

## THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

### Revelation: 2:8-17 | Session 5 | The Synagogue and Seat of Satan

#### Summary <sup>1</sup>

- The book is one revelation, not several. Thus we refer to it as *The Revelation*.
- John is the author of the book. He is writing it on the Island of Patmos, located west of Ephesus on the Aegean Sea. We assume this is John the apostle, although the text does not say which John is writing.
- It is delivered unto seven assemblies via the Angel of each assembly. The Greek word *Angelos* messenger is not always a heavenly supernatural being. For example, John the Baptist was called a messenger. In this case, the messenger is the human leader of the synagogue (See Session 4).
- It contains prophecy regarding the revealing of Jesus Christ in His glorified state at His second coming and the events during the Day of the Lord.
- All English Bibles translate the Greek word *ekklesia* as churches. This is misleading since *ekklesia* does not mean church or churches as we think of our churches today, but a gathering or assembling of people. It is written to the Seven Jewish assemblies or synagogues.
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#### To the Angel of the Assembly in Smyrna

Verse 8—

In our last session, we looked at the first letter to the angel/messenger of the church/assembly in Ephesus. The second letter is addressed to the *messenger* of the assembly in Smyrna. The only time this location is mentioned in the New Testament is here and in 1:11. Smyrna, as are all of these seven assemblies in chapters 2 and 3, is located in modern-day Türkiye and is now known as Izmir.

There is no known reason why the letters are addressed to these particular seven assemblies. Nonetheless, Jesus, **the First and the Last, Which was dead and is alive**, has a message for the messenger of this assembly. The introduction used here, as we have already seen, i.e., **the First and the last,**” is a title God used specifically in connection with Israel in Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12, pointing us again to the Jewish nature of these letters.

Verse 9—

In the New Testament, a **synagogue** was an assembly of Jews who gathered together to offer prayers and listen to the reading and expositions of the scriptures. These assemblies were held every Sabbath

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<sup>1</sup> See notes from previous sessions at <https://rogerfeenstra.com/dispensational-times-online-bible-study/>

and Jewish feast day.<sup>2</sup> Synagogues likely came into being during the Babylonian captivity of B.C. 586. These synagogues were led by the Shaliach Tzibur, a man chosen as the *angleos* or messenger (See Session 4). This man would conduct prayers and read the Scriptures. The seven letters in Revelation are addressed to the Shaliach Tzibur, who would be designated as the messenger to read the letter to the congregation.

Just like we read and derive our doctrine for Christian living from the epistles or letters written by the apostle Paul, so too in the Tribulation, Jews will read these prophetic letters to discover how they are to live and overcome the persecution from the antiChrist.

Not only does Jesus Christ know the **works** of this assembly, but also the **tribulation and poverty**. Since this is a future message, we do not know specifically what is causing **tribulation and poverty**. However, it is quite probable that their persecution stems from not taking the *mark in their right hand or in their foreheads* (Revelation 13:16,17) and not being able to *buy or sell without the mark*. Great poverty will follow those who refuse the mark.

This assembly's *works* are strong in the Lord, and although poor and troubled, Jesus tells them **thou art rich**. James wrote regarding Israel and the Jews, **hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him?** (James 2:5). So, while this assembly is poor in one sense, they are rich in another.

Although this is directed to a future assembly during the Tribulation, we can find some application for us in that there is a principle that transcends dispensations; That it is okay to be poor in this world yet rich in faith! The apostle Paul prayed that The Lord "*would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man...And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*" (Ephesians 3:16,19).

We noted in our last session (Session 4) that the church of Ephesus would be filled with some men who claim to be apostles but *are fake*. There have always been false apostles. The Apostle Paul called them "**Deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his (Satan's) ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness....**" (2 Corinthians 11:15).

In the assembly of Smyrna, false Jews have crept in saying they are of God, but they are filled with **blasphemy; they say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan.**

It isn't easy to know the exact meaning of this phrase, but there are at least three possibilities<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> Levertoff, Paul. "Synagogue." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, edited by James Orr et al., vol. 1–5, The Howard-Severance Company, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, Charles B. "Satan, Synagogue Of." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, edited by James Orr et al., vol. 1–5, The Howard-Severance Company, 1915.

