

RESUME

of

THE SEVEN CHURCH AGES OF REVELATION 2 & 3

A summary of my more detailed studies on this topic

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THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION 2 & 3

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHURCH AGES

An overview of Church history will give a better understanding of our own age. Such an overview is found in Revelation 1-3.

In chapter 1, John saw Christ walking amongst 7 candlesticks, holding 7 stars in His hand.

The 7 Candlesticks/Lampstands or Churches

- These symbolise **7 churches** of John's day in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day western Turkey), shedding light amidst the prevailing darkness (Rev 1.20).
- Though literal churches, Revelation is prophecy (Rev 1.1-3). So, conditions in those churches in the days of John were prophetic of the **7 successive ages** of Church history, from the early Church to the Coming of the Lord.

The 7 Stars or Messengers

- These are the angels or messengers to the 7 churches (Rev 1.20), shining in the darkness of this present evil age.
- Such messengers can be human or angelic. In this case they are human. They are the men to whom was given the message of Jesus by the Spirit to each of the churches.

Overview of the 7 Churches

- As stated, conditions in the **7 churches** described in Revelation 2 & 3 were prophetic of the **7 ages** of Church history, from the early Church to the return of the Lord.
- At the beginning, the Church had everything she needed,
 - The full Word;
 - The fulness of the Spirit; &
 - The full knowledge of Christ.
- But, through the first four Church Ages, she progressively lost that original endowment.
- Then came a turning of the tide and a progressive recovering of the original.
- Finally, despite the terrible end time apostasy, the true Church will fully recover all that was lost.

TWO SEEDS, TWO SPIRITS & TWO PURPOSES

The Original Seed

- The Church is God's field (1 Cor 3.9).
- The seed sown at the beginning was the Word (Mk 4.14).
- The divine Husbandman patiently awaits the harvest (Mk 4.26-29; Jas 5.7).

(Although in the parable of the sower, the seed is the Word, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the good seed are the children of the kingdom (Mt 13.38). How are these two reconciled? Easily. When a believer receives the Word in a prepared heart, cleared of all impediments, the harvest he brings forth will be a revelation of the seed within him. So, the believer himself will be the manifested/harvested Word (Jas 1.18).)

Now, since the Word is Christ (Jn 1.1), and since the Word and the Spirit are one (Jn 6.63), then the essence of the original seed sown at the beginning was,

- **The Word** Acts 20.20, 27; Gal 1.8-9,12
- **The Spirit** Acts 2.4; 9.17; 19.2; Ro 1.11; 2 Cor 3.6
- **Christ** Gal 1.16; 2.20; 4.19; Col 1.28; 2 P1.3-4

Another Seed, the Tares

But, from the very beginning, the enemy, the spirit of antichrist, opposed and persecuted the original seed/message.

In addition to physical persecution, he also sought to turn the early Church bride from the original Word by a far more subtle strategy. Imitation. He spread another word mirroring the original. (Remember, "**antichrist**" literally means not only **against** Christ but also **in the place of** Christ.)

So, he sowed a false, hybrid seed alongside the true, the tares (Mt 13.36-43). A hybrid is a mingling of the original life with a different life. What was this false seed, this hybrid message of the evil one, copying/imitating every detail of the original? Paul summed it up succinctly in 2 Corinthians 11.4.

- **Another gospel/word**
- **Another spirit**
- **Another Jesus**

Another Church

Alongside the true churches of God (1 Th 2.14) there arose an alternative, counterfeit church, the synagogue of satan (Rev 2.9; 3.9), claiming to be, and imitating, the original in every detail.

- **False Apostles** 2 Cor 11.13; Rev 2.2
- **False Prophets** 1 Jn 4.1
- **False Teachers** 2 Pet 2.1
- **False Brethren** Gal 2.4

Another Spirit

From the very beginning the two inspiration spirits of these two opposing (yet parallel) churches were engaged in a mammoth struggle.

- **The Spirit of Truth vs the spirit of error** (Jn 16.13; 1 Jn 4.6).
- **The Spirit of Christ vs the spirit of antichrist** (Ro 8.9; Phil 1.19; 1 Jn 4.3).

Don't forget, the antichrist spirit not only opposes all that Christ is and does. It also seeks to replace Him, professing that it alone is the true Spirit of Christ.

Another Mystery, Another Purpose

Every detail of the purpose, or mystery, of God was imitated by the anti-spirit in the titanic struggle between the two opposing antagonists.

- **The mystery of godliness vs the mystery of iniquity** (1 Tim 3.16; 2 Th 2.7).
- **The deep things of God vs the depths of satan** (1 Cor 2.10; Rev 2.24).

Unfortunately, as Paul feared, just as with the first bride in Eden, the spirit of antichrist succeeded in seducing the early Church bride with its hybrid message (2 Cor 11.2-4).

The result was sad indeed.

EPHESUS, THE FALLEN CHURCH

The Downwards Slide Begins

The Ephesus Church Age stretched from Acts to the mid-2nd C.

The First Angel/Messenger

The messenger to the first age was Paul. He was the pattern for the later messengers.

- He was a man of the Spirit and of the supernatural (Acts 19.11-12; Ro 15.18-19, 29; 1 Cor 2.1-5; 1 Th 1.5).
- His calling was of God, not man (Gal 1.1).
- His doctrine also was of God, not man (Gal 1.11-12). He imparted the full revelation of the plan and purpose of God in all history, all the counsel of God (Acts 20.20,27,31), i.e., the counsel of His will, the mystery of His will, the eternal purpose (Eph 1.9,11; 3.9).

Truly, then, the churches he established were founded on the power of God and the revelation of His purpose and of the deep things of God (1 Cor 2.10).

