

Introduction to Revelation 2-3

Ray C. Stedman: There were many other churches in the province of Asia at the time John wrote this letter. Others of them could have been selected, but only these seven were chosen. They were not even the best known churches in Asia, but they were chosen by the Lord because they represent conditions . . . throughout the whole period of church history from its beginning to its end.

The word “angel” appears many times in the book outside these seven letters, and in every case it refers to a heavenly being—what we normally think of as an angel. It is suggestive here that each church has a heavenly being responsible for guiding the human leadership. **Hebrews 1:14: Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? In those invisible realms, which are very real but which we cannot see, there are angels assigned to each church to help the leaders and the congregation to know what is on the heart of its Lord.**

There is a pattern to the structure of these letters. The pattern looks like this:

1. City is Distinguished
2. Christ is Described
3. Commendation is Delivered
4. Condemnation is Disclosed
5. Counsel is Directed
6. Challenge is Declared

Christ is the Author of each letter, the Answer to each problem, and the Authority in each life.

Background on Ephesus

Location: 60 miles from Patmos

In the first century AD it was a significant seaport city with a population of ¼ million about 60 miles from the island of Patmos. But now nothing is there because there are three miles of swampland where the harbor used to be.

Ephesus was primarily known for the Temple of Artemis (described by Antipater of Sidon, the man who compiled the list of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World), this way: I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labor of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, "Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand").

The Temple of Artemis was an entirely marble structure that was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide with each of its 120 columns donated by a king. Only one of its columns still exists today and the rest of the temple structure is nothing but ruin. The temple was considered to be the banking hub of Asia Minor because of all of the commerce it brought in to worship the false god Artemis. Artemis had her own month named after her in this area and a huge celebration was held each year during that month.

A lesser-known structure in Ephesus was their theatre: it held an estimated 44,000 people and is believed to have been the largest outdoor theater in the world at that time.

Revelation 2:1-7 (NKJV)

The church at Ephesus was started by Paul (you can read about that in [Acts 19](#)). Paul worked there himself later on and wrote two letters to a young pastor named Timothy ([1 Timothy](#) and [2 Timothy](#)). Church tradition says that after John wrote [Revelation](#) he went to Ephesus and lived the rest of his life.

The City is Distinguished (1a)

1 **“To the angel** [a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God] **of the church of Ephesus** [permitted] **write,**

The Christ is Described (1b)

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

The Commendation is Delivered (2-3)

2 **“I know your works, your labor** [literally, a beating—from the Greek word *kopos* (KOP-os), which means to beat your chest in sorrow], **your patience** [steadfastness, constancy, endurance], **and that you cannot** [have no power to] **bear** [take up, carry] **those who are evil** [bad nature, troublesome, injurious, pernicious, destructive]. **And you have tested those who say** [affirm, allege, portend or profess] **they are apostles** [a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders] **and are not, and have found** [the Greek word is *heurisko* (hyoo-RIS-ko), meaning to find by thought—where we get our English word heuristics] **them liars** [false, deceitful]; **3 and you have persevered** [take up, carry] **and have** [hold, echo] **patience** [steadfastness, constancy, endurance], **and have labored** [to be tired and exhausted from labor] **for My name’s sake and have not become weary** [sick of it].

The Condemnation is Disclosed (4)

4 **Nevertheless I have** [hold, echo] **this against you, that you have left** [literally, to send away, to leave: also used of a husband divorcing his wife] **your first love** [*agape* love]. [Notice, however, that the first Love did not leave them. Notice, also, that they did not lose their first Love. **J. Hampton Keathley, III: Christ is more concerned about what we do with Him than for Him. Labor is no substitute for love.**]

The Counsel is Directed (5-6)

5 **Remember** [an imperative] **therefore from where you have fallen; repent** [another imperative meaning to change your mind] **and do** [a third imperative] **the first works** [primary business], **or else I will come to you quickly and remove** [riot, disturb, throw in to a commotion] **your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.** [**Ray C. Stedman: They would become a church with no influence or impact spiritually upon the community. . . . busy doing religious, but entirely irrelevant, things.**] **6** **But this you have** [hold, echo], **that you hate** [detest] **the deeds of the Nicolaitans** [a group upholding the liberty of eating things sacrificed to idols as well as committing fornication], **which I also hate** [detest].

The Challenge is Declared (7)

7 **“He who has an ear, let him hear** [imperative to at the individual] **what the Spirit says to the churches** [to all believers]. **To him who overcomes** [conquers, the Greek where we get our word Nike (meaning victorious)] **I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”**

Introduction to Revelation 2-3

Ray C. Stedman: There were many other churches in the province of Asia at the time John wrote this letter. Others of them could have been selected, but only these seven were chosen. They were not even the best known churches in Asia, but they were chosen by the Lord because they represent conditions . . . throughout the whole period of church history from its beginning to its end.

