it was a way of making them exchange gods, from the true God for Mammon and all the others existing in each of these pagan meetings. She also encouraged experiencing sin to overcome it, but it is not biblical ("Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself" – *1 Cor. 6: 18*). It was liberal Christianity without laws or norms, to suit paganism of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

This teaches us that we should be tolerant of one another, but not of heresy, religious deception, false teaching, perversion of the truth, because all this pervert character.

“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.” Both she and the sinful believers were invited to repent, but the bible says that there was no repentance of the woman; therefore, God would put her to bed and bring her suffering; her children would undergo death and there would be tribulation for those who followed her. This was a consequence of divine justice, for God had no more tolerance.

“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.” The Lord knew those who stood firm. Therefore, it is possible to be faithful to the doctrine of Christ, even when others stray. It’s difficult, but it’s possible. Another comment: “But to the rest of you who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan” – it should not be confused here with ignorance of spiritual things, since it is necessary for a believer to have the study and know how Satan works in the area of human knowledge, not only to avoid their evil snares as well as to be able to help those who are deceived by false teachings, mysticism, etc. What Jesus is saying is not to participate in evil things; instead, to strengthen ourselves in His word; however, not to run away from the information that is necessary to have true spiritual victories. After all, “With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbors, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered” (*Prov. 11: 9*).

“Hold fast to what you have until I come” – the holiness, the experiences, and the intimacy they had with God, the knowledge of His word, and the inner peace of having obeyed Him were enough. They did not need to seek the novelties of sin to know His grace. What the others did was distort the word of God: “but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (*Rom. 5: 20b*).

“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.” This means: the faithful should keep what they had until the coming of the Lord to receive authority over the nations: an iron rod (Iron symbolizes divine strength) shattering the clay (the things of the flesh and the perishable things). In other words, the Lord will give them the authority to judge the wicked.

As a reward, besides they can rule over the nations with a rod of iron, the faithful remnants would receive the Morning Star. He was proposing to His children that, instead of knowing the deep things of Satan, they should know more of Him, the Morning Star; to experience the glory of Christ and to remain shining with Him.

In *Rev. 22: 16*, 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. 21: 23* it is written: “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.”

In *Rev. 22: 5* the same text is repeated in other words: “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”.

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.

How can we bring this to our day?

We can be a brave church, a church that shows spiritual works even greater than the material ones, 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 may think that this is not true and that we have dominion over the demons that annoy us, but what is our true testimony if we sincerely look inside ourselves, seeing countless things of the ‘old self’ that are still present, if we are provoked by someone or some situation? What about so much contention, division and power struggle within the House of God? What do we have to say about so much gossip and so many works of the flesh still fully alive and active in believers ‘converted’ years ago? What do 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 about many church members or their relatives, who say they are converts, but don’t show a single sign of that true conversion that is love for God and neighbor? What do 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? What do we have to say about believers who after years sitting on the bench are unable to speak by heart a biblical verse (at best, “Jesus wept”)? Worse than that, unable to apply it in their daily lives! What about unresolved sexual problems? What about the financial attachment that still prevails over the needs of the Work of God? What about the mixture the gospel with business influences? What about the adulteries behind-the-scenes?

It’s no use making of the altar a place of manifestation of demons to say that the power of God exists, but leaving 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 individually win our personal battles, achieving what was devastated or stolen from us: 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 its real content and not let the ‘Jezebels’ enter and make an abode in us. Nowadays, everyone wants to be a prophet, pastor and apostle. 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 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 remove from its midst the false prophecies and the seduction that led to carnality and idolatry, 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 (Isa. 11: 2), 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 primarily 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 from 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 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 [KJV: be watchful], 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. Pactolus River (in Turkish, Sart Çayı) is a river near the coast of the Aegean Sea in Turkey. Its wellspring is on Mount Tmolus (now Bozdağ) and flows through the ruins of the ancient city of Sardis, the capital of Lydia, and empties into the river Gediz, the ancient Hermus. Pactolus contained an alloy of gold and silver (the ‘Electrum’), which was the basis of the economy of the former state of Lydia in Ancient times. The Electrum is a natural alloy of gold and silver, with traces of copper and other metals such as nickel, sometimes zinc. Depending on the proportion of gold and silver, the ancient Greeks called it ‘white gold’ or ‘gold’, to distinguish it from refined gold; so it would be more appropriate to call it ‘pale gold.’