Initial Purity

At its inception, the Church was so pure and undefiled that,

- Acts 5.13 of the rest durst no man join himself to them.

Even later, the light was often so great that those holding false doctrines could not remain and sit under the Truth and would often separate themselves (1 Jn 2.19).

The Demonic Invasion

The enemy did not remain idle. As well as stirring up sporadic and often bitter physical persecution, he employed a far more effective and deadly tactic.

Paul often spoke of an invasion of seducing spirits and deceivers into the Church (Acts 20.29-30; 2 Cor 11.13-15; 1 Tim 4.1-2; 2 Tim 3.8-9). He also warned that the deception would get progressively worse (2 Tim 3.13).

John spoke later of the large numbers involved.

- 1 Jn 2.18 **many** antichrists
- 1 Jn 4.1-6 **many** false prophets
- 2 Jn 7 **many** deceivers

Initially the tactic was not a full-frontal assault, but an insidious worming in. As yet the Church had too much light to tolerate widespread, blatant denial of the Word.

- 2 P 2.1 false teachers... who **privily** (*i.e., secretly, craftily*) shall bring in damnable heresies
- Gal 2.4 false brethren **unawares** brought in (*i.e., secretly, surreptitiously smuggled in*) who came in **privily** (*i.e., crept in by stealth*) to spy out
- Ju 4 there are certain men crept in **unawares** (*literally, by the side door*)

Sadly, although the early Church virgin still had sufficient anointing to discern the false (1Jn 2.26-27), her ear was progressively bent to the seductive blandishments of the serpent and his ministers. As Paul feared (2 Cor 11.2-4), she would be deceived by his subtlety. No longer would she put out those who did not walk in the doctrine of Christ. Instead, those who sought to remain faithful to the original Word would themselves be put out.

The Divine Verdict

The Ephesus Church Age, had many commendable qualities.

- Patient perseverance, works and unwearied labour (Rev 2.2-3)
- Strong intolerance of evil; false apostles were discerned and rejected (Rev 2.2).
- Hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2.6).
 - “Nicolaitan” literally means to conquer the laity, i.e., seeking to squeeze out the ministry of the Spirit in each member the Body, progressively taking full control over the true Church and subjecting the laity to a hierarchy of priestly power.

Yet, despite all that, Jesus said Ephesus was a fallen church. As one translator graphically paraphrases Revelation 2.5, “Remember the heights from which you have fallen.”

It had left what it was at the beginning. It had,

- Not only, **fallen from its first works** (2.5).
- But, even worse, **left its first love** (2.4).

How is that first love manifested? By the attitude to the Word.

- Jn 14.15 If ye love me, keep my commandments
- Jn 14.23 If a man love me, he will keep my words
- Jn 15.10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love
- 1 Jn 5.3 this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments
- 2 Jn 6 this is love, that we walk after his commandments

In other words, though she still loved Him, it was not the love she had at the beginning. She had turned from the pure, full, original Word.

The Divine Appeal: Go Back to the Original, Back to the Beginning

What was Jesus’ exhortation (Rev 2.4-5)?

- They had **fallen**; they were no longer at the height where they used to be.
- They had **left**, departed from, where they once were.
- They were to turn their mind back, to **remember**, what was originally in it.
- They were to **repent**, i.e., to turn round and go back to where they had fallen from
- Though commended for her works, they were to go back and **do the first works**.

That same message of going back to the original Word, to the Word given at the beginning, had been proclaimed by Paul, Peter, John and Jude,

- **Paul** 2 Tim 1.13-14; 2.2; 3.10,14; 4.2
- **Peter** 2 P 3.1-2,17
- **Jude** Ju 3
- **John** 1 Jn 2.7,14,24; 3.11; 2 Jn 6,9

Ephesus’ fall explains the reward to the overcomer. Like Eve, the first Church Age virgin was beguiled, and partook of the tree of knowledge. But they who heeded the divine plea and overcame the demonic invasion were given to eat of the tree of life (Rev 2.7).

Sadly, however, the call to repent was neglected. Ephesus’ candlestick was removed (Rev 2.5). It is not enough to labour unto weariness. Go back to the Word, the whole Word. That alone, not our labours, is the true measure of our love for God.

Even worse, in the following ages the downwards slide gathered great momentum.

THE DOWNWARDS SLIDE & ITS AWFUL NADIR

(Smyrna, Pergamos & Thyatira)

THE THREE DEADLY DOCTRINES

The intense struggle of the two spirits to achieve their two parallel yet antagonistic purposes continued in the following Ages. As believers progressively loosened their grip on the original Word, the Spirit and the knowledge of Christ, the power and influence of the false increased

Over the next three Ages, the embracing of three key doctrines brought the downwards slide from the original to its awful conclusion.

- **The doctrine of the Nicolaitans** (2.15). Although Ephesus rejected and hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans (2.6), Nicolaitanism did not go away. Though universal acceptance was hindered by the climate of persecution in Smyrna, the principles of Nicolaitanism continued to spread. Once persecution ended, it was embraced as a fully-fledged doctrine, formally codifying the concept of a hierarchy of priestly power over the laity and squeezing out the role and rule of the Spirit.
- **The doctrine of Balaam** (2.14). This enabled the newly empowered Nicolaitan priesthood to open the door to a flood of pagan concepts into the official church.
- **The doctrine of Jezebel** (2.20,24). This taught the use of state power to enforce the rule of the hierarchy resulting in an even greater flood of pagan Balaamite doctrines.

The terrible nadir of this dire downwards slide was the awful depths of satan (2.24) when the very Bible itself in the vernacular was banned by the self-proclaimed one true Church.