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Background on Smyrna

“Smyrna” means “**myrrh**” [picture] which is used as a fragrance. Myrrh is basically tree sap that has been dried out and is then subsequently crushed and burned to make sweet fragrances that were used as perfumes and embalming agents. It’s currently used in everything from toothpaste to toiletries.

Smyrna is an incredibly old city, with periods of activity and inactivity stretching back to 3,000 BC (it went from death to life to death to life).

Smyrna is located about **35-40 miles north of Ephesus** [picture]. Smyrna was located on a significant trade route and it was a very wealthy city at the time of John’s writing of **Revelation**. Geographically, it is situated at the end of a long land-locked harbor making it a very safe harbor. Many of the buildings from the older parts of Smyrna are located on a hill and the shape of the buildings looks like a **crown** [picture] on the hill, so it’s referred to as the “Crown of Smyrna.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Around 600 B.C. it was invaded and destroyed by the Lydeans and for 400 years there was no city there at all. Then around 200 B.C. Lysimachus had it rebuilt. . . . It was built with streets that were broad, straight, sweeping, and beautifully paved.

About the time that Smyrna was rebuilt, Smyrna switched allegiances from Pergamum to the Romans. To elevate their status with Rome, the city created the goddess **Roma** [picture] to worship Rome itself.

Barclay: Toward the end of the first century . . . Caesar worship became compulsory. Once a year the Roman citizen must burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar; and having done so, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had performed his religious duty. All that the Christians had to do was to burn that pinch of incense, say, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ receive their certificate, and go away and worship as they pleased.

Some of the more popular residents of Smyrna were Aelius Aristedes (a Greek orator), Irenaeus (early church father), and **Polycarp** [picture] (the bishop of Smyrna—whose death is described in *Fox’s Book of Martyrs*). While there is no record of how Christianity came to Smyrna, Christianity stayed. The city still exists today (it’s called Izmir now).

Revelation 2:8-11 (NKJV)

The City is Distinguished (8a)

8 **“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna** [myrrh] **write,**

The Christ is Described (8b)

‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life [Smyrna itself was dead for 400 years and came alive again; similarly, Jesus died and came alive again—because love always wins]:

The Commendation is Delivered (9)

9 **“I know** [to perceive because having seen—Jesus knows] **your works** [business, employment, what you’re occupied with, what you make, what you are doing], **tribulation** [pressing together, distress, straits—used to describe pressing grapes together], **and poverty** [used of beggars—this standard of living was probably exacerbated by the tribulation] **(but you are rich** [abounding in material resources or Christian virtues that are eternal possessions]); **and I know the blasphemy** [slander, injurious speech to another’s good name—**Ray C. Stedman: Because the Christians talked about eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ, they were accused of being cannibals. . . . because they refused to visit the pagan temples, or to acknowledge the gods of the pagans, they were called atheists. . . . Christians talked often about being members one of another and of loving one another, and so they were accused of sexual orgies.] of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue** [assembly] **of Satan** [adversary]. [Inter-Varsity Press: **Judaism was an ancient religion, largely tolerated in Roman Asia, while Christianity, being relatively new, was regarded with suspicion. . . . Judaism may have seemed to some Christians in Smyrna a tempting haven of safety.**]

The Condemnation is Disclosed (N/A)

The Counsel is Directed (10)

10 **Do not fear** [an imperative; Greek word is *phob-E-o* (where we get our English word phobia) meaning to put to flight by terrifying] **any of those things** [things or people] **which you are about to** [to intend or have in mind to] **suffer** [used of sick people]. **Indeed** [an imperative meaning to pay attention], **the devil** [slanderer, false accuser] **is about to** [to be on the point of doing or to intend or have in mind to] **throw** [to throw or let go of a thing without caring where it falls] **some of you into prison, that you may be tested** [testing of faith to attempt to entice in to sin— **Vance Havner: They were not promised deliverance from tribulation, poverty and reviling. In fact, the worst was yet to come.**], **and you will have** [hold, echo] **tribulation** [same word as in verse 9] **ten days. Be** [an imperative] **faithful** [literally, keep on being faithful; the Greek word is *pis-TOS*, meaning one who is faithful in the execution of their business or duties, one that can be relied upon] **until death, and I will give you the crown** [there are two types of crowns in Greek: one for a king and one for a winner—this crown is for the winner] **of life.**

The Challenge is Declared (11)

11 **“He who has an ear, let him hear** [an imperative] **what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes** [Nike] **shall** [absolutely] **not** [never (a double negative in the Greek, which unlike English, emphasizes rather than cancels out the meaning)] **be hurt by the second death.”**

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Background on Pergamos

Pergamos was geographically 16 miles from the Aegean Sea (the first of our seven cities that isn't a port city) and means "elevation." It was an acropolis (a city on the edge) located on a promontory [picture] (a prominent land mass overlooking lower lying land). Cities, forts, and castles are built here because of their defensive properties. Pergamos no longer exists today, but a small city named Bergama exists close to the ancient ruins and has about 55,000 people while ancient Pergamos had closer to 150,000.

