

REVELATION TEACHING NOTES

Steven Hugh Mathews

United Baptist Church, Valdese, North Carolina

This document is a preliminary, ongoing draft of teaching notes. Final editing is incomplete.

© S. H. Mathews, 2021

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

I. Setting and Context

- a. Date: probably around 95 AD, during the reign of Domitian.
- b. Author: John the Apostle. Brother of James, son of Zebedee. Author of the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John.
- c. Location: Island of Patmos. John was a prisoner on the island.

II. Interpretive Challenges and Principles

- a. Challenges- Revelation is a difficult book to interpret for many reasons.
 - i. Symbolism- it is difficult to know what the heavenly visions represent
 - ii. Chronology- it is difficult to properly understand the timeline of events
 - iii. Prophecy- is it a prophecy of the end times only, or of the entire history from John's vision to the coming of the Kingdom?
 - iv. Relationship to other texts- Revelation is primarily about the end of days and the coming of the eternal kingdom of God. Other texts also discuss this, including:
 - 1. Daniel
 - 2. Joel
 - 3. Matthew and Mark
 - 4. 1 and 2 Thessalonians

5. How does Revelation correspond to these texts?

- v. Isogesis- pre-constructed eschatological theologies imposed on the text. We “read into” the text what we think it should say, rather than what it says.
- vi. Divine clouding- In Matthew 24:36 Jesus said that “no man knows the day or the hour” of His coming. There are interpretive limitations built into the text because God keeps His secrets.
- vii. Types of Literature in Revelation
 - 1. Letters
 - 2. Narrative
 - 3. Prophecy
 - 4. Apocalyptic literature- similar to some OT literature and also to some contemporary Greek and Mesopotamian literature

b. Principles- How will we approach the text?

- i. Hermeneutic of humility- we should always approach the text with humility. We do not swagger up to the Word of God assuming we have mastered it. However, we can have a good deal of confidence in our understanding of some texts. Not so in Revelation. We know that we will misunderstand and get a lot wrong.
- ii. As much as possible, prefer the plain, clear meaning. Where such a meaning is available, it is preferred over one that requires mental and theological gymnastics.
- iii. Let Scripture interpret Scripture-

1. Revelation borrows imagery from many Old Testament texts. Where there is a clear connection, we will form our interpretation of the New Testament text from our interpretation of the Old Testament text.
2. Interpretations must be consistent with New Testament teaching, particularly from Jesus and Paul, about the end of the age.
 - a. For example, Jesus said in Matthew 24 that the gathering of the saints will be after the Great Tribulation. We cannot accept Jesus' teaching at face value and also accept an interpretation of Revelation that puts the gathering of the saints before the Great Tribulation.
- iv. Interpret according to genre. We will interpret letters as letters, narrative as narrative, prophecy as prophecy, etc.

III. Our Goal:

- a. Not to figure out the exact sequence of the end of the age- impossible.
- b. To learn about Christ, the church, and salvation

REVELATION 1

I. Opening and Introduction- vs. 1-3

¹The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

1. The revelation is of Jesus Christ- the book is about the actions and ministry of Jesus Christ.
2. The revelation is a gift from God for the servants of God. God desires that we know those things which can be known from Revelation.
3. Revelation is a book of prophecy- these things must *shortly take place*.
 - a. Other views of Revelation- if it is not prophecy, what is it?
 - i. A play to be performed in Ephesus
 - ii. An epic myth- there are similarities to other epic myths
 1. Archetypes- damsel in distress, dragon, wicked queen, miraculous birth, cosmic battles, evil sorcerers, etc.
 2. Symbols- numbers, water, light, journeys, battles, etc.
 - iii. Encouragement for the persecuted church in John's day.
 - iv. Allegory
 - b. Revelation may have some of these characteristics, but its primary purpose is to predict events yet to come.
4. Revelation is authoritative- is “sent and signified” by God's angel under God's authority.
5. Johannine authorship- Revelation was written by the Apostle John. He also wrote the Gospel of John and the three Johannine epistles.

²who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

1. Word and Testimony- John begins a pattern which will be developed in Revelation, the concept of “testimony”. Here, the Word of God is equated with the testimony of Jesus Christ. More accurately, this is John’s testimony of *all things that he saw*.

³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

1. Blessing- there is a blessing attached to the reading, hearing and the obeying of Revelation. It is a mysterious book and there are many parts we may not understand, but we are blessed in our pursuit of it.

2. Prophecy- for a second time, John asserts that Revelation is prophecy, rather than something else.

3. The time is near- the events in Revelation are future events, but when do they occur? How near are they to the time of writing? This is one of the key questions in interpreting and understanding Revelation. In our discussion of ch. 2, the seven letters to the seven churches, we will discuss some options for understanding the relationship of Revelation to history.

II. Greetings for the Seven Churches- vs. 4-8

⁴ John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne

1. John repeats his claim of authorship.

2. Seven churches- this is the first use of the number 7, the most significant number in Revelation.

a. Numbers play a significant role in revelation.

i. The number 7 represents completeness or fulfillment.

ii. The number 3 represents the Godhead: Father, Son, and Spirit

iii. The number 10 represents fullness

iv. The number 12 represents the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles- the union of the Old and New covenants.