SMYRNA

The Suffering Church

This was the age of persecutions and martyrdoms by the pagan Roman Empire before the legalising of Christianity in 312 AD. The bitterness of death was ever present. Even the very name Smyrna is prophetic. It means, “myrrh”, a bitter gum often used to embalm the dead.

But the prophesied death was not only physical. It is no coincidence that the reward to the overcomer was to not be hurt by the **second** death (2.11).

The External Threat, Physical Death

- Tribulation, suffering, prison, death (2.8, 10).

The Internal Threat, Spiritual Death

Alongside the true, a false church had arisen claiming to be the true.

- They did not gather in Jesus’ Name.
- It was not the church of the living God (1 Tim 3.15) but the synagogue of satan (2.9).
- They were blasphemers (2.9), i.e., they spoke against the true/Truth.

The Progressive Spread of Nicolaitanism

Although Ephesus rejected the deeds of the Nicolaitans (2.6), they did not disappear. The influence of their ideas spread widely.

Without Scriptural warrant, ecclesiastical power was increasingly concentrated in one man. Firstly, one single bishop gained control over one assembly; then over all the assemblies in a neighbourhood; then in a province; then in several provinces. Certain practices were reserved to the bishop alone. He progressively absorbed into himself the ministries of the prophet and the apostle, and the gifts of the Spirit ceased, thus ending the rule of the Spirit and the headship of Christ in the churches.

PERGAMOS **The Adulterous Church**

When persecution ended and Christianity was legalised, the downward slide gathered pace.

The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans

The deeds of the Nicolaitans, hated by the first Church (2.6), were now embraced as a settled doctrine (2.14). This led to an even greater concentration of control and power in the bishops.

- Ultimate control over all church life was increasingly centred on a very small number of them, with the bishop of Rome constantly pushing for the primacy.
- The guidance of the Spirit through apostles, prophets and spiritual gifts ceased.

The Doctrine of Balaam

This Nicolaitan power structure was the key to opening the door to the doctrine of Balaam (2.14).

- ***Just as Balaam***, frustrated in his initial attempt to curse Israel, for honour and financial gain set a trap to lure her into an adulterous union with pagan gods (Nu 31.16; 25.1-5), thus bringing the curse of the Lord upon Israel.
- ***So Pergamos***, guided by a Nicolaitan clergy seeking worldly status and wealth, fell into a similar trap and was lured into spiritual adultery, embracing a multitude of unbiblical practices and doctrines blending Christianity with paganism (2 P 2.15-16; Ju 11).

Worldliness flooded in. The Church's previous separation from the world ended. The reality of the power of godliness, the sanctification of the Spirit and the knowledge of Christ our sanctification were lost. How appropriate that the literal meaning of Pergamos is, "***thoroughly married***"! The once pure virgin bride, who had earlier left her first love, had now joined herself to another.

It is no coincidence that Jesus said Pergamos was ***where satan's seat is*** (2.13). The ultimate source of the Balaamite pagan doctrines flooding into Pergamos was Babylon. And Pergamos became the historical, literal seat of the priesthood of the old Babylonian mystery religion when forced to flee from its home base many years before.

The Overcomers

But, whilst the fallen church gripped and held tightly to,

- ***the doctrine of the Nicolaitans***, &
- ***the doctrine of Balaam***,

The overcomers held equally tightly to,

- ***His faith***, i.e., the original faith (Ju 3); &
- ***His Name*** (2.13).

THYATIRA **The Doctrine of Jezebel & the Depths of satan**

Thyatira covers the long, dreary Dark Ages, from the 7th C to the 16th C.

Nicolaitanism came to its awful climax. All ecclesiastical power was concentrated in one man, the bishop of Rome. And not only ecclesiastical power; political and thus military power also.

The Terrible End Result of the Three Deadly Doctrines

The key to understanding this Age is the life of Jezebel and her children (1 K 16 – 2 K 11).

- Ahab, king of the northern kingdom, Israel, married Jezebel, a pagan Sidonian.
- She introduced Baal worship into Israel, the worst form of idolatry up to that time.

- Her two sons, who later ruled the northern kingdom, were also idolators.
- Her daughter, Athaliah, was married to the heir to the southern kingdom, Judah.
- Influenced by his wife, Athaliah, her husband forced Judah to follow Jezebel's idolatrous religion (2 Chr 21.5-6, 11).
- When widowed, Athaliah, now having total power, continued to enforce that religion. Her wickedness culminated in wiping out the whole seed royal, the line of the promised Messiah, apart from one sole child secretly hidden away in the temple.

The pattern was the same in Thyatira.

- Claiming divine inspiration, spiritual Jezebel and her children, were permitted to teach their idolatrous, seductive doctrine (2.20,24), (How different from the godly intolerance of Ephesus (2.2,6)!)
- Not satisfied with gaining absolute **ecclesiastical** power, the Jezebel spirit also sought and progressively achieved more and more **political** power.
- Whereas in Pergamos, as Israel with Balaam, the churches fell into the trap of their own free choice, in Thyatira the people were compelled to accept an adulterous religion by state power and bitter persecution.

The fruits were terrible indeed.

- The flow of pagan false doctrine entering through the door first opened in Pergamos became a flood in Thyatira, with the same effects (2.14, 20).
- Interpretation and teaching of the Scriptures was restricted to the Nicolaitan priesthood alone. Laymen were forbidden to read the Bible. In fact, not just Biblical Truth, but the very Bible itself in the vernacular was lost to the people.
- Those submitting to this awful blasphemy truly tasted the very depths of satan (2.24).