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. Its apogee was in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, shortly before the time of King Croesus, ruler of Lydia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The city also enjoyed this wealth in the times of the NT. 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, just 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). Alexander the Great rebuilt it and brought Hellenism to it. In 17 AD the city was destroyed by an earthquake. Tiberius rebuilt part of it and it absorbed the Roman culture, becoming lascivious and permissive. The church lost its values and then the Lord sent it this letter. Sardis conformed to paganism. 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 believers were lukewarm and drowsy. Only a small group remained faithful. The people who remained faithful would be holy and worthy (white robes) and would attain salvation (would have their names written in the *Book of Life*). They would display the brightness of the Lord (known as the ‘*Sun of Justice*’).

For us, the message that remains is that past honors and glories do not sustain us today and lack of vigilance and stagnation lead only to theft; more than material theft, there is spiritual theft, which is more serious.

There were different groups of believers inside that church:

1) Spiritually dead believers, not truly converted (“I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead”). The church in Sardis had an apparently lively



liturgy, with celebrations, but no spiritual life. Solemnities and rituals impacted people, but they had no life before God. Faith was not from the heart.

2) Believers full of emotional and spiritual wounds and almost dead, unwilling to follow their path with Christ (“Wake up [KJV: be watchful], and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death”). The flame of the spirit was almost quenched in them, for worldliness was a great influence on them and it defiled their garments. The Roman way of life and the style of the mundane society of the time spoke louder; therefore, they had little interest in sanctifying and purifying themselves.

3) Believers who do not live a life of integrity (“For I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God”) – the church was involved in projects and works (The main business of the city was dyeing and making woolen garments). Believers could even do social works there, help people, but maybe it was just to receive the applause of men, not God’s, because what they did was not to give glory to Him but to themselves. The motive was not the kingdom of God, and this was called ‘lack of integrity.’

4) Believers openly defiling themselves with worldly practices; others managed to resist (“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”). Few believers had not been contaminated by the influences of society and the world.

In short: This church in Sardis did not face persecution from the emperors or the Jews, nor from heresy, but it had become a partner with the world.

“Wake up [KJV: be watchful], 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” – this meant an appeal from God for them to urgently return to the Word and keep what they had received, namely, the true doctrine, which would make them grow and receive the solid food of a mature church, not the spiritual milk of beginners in the faith. The fact that He said, “be watchful” meant a warning to wake up, because they were being robbed of their spiritual strength and God’s plan for them and they didn’t realize it. “Be watchful” [Strong #1127 – grégoreó; γρηγορέω; means: to be awake (in the night), watch, to be watchful, on the alert, vigilant. From egeiro; to keep awake, i.e. watch (literally or figuratively). Therefore: be vigilant, to wake, to watch, to be watchful].

“Strengthen what remains and is on the point of death” – this means that those who are awake must wake up those who are sleeping, almost dying.

“For I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God” – integrity was closely linked there to the motivation of their attitudes; first of all, they must look for holiness, that is, to come out of sin and make their lives right with God.

But the Lord knows His church thoroughly; He knows who each one is: “These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars... 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.” He was there ready to pour out the seven Spirits of God upon them, that is, the fullness of the Holy Spirit to revive them. They were quenching the initial flame of the Holy Spirit they had received by giving their lives to Jesus. They still had the Holy Spirit; however, they were not filled with the Spirit. Therefore, they were almost dead (some really were; they extinguished the flame of the Spirit), they did not have the life of God within their hearts.

It is interesting to meditate a bit about the blessing that this church has lost because of self-indulgence and ‘paralysis’ in relation to the things of God. Apparently, Sardis was situated 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, His protection and His living word. 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 cannot 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.

"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."

Thus, there were still some within the church who resisted the lie of wealth and opulence, and walked in righteousness and integrity before God. Whoever lived in holiness here on earth will have white robes in heaven. There is no salvation for one who has no garments without integrity. White is a symbol of holiness, purity, victory. The church in Sardis would be dressed in white linen again when it was faithful and just. The whiteness of his garments would shine like sunlight or the glow of gold.

“I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels.” – A revived person will have his name proclaimed in glory before the Father.