3. Churches in Asia- In ch. 2, John will list seven actual churches which were located in present-day Turkey.

4. Seven Spirits- perhaps a reference to seven angels which oversee the churches (vs. 20).

5. Grace and peace- a common greeting at the time. Grace and peace from Jesus Christ Himself. A focus on the eternality of Christ- He was, He is, He is to come. Past, present, future.

⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.

1. And from Jesus Christ- an emphasis on Christ. Three things we learn about Christ:

a. Faithful witness- Revelation is an eyewitness account. It is what John saw, and what Christ showed him. Jesus is a faithful witness of God's grace.

b. Firstborn from the dead- Jesus is the first to rise from the dead to a glorified body. His own will follow.

c. Ruler over the kings of the earth- Revelation will depict massive and terrible abuses of power by earthly rulers.

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1. This is a doxology- a declaration of praise to God. It teaches us several things about God.

a. He loved us

b. He washed us from our sins in His own blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. We were saved by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

c. He has made us kings and priests- there are three significant Old Testament offices that point to Christ:

- i. Prophets
- ii. Priests
- iii. Kings

He has made us kings to rule with Him. He has made us priests to bring others into His presence.

2. glory and dominion forever- No matter what events we see unfolding in Revelation, they all culminate in the eternal glory and rule of God in Christ.

⁷ Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

1. The Return of Christ

a. with clouds- a cosmic event in the sky

b. every eye will see Him- a global event

c. even they who pierced Him- not bound by time, salvation, or damnation. Even guilty sinners from thousands of years ago will be party to the return of Christ.

d. All the tribes of the earth will mourn- a global event that disturbs the world order.

e. What should our attitude be? Even so, amen!

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

1. Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End- a reference to the eternality of Christ.

2. Was and is and is to come- see vs. 4. Christ is eternal.

3. Almighty- literally “all-mighty”. God is omnipotent. All power is in His hands.

3. Vision of Jesus Christ Glorified- vs. 9-20

⁹ I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

1. John is a Christian brother and a companion- he is an apostle, but is not “above” other Christians.

2. Tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ-

a. Tribulation means “trial” or “suffering”. Revelation speaks of a “Great Tribulation”, but there are also other tribulations.

b. kingdom- the kingdom of God pervades all of humanity. It is the end toward which history is moving. Revelation is about the kingdom coming.

c. patience- God is good. His grace bears with our sin as He saves us.

3. Island of Patmos- John was in exile on a prison island. He was not the only one there. He was very elderly, and probably had a companion to assist him in his imprisonment.

4. Word of God and testimony- these two concepts are linked throughout Revelation- the Word of God and the testimony of the saints. We join with God in His redemptive work. God speaks, and we speak.

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,

1. In the Spirit- a Holy Spirit-inspired trance or vision, most likely occurring during prayer.

2. Lord’s Day- Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead. The day after the Sabbath.

3. Loud voice, as of a trumpet- trumpets are a repeated feature of Revelation (7 trumpets).

a. Trumpets are louder than human voices.

b. Trumpets are used to announce something, such as the arrival of a king.

¹¹ saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

1. Alpha and Omega, First and Last- this is the third reference to the eternality of God the Son.
2. Write in a book and send it to the seven churches in Asia- John’s visions were to be written and sent to seven specific churches. In the next chapter, introductions are written to each of the churches. The entire book of Revelation went to each church, but each church got a special message as well.

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

1. Seven lampstands- verse 20 will tell us that the seven lampstands are the seven churches.
2. One like the Son of Man- Jesus called Himself the Son of Man.- John knew Jesus personally, and equated his vision with Jesus Christ.
3. Clothed with a garment down to the feet- clothing plays a prominent part in Revelation. Jesus here is wearing a long robe with a golden sash. It is symbolic of royalty.

¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire;

1. White hair- I’m not sure why this should be the case. White hair may represent age, glory, and wisdom.
2. Eyes like flame- piercing, fiery eyes. Represents burning, all-seeing. (illustration- Sauron in *Lord of the Rings*).

¹⁵ His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

1. feet like fine brass- Not sure of the meaning. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a statue. It had feet of iron mingled with clay. The remainder of the statue was iron, bronze, silver, and gold. If this is reminiscent of the statue in Daniel 2, brass is superior to iron and clay.

2. voice- previously His voice was like a trumpet. Here it is like a waterfall- loud, powerful, and pervasive.

¹⁶ He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

1. Seven stars- verse 20 explains that the seven stars are the “angels of the churches”. “Angels” means “messenger”. This could refer to a person, such as the pastor or elder of the church, or to a spiritual being. Since they were described in verse 4 as the “seven spirits”, it is more likely to assume that these are angels.

In Ephesians 6:10-20 Paul describes a hierarchy of principalities, powers, world rulers, and “spiritual forces” (*pneumatika*). We assume that he means that angels and demons are organized in their service to God and Satan, respectively.

2. Sharp two-edged sword out of His mouth- the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword. It pierces and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart. The sword from the mouth of Jesus is the Word of God, contained in the Bible.

3. Shining like the sun- in Mark 9, Jesus was transfigured in front of Peter, James, and John. He was so radiant no one could look on Him, and He was wearing a white robe.

The Jesus standing before John here is similar to Jesus transfigured in His glory on the mountain. Their vision in Mark 9 was of the glorified Christ.

¹⁷ And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.