Contents of Pergamos (from Wikipedia)

Upper Acropolis:

- The altar (open-air altar dedicated to Zeus and visible from almost anywhere in Pergamos): excavated in the late 1800s and reassembled and transported to East Berlin in the early 1900s and now in a museum [picture]
- A 10,000 seat theater (the steepest of any ancient theater)
- Sanctuaries and temples: Trajan, Athena, Dionysus, the Heroon (where past kings were worshipped)

- The library (the second best in the ancient Greek civilization. When papyrus was in short supply, the Pergamenes invented parchment (made of fine calfskin, a predecessor of vellum). It contained 200,000 volumes—as a wedding present, Mark Antony gave it to Cleopatra)

Lower Acropolis:

- upper, middle, and lower gymnasiums
- temple of Demeter and the sanctuary of Hera

Asclepieion (3 km south):

- sanctuary of Asclepius—the god of healing [picture]
- Barclay: Sufferers were allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple. In the temple there were tame snakes. In the night, the sufferer might be touched. . . . The touch of the snake was held to be the touch of the god himself, and the touch was held to bring health and healing.
- a healing spring (patients would bathe here)

The church in Pergamos is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture and is not the 'Perga' in Acts 13-14.

Revelation 2:12-17 (NKJV)

The City is Distinguished (12a)

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

The Christ is Described (12b)

‘These things says He who has [holds, possesses] **the sharp** [swift, quick] **two-edged** [having a double mouth] **sword** [Gk = *rhomphaia*, a large sword worn on the right shoulder]:

The Commendation is Delivered (13)

13 “**I know** [I have perceived it because I have seen it] **your works** [business, employment, what you’re occupied with, what you make, what you are doing], **and where you dwell** [settle], **where Satan’s** [adversary (one who opposes another in purpose or act)] **throne** [chair] **is. And you hold fast** [Greek = *krateo*, in the present active indicative tense, which means to keep on holding on to] **to My name** [name, cause], **and did not deny My faith** [conviction of the truth of anything, belief] **even in the days in which Antipas** [against all] **was My faithful** [trusty] **martyr** [a witness who proves the genuineness of their faith in Christ by undergoing a violent death—Jesus is referred to this way in [Revelation 1:5](#); martyrdom purifies], **who was killed among** [beside, near] **you, where Satan dwells** [settle].

The Condemnation is Disclosed (14-15)

14 **But** [Nevertheless] **I have** [hold, possess] **a few** [small number of] **things against you, because you have** [hold, possess] **there those who hold the doctrine** [teaching] **of Balaam** [literally, ‘perhaps’; Balaam's story is in [Numbers 22-24](#); [Ray C. Stedman: Balaam was a false prophet who had been hired by Balak, the King of Moab, to curse Israel, but when he tried to do so he found he could not. Every time he tried to curse them, words of blessing came out of his mouth. God would not let him curse His people. So, in order to achieve the end for which he had been hired, he paid beautiful maidens from Moab and Midian to parade before the young men of Israel, tempting them into sexual immorality. Since these women were worshipers of idols, by that means he introduced idol worship into the tribes of Israel. Thus he corrupted and enticed them into sin.](#)], **who taught Balak** [a devastator or spoiler] **to put** [to throw or let go of a thing without caring where it falls] **a stumbling block** [Greek = *skandalon*, the movable stick or trigger of a trap] **before** [in the presence of] **the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality** [Greek = *porneuo* (the root word for our English pornography); prostitution, unlawful sexual intercourse. [David Guzik: Sexual immorality marked the whole culture of the ancient Roman Empire. . . . To paraphrase the Roman statesman Cicero . . . “If there is anyone who thinks that young men should not be allowed the love of many women, he is extremely severe.”](#)]. **15** **Thus** [In this manner] **you also have** [hold, possess] **those who hold** [hold, possess] **the doctrine** [teaching] **of the Nicolaitans** [literally, ‘destruction of people’; a group upholding the liberty of eating things sacrificed to idols as well as committing fornication], **which thing I hate** [Greek = *miseo* (the root for our English word misery)—mixture putrefies. [Tony Garland: The problem for the church at Pergamum was not that Nicolaitans existed in the city, but that they were within the church](#)].

The Counsel is Directed (16)

16 Repent [an imperative, to change your mind], **or else** [otherwise] **I will come to you quickly** [without delay] **and will fight** [war] **against them with the sword** [same word as in [Revelation 2:12](#)] **of My mouth** [not a double-mouthed sword as [Revelation 2:12](#) indicates, but a single mouth—that of a person].