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” – understand and obey the word.

What does this mean for us?

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 the Church of Christ is not? Just look at the traditionalism that surrounds us and we’ll see that it hasn’t brought newness 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! 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 have 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. 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.

It is also important to mention something else: God is not against money, but against the love of money. Money that is misused, just for the aggrandizement of certain ministries just because the world wants to hear about Jesus in a new way, ends up leading the leaders and the sheep to exhaustion, because they allow themselves to be involved by the subtleties, the attractions, superfluous and for the demands and competitiveness of the world. Everything has a balance point. We today are often forced to use worldly mechanisms to spread the gospel of Christ, but it is the Spirit of God that sets the limits. The victories we have conquered so far are ours, no one can take them away, but they must be watched over and seen as proof that it was the Lord who gave them to us; they are an incentive to move forward and conquer what He has already determined. This He reveals every day. It is not the human being who needs to do something for Him as if he wanted to show service. This is not how the kingdom of God works. The world, indeed, is demanding and cares about productivity. Nothing is good enough. And when we try to please the demands of the world, our spirit doesn’t let God speak; then the Holy Spirit fades, because the ego has taken over. So the advice “be watchful” is quite pertinent here.

Jesus said: “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 praised and honored. 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 one's own clothing. God does not want us to wear garments of wool dyed by sin, worldly contamination and laziness, but with fine and shining linen of the acts of justice we practice.

*Lampstand:*

The church of Sardis was living on the glories of the past and now needed to be reborn and watch over not to be caught by surprise anymore. Therefore, 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 it was in and start to experience the Living Word of the Lord within itself. More than that, it should know how to manage the material goods that the Lord had given His children.

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 189 BC by Eumenes II (197-160 BC) and received the name Philadelphia because of the loyalty of Attalus II Philadelphus king of Pergamum (160-138 BC), his brother, to him. Attalus II Philadelphus has already died. The city was on the imperial mail route as a gateway to the east; hence it was called ‘the gateway to the east.’ The site is currently occupied by the village of Alaşehir. Philadelphia is the figure of the church loyal to Christ, because of the loyalty of the two brothers, Attalus and Eumenes.

It was situated on an interior plateau, fertile, which explains its commercial prosperity. 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.

However, it was subjected to frequent earthquakes (the earthquake that destroyed the city of Sardis in 17 AD also destroyed Philadelphia). The people then went to live outside the city in tents outdoors. Rome restored the city; so the citizens of Philadelphia willingly renamed it Neokaisareia. Vespasian (69-79 AD) changed its name to Flavia (for being the first emperor of the Flavian Dynasty). 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. Jesus would make them pillars that would never be shaken, and this would be to comfort them in their insecurity and instability.

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.

Such as the Lord did with Smyrna, He only had good things to say to Philadelphia.

In a church with false teachers and so much idolatry, He shows Himself as the Holy and the True One: “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.” The key of David means the authority and the power of Christ. He is the key that opens the door to salvation. And He gave that key to His church in Philadelphia, the key to evangelism and preaching the Word. At the same time that the city had an open door to commerce in material life, Jesus also opened for His church the door to spread the gospel, for there were many pagans in the city, and pagan people likewise came to it by the roads.

And it seems that the church in Philadelphia was faithfully doing the work of God, for the bible says: “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.” The Lord had opened the door for His work, they had taken advantage of it, for it is written that they did not deny His name, but the church had little strength. Perhaps because it was a small church, or because it was

made up of slaves or poor people, without political influence like Pergamum or Smyrna, for example, which had temples dedicated to Caesar. So, for a church without strength in the eyes of the world, Jesus congratulated it on its faithfulness and promised that the door would not be closed. It was faithful and God gave strength to it to continue.

“I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you” – Philadelphia faced opposition from the Jews, as did Smyrna. They denied the Messiah; therefore, they were false teachers, their meetings were to plot against the Christians and that’s why He called them the synagogue of Satan. They thought that they alone were saved because they kept the precepts of the Law. Philadelphia might be hated by the world but it was loved by Jesus. This was a strength it could not despise. One way or another, Jesus would make them acknowledge His love for that church.