1. Fell at His feet as dead- John fainted at the sight of Jesus.

2. laid His right hand on me- Jesus touched lepers, outcasts, and unclean people. His touch heals and accepts people.

3. Do not be afraid- a typical saying from angels when they appear to people.
4. First and Last- fifth reference to this in Revelation 1. Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

¹⁸ I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.

1. lives... dead... alive forevermore. – This is the resurrected Jesus.

And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. ¹⁹ Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

1. Keys of hades and of death. Hades is the underworld, the place of the dead. It is often confused with Gehenna (hell), which is for the condemned. Here, He means that He is sovereign over death and the dead.

2. Write- John will serve as a scribe

3. past, present, future- Just as Christ is He who was, who is, and who is to come, the visions of Revelation deal with the past, the present, and the future.

²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars which 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 which you saw are the seven churches.

1. Jesus explains the mystery- seven stars in His right hand are the angels (messengers) of the churches.
2. Seven lampstands are the churches.
3. Jesus is standing in the midst of the churches, and holding their angels in His hand.

REVELATION 2

Seven Letters to Seven Churches

Interpretative Principles:

Historical: Seven churches represent seven ages of the church throughout history. Interpretations vary, but here is an example from Hal Lindsey:¹

1. The Church in Ephesus: Apostolic Church (A.D. 33–100)
2. The Church in Smyrna: Era of Persecution Under the Ten Caesars (A.D. 100–312)
3. The Church in Pergamum: Era of Church-State Union (A.D. 312–590)
4. The Church in Thyatira: Era Spanning the Middle Ages (A.D. 590–1517)
5. The Church in Sardis: Protestant Reformation (A.D. 1517–1750)
6. The Church in Philadelphia: Era of Revival and Great Awakening (A.D. 1750–1925)
7. The Church in Laodicea: Era of “Higher Criticism” (A.D. 1900–Tribulation)

This view requires us to believe that the original audience of Revelation could have had no idea how to read these letters properly. Jesus hid a “secret code” in what appears to be plain speech.

Literal: Seven churches actually existed in these cities in modern-day Turkey, and John wrote letters to them at Jesus’ instruction. This is reasonable and plausible. John wrote three other letters that we know of, and he ministered throughout the region. He taught in Ephesus.

This view is the most natural from a plain reading of the text, and will be the view adopted here.

¹ Lindsey, Hal, *There’s a New World Coming* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1973)

I. Ephesus

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

These are the words of Jesus to the church.

² “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

1. *I know your works, your labor, your patience*- Jesus has watched His church. He keeps account of their faithfulness. Our “works follow us” (Rev. 14:13).
2. *And that you cannot bear those who are evil*- Jesus rewards His people when we make a distinction between right and wrong, and choose right.
3. *You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars*- The Ephesian church was committed to receiving only the truth of God

³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.

1. Jesus notes the church’s labor for His name’s sake. Our good works do not save us, but God rejoices in them.

⁴ Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

1. Jesus has a complaint against the Ephesian church- they have lost their first love.
2. Losing their first love is described as a fall, and as sin requiring repentance.
3. They are called to remember, repent, and do their “first works”.

4. The penalty for refusal to repent is that they will no longer be a true church. Their lampstand will be removed.

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

1. See Addendum: The Error of the Nicolaitans

⁷ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’

1. Jesus invites all to hear and understand the message of the Spirit to the churches.
2. The overcomer will eat from the Tree of Life. This is a reversal of the curse of sin.
 - a. In Genesis 3:22-24, God said:

²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

II. Smyrna: Persecuted Church

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,

‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

1. Jesus returns to His theme of eternity and resurrection. He is the eternally resurrected Son of God.

⁹ “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Five things Jesus knows:

1. Our works
2. Our tribulation
3. Our poverty
4. The blasphemy of the religiously insincere
5. The true identity of each person's faith.

¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

A Hopeful Future

1. Because Jesus is the First and Last, we do not need to fear the future.
2. Spiritual warfare can lead to suffering and testing.
3. "Ten days"- probably a reference to "many days"
 - a. In Genesis 31 Jacob complained that Laban had changed his wages "ten times"
 - b. Ten is how many can be counted on both hands.
 - c. In Rev. 5 there are ten thousand times ten thousand angels.
 - d. The beast of Rev. 12-13 has ten horns with ten crowns on them, which represent ten kings.
4. Faithfulness to the end results in the crown of life. We may lay this crown at Jesus' feet even as the 24 elders lay their crowns at His feet.

¹¹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

1. “He who has an ear”- a call to everyone to listen to the Word of God’s Spirit to God’s churches.
2. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.
 - a. In Rev. 12 “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony, and loved not their lives unto death.”
 - b. Overcoming sometimes means laying down our lives, but we are not harmed by the second death.
3. The second death is judgment- the lake of fire. We all pass through the first death, but the second death is for unregenerate sinners.

III. Pergamos: The Compromising Church

¹² *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write,*

‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

1. The letter to Ephesus was from Jesus walking among the lampstands (churches) holding the stars (angels) in His hands.
2. The letter to Smyrna was from Jesus the First and Last who died and rose again.
3. This letter to Pergamos is from Jesus with a sharp sword coming out of His mouth. There is a shift in tone. This is not comforting, but is warning of judgment.

¹³ *“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

1. *“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is.... where Satan dwells.”* The church is not guaranteed protection or separation from Satan and his dominion.