The Faithful Remnant

- As in the time of Jezebel, much of the original faith was lost in Thyatira.
- The very small remnant of the true seed which sought to stay faithful to such parts of the Truth as still remained were hunted down and almost completely wiped out.
- The Lord laid on that remnant no other burden than to hold tight to what they still had (2.24-25).
- So faithful was that remnant that their last works were more than their first (2.19). Despite the terrible times, these were the first signs of the coming new dawn.

The Promise of the Morning Star

Very appropriately, confirming the signs of an end to the awful darkness of Thyatira, the reward of the overcomer is the Morning Star (2.28; 22.16). This star appears towards the end of the night, at its darkest part, giving hope of the dawn of a new day.

This tallies exactly with the historical record. Towards the end of the long dreary Thyatira Age, there appeared a man often styled by Protestant historians, "the morning star of the Reformation", John Wycliffe. His unorthodox teachings in the late 14th C anticipated those of the 16th C Reformation. Denouncing many errors of the Roman Church, he issued the first full (hand-written) English Bible, sending out men to proclaim it over all the land.

This prepared the way for the reversing of the long downward slide.

The following Sardis (Reformation) Age began the process of restoring what had been lost over the preceding centuries: the Word, the Spirit and the full knowledge of Christ.

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

The Progressive Restoration to the Original (Sardis & Philadelphia)

SARDIS

The Church with a Name but No Life

This is the period commonly known as the Reformation (16th - 17th C).

The tide finally turns. From now on there is a progressive recovery of the lost original endowment of the Church, i.e., the full Word, the fulness of the Spirit and the full knowledge of Christ.

The angel/messenger to this Age was Martin Luther.

I Know Thy Works

The two fundamental achievements of this Age were,

- ***The translation and distribution of the Bible*** in numerous European languages, so long kept from the common people. Despite intense opposition by Rome, its widespread distribution was greatly helped by the newly invented printing press.
- ***The doctrine of justification by faith*** was the most significant Truth recovered from the many lost over the years as a result of hitherto unknown widespread Bible reading. As a result, the believer recovered direct access to our High Priest and Saviour and the personal experience of Christ our Righteousness. The accumulated errors of past centuries claiming that the Nicolaitan priesthood was essential for access to God were swept away

But, Theirs was an Unfinished Work

The restoration had begun, but was far from complete. It was an unfinished work (3.2).

- Though much papal error was swept away by extensive reforms, it was certainly not a full-blooded restoration.
- Even truths initially recovered were later lost, and there was a danger of losing even more.
- Despite the glowing descriptions of this Age by many Protestant historians, the divine appraisal is very different. Its reputation for spiritual life was undeserved (3.1). In fact, in spite of much religious activity, true Spiritual life was seriously lacking.

Three Solemn Warnings

- They had not finished what they began (3.2).
- They had loosened their grip and lost some of what they originally had (3.2).
- It was necessary to bring back to mind what they had once been given, to repent, and to grip steadfastly and tightly what they originally had (3.3).

Very solemnly, if they did not heed the warnings and stay alert, they were in danger of defiling or even losing their white garments, and having their names blotted out of the Book of life (3.3-5; cp 16.15).

Truly, though this Age was indeed a reformation, it was certainly not a restoration.

PHILADELPHIA ***The Age of the Open Door***

This Age covers the 18th and 19th C. In it the recovery gathers real momentum. It is the Age of successive evangelical awakenings, ever widening missionary outreach and Bible translation and distribution, deepening awareness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and a long-lost reawakening of awareness of the 2nd Coming.

The angel/messenger of this Age is John Wesley.

The distinguishing features of the Age are to be found in the different aspects of the letter to the church of Philadelphia.

These Things Saith He that is Holy (3.7)

- This designation of the Lord highlights the distinctive doctrine of the Age.
- The essence of Wesley's mission was to spread Scriptural holiness throughout the land. It emphasised a holiness which was supernatural, a work of the Spirit, not a mere moralism.
- Starting with the early Methodists, the quest for the sanctification of the Spirit later spread through all evangelical Protestantism.

To the Church in Philadelphia (3.7)

- The very name of the Age, which means "brotherly love", prophetically reflects the core component of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, divine love.

I Have Set before thee an Open Door (3.8)

- The promise of an open door accords perfectly with history. This Age saw the most extensive worldwide missionary outreach since the early Church, radiating out in successive, ever-widening waves, initially from Protestant western Europe, and later from North America also.

Thou Hast Kept My Word (3.8,10)

- Philadelphia is twice commended for keeping His Word (3.8,10), guarding it carefully.
- Whilst Sardis initiated the translation of the Bible, this was manly restricted to European languages. Philadelphia, however, was the age of the Bible societies, labouring strenuously, in conjunction with the worldwide missionary endeavour, to translate and distribute the Word to the ends of the earth.

I Will Make Them of the Synagogue of satan... to Come & Worship before Thy Feet (3.9)

- A very notable feature of the Age was the humbling of synagogue of satan (3.9), the false Nicolaitan church.
- The inherited Roman hierarchical control structure, weakened in the early Reformation, soon began to re-establish itself in the newly emerging Protestant denominations.
- But in Philadelphia, the successive major evangelical awakenings were often associated with an empowering of the laity and a major diminishing of the ability of Nicolaitanism to control and dominate.

Behold, I Come Quickly (3.11)

- The reference to Jesus' soon Coming is the only explicit reference to it in the letters to the 7 churches. Very appropriately, for the first time since the Smyrna Age, the soon Coming of the Lord was widely studied, preached and anticipated.

I Will Keep Thee from the Hour of Temptation (3.10)

- But Philadelphia would not see the hour of temptation. The great tribulation would come in the next and final Church Age.