The Challenge is Declared (17)

17 “He who has [holds, possesses] **an ear, let him hear** [an imperative] **what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes** [conquers, the Greek is the verb form of the English word Nike (meaning victorious)] **I will give some of the hidden** [concealed] **manna** [literally, what is it; the food that nourished the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness] **to eat. And I will give him a white** [light, bright] **stone, and on the stone a new** [fresh] **name** [name, cause] **written which no one knows except him who receives** [takes] *it.*”

Some ideas from [Tony Garland](#) about the white stone:

- **Token of Innocence** (as in a vote for innocence as white stones were votes for innocent and black stones were votes for guilty)
- **Token of Privilege** (given to victors of Olympic games with subsequent social privileges—these were rectangular bone fragments that had a man’s name inscribed on them as well as the date of the event)
- **Good Omen** (a person would put a white or black stone in an urn for each day—white represented good days, black represented bad days; at the funeral, the stones were counted to see if the person had a happy or sad life)
- Regardless of interpretation, it is obviously used in a highly positive manner

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Background on Thyatira

Pronounced, "thoo-OT-eh-rau"; Thyatira means "odor of affliction"

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Thyatira was . . . an important point in the Roman road system, for it lay on the road from Pergamum to Laodicea. Wikipedia: It was famous for its dyeing and was a center of the indigo trade. Among the ancient ruins of the city, inscriptions have been found relating to the guild of dyers in the city. Indeed, more guilds are known in Thyatira than any other contemporary city in the Roman province of Asia (inscriptions mention the following: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers, and bronze-smiths).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: This 'purple' was obtained from the madder root [pictures], and was still produced in the district, under the name 'Turkey red,' into the present century.

New Unger Bible Dictionary: The principal deity of the city was Apollo, worshiped as the sun-god under the surname Tyrinnas [picture]

David Guzik: Thyatira was the smallest and least important of the seven cities Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 and 3. In history, we have no record that the Christians of Thyatira suffered any significant political or religious persecution. When Paul was going through Philippi, he met Lydia (from Thyatira) in Acts 16:13-15, but the church in Thyatira is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture.

Today, the city of Akhisar ('white castle') sits on the ruins of Thyatira and about 100,000 live there.

Revelation 2:18-29 (NKJV)

The City is Distinguished (18a)

18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira [odor of affliction] write,

The Christ is Described (18b)

'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass [a compound word meaning brass and frankincense--implying a fine quality]:

The Commendation is Delivered (19)

19 **"I know** [I have perceived it because I have seen it] **your works** [business, employment, what you're occupied with, what you make, what you are doing], **love** [agape love], **service** [the feminine form of the Greek word *diakonos*--where we get our English word for deacon (a servant)], **faith** [trust, conviction], **and your patience** [steadfastness, constancy, endurance] [Ray C. Stedman: Love leads to service; faith leads to perseverance. If you love God, you will serve his people. You cannot help it. It is the sign that you love that you are willing to serve.]; **and as for your works** [business, employment, what you're occupied with, what you make, what you are doing], **the last are more than the first** [meaning these traits are growing].

The Condemnation is Disclosed (20-23)

20 **Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow** [permit, give up, let go, leave alone] [David Guzik: This shows the sin of the church of Thyatira. On the outside, they were a model church, showing works, love, service, faith, and patience. Yet there was significant corruption inside the church.] **that woman Jezebel** [ironically enough, 'chaste'], **who calls** [says about] **herself a prophetess** [a woman to whom future events or things hidden from others are at times revealed, either by inspiration or by dreams and visions; Anna being a true prophetess in Luke 2:36--David Guzik: This 'Jezebel' at the church of Thyatira wasn't really a prophetess, she only claimed to be one.], **to teach and seduce** [to cause or lead away from the right way; to deceive one away from the truth] **My servants** [David Guzik: Jesus said this would happen in Matthew 24:11] **to commit sexual immorality** [prostitution, sexual idolatry, or any unlawful sexual intercourse] **and eat things sacrificed to idols** [Ray C. Stedman: Evidently there was in the church at Thyatira a woman who was a very dominant leader. Jesus names her "Jezebel." That was not her name, of course, but our Lord always names people according to their character. That is why he often renames people in the Gospels. Here he chooses the name of the most evil woman in the Old Testament. . . . She was the wife of King Ahab of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and she is particularly noted for having made the worship of the god Baal popular in Israel. Baal was a fertility god, and his worship involved immoral and licentious practices. . . . It was Jezebel who spread that degraded worship widely among the ten tribes of Israel until it became one of the popular religions of the day. She herself supported over 800 prophets of Baal, who ate at her table. She was the one who tried to kill Elijah. . . . She was also the one who murdered her neighbor Naboth because her husband wanted his vineyard. . . . According to the prophecy of the Old Testament, Jezebel ended her days by being thrown from her palace window into the courtyard below where the dogs came and ate her body and licked up her blood. . . . [The New Testament Jezebel] taught that it was all right for Christians to indulge in sexual immorality and in idolatry. . . . Here is the link with the trade unions of Thyatira. In order to work in these unions, which constituted the entire business of the city, Christians had to join a union, or guild, made up of pagans for the most part. . . . [from William Barclay] *"These guilds met frequently, and they met for a common meal. Such a meal was, at least in part, a religious ceremony. It would probably meet in a heathen temple, and it would certainly begin with a libation [pouring of a drink offering] to the gods, and the meal itself would largely consist of meat offered to idols."* . . . In order to make a living they had to belong to a union, but to attend the union was to become involved, or to be sorely pressured to become involved, with the worship of idols and with licentious and lascivious debauchery. So they had to make a choice. . . .