2. *“And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith”*- The church at Pergamos had refused to bow the knee, and had kept their faith.
3. *“even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you”*- The fear of death had not turned the church away from their faith in Christ.

¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

1. Doctrine of Balaam- sexual immorality that causes the church to stumble
2. *“to eat things sacrificed to idols”*- Paul does not condemn eating meat offered to idols (Romans 14, I Corinthians 8), but leaves it as a matter of conscience. What is the problem here?
 - a. It was probably not that individuals were eating meat within their conscience, but that the church was openly approving of idolatry by eating the meat.
3. *“and to commit sexual immorality”*- The Nicolaitans incorporated pagan sexuality into their worship of Christ

¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

1. *“Thus”*- links the sexual immorality in vs. 14 to the Nicolaitans.
2. *“you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”*
 - a. Summarize error of the Nicolaitans if necessary
 - b. In a nutshell: the Nicolaitans incorporated sexual immorality into Christian worship in a manner similar to pagan fertility cults.

- c. God hates this.
3. *“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth”*
 - a. The church is called to repent, like the church at Ephesus.
 - b. Jesus told the Ephesian church He would come quickly and take away their lampstand if they did not repent.
 - c. Jesus warns the church at Pergamos that He will come quickly and fight them with the Word of God if they do not repent.

¹⁷ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” ’

1. Again, an invitation for all to hear the message of God’s Spirit to God’s church.
2. “To him who overcomes”- like the church at Smyrna in vs. 11, the church at Pergamos is called to overcome.
3. “I will give some of the hidden manna to eat.”
 - a. Manna was provided by God for the children of Israel in the wilderness.
 - b. They called it “Manna”, which means “what is it?”
 - c. Manna represents God’s provision in mysterious ways.
 - d. This may be a way of saying “I will take care of them in ways that they do not understand.”
4. *“And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” ’*

- a. In Rev. 19, Jesus has a secret name known only to Himself.
- b. Rev. 3:12 says: “*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.*”
- c. This secret name may represent close proximity to Christ. Those who overcome are like Christ in that they have a new name, like Christ.

IV. Thyatira: The Corrupt Church

¹⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

1. Eyes and feet- “head to toe”.

¹⁹ “*I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.*

Six things Jesus knows:

1. Our works
2. Our love
3. Our service
4. Our faith
5. Our patience
6. Our growth

²⁰ *Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

1. Jezebel- an Old Testament archetype of an immoral, wicked woman
 - a. Probably not her real name, but used to indicate her character
 - b. Called herself a prophetess
 - c. Taught the church to:
 - i. Commit sexual immorality
 - ii. Eat things sacrificed to idols
 1. Again, probably an indication that they endorsed or supported these sacrifices
2. “you allow”- the church is accountable for those who are permitted to teach

²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

1. Romans 2:4-6 says: “*Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But in accordance with your hardness and your ^[a]impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,*”

2. God calls sinners to repentance- even those who lead others astray.

²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

1. *Cast her into a sickbed*- a reversal. She used the bed for sexual immorality, now she will lie in it and die.
2. *Those who commit adultery with her*- those in the church who follow her into sin.

- a. *Great tribulation*- not “the Great Tribulation”, but a time of trials to bring them to repentance.
 - b. *Unless they repent of their deeds*- God always allows for repentance.
- 3. *I will kill her children with death*- Her children- those who follow her teachings. Those who are killed are killed because they are guilty- “according to your works”.
- 4. *And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the hearts and minds.*
 - a. God will be glorified
 - b. Churches will walk in holiness
 - c. Hearts and minds- our thoughts, motivations, and desires
- 5. *And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*
 - a. *I will give to each one of you*- no one get a free pass to live in sin without repentance
 - b. *According to your works*- God is just and fair. When we fall under His judgment, it is because of our actual guilt.
 - i. Repentance is the exception to the fairness of God.
 - 1. The unrepentant receive fair judgment. (Justice)
 - 2. The repentant receive free grace. (Mercy)
 - 3. No one receives unfair treatment from God. (Injustice)

²⁴ ***“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.”*** ²⁵ ***But hold fast what you have till I come.***

- 1. *Now to you I say... I will put on you no other burden-*

- a. Those who walk in holiness are not burdened with legalistic rules.
2. *But hold fast what you have till I come.*

- a. Those who walk in perseverance should persevere in faith.

²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

- 1. God's promise to those who overcomes and perseveres:
 - a. Power over the nations

²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—

- 1. *He shall rule them with a rod of iron*- overcomers join with Christ in His dominion.
- 2. They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels- The nations will not retain their power in the face of God's judgment.

as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

- 1. *As I also have received from My Father*- the authority of Jesus over the nations is given to the overcoming church
- 2. *And I will give him the morning star*- two possible meanings:
 - a. Satan as the morning star- Lucifer means "morning star".
 - i. Verses 26 and 27 depict the church ruling over the nations.
 - ii. If this is a reference to Satan, it would indicate that the church will be given dominion over the works of Satan.
 - b. Jesus Christ as the Morning Star
 - i. Revelation 22:16: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the

Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.””

- ii. This is the preferred interpretation. Overcomers receive Jesus Himself.