LAODICEA, THE GREAT PARADOX: APOSTASY & FINAL RESTORATION

*The Last Voice of the Spirit to the Churches
The Church with Jesus Outside*

The Great End Time Paradox

This Age is a great paradox. At first sight, the letter to Laodicea hardly seems to describe a church coming back to the full original. No good thing is said about it. But all is not as it seems.

- True, it depicts the awful condition of the end time professing church in its final great apostasy/rebellion against the Word accompanied by the greatest deception ever.
- Yet, despite everything, though few, there are overcomers. These experience the glorious final stage of the restoration of the Church's original endowment, the full Word, the fulness of the Spirit and the full knowledge of Christ.

The Messenger to the Church of the Laodiceans & His Ministry

Each church/Age has its angel/messenger (Rev 1.20) who brings to it the message of Jesus to that Age by the Spirit.

The Bible says that before the 2nd Coming of the Lord a prophet would come in the same Spirit of Elijah as John the Baptist, the angel/messenger before His 1st Coming. This prophet is also the angel/messenger to Laodicea, the Church Age in which the Lord returns.

1) The Spirit of Elijah before the 1st Coming

- At the 1st Coming, at the end of the Jewish age, John the Baptist, was sent to prepare the Israelite bride for the coming Bridegroom (Jn 3.29).
- How was he equipped? By the same Spirit that anointed Elijah (Lk 1.16-17).
- Why? To do what Elijah did, to restore, to turn Israel back to the original faith.
- How did Elijah do this? Consider his acts at Mt Carmel.
 - ***“He repaired (= restored to its original condition) the altar of the Lord that was broken down”*** (1 K 18.30). Why? To bring Israel back to its original faith.
 - Battling against Jezebel and her false prophets, he ***“turned their heart back again”*** (1 K 18.36).
- This was the essence of the message of John, an urgent call to repent (Mk 1.4), i.e., to turn back to what they once had and had turned away from.

2) The Spirit of Elijah before the 2nd Coming

- After the death of John, Jesus said Elijah not only ***had already come***, He ***also*** said that Elijah ***shall come*** (Mt 17.11-13). and that this future Elijah, just like the literal Elijah, would ***“restore all things”***, i.e., bring back all that had been lost from the original.
- Jesus was referring to Malachi 4.5-6, where Malachi spoke of ***two*** comings of Elijah.
- Although the passage does not explicitly refer to two comings, a closer examination makes it clear that it is in fact the case.
 - The angel said John, coming in the Spirit of Elijah, would fulfil the first part of the prophecy at ***the 1st Coming*** by turning ***“the heart of the fathers to the children”*** (Mal 4.6; Lk 1.17). In other words, he would turn the people from the old to a new dispensation, the ***New Testament***.
 - But the final fulfilment of the prophecy awaited ***“the great and dreadful day of the Lord”*** (Mal 4.5), i.e., ***the 2nd Coming***. At that time, that same Spirit of Elijah would fulfil the second part of the prophecy, and ***“turn the heart of the children to their fathers”*** (Mal 4.6), i.e., turn the hearts of the New Testament children back to their first Pentecostal fathers.

So, just before the 2nd Coming of the Lord, in the seventh (Laodicea) Church Age, there was prophesied to come an angel/messenger (= the same word in Greek), who would also be a prophet in the Spirit of Elijah, whose message would be to restore the end time Church to the faith of the early Church fathers. In other words, to the faith once delivered to the saints (Ju 3).

That messenger is the angel to the church of the Laodiceans.

Who is this Messenger?

His name is William Branham (1909-1965).

He was the same kind of man as John,

- a blazing and shining light (Jn 5.35);
- a man of the Spirit (Lk 1.17, 41);
- separate (Mt 3.4; Lk 1.80);
- not seeking honour of man (Mt 11.7-8; Mk 6.17-20);
- speaking what he heard from above (Jn 1.32-33).

His life story was unique.

- In 1933, a light appeared over him while baptising in a river. A voice said, "As John the Baptist was sent to forerun the 1st Coming of Jesus Christ, so are you sent with a message to forerun His 2nd Coming."
- His miraculous supernatural ministry has no equal in all recorded Church history. His message was confirmed by prophecy, countless remarkable healings (including raising the dead) and many thousands of revelations of the secrets of the heart.
- Despite great opposition, he was remarkably and publicly vindicated on numerous occasions.

The Message to the Church of the Laodiceans

What is the message of Jesus by the Spirit, through the messenger to the final Church Age?

Essentially, it is the same as that of John at the 1st Coming, at the end of the Jewish Age,

- To call the bride of the day to prepare herself for the coming Bridegroom.
- To warn of the solemn condition of professing believers and its awful consequences.
- To urgently proclaim the only remedy: to repent and turn back to the original faith.

1) The solemn diagnosis

Lukewarm (3.15)

- Compare the perilous condition of the end time church described in 2 Tim 3.1-5). This is much worse than the loss of her first love by Ephesus (Rev 2.4). Her lukewarmness makes Him sick.

Rebellious, putting Jesus outside His own church (3.20).

- Compare 2 Th 2.3, which speaks of the "falling away" before the day of Christ. The word is a military term. It speaks not of a desertion, but of a rebellion, a mutiny, a refusal to obey the orders of their Commander (i.e., the Word), just as Israel rejected Him at the 1st Coming (Jn 1.11).

Deceived, (rebellion results in deception), so much so that they are oblivious to their true state (3.17).