Perhaps His way of doing this would be to protect it from pagan invasions, from Roman persecutions by Trajan, according to some sources, and from martyrdom. We can notice that in the next verse it is written: “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.” The judgment of God would fall on the wicked and on the rebellious church, but those faithful to Him would have this promise, for they exercised love, and the love of God in them made them spiritually strong, would attract His blessing. If this church had kept His word in the trials and persecutions thus far, now Jesus promises to keep it in the trials that will come. Philadelphia is the example of the church that trusts in the faithfulness of its God.

As in other passages of Revelation (*Rev. 22: 7; 12; 20*) the Lord here repeats the phrase, “I am coming soon” (*Rev. 3: 11*). He also gives the same guidance to Philadelphia that He has given to other churches: to hold fast to what it has and watch lest it be stolen – “Hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” He tells this church to hold fast to the pure gospel, based on His love, which it knows and practices (*cf. Matt. 24: 12-13*).

Crown is symbol of victory and royalty, power to reign. And here, the word ‘crown’ is the same used for Smyrna (*Rev. 2: 10*), that is, *stephanos* (στέφανος – Strong #4735), which means ‘crown, garland, honor, glory’, more specifically, a chaplet (as a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor generally; but more conspicuous and elaborate than the simple fillet, diadem). This crown that John is talking about here was like those that people received at special times, like the crown given to victors at games (*1 Cor. 9: 25; 2 Tim. 2: 5*). The Christian life is like an athlete’s race. “I have finished the race” said Paul (*2 Tim. 4: 7*). ‘Stephanos’ (crown) was also given at a feast; then they will receive it at the wedding supper of the Lamb. People also received such a crown when they entered the temples of the gods; therefore, Jesus spoke to the believers in Philadelphia and Smyrna about the joy of entering the presence of God in the New Jerusalem.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the text, there were many temples to pagan gods in Philadelphia. Their followers could receive a crown upon entering them, but believers would receive it upon entering the heavenly city of God. 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.

And the Lord goes on saying, “If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it.” In addition to receive the crown that the

winners gain for taking possession of the Lord's promises and carrying out the call He gives them with faith and perseverance, the Philadelphia winners would be 'pillars' in the sanctuary of God. This means that if we remain faithful here, in the New Jerusalem we will be with the Lord. The pillar is the symbol of security, something firm that supports a building. Thus, 'crown' and 'temple' would be a contrast to the religious festivities and rites of the city.

"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." – As the city has changed its name several times, the winners will receive new names, which will show their permanent participation in the City of God. There is a reference to a new name of Christ not only in this text (*Rev. 3: 12*) but also in *Rev 2: 17* and *Rev. 19: 11-12*.

What does this mean to us?

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, not only for envy of their fertility, which also brought wealth, as well as for their friendly attitude, willing to love and to share and to do God's Work with faith, joy and perseverance, even having little power, without help from outside, both from the money of Rome and the moral support of Christians sympathizers. 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, in haughtiness and disputes there is no fertility, let alone God's presence!

The faithful to Christ faced opposition, so much so that the Lord's promise was to bring to them those who had humiliated them to acknowledge that He loved them. Jesus



knew that, despite their little strength and 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.

The Lord is in control of all things and knows the purposes of every heart. Sooner or later He can bring us people who hate or despise our work to show them that what they found small and weak is honored by Him and has more strength than what the world exalts so much, that it proves to be so great. The end of the faithful to Christ is salvation and honor beside Him, but the end of the wicked is the condemnation.

“I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.” The door that the Lord opens no one shuts; and the one He shuts no one can open. All authority and wisdom are in Him.

The church in Philadelphia resisted the false teachers, the false prophecies, human knowledge and the seduction of the world; therefore, those who remain in constant relationship with the Lord know His thoughts, His will, His faithfulness and His strength. The strength to resist evil comes from the Spirit of God, not from man’s flesh (see *Jn. 6: 63*: “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life”).

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.

#### *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*, in order 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 cannot, 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 (250 BC) and received this name because of his wife, Laodice. Originally it was called Diospolis and Rhoas. The site is currently in ruins, being called by the Turks Eskihsar (Old Fortress). It was a thriving commercial center the most rich in Phrygia, and was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD, but for being rich it refused the imperial aid for reconstruction. It stood at an important crossroads of the world’s major trade routes, 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 (known as Phrygian powder, which mixed with oil, was used to produce ear ointment and eye drops). 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 site was eventually abandoned and the modern city, called Denizli, grew up around the hot springs.