²⁹ ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’***

- 1. As before, this word is:
 - a. For everyone
 - b. From the Spirit
 - c. To the churches

Excursus: The Error of the Nicolaitans

The works of the Nicolaitans are mentioned twice in Revelation 2, in the letters dictated to Ephesus (2:6) and Pergamum (2:15). The Nicolaitans are mentioned only in these two passages, so it is not clear from the Bible who they were and what their error was.

Who was Nicholas?

According to several church fathers, the founder of the cult of the Nicolaitans was Nicholas of Antioch.² He was one of the seven deacons ordained by Peter (Acts 6:5). Acts 6 states that he was a “proselyte from Antioch”. According to tradition, he became corrupted and obsessed with sexuality.

Isidore of Seville was the last of the Western Church Fathers. He wrote in 639 AD that “The Nicolaites (Nicolaita) are so called from Nicolaus, deacon of the church of Jerusalem, who, along with Stephen and the others, was ordained by Peter. He abandoned his wife because of her beauty, so that whoever wanted to might enjoy her; the practice turned into debauchery, with partners being exchanged in turn.”³

What is the error of the Nicolaitans?

Jesus identifies the Nicolaitans with Balaam in the letter to Pergamum (2:14-15). He associates Balaam with sexual immorality.

Peter makes this connection in 2 Peter 2:12-16:

¹² But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, ¹³ and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, ¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. ¹⁵ They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor,

² Hippolytus, *Philosophumena*, vii. 26

³ Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W. J., Beach, J.A., and Berghof, Oliver (ed.) *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 175.

who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶ but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

Jude makes the same connection in Jude 10-11

¹⁰ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

The connection between sexual immorality and the early Christian “love feasts” leads many Bible scholars to believe that the error of the Nicolaitans was to treat Christianity as a fertility cult, and to incorporate fornication into the worship of the church.⁴

This was not simply sexual immorality or fornication, but *religious* fornication.

⁴ Blount, John Henry, *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties, and Schools of Religious Thought* (London: Rivingtons, 1874).

REVELATION 3

V. Sardis- The Dead Church -vs. 1-6

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,

‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:

1. Jesus identifies Himself as Lord of the church- He is in possession of the seven spirits and the seven stars, previously identified as the churches and their angels.

“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

1. Previous letters contain the formula “I know your works”. This is usually followed by other qualities which are known, such as labor and patience (2:2), tribulation and poverty (2:9), or love, service, faith, and patience (2:19).
2. Here the formula is abbreviated to works alone. No other qualities are attributed to the church at Sardis.
3. The disconnect between identity and reality.
 - a. “you have a name that you are alive”- In contemporary language, we might say that the church at Sardis “identified as” being alive. They called their deadness life. Perhaps others agreed with them as well. But they were still dead.
 - b. “but you are dead”- Sardis’ self-identity as alive did not change the basic fundamental fact that they were dead. God declares them dead- no other opinion matters.
4. “To be and not to seem”- The Great Seal of the State of North Carolina has a Latin phrase at the bottom: “*Esse Quam Videri*”, which means “to be and not to seem”. The church at Sardis seemed alive, but was dead.

Application: In our world, seeming is more important than being. Perception is more important than reality. Imagination is valued over history, biology, and economics. Intention is more important than results. God does not participate in

our fantasies. He does not care what we call ourselves. He is the final and ultimate arbitrator of what is true.

² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

1. The solutions to deadness:

- a. Be watchful- self-evaluation. We must be able to see things as they are, and not as we desire that they should be.
- b. Strengthen the things that remain- Paul says to “exercise ourselves to godliness”. The same idea applies here. Think of it as spiritual rehabilitation. After surgery or inactivity, muscles must be strengthened or their use is lost. After a season of spiritual deadness, strengthen those things that do remain.
- c. Remember- Jesus does not say “remember what you have received and heard”. They remember these things, and that’s why they call themselves alive. They have not forgotten the gospel. Rather, He says “remember how”. It is their response of faith and repentance that they have forgotten. Believing the Gospel is more than agreeing with the facts of the Gospel, it is participation in the Gospel with all of our being- loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.
- d. Hold fast- clinging to something, not letting it go. When our faith and love of God are dying, we are called to hold fast to them.
- e. Repent- Repentance is God’s solution to every sin. Spiritual deadness is no different. God calls us to repent of our spiritual deadness.

Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

Consequences of Spiritual Deadness

1. *Therefore if you will not watch-* spiritual deadness leads to spiritual dullness. We lose the ability to see God at work because we are not watching for Him.
2. *I will come upon you as a thief,-* Jesus will return suddenly, and it will be too late to revive ourselves. He calls us to watchfulness, faith, and repentance while there is time.
3. *And you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* Jesus does not threaten to wage war against them like He did with the church at Pergamos (2:16). This is not a threat, but a warning. We may not wake up from spiritual deadness until it is too late.

⁴ You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

1. Soiled garments refer to impurity. Walking in white refers to moral purity. Traditionally, brides wear white on their wedding day to represent purity. Baptismal robes are white, to represent the new, pure life of the believer.
2. Worthy- we are worthy in two ways: one is that Christ has made us worthy by forgiving our sin. The second is that we are worthy because we walk in holiness.
3. Like an oasis in the desert, there is always life, even in the midst of death.
 - a. Remnant- there is a biblical theme that God will preserve a remnant.