- **Poor**. This refers to a lack of spiritual riches not material wealth, i.e., the pure spiritual gold of true, genuine faith (1 P 1.7).
- **Blind** (and also blinded), just as,
 - The Jews at the 1st Coming (Mt 15.14; 23.16, 24; Jn 9.39);

- Sodom, whose condition Jesus said foreshadowed conditions at the end (Lk 17.28-30). Though blinded to the location of the door of Lot's house, the men of Sodom were unaware of their blindness and continued to search for it, for they could see everything else quite normally (Gen 19.11). (Cp 2 K 6.18-20.)
- **Naked**, which means they had,
 - **No covering for sin**, i.e., no garment of salvation or robe of righteousness (Ps 132.9,16; Isa 61.10). At least Adam **knew** he was naked, and was in need of a covering (Gen 3.10,21)!
 - **No Clothing of the Spirit**. (Compare Ju 6.34 and Lk 24.49. In both cases, the literal translation speaks of being "clothed" with the Spirit.)
 - **No wedding garment** (Rev 19.8), just as Israel at the 1st Coming (Mt 22.12), leaving her unprepared for the marriage feast.

2) The awful consequences

- **The end time Laodicean church is vomited out of His mouth** (3.16).
 - Just as Israel was cast out at the 1st Coming (Mt 21.43).
- **Jesus is outside His own Church** (3.20).
 - Just as Israel would not receive Him at His 1st Coming (Jn 1.11).
 - Only those who open the door to Him will be at His (wedding) supper (3.20).
- **The greatest deception in all history** (3.17-18).
 - The fact of Laodicea's deception has already been seen in its ignorance of its poverty, blindness and nakedness. The full extent of that deception is detailed in other Biblical references to spiritual conditions at the end time, before Christ's return.
 - Deception is a direct consequence of rebellion. To deliberately turn the ears from the Truth (= the Word, Jn 17.17) results in judicially being turned unto falsehood (2 Tim 4.3-4). The great end time rebellion (2 Th 2.3) will result in the greatest deception in all history (2 Th 2.9-11).
 - The reference to "lying wonders" (literally, "wonders of falsehood") does not mean these wonders are false. They are real, but they advance the cause of falsehood, just like the real miracles of the Egyptian magicians who withstood Moses. At the end time, however, unlike in Egypt, these lying wonders will be performed by professing believers who resist the Truth, and done in His Name (Mt 24.4-5, 12, 24; cp 7.15, 21-23). They will deceive all not fully committed to the Word in all things, including their own selves.

3) The urgent final warning of the Spirit

- **Flee from lukewarm religion** (3.15-16)
- **Zealously repent** (3.19)
 - The same message as before the 1st Coming.
 - Do not delay. Turn your mind back quickly. Back to what? Back to the original Word.
- **Buy from Jesus** (3.18), without money and without price (Isa 55.1),
 - The true faith, the original faith of the first Pentecostal fathers.
 - The eyesalve of the Spirit, to see clearly the day in which we live.
 - Your wedding garments, to be suitably dressed to go into the wedding supper.

Will There be Any True Believers at the End?

What a terrible condition! Nothing good is said about Laodicea. It is the worst of all the seven churches.

In the light of this, will there be any true believers at the end (cp Lk 18.8)?

Yes!

Who?

The overcomers (3.21).

Who are these Overcomers?

At first sight there is no specific reference to overcomers. But since Jesus explicitly refers to them (3.21), they must be those who heed His counsel to,

- Not be lukewarm (3.15-16).
- Buy from Him gold tried in the fire, eyesalve and white garments (3.17-18).
- Zealously repent (3.19).
- Open the door to Him (3.20).
- Pay heed to the voice of the Spirit through the angel/messenger to Laodicea (3.22).

How do they Overcome?

The Laodicean overcomers overcome by the Word and by the Spirit, just like,

- Their Bridegroom (Mt 4.1-13 & Lk 3.22; 4.1, 14); &
- The early Church (1 Jn 2.14 & 1 Jn 4.1-4; 2.27; 3.24),

They overcome by the Word and by the Spirit in the same way they are,

- born (1 Jn 5.4; 1 P 1.22; Jn 3.5);
- washed and sanctified (Eph 5.26; 1 Cor 6.11); &
- made perfect (2 Tim 3.16-17).

1) Overcoming by the Word

- **They turn from lukewarm religion** (3.15-16). Such a religion, if ever it had it, has long lost its first love. And how is love to God is manifested? By **the attitude to the Word** (Jn 14.15, 23; 15.10; 1 Jn 2.5; 5.3; 2 Jn 6). The overcomer **turns with fervent love back to the Word** that the professing Laodicea church treats with indifference.
- **They buy gold tried in the fire** (3.18). The gold symbolises a genuine faith, tried and tested by fire (cp 1 P 1.7). The Lord asked whether He would find the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints on His return (Lk 18.8). The answer is the Laodicean overcomer, with a **pure faith in the original Word first given at the beginning**.
- **They zealously repent** (3.19). No lukewarmness here! Repentance means to change the mind, to think differently, to turn.
 - **To turn from** the prevailing thoughts of the religion of Laodicea.
 - **To turn back to** what has been turned from, **the original Word**.
- **They open the door to Him**, welcoming Him back (3.20). And **Who is the One they welcome back? The Word** (Jn 1.1, 14).

The overcomers' love of the Truth, the Word, ensures they are not taken in by the great end time deception. In fact, they will be so one with the Word that they will become one with the Word and with He Who is the Word.

2) Overcoming by the Spirit

- **They buy white raiment** to cover the shame of their nakedness (3.18). White raiment speaks of the garment of salvation (Ex 39.27; Ps 132.9, 16; Isa 61.10), of the overcomer (Rev 3.4-5) and of the wedding garment (Rev 19.7-9). But raiment has another symbolic meaning in the Bible.