apparently Jezebel had begun to teach that it was all right for them to go along with the requirements of the guild, that they needed to submit to the pressures of the world around in order to make a living, and that God would understand and overlook this. Her philosophy was what you often hear today: "Business is business." If business practices collide with your Christian principles, then your principles have to go--because you have to make a living. Have you ever heard that argument? David Guzik: One ancient Christian named Tertullian wrote about Christians who made their living in trades connected to pagan idolatry. . . . [and then] justify this by saying, "This is my living, and I must live." Tertullian replied . . . "Must you live?". **21 And I gave her time to repent** [change of mind leading to a change of actions] **of her sexual immorality** [a narrower word than in [Revelation 2:20](#), this one limited only to illicit sexual intercourse], **and she did not repent.** **22 Indeed** [an imperative meaning to look, or see] **I will cast** [to throw without concern of where a thing falls] **her into a sickbed** [William Barclay said this, "is also the word for a *banqueting couch*; and if that meaning is taken, the meaning is: 'I will strike her down as she sits at her forbidden feasts.'"] [[Ray C. Stedman: There is a note of irony or sarcasm there.](#)], **and those who commit adultery with her** [speaking specifically to those she has seduced into sexual relations] **into great tribulation** [major oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits], **unless they repent of their deeds** [business, employment, what you're occupied with, what you make, what you are doing]. **23 I will kill her children with death** [the OT Jezebel's children died (see [2 Kings 10:1-7](#)), but this may be referring to spiritual children], **and all the churches shall know** [understand, get acquainted with the fact] **that I am He who searches** [examines] **the minds** [kidneys (place of emotion)] **and hearts** [place of intellect]. **And I will give to each one of you according to your works** [business, employment, what you're occupied with, what you make, what you are doing].

The Counsel is Directed (24-25)

24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have [hold] **this doctrine** [teaching], **who have not known** [understand, get acquainted with the fact] **the depths of Satan** [God has 'deep things' as well (note [1 Corinthians 2:10](#)); [Ray C. Stedman: Whenever God has something good, Satan imitates it](#)], **as they say, I will put on you** [to throw without concern of where a thing falls] **no other burden** [heaviness, weight, burden, trouble]. **25 But hold fast** [an imperative] **what you have** [hold] **till I come** [am present]. [[J. Hampton Keathley, III: It's much like the second law of thermodynamics which simply put says, life goes from order to disorder. . . . Things naturally go downhill unless there is great effort against those forces that, like gravity, tend to pull us downward. So there is always the need to cling to the Lord and hold tightly through a close walk with Him .](#)]

The Challenge is Declared (26-29)

26 And he who overcomes [conquers, the Greek is the verb form of the English word Nike (meaning victorious)], **and keeps** [guards carefully] **My works** [business, employment, what you're occupied with, what you make, what you are doing] **until the end, to him I will give power** [legal governmental power] **over the nations— 27 ' He shall rule** [to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep] **them with a rod** [staff] **of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'** [from [Psalm 2:9](#)]**—as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 "He who has** [holds, possesses] **an ear, let him hear** [an imperative] **what the Spirit says to the churches."**

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Background on Sardis

Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures: Some thirty miles south-east of Thyatira [picture: geography] . . . according to Pliny the place where the dyeing of wool was discovered

Sardis means "red ones"

Ray C. Stedman: Sardis was built on a mountain spur about 1,500 feet above the valley floor. It was regarded as virtually impregnable to military assault. It was as geographically secure as it could get.

Ray C. Stedman: Sardis was once one of the greatest cities of the world. It had been the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, and in the 6th century BC was ruled by a fabulously wealthy king whose name, Croesus [pronounced CREE'-sus], became a byword for uncounted wealth. Some of you may remember the phrase, "as rich as Croesus."