1. They *claimed to be Jews*. That is, they were descendants of Abraham and laid claim to the blessings promised by God to Abraham and his seed.
2. The Lord does not regard them as *real Jews*. Just because they professed to be Jews outwardly did not make them Jews. The apostle Paul addressed this in Romans 2:28,29, *“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*
3. These so-called Jews are persecutors of the Christians in Smyrna since Jesus *knows their blasphemy*.

Whatever reason they say they are Jews and are not, Jesus will call them out for being in the wrong synagogue! Speculation: Are these people those who take the mark but join in this Jewish synagogue thinking they could still enter the Kingdom?

Verse 10—

Anxiety will certainly creep in for those who do not receive the *mark* and know that more suffering is about to come, but Jesus comforts them, **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.**

**Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.** The use of **ye** indicates that Jesus includes the messenger with some of those in his assembly who will go to **prison**. However large that group is, they will be **tried<sup>4</sup> and have tribulation for ten days**. They are going to suffer an anti-Semitic<sup>5</sup> tribulation for days. Exactly what the trial is about, we are not told. But Jesus, in Matthew 10:22, may have alluded to this particular trial, *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”* This period of tribulation might coincide with Jesus’s remarks in Matthew 24:9, referring to the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation, in what He calls *the beginning of sorrows*, *“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations of my name’s sake.”* (See also Isaiah 66:5, and Luke 6:22).

Whatever this testing is, it will last for **ten days**. Jesus encourages the messenger (and seems to predict he will die\*) to **be thou (singular) faithful unto death**, don’t cut and run!

\*Interestingly, the word Smyrna carries the meaning of Myrrh; Myrrh was a plant used by the Jews to embalm the dead (John 19:39). Draw your conclusion on whether or not this has any significance.

And if this messenger remains **faithful**, Jesus will **give him a crown of life**. This crown is only mentioned twice in Scripture (here and in James 1:12), both times in a Jewish context; it is given to those who are faithful unto death during the Tribulation; this crown is not for those in the body of Christ who will have been raptured and with Christ, glorified and complete in Him. For those who have believed in Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> **Tried**; proved, examined, or tested.

<sup>5</sup> An “Anti-Semite” is someone who is against Jews. Christians in the body of Christ often unknowingly anti-Semitic when they try to appropriate for themselves the promises and covenants given to Israel by God. We must rightly divide what is for Israel and what is for the Body of Christ, the Church.

Christ in the dispensation of grace, we are “complete in him.” There is nothing we must do and nothing more we need. (Colossians 2:10).

The *faithfulness* Jesus mentions here *may* refer to Revelation 20:4, that is, those who did not worship the Beast or take the *mark*: “*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*”

Verse 11—

**He that hath an ear...** same as verse 7 to the church of Ephesus. **He that overcometh**, that is, the Jews in the assembly of Smyrna. **Shall not be hurt by the second death. The second death** constitutes being cast into the *Lake of Fire*, Revelation 20:14; 21:8.

The Jews who are faithful unto death and die a violent death during the Tribulation, which will happen to anyone who does not receive the mark of the beast, are promised they will not suffer the death that will finally destroy their enemies, *the lake of fire*. Jesus can promise this because He was faithful unto death, thereby making Him, *Lord, both of the dead and the living* (Romans 14:9).

To the Angel of the Assembly of Pergamos

Verse 12—

**To the angel of the church in Pergamos, write.** This city is known today by the name *Bergama*. It is located in modern-day Türkiye. While a relatively small city, it is known for growing cotton and mining gold (although gold mining was halted in one of the largest mines in June 2022 due to environmental damage).

Jesus is identified to the messenger as **He which hath the sharp sword with two edges** (See 1:16). In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul refers to the sword of the spirit as the Word of God. God’s Word reproveth, corrects, and instructs. Here in Pergamos, by the **sharp sword**, Jesus will teach this messenger that by His Word, He will also destroy (Revelation 19:15); therefore, the messenger will do well to listen to Jesus’s words. This is a threatening letter—not one of grace.

Verse 13—

**I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is.** In Revelation 13:2, John saw that the *dragon (Satan) gave him (the beast, Antichrist) his power, seat, and great authority*. All the powers of the Antichrist are given to him by Satan. Since we are taking a futuristic interpretation of Revelation, it appears **Satan’s seat will be** in Pergamos.

Such a small, obscure city does not seem a likely place for the Antichrist's seat. Yet just because a city may be small today does not mean it cannot be rebuilt into a major international center in the future.<sup>6</sup> Or, why does the Antichrist have to have his seat in a large city? With today's technology, a leader can rule or govern from anywhere, even in a basement. If we take this literally, large city or small, Satan's seat will be in Pergamos.