- When Elisha put on the mantle of Elijah, that symbolised his ***being clothed with the same Spirit*** that had clothed Elijah (2 K 2.12-15).
- When the Bible says ***the Spirit came upon*** Gideon (Jud 6.34), the Hebrew says, literally, ***the Spirit clothed*** Gideon.
- Jesus said the disciples would be ***endued (i.e., clothed, arrayed) with*** the power of ***the Spirit*** (Lk 24.49).
- So, the Laodicean overcomer is clothed with the Spirit.
- ***They buy the eyesalve of the Spirit***, giving spiritual vision (3.18). ***Their eyes are enlightened, by the Spirit*** of wisdom and revelation (Eph 1.17-18). Overcomers have understanding of the times, and recognise the day in which they live and its message (1 Chr 12.32; Mt 16.3).
- ***They heed the voice of the Spirit*** through the messenger to their age (3.22). Each of the 7 churches had a messenger anointed to bring the food for that age (Mt 24.45; Lk 12.42), the manna for that day. But, though nourishing and filling in its own day, yesterday's manna is of no benefit for the new day (Ex 16.19-20). In each age the overcomer ***heeds the voice of the Spirit*** through his own messenger.

The Reward of the Overcomer

The Lord's promise to the Laodicean overcomer is to sit with Him in His throne (Rev 3.21).

The implications of this promise are beautiful indeed. Who sits on the throne with a king? The queen (Neh 2.6). So, the promise is to be His bride.

The same idea of coming nuptials for the overcomer seems implied in two other places in the Laodicean letter.

- ***3.17-18***, when the Lord counsels the believer to buy of Him white garments. The bride was arrayed in white linen (19.8).
- ***3.20***, when the Lord says He would sup with those who opened the door to Him. Is this a reference to the wedding supper (19.9)? It certainly does not refer to the present time, for Jesus explicitly said, at the last supper, that His disciples would eat and drink at His table in the kingdom, and that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He drank it there with them (Mt 26.29; Lk 22.29-30).

This reward, however, is for the future. But there is also much to look forward to in the present. Though in many ways this is a terrible Age, and though the true are few in number, by their heart-felt adherence to the Word and to the Spirit, as we shall see, these end time overcomers will experience the glorious conclusion of the Church's progressive recovery of all that she had at the beginning,

THE RESTORATION REACHES ITS CONCLUSION: BACK TO THE BEGINNING

At the end of the Laodicea Age, despite its many perils, there are glorious things for the believer to look for.

- The good seed planted at the beginning comes to fruition.
- All that has been lost over the Church Ages is fully and finally recovered.
- The purpose/mystery at work through the Ages comes to its full and final expression; the mystery of God is finished.

The End Time Harvest of the Two Seeds

At the beginning of the Church Age, two seeds were planted.

When the Lord returns, each will have come to full maturity and will be harvested.

- Just as at the 1st Coming the chaff was burned (Mt 3.12), so at the 2nd Coming the tares are gathered together for burning (Mt 13.30,40-42).
- Just as at the 1st Coming the good seed is gathered into the heavenly barn of the divine Husbandman, so at the 2nd (Mt 3.12;13.30).

But what is the nature of these two harvests?

The Tares

During the growing season, the false, hybrid seed so resembled the true that the Lord forbade His servants from gathering them lest some of the good seed also be inadvertently uprooted (Mt 13.27-29).

At the time of harvest, there will come the greatest deception in all history, so great that, if possible, even the very elect would be deceived. The false will be so close to the true that they will prophesy and do wonders in His name (Mt 7.22-23; 24.24). The Laodicean church will be so deceived it will not even realise it is poor, wretched, blind and naked.

But let us focus rather on the nature of the glorious final fruit of the fully matured good seed.

The Good Seed

What is the nature of the harvest of the good seed when it comes to perfection (Lk 8.14)? The harvest which the divine Husbandman has so patiently waited for as it progressed through its different stages of growth to full maturity (Mk 4.26-29; Jas 5.7)?

According to God's law of reproduction (Gen 1.11; Jas 3.12), a seed must bear after its own kind.

So, what was the seed sown at the beginning? The Word (Mk 4.14). And, as explained earlier, since the Word is Christ (Jn 1.1), and since the Word and the Spirit are one (Jn 6.63), the original seed sown at the beginning of the Church was the Word, the Spirit and Christ.

So, since a seed must bear after its own kind, having the same characteristics and able to do the same works as the seed originally sown, the final harvest must be a manifestation of what was sown at the beginning, i.e.,

- The Word,
- The Spirit, and
- Christ.

The End Time Final Recovery of the Original

The nature of that final harvest matches exactly the final result of the progressive recovery of all that was lost in the first four Church Ages.

The original endowment of the Church was the Word, the Spirit and Christ.

- **The full original Word/faith** once and for all delivered to the saints.
- **The full experience of the Spirit** in every area of corporate Church life and the personal life of the individual believer.
- **A full understanding of Who Christ is, and a full appropriation of all He is** in every area of life of the believer.

As seen, however, starting with Ephesus' fall and loss of her first love, the Church progressively lost more and more of that original endowment over the first four Church Ages,

- Different truths of **the Word** were lost, such as the mode of Church government, the 2nd Coming and the Godhead, until even the very written Word itself was taken from her.
- The experience of the ministry, gifts and power of **the Spirit** ceased; the sanctification of the Spirit degenerated into self-effort and self-mortification.
- The vital experience of the life of **Christ** in every area of the believer's experience ended; His role was usurped by a Nicolaitan priesthood.

That downwards slide culminated in the awful nadir of the depths of satan.

But, at the end of the Thyatira Dark Ages, the Morning Star arose. The tide turned. There began a progressive recovery of all that had been lost of the Word, the Spirit and Christ, a process that concludes, paradoxically, at the end of the final, apostate Laodicea Age.