⁵ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

1. Each letter includes a promise to the overcomer.
 - a. 2:7- eat from the Tree of Life
 - b. 2:11- not hurt by the second death
 - c. 2:17- given some of the hidden manna to eat

- d. 2:26- power over the nations
- 2. *Clothed in white garments*- throughout Revelation, white garments are worn by the saints in heaven and represent the purity of the redeemed church.
- 3. *Not blot out his name from the Book of Life*- nowhere in the Bible does it record a name being written in the Book of Life. Rather, names are “found written” in the Book of Life.
 - a. This is not necessarily an indication that Jesus *will* blot out those who do not overcome.
 - b. In the Revelation, the Book of Life is never edited. It is opened and checked. There is no record of adding or removing names.
 - c. Those who do not overcome may not be written in the Book of Life. We don’t know who is in the Book until it is opened for judgment, and only Jesus is worthy to open it.
- 4. *I will confess his name before my Father and His angels*- Jesus stands with those who stand with Him.
 - a. They had a *name* that they were alive, but Jesus declared them dead.
 - b. Jesus will confess the *name* of those who overcome with Him.
 - c. It does not matter what we call ourselves. It matters what Jesus says of us.

⁶ ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*** ’

Again, the revelation is *from* the Spirit, *to* the churches, and *for* all who can hear it.

VI. Philadelphia- The Faithful Church

⁷ ***“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,***

‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”:

Four Doors; Four Names

1. This introduction begins a “door” theme.
 - a. Vs. 7- Jesus holds the keys and has the power to open or shut the door
 - b. Vs. 8- Jesus has set an open door before the church
 - c. Vs. 20- Jesus stands at the door and knocks
 - d. 4:1- John sees a door standing open in heaven and is invited to “come up here”.
2. The “door” theme runs parallel to a “name” theme.
 - a. Vs. 1- the church at Sardis had a name that they were alive.
 - b. Vs. 5- Jesus will confess the names of overcomers before His father and angels
 - c. Vs. 8- the church at Philadelphia has not denied Jesus’ name.
 - d. Vs. 12- Jesus will write on overcomers the name of His God, the name of the holy city, Jerusalem, and His new name.
3. Key of David
 - a. David was the first true, anointed king of Israel.
 - b. David received a promise that his descendant would sit on the throne of Israel forever.
 - c. Jesus has the “key of David”- that is, He is the eternal King of Israel in David’s line.

⁸ ***“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*”**

1. *I know your works*- Jesus has said this to every church. Here, He does not list works as in most previous letters.
2. *Open door*- the One who holds the key of David, and has the power to lock and unlock, has opened the door for the church.
3. *A little strength*- great strength is not required for faithful living. I Corinthians 4:2 says that it is required of a steward that a man (or woman) be found faithful. God has all the strength needed. What He expects of us is faithfulness.
4. *Kept My word*- again, faithful obedience to the Word of God.
5. *Have not denied My name*- the name theme reoccurs. They have kept the name of Christ, even through persecution.

⁹ Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

1. *Synagogue of Satan* – refers back to 2:9. Jews who rejected the Messiah are not true worshippers of God.
2. *Worship before your feet*- they will not worship the church at Philadelphia, but will worship God in the presence of the church. Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
3. *Know that I have loved you*- this is a reference to the church as the “new Israel”.
 - a. God loved Jacob and hated Esau (Romans 9:13).
 - b. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel. He was the father of the 12 tribes.
 - c. Jews of Jesus’ time believed that God loved them because of their genetic lineage.

- d. Paul wrote that true Jews are not those who are circumcised outwardly, but circumcised in the heart (Romans 2:28-29).
- e. Those who claim to be Jews but are not will know that God's special covenant relationship is with the church- those who are faithful to Him.

¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

- 1. *Keep you from the hour of trial*- because of their faithful perseverance, God will spare them the trial which will come on the world, and on other churches.
- 2. *Test*- trials are an opportunity to learn and demonstrate faith, love, and obedience.
- 3. *Coming quickly*- Jesus repeats His word that His arrival will be soon.
- 4. *Hold fast*- again, similar to His word to other churches.
- 5. *Take your crown*- believers may lose rewards in heaven if we do not remain faithful. We do not lose salvation, but we can lose "crowns"- rewards.

¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

- 1. *Pillar in the temple*... go out no more- possibly a reversal of the door theme. Pillars are fixed in place. They do not go in and out, but stay. Doors represent coming and going, but pillars represent permanence.
- 2. *Identification*- the overcomer will have three things written on him or her:
 - a. The name of God

- b. The name of the city of God, New Jerusalem
- c. Jesus' new name
- d. That is, the believer will be fully identified with God
 - i. Contrast with vs. 1- *"you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."*
 - ii. Christ will properly identify His faithful overcomers. Self-identity is irrelevant.

¹³ ***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '***

- 1. The familiar formula calling all people to hear God's word to His church.

VII. The Lukewarm Church

¹⁴ ***"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,***

'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

- 1. The identity of Jesus:
 - a. The Amen- the final word of God's affirmation
 - b. Faithful and true Witness- the One who sees God rightly
 - c. Beginning of the creation of God
 - i. Does not mean that Jesus is a created Being- He is not.
 - ii. Does mean that Jesus is the power through which God created.
 - 1. Gn. 1:1- *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."*

2. Jn 1:1- *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

3. Jesus is the revelation of God- the Word.

¹⁵ “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

1. *I know your works*- same formula. God knows how His church is living, loving, and serving.