An example of this wealth is shown in the stream Pactolus, which flowed through ancient Sardis. There was gold dust that was present in the stream . . . one could walk down to the stream and literally get gold out of the water--that's a rich place.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele [pronounced, Sybil-E'--similar to "Mother Earth"] and no temple worshipper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments. A white and clean robe was required.

David Guzik: Sardis was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. . . . This softness, this lack of discipline and dedication, was the doom of Sardis on a few different occasions. The Greek historian Herodotus tells the story of the fall of Sardis in days of Cyrus [549 BC]. King Cyrus had come to Sardis, and found the position of the city ideally suited for defense. There seemed to be no way to scale the steep cliff walls that surrounded the city. He offered a rich reward to any soldier in his army who could figure out a way to get up to the city. One soldier studied the problem carefully, and as he looked he saw a soldier defending Sardis drop his helmet down the cliff walls. He watched as the soldier climbed down a hidden trail to recover his helmet. He marked the location of the trail and led a detachment of troops up it that night. When they scaled the cliffs, and came to the actual city walls, they found them unguarded. The soldiers of Sardis were so confident in the natural defenses of their

city they felt no need to keep a diligent watch. So the city was easily conquered [the king that Cyrus captured? Croesus]. Curiously, the same thing happened almost 200 years later when Antiochus attacked and conquered the overconfident city that didn't set a watch.

Ray C. Stedman: Thus, Sardis was a city characterized by a complacent spirit. They were 'OK' because of their security.

Wikipedia: remains include the bath-gymnasium complex, synagogue and Byzantine shops

The church in Sardis is not mentioned anywhere else in the Scripture.

Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV): Secure Sardis

The City is Distinguished (1a)

1 **“And to the angel of the church in Sardis** [red ones] **write,**

The Christ is Described (1b)

‘These things says He who has [holds] **the seven Spirits of God** [a symbol of the fullness of the Holy Spirit] **and the seven stars** [representing the seven churches as stated in [Revelation 1:20](#)]:

The Condemnation is Disclosed (1c)

“I know [I have perceived it because I have seen it] **your works** [business, employment, what you're occupied with, what you make, what you are doing], **that you have** [hold] **a name** [name, cause] **that you are alive** [alive and enjoying life], [[John Piper on James 1:22: I am self-deceived](#)] **but you are dead** [Greek = *nekros*, from the Greek root word that means corpse--can mean either physical or spiritual death; obviously here meaning spiritually dead because physically dead people don't read letters: destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God, because given up to trespasses and sins; inactive as respects doing right; destitute of force or power, inactive, inoperative; **Swete: The paradox of death under the name of life**].

Ray C. Stedman: As in all these letters, the life of the church is revealed in its deeds. Our Lord says, as he does in most of the letters, "I know your deeds; I know your works." In Sardis . . . They had a good reputation, but it was actually a dead church. The members of it were for the most part not even believers. . . . Hollywood has given us a name for people like that: it calls them "Zombies"--corpses that are alive, that walk about as though they are living but they are really dead. This church had **zombies for members**. If you Google, "zombie church Sardis" you'll get 177,000 hits--including some really good sermons.

The Counsel is Directed (2-3)

2 **Be** [an imperative] **watchful** [the root word means to wake up and the tense indicates that this should be done continuously; keep on watching, keep on being alert, keep on waking up], **and strengthen** [an imperative; stabilize, place firmly, set fast, fix, make firm, confirm] **the things which remain** [the rest of the things--the things that aren't fully dead], **that are ready** [about to, to intend to] **to die, for I have not**

found [observed, found, discovered] **your works** [business, employment, what you're occupied with, what you make, what you are doing] **perfect** [full, complete] **before** [in the presence of] **God. 3 Remember** [an imperative; recall] **therefore how** [the way--some of your translations may say 'remember what' but that is a poor translation and misses the emotional nature of the memory] **you have received and heard** [heard, understood, comprehended]; **hold fast** [an imperative; take care of this, guard it, keep it in the state that it was] **and repent** [an imperative; change your mind]. **Therefore if you will not watch** [to pay attention unless through neglect destruction overtakes you; the root word means to wake up], **I will come upon you** [I will arrive unexpectedly] **as a thief** [an embezzler, a pilferer--one who doesn't care about what he takes], **and you will not know** [a double negative in the Greek; meaning to perceive, understand, be acquainted with] **what hour** [any specific time period] **I will come upon** [arrive unexpectedly to] **you.**

Ray C. Stedman: This church in Sardis was so devoid of life that it actually had no struggles going on within it. Notice the difference between it and the other churches. There are no Jewish accusers of this church even though there was a large colony of Jews in the city of Sardis. [These Jews] ignored the church, or perhaps did not even know of its existence. There were no false apostles here. There were no domineering Nicolaitans who needed to be guarded against. There were no female seducers, as at Thyatira. There was no reason for Satan to mount an offensive attack because no one was mounting an attack against Satan--Sardis was not a threat to Satan. Caird says it was "A perfect model of inoffensive Christianity." It was at peace, but Barclay says it was, "the peace of the dead." Ed Stetzer Twitter quote.