**And thou holdest fast my name** instead of taking the mark of the beast. **And hast not denied my faith even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr who was** (aorist tense; point in time) **slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.** The messenger of Pergamos is *faithful*. One of the martyrs of his assembly to be killed<sup>7</sup> is mentioned here prophetically by the name; Antipas.<sup>8</sup> There is no historical record of a certain *Antipas* being martyred, although there is some Catholic tradition that states the apostle John ordained Antipas as the bishop of Pergamos and that he was martyred during the reign of Nero or Domitian. The spurious account of *this* Antipas has become folklore in that there is a tradition of oil being secreted from his relics. *Saint Antipas* is also invoked for relief from a toothache.

Is this the same Antipas mentioned here or is this tradition made up in some kind of attempt to prove the legitimacy of this passage?

While Jesus praises the messenger of this assembly, he is not getting everything right.

Verse 14—

**Nevertheless**, Jesus also has a few things **against** him. Some in his assembly **hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.** The book of Jude calls **the doctrine of Balaam** *the error of Balaam*. The account of Balaam is found in the O.T. book of Numbers 25:1 and 31:16. The error of Balaam has to do with idolatry in which sexual fornication was made a religion; like all cults and godless systems of religion; they are turned into idolatry. This will come to earth during the Tribulation—we already see it growing today. Jesus holds the messenger accountable for allowing this false doctrine in his assembly.

Verse 15—

We read about the Nicolaitans in session 4. In the future, the meaning of the Nicolaitans will be known during the Day of the Lord. Otherwise, there is no meaning we can connect to this group (presumably, it is a group of people). What do we know about them? Jesus Christ hates their doctrine. This sort of

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<sup>6</sup> Consider Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Established as a small fishing village in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is now the most populous city in the UAE (about 3.4 million). Its growth came primarily in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the help of oil revenue. Dubai boasts the tallest building in the world.

<sup>7</sup> This is one of many martyrs during the Tribulation, see for example Revelation 6:9; 20:4.

<sup>8</sup> Scripture records other prophecy of naming a person years before he appears. 1 Kings 13:2, Josiah is named 290 years before his reign. Isaiah 44:28, and Isaiah 45:1 name Cyrus, king of Persia, 150 years before we read about him in the book of Daniel.

squashes the idea that Jesus is just about love, love, love. There may be times when the answer to WWJD? Would be, He would hate. But notice what he hates? In verse 6, we see that he hates their *deeds*; in this verse, he hates their **doctrine**. In other words, what they do, and what they teach.

Verse 16—

**Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.** The repentance needed is that the messenger must repent of the sin of allowing false doctrine to creep into his assembly, and those who have adopted the false teaching must repent. Like the warning to the assembly in Ephesus (2:5), works are required for Jews living under the Law. This is not a message of grace; the Lord never threatens those who have believed and received salvation by grace through faith because the gift we received is *not of ourselves...not of works* (Ephesian 2:8). Each believer today is of the body of Christ, and we are *complete in him* (Colossians 2:10); therefore, this warning is not for us.

We see the fulfillment of this threat for those who do not repent in Revelation 19:21.

Verse 17—

Jesus uses the same words as before, **He that hath an ear...**

**To him that overcometh** (this false doctrine of Balaam) **will I give to eat of the hidden manna.**

Thus far, a promise has been given to each assembly, all based on their works:

Ephesus (2:7): Eat of the tree of life.

Smyrna (2:11): Not be hurt by the second death.

Pergamos (2:17): Eat of the hidden manna.

**I will give him** (the overcomer) **a white stone and in the stone, a new name is written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.** Christians have taken this so often to mean that *we, you and me*, will get a new name in heaven. But, the subject of this prophecy is Israel, and it is to them to receive the new name. The often-repeated mistake could be avoided by Christians today if we would only study the Bible and rightly divide what is for Israel and what is for the Body of Christ.

Isaiah 62:2, speaking to Israel, God says, *“And the Gentiles shall see thy (Israel’s) righteousness, and all kings thy (Israel’s) glory: And thou (Israel) shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.”*

Isaiah 65:15: *“For the LORD GOD shall...call his servants (Israel) by another name.”*

Revelation 19:12 tells us that Jesus Christ has a *name written that no man knew, but he himself*—a likely fulfillment of this promise of a new name.