Laodicea received the gospel probably when Paul was living in Ephesus (*Acts 19: 10*), through Epaphras (*Col. 4: 12-13; 15-16*: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you [*the Colossians*] and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis... Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you [*the one he wrote to Ephesus*], have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea”). Apparently, Paul did not know Laodicea personally: “For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you [*the Colossians*], and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face” (*Col 2: 1*).

It is evident that this church maintained the connections with communities in the neighboring cities of Hierapolis and Colossae. In *Col. 4: 16* it is more likely that Paul sent a copy of his epistle to the Ephesians to be read at Laodicea, not specifically a letter dedicated to this church: “And when this letter has been read among you [*the one he wrote to Ephesus*], have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.”

The city of Colossae was about sixteen kilometers southeast of Laodicea, in the Lycus valley; today fifteen kilometers east of the city of Denizli. In that church there was a mixture of Jewish, Greek and Phrygian elements, as we can infer from Paul's letter to the Colossians.

The city of Hierapolis was nine kilometers north of Laodicea on the opposite side of the broad Lycus valley. Hierapolis means 'city of sanctuary' or 'sacred city', for it was a center of pagan cults since ancient times. There is currently only one small village nearby, called Eçiriköy. In 17 AD, during the rule of Emperor Tiberius, a great earthquake destroyed the city of Hierapolis. It was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1354. Philip, the apostle of Jesus (not the evangelist described in *Acts* 6: 5; *Acts* 8: 5; *Acts* 21: 8-9), preached the gospel in Palestine, Greece, and Asia Minor, including in Phrygia, where the wife of a Roman Proconsul was converted. He lived there in Hierapolis, preached and died, according to Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus in 190 AD. Philip was crucified and then stoned in the year 80 AD in Hierapolis, Phrygia, by order of the Proconsul. One might think that it is about Proconsul Sextus Julius Frontinus (c. 40–103 AD), a prominent Roman civil engineer, author, soldier and senator of the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and a successful general under Domitian (81–96 AD). An inscription at Hierapolis in Phrygia, as well as a number of coins of Smyrna, attests that he was proconsul of Asia in 86 AD. It's just a hypothesis.

The church thought to have no need of anything, but in fact, it needed gold refined by fire, whitened garments and salve, more effective than its bankers, tailors and physicians 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.

Of all the letters this is the most severe. There was no compliment from Jesus, only rebuke. It was a rich, opulent city and the Christian church assimilated its diverse cultures and values, for it was the center of many roads and welcomed visitors from all over the world. In other words, the city shaped the church. It ended up tolerating the culture of the pagan gods of the city and the gods of the nations that visited Laodicea; not just the gods, but many Greek, Phrygian and other philosophies from Anatolia, eastern Turkey.

Laodicea exerted influence in four ways:

- 1) Financial – it was the banking and financial center of Asia.
- 2) Commercial – as the center of Asia's textile industry; its wool was exported all over the world.
- 3) Scientific – Laodicea was an important medical center, especially in the field of ophthalmology. There was a famous medical school in Laodicea. The well-known 'Phrygian powder' the city produced was an important ingredient for eye drops and this was a real miracle in curing eye problems.
- 4) Tourist – because of the thermal waters of the neighboring cities: Colossae and Hierapolis. The city of Colossae produced cold waters; Hierapolis, hot waters, also medicinal. But only warm waters reached Laodicea. Therefore, taking advantage of this characteristic, Jesus says that the behavior of the church is like the temperature of water, lukewarm, which only serves as an emetic.

Walking among the lampstands, Jesus knows the spiritual health of His church. He saw that it had lost its spiritual revival, its values and its spiritual vision, and its robes were not white, its heart was lukewarm; quite different from the disciples on the way to Emmaus, when Jesus met them after His resurrection and whose hearts were burning (*Lk.* 24: 32: "They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'""); quite

different from a cold heart, where there is neither love nor faith, and therefore lack of God and ungodliness (*Matt. 24: 12*: “And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.”; *Ezek. 36: 26*: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” cf. *Ezek. 11: 19*).