2. *Neither hot nor cold*

a. It is a mistake to assume that hot = “on fire for the Lord” and cold = “cold hearted”.

b. Jesus wishes that the church were hot or cold. If cold were negative, Jesus would not wish it.

3. *Lukewarm*- tepid. This church has no passion. Hot is good. Cold is good. They are neither. They are dispassionate because they perceive themselves to be rich, to be taken care of.

4. *Vomit you out of my mouth*

a. Lukewarm food or drink is unappetizing, so the analogy makes sense.

b. The first letter to the church at Ephesus ends with a warning that Christ will “come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place- unless you repent.” (2:5)

c. The last letter, to Thyatira, warns of the church being vomited out of Jesus’ mouth.

i. Both letters warn of separation between God and the church.

ii. Both represent rejection of the church by God.

¹⁷ Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

1. Rev. 2:9- letter to Smyrna- Jesus said “*I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich).*”
2. Here the church assumes it is rich, but it is “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.*”
3. It does not matter how we label ourselves, because we often do not think of ourselves rightly. Only God’s opinion matters.

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

The solution to lukewarmness

1. *Buy from Me gold refined in the fire*- I Corinthians 3 tells us to build on the foundation of Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones. These are good works which will be refined in the fire of judgment. Jesus’ meaning here is probably similar to His admonition to the church in Ephesus- repent and return to your first works.
2. *That you may be rich*- they thought they were rich, but they had only the world’s goods. True wealth is eternal reward.
3. *White garments... shame of your nakedness may not be revealed*- they should pursue the purity and covering of God.
 - a. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were naked and ashamed.
 - b. They made clothes of fig leaves- rudimentary and inadequate coverings.
 - c. God killed animals and made them coverings of skins.
 - i. Sins are covered by sacrifice- ultimately, that of Christ

ii. The Bible begins and ends with sins being covered.

4. *Anoint your eyes with salve, that you may see*- we cannot trust that we see ourselves rightly. Only God can rightly reveal His truth to us.

¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

1. *As many as I love*- Christ rebukes the church, but He still loves it.
2. *I rebuke and chasten*- instruction for the purpose of purity.
3. *Be zealous and repent*- this church has no zeal. They are not hot or cold, but lukewarm. Christ calls them to ignite a passion for Him and to repent of sin.

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

1. Door- Jesus stands at the door and knocks- why does He knock? He has the keys of David?
 - a. It is not because He cannot get in without permission- He opens and shuts as He will.
 - b. It is because He desires a faith response to His invitation.
 - c.
2. Dine- the Middle Eastern practice of hospitality is in view here.
 - a. Jesus will make himself an honored guest if we will invite Him.
 - b. Jesus will share fellowship with us- He does not sit at an elevated table, isolated like a dignitary, but at our table, sharing a meal with us.

²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Word to Overcomers

1. *Sit with Me on My throne*- overcomers will rule and reign with Christ.
2. *As I also...*- in a manner similar to Jesus Himself.

²² ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’ ’***

1. From the Spirit, to the church, for everyone.

Summary of Promises to Overcomers:

1. Eat of the Tree of Life in the paradise of God- 2:7
2. Not hurt by the second death- 2:11
3. Eat the hidden manna- 2:17
4. Receive a white stone with a new secret name- 2:17
5. Power over the nations- 2:26
6. Clothed in white garments- 3:5
7. Name not blotted out of Book of Life, but confessed before Father and angels- 3:5
8. Made a pillar in the temple of God- 3:12
9. Receive the name of God, the city of God, and the Son of God- 3:12
10. Sit on the throne with Jesus- 3:21

REVELATION 4

I. John Called Up to Heaven- vs. 1

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

1. Many dispensationalists believe that 4:1 is the rapture of the church. They envision a secret, sudden calling away of the church before the Tribulation. No such event is clear and obvious in Revelation. Many believe that the invitation to "come up here" is the rapture.
 - a. Because John is called up to heaven to witness, rather than participate in, the events he describes.
 - b. Because "the church is not seen on the earth after Revelation 4:1."⁵
 - c. Because they see the seven letters to the seven churches as an historical survey of the church age. At the end of the church age, they believe that the church is called up to heaven before the tribulation. They interpret "after this" as meaning after the church age.⁶
2. I reject this interpretation, and favor a more straightforward interpretation.
 - a. John presents this as a firsthand experience. He is the subject of the vision. He makes clear distinctions between himself and the church in the first three chapters. Why would he represent the church all of a sudden?
 - b. I interpret the seven letters as simply seven letters to seven specific churches in Asia Minor. If the letters to the churches are not descriptions of historical ages, then 4:1 is not the end of the church age.
 - c. The word *ekklesia* indeed does not appear again until 22:16. However:

⁵ Pentecost, J. Dwight. Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 179.

⁶ Johnson, Alan F. in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 461.

- i. In Revelation, the word always refers to local churches, and not the universal church.
- ii. The universal church is represented by the word “saints”.