The Commendation is Delivered (4-5)

4 You have [hold] **a few** [small number of] **names** [names, causes] **even in Sardis who have not defiled** [polluted, stained, contaminated, defiled; the root word means black] **their garments; and they shall walk** [progress, walk, live their lives] **with** [with, after, behind] **Me in white** [light, brightness], **for** [because] **they are worthy** [have weight or substance]. [Why are they worthy? Because Jesus made them worthy. **David Guzik: Real righteousness is receiving God's covering instead of trying to cover ourselves. Adam and Eve tried to cover their own sin (Genesis 3:7) but God provided them with a covering that came from sacrifice (Genesis 3:21).**]

5 He who overcomes [conquers, the Greek is the verb form of the English word Nike (meaning victorious)] **shall be clothed** [surrounded, clothed] **in white** [light, brightness] **garments** [like the angel in **Matthew 28:3**], **and I will not blot out** [a double negative in the Greek--actually **the strongest negative possible in the entire Greek language**; meaning to wipe out, wipe away, obliterate] **his name** [name, cause] **from the Book** [book, scroll] **of Life** [**David Guzik: Does this mean that someone can lose their salvation? That someone is saved one day--their name is in the Book of Life--and another day, they have fallen away and their name has been blotted out from the Book of Life? . . . The focus is assurance, so we should not think that names are being constantly erased and then re-written. The focus here is on assurance, not the idea that Jesus sits in heaven with a busy eraser.**]; **but I will confess** [to acknowledge openly and joyfully; the root of this word is the normal Greek word for confess (meaning to say the same thing about); this word means to say the same thing about with great joy] **his name** [name, cause] **before** [in the presence of] **My Father and before** [in the presence of] **His angels.** [Clearly a reference to **Matthew 10:32** and **Luke 12:8**]

J. Hampton Keathley, III: There is even evidence that a person's name was sometimes removed from the city register before death if he had been convicted of a crime. When these messages were written, Christians were under the constant threat of being branded as social rebels and stripped of their citizenship if they refused to recant or denounce their faith in Christ. So here, as a source of motivation and encouragement, the Lord personally reminds the overcomer not only of the safety of his heavenly citizenship, but of the special acknowledgment the Lord Himself will give before the Father and before His angels.

The Challenge is Declared (6)

6 **“He who has** [holds, possesses] **an ear, let him hear** [an imperative] **what the Spirit says to the churches.”** [David Guzik: We must all hear what the Holy Spirit says to the church at Sardis. It is easy to drift in sleepy apathy towards spiritual death, especially when you have a good reputation (people recognize that you are mature in Christ), and when you place a high value on stability. But there is always hope for the dead church, because **Jesus is an expert at raising the dead.**]

Introduction to Revelation 2-3

Ray C. Stedman: There were many other churches in the province of Asia at the time John wrote this letter. Others of them could have been selected, but only these seven were chosen. They were not even the best known churches in Asia, but they were chosen by the Lord because they represent conditions . . . throughout the whole period of church history from its beginning to its end. We are taking the position that the seven angels are actual angels and not stand-ins for pastors, etc.

It is important to remember that Christ is the Author of each letter, the Answer to each problem, and the Authority in each life. There is a pattern to the structure of these letters. The pattern looks like this:

1. City is Distinguished
2. Christ is Described
3. Commendation is Delivered
4. Condemnation is Disclosed
5. Counsel is Directed
6. Challenge is Declared

Background on Philadelphia (Geography)

I think of Rocky and cheese steaks when I think of Philly. Philadelphia means “brotherly love.”

Wikipedia: Was established in 189 BC by King Eumenes II. . . . Eumenes II named the city for the love of his brother . . . Attalus II, whose loyalty [the Romans offered to support Attalus II in overthrowing his brother and he declined] earned him the nickname, “Philadelphos”—“one who loves his brother.”

David Guzik: Philadelphia was originally founded as a missionary outpost for Hellenism, the culture of ancient Greece [to spread the language and culture of Greece to all of Asia].

Ray C. Stedman: the city was destroyed by an earthquake in 17 AD, along with Sardis and other cities in that locality. Most of the other cities recovered rather quickly from the disaster, but the aftershocks [the Greek historian Strabo said the aftershocks occurred daily] continued in Philadelphia for quite a number of years, with the result that the people had to flee the city repeatedly [many of the inhabitants lived outside the city for extended periods of time]. Tiberius Caesar helped Philadelphia to recover from the earthquake [by not requiring it to pay taxes for a short while], and out of gratitude the city changed its name to Neocaesarea (New Caesar).