Laodicea was symbolically a lukewarm church, accommodated 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. Its lukewarm attitude only served to make God vomit, because for Him this behavior was disgusting. So He says, “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: eye salve] to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” – Laodicea was lukewarm, apathetic to the things of God, and did not recognize this. Because of being pitiable and poor in spirit, the church 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.

He was the Creator of all things, so He was able to make promises and fulfill them: “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.” Laodicea thought it worked many wonders, but the Lord could do much more than the church could ever imagine, in particular, make it open its eyes to see its situation.

“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.” – Laodicea 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. Repentance is attitude, not emotion; it means changing one’s mind, values and principles. “If you hear my voice and open the door” means the invitation is personal. He knocks at the door through the circumstances that people go through, and calls them through the Scriptures. But how can He call them and how can they hear without even wanting to read the bible and look for the answers to their problems in the Holy Book?

“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.” – 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 an heir. When we have fellowship with Him, we have a place on the throne, He publicly honors us.

What does this mean for us?

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 status 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 deep healing. Only the Holy Spirit can change the ingrained patterns of behavior, including doctrines of a church that was founded centuries ago but that are no longer useful to the believers today because the wars and challenges are different.

This does not mean accepting fads and novelties, but ‘updating’ the teachings and revelation that the Lord transmits today, day by day, through His Spirit to everyone who takes time to be in His presence without the distractions of what is around and without unnecessary activities that attract His children today. 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 doesn’t love him.

Having good financial conditions and a good reputation in the evangelical circle and even in society does not mean that we are pleasing God. What are the fruits of our work for Him? The applause of people can blind the eyes to the reality of the interior of the heart, to the real color of the spiritual clothes, stealing the sensitivity of our spirit to the silent and subtle voice of the Holy Spirit, who speaks many times through a feeling in our heart, of something that does not let us perceive the smile of approval of Jesus for what we do.

Being open to communication with all churches in the Body of Christ does not necessarily mean building and strengthening. Many churches do not watch over, and impart ‘revelations’, new doctrines and modernized learning that they have inadvertently let in from the world or other religious lines. And then this ‘evangelical ecumenism’ starts to contaminate the minds of believers who are not used to praying or reading the bible, who just like to listen to online sermons wherever they are, even on the way home or to work (by bus, car or subway), without having some time reserved to meditate in silence together with the Holy Spirit and to do a self-analysis; no privacy even to cry. The voice of God is not heard in the midst of noise and agitation, but in the silence of the mind and heart.

The church of Laodicea was used to receiving all kinds of information and doctrine that came through the city gates, its rich and important members helped to update their knowledge with what they probably heard in the commercial centers of the city, with the latest philosophies of the Greek culture. They helped the church with money and could even give advice on how to use it ‘correctly’, for they were in contact with the banks and with secular knowledge on how to apply the money in the most convenient way. The influence of science brought a sense of security and well-being; perhaps even making them disbelieve in the divine miracles they once saw when Jesus’ apostles went out to spread the gospel.

And this still happens today, when the church of Christ has become a company, where members within it have important professions and influence too much with secular knowledge, instead of leaving the Spirit of God free to do things His way, to

keep the faith, hope and belief of the members that God is the Creator, He is above finance, science, the arts and knowledge and is still able to work miracles, and do them in the simple way that He has always did because of the innocence of His children's hearts. Doctors treat; only God heals. Psychologists help to locate problems, but don't provide a profound or effective solution to them. Bankers and business administrators give tips on how to manage resources and generate productivity, but a housewife faithful to God is better able to know how to feed a family with what little food they have at home. God's wisdom will always be greater than human wisdom. We are not despising study and intellectual ability, but calling attention to the fact that Jesus is knocking at the door in order to enter and participate in our lives.

Laodicea, Colossae and Hierapolis were a tourist complex because of their thermal waters, and great celebrities of the time ended up living and dying there. Even Roman senators made their home in that place. The church of Christ cannot be a bathing resort, which warms hearts with a beautiful and convenient word, but unfortunately uncommitted to salvation, conversion and correction of lives. Concerts, for the most part (with a few exceptions), don't convert people to Christ, they just draw crowds. On the other hand, a serious course of biblical teaching has few students.

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 settles down.

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 God's treatment. 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 most needed His mercy to remain firm and those who most needed strength 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.