II. The Throneroom of Heaven- vs. 2-5

² *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.* ³ *And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.* ⁴ *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.* ⁵ *And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

1. *Immediately I was in the Spirit*- this was a spiritual vision. John’s body was on Patmos, but his consciousness was in heaven.
2. Description of God on His throne- jasper, sardius, rainbow, emerald. None of these are intended to describe what God looked like. Rather, they bring to mind radiance, color, depth, rarity, beauty.
 - a. Three questions that Christian philosophers have historically asked:
 - i. What is good?- Ethics. God is good.
 - ii. What is true?- Metaphysics. God is true.
 - iii. What is beautiful?- Aesthetics. God is beautiful!
3. *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.*
 - a. Twenty-four elders- most likely represent the union of the old and new covenants in Christ.
 - i. 12 tribes of Israel under the covenant

- ii. 12 apostles under the new covenant
 - iii. Christ came to bring in a new covenant that would fulfill the old covenant
 - iv. God's eternal plan included the old and new covenants. Both are represented together in heaven.
 - b. White robes- represent purity. Those in heaven have been purified and made holy.
 - c. Crowns of gold- represent power, ruling, reigning. The elders reign with Christ, but will cast their crowns at His feet.
4. *And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*
- a. *lightnings, thunderings, and voices*- exhibitions of raw power, beyond the scope of humanity. Thunder and lightning come from the sky. Voices with no person speaking come from a spiritual source.
 - b. *Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God-*
 - i. In 1:20, the lamps are the churches, and the stars are the angels of the churches.
 - ii. In 3:1, Jesus is said to *have the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars*.
 - iii. Here, the lamps are in the throneroom of God, and are the *seven Spirits of God*.
 - iv. This may refer to:

1. The Holy Spirit

- a. Seven represents completeness- the whole Spirit of God.

2. The angels of the churches- consistent with previous usage

III. Angels and Elders Worship God- vs. 6-11

⁶ Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸ The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.

And they do not rest day or night, saying:

*“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”*

1. *Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal-*

- a. Sea- usually represents separation, fear, darkness, depth.
- b. The sea was perfectly calm- glass or crystal. There was thunder and lightening in the throneroom of God, but perfect calm as well.

2. *And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁸ The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.*

And they do not rest day or night, saying:

*“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”*

- a. Ezekiel 1:3-14:

the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.

⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. ⁵ Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. ⁶ Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. ⁸ The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. ⁹ Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. ¹¹ Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. ¹² And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

¹³ As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning. ¹⁴ And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

i. In Ezekiel 10, he describes the same four creatures

b. Isaiah 6:1-2:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. ² Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one cried to another and said:

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory!”*

3. The Identity of the Four Living Creatures

a. The four living creatures:

- i. A lion
- ii. A calf
- iii. A man
- iv. An eagle

b. Throughout church history, many have equated the four creatures with the four gospels. This is referred to as the tetramorph- four symbols for the four evangelists.

i. Irenaeus: (the oldest theory)

- 1. Matthew- the man, because he begins with genealogy
- 2. Mark- the eagle, because he begins with a prophecy from Isaiah
- 3. Luke- the ox (calf), because he begins with priestly sacrifice
- 4. John- the lion, because he begins his gospel with confidence and boldness

ii. Jerome: (most popular theory)

- 1. Matthew- the man, because he begins with genealogy
- 2. Mark- the lion, because Jesus roars in the desert with power
- 3. Luke- the ox (calf), because he begins with priestly sacrifice

4. John- the eagle, because the divine word flies heavenward

iii. Witness Lee- (the most recent theory)

1. Matthew- the lion, because it portrays Jesus as the King
2. Mark- the ox, because it portrays Jesus as the servant
3. Luke- the man, because it portrays Jesus as the perfect man
4. John- the eagle, because it portrays Jesus as God

4. Interpreting the Four Creatures

- a. They are the same creatures Ezekiel and Isaiah saw.
 - i. They are in the presence of God.
 - ii. They have the same faces.
 - iii. They have six wings.
 - iv. They sing the same song.
- b. Their faces are symbolic and represent something.
 - i. We do not know with certainty what they represent.
 - ii. There is a long-standing tradition which equates the four creatures with the four gospels.
 - iii. In the absence of certainty, we are wise to withhold judgment.
 - iv. In the presence of a long tradition, we are wise to give it strong consideration.

IV. The Living Creatures and Elders Worship in Heaven -vs. 9-11

⁹ *Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:*

¹¹ *“You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.”*

1. *Glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne*- this is the nature of worship in heaven. God is glorified and honored in gratitude. We should imitate this worship on earth.
2. *Who lives forever and ever*- the eternal God- always has been, always will be.
3. *the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne.*
 - a. Elders represent the old and new covenants- they probably represent all the saints in all the ages. Their behavior probably speaks for what the redeemed will do.
 - b. Fall down before God- they prostrate themselves in humility- they have crowns, but He alone is the King.
 - c. Worship- glory, honor, and thanks.
 - d. *Cast their crowns before the throne.* The elders received their crowns from God, and return them to God.
4. *You are worthy, O Lord*- Worship in heaven is directed to God personally.
5. *To receive glory and honor and power*- God is the only worthy recipient of praise

- a. *Glory*- the idea of heaviness, or a thick fog or smoke.
 - b. *Honor*- elevation above all others. He must increase, and I must decrease.
 - c. *Power*- “dunamis”, the word from which Dynamite was named.
6. *For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created-*
- a. God is glorified for the beginning of the book at the end of the book. In Heaven the angels praise God for His initial acts of creation.
 - b. This returns to the themes of first and last, beginning and end, Alpha and Omega.