So, what do we have to look forward to? What is the nature of the final harvest?

The Word

Since the turning of the tide, truths lost over the years have been progressively recovered (e.g., justification, sanctification, water baptism, the 2nd Coming, the baptism and gifts of the Spirit). Now, in this final Laodicea Age, The true believer will,

- No longer be immature, blown about by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4.14);
- But, come the unity of the full original faith (Eph 4.13), having the full assurance that comes from a complete understanding and knowledge of the mystery of God (Col 2.2).

The Spirit

The progressive recovering of the experience of the Spirit in every area of individual and corporate Church life will climax in Brother Branham's graphic prophetic words, "the entire Holy Spirit visits the Church, making God in human flesh..." (63-0901E, Desperations). The end time bride and the Spirit will speak with one voice (Rev 22.17).

Christ

Since the turning of the tide, there has been a progressive recovery of the revelation of and experience of Christ in every area of life.

- In **Sardis**, He was revealed and experienced especially as our righteousness (1 Cor 1.30).
- in **Philadelphia**, as our sanctification (1 Cor 1.30).
- In **Laodicea**, that progressive recovery of the revelation and experience of Christ will climax with Christ as all and in all (Col 3.11). Believers will come to the unity of the full knowledge of, and to the full stature of, Christ (Eph 4.13). In fact, they will not only

come to the full revelation of Who Christ is, but will themselves **become the full revelation** of Who He is.

The End Time Climax of the Two Purposes/Mysteries

The Two Spirits

From the beginning of the Church Age, two antagonistic spirits have been in constant conflict,

- The Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error;
- The Spirit of Christ and the spirit of antichrist.

As well as directly persecuting and opposing everything of the true, the spirit of antichrist has also counterfeited it. A whole alternative, parallel church was constructed, replicating and perverting every detail of the true.

Through the Church Age, these two spirits have been working towards a full and final fulfilling of their separate yet parallel purposes, the mystery of godliness and the mystery of iniquity.

That work comes to its climax at the end of the Laodicea Church Age.

The Mystery of Iniquity

The mystery of iniquity is the counterfeit of the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim 3.16). When this satanic perversion comes to its awful climax,

- The man of sin will be revealed, the embodiment of the full purpose of the evil one in flesh (2 Th 2.3-4, 7-10).
- The spirit of antichrist, previously manifested in part in many antichrists, will be fully incarnated in one single body of flesh, the Antichrist (1 Jn 2.18).

(I do not wish to look any further at the mystery of iniquity. My focus here is on the glorious end time climax of the finishing of the mystery of godliness.)

The Mystery of Godliness

The mystery of godliness is,

- Not just God manifest, but God manifest in flesh.
- Not Just God manifest in the flesh of Christ, but God manifest in the flesh of man.

This purpose/mystery also has been at work all through the Ages, seeking to bring the Church to fully express Christ in her flesh.

This purpose will come to completed in the last Church Age. At that time, the mystery of God (Rev 10.7) will not only be finished in the sense of its being fully **revealed to** the believer. It will also be fully **revealed in the flesh of** the believer. The end time Church will incarnate Christ. She will be the very manifestation of Christ.

This same truth is also illustrated in the nature of end time harvest of the good seed.

We have already seen how that seed brings to final perfection a harvest having the same characteristics and able to do the same works as the seed originally sown, for the final harvest must be a manifestation of what was sown at the beginning, the Word, the Spirit and Christ.

But there is more. That final harvest is not just the Word, the Spirit and Christ fully restored to the believer.

Where was the original seed, the Word, sown? In the heart of believers (Mk 4.15). This is why Paul said the Church is God's field (1 Cor 3.9). So, provided the heart is free from all impediments, then the end time harvest must be a revelation **within the heart of end time believers** of the nature of the seed sown. In other words, **they themselves are the final harvest** the Husbandman has so patiently waited for over the years.

So, the final harvest is not just the Word, the Spirit and Christ fully restored **to** the believer, but **in** the believer.

The implication is unspeakable.

End time believers will become one with the Word and one with Christ.

- **They will be the full manifestation of the original Word.**
- And since Christ is the Word, **they will also be the revelation of the fulness of Christ** (cp Eph 1.23). They will be one with Him, epistles of Christ (2 Cor 3.1-3).

This throws light on why Christ describes Himself to Laodicea as "the Beginning of the creation of God" (i.e., of the new, the second creation) (Rev 3.14). How? Because Laodicea will see the conclusion of His new creation work.

By the day-by-day renewing of the Holy Ghost (2 Cor 4.16; Ti 3.5), He has been progressively changing the believer through the Church Ages back to His original image and glory (Col 3.10-11; 2 Cor 3.17).

The final result of that renewing is,

- A new man, where **Christ is all and in all** (Col 3.10-11),
- A perfect, fully mature man, **measured by nothing less than the full stature of Jesus Christ Himself** (Eph 4.13,15-16).

Christ will not just be everything **to** the believer, but everything **in** him, fully manifest in his flesh. Great, indeed, is the mystery of godliness.

Truly, the end time bride is made ready (Rev 19.7). Her preparation is complete. She is, "the perfection of beauty"; God shines out of her (Ps 50.2). The beauty of the Lord is upon her (Ps 90.17). Her beauty is His/Him (Ezk 16.14). He is everything she has and is.

No wonder the Bridegroom describes her as, "all fair" (SoS 4.7). She is ready to be married and joined to Him.

How glorious! The mystery of God is finished.

Truly, despite the evil day in which they live, the Laodicean overcomers have much to look forward to.

APPENDIX

Summary Chart of the 7 Church Ages

THE 7 CHURCH AGES or The 7 LAMPSTANDS (Revelation 2 & 3)