William Barclay: Philadelphia had so many gods and so many temples that sometimes men called it ‘Little Athens’. . . . Philadelphia honored its illustrious sons by putting their names on the pillars of its temples [picture] Not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture.

Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV): Friendly Philly

The City is Distinguished (7a)

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia [brotherly love] write,

The Christ is Described (7b)

‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true [meaning, ‘true and not fake,’ not, ‘true and not false’; J. Hampton Keathley, III: Philadelphia . . . gave to the emperor the title “The Son of the Holy

One.”), “He who has [holds] *the key of David, He who opens and no one* [no man/no thing] *shuts* [closes], *and shuts and no one* [no man/no thing] *opens*”:

The Commendation is Delivered (8-10)

8 “**I know** [I have perceived it because I have seen it] **your works** [business, employment, what you’re occupied with, what you make, what you are doing]. **See** [indeed, behold, look, see; an imperative], **I have set** [given] **before you** [in your presence] **an open door** [an opportunity—Paul uses this same imagery in **1 Corinthians 16:9**; **J. Hampton Keathley, III: First, open doors of opportunities, no matter how hard we think we have worked to open the doors to this ministry or that one, are gifts from the Savior because without Him, they would not open. Second, open doors are trusts given to us for faithful stewardship just as with our spiritual gifts or our finances.**] [David Guzik: These Christians in Philadelphia seem to have been excluded from the synagogue. The open door may also speak of their opportunity to enter God's kingdom in contrast with their exclusion from the synagogue.], **and no one** [no man/no thing] **can** [has the power to, is able to] **shut** [close] **it** [*himself*]; **for you have** [hold] **a little strength** [*dunamis*; power, strength, ability—but even a little dynamite will blow things up], **have kept** [taken care of this, guarded it, kept it in the state that it was] **My word, and have not denied My name** [name, cause]. **9** **Indeed** [indeed, behold, look, see; an imperative] **I will make** [give] **those of** [out of, from] **the synagogue** [congregation] **of Satan** [the adversary], **who say they are Jews and are not, but** [nevertheless] **lie** [deliberately deceive by lying]—**indeed** [indeed, behold, look, see; an imperative] **I will make them come** [so that they come to seek an intimacy in order to become a follower: to come upon one (unexpectedly)] **and worship** [the Greek word is *proskuneo*, where we get our English word prostrate; it is a compound Greek word: the first part meaning to come near and the second part meaning a dog—the idea being that you come near someone and lick the hand (or more appropriate for this culture, kiss)—it was an idea of respect and showing submission to] **before** [in your presence] **your feet** [two possible meanings: (1) in this culture, you put your foot on your enemy that was conquered or (2) disciples listening to their teacher's instruction are said to be at his feet], **and to know** [understand, perceive, discern] **that I have loved** [*agapao*, welcomed, entertained, fond of, loved dearly] **you**. **10** **Because you have kept** [taken care of this, guarded it, kept it in the state that it was] **My command** [word—command is far too strong a word to use here] **to persevere** [steadfastness, constancy, endurance, a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith by the greatest trials and sufferings], **I also** [likewise] **will keep** [take care of, guard, keep it in the state that it was] **you from** [out of, from, away from] **the hour** [hour, specific time] **of trial** [an experiment, attempt, trial, proving] **which shall** [is about to] **come upon the whole world, to test** [to try, make trial of, test: for the purpose of ascertaining his quantity, or what he thinks, or how he will behave himself] **those who dwell on the earth**.

The Condemnation is Disclosed (N/A)

David Guzik: Look at the features of the church in Philadelphia: (1) Evangelistic opportunity (I have set before you an open door), (2) Reliance on God (you have a little strength), (3) Faithfulness to Jesus (have kept My word, and have not denied My name). In some ways, these features seem “unspectacular.” They should be commonplace among churches. Yet Jesus was *completely* pleased with this church. He has *nothing* negative to say to the church at Philadelphia.

The Counsel is Directed (11)

11 Behold [indeed, behold, look, see; an imperative], **I am coming** [appearing] **quickly** [quickly, speedily, without delay—the idea is suddenness, not immediacy]! **Hold fast** [get possession of, master, rule, continue to handle] **what you have** [hold], [so] **that no one** [no man/no thing] **may take** [take, receive—i.e., beat you to the finish line] **your crown** [there are two types of crowns in Greek: one for a king and one for a winner—this crown is for the winner. **Terrill Price: Crowns can be lost. Believers are in a race. We run to receive a crown. We don't run to receive salvation. That's a gift. The crown is given at the end of the race. To receive the crown or crowns because all are attainable, we have to follow the rules (see him for more on this topic—neat stuff but not enough time to get in to it here). Vance Havner: “Never forget that the man most likely to steal your crown is yourself.”**].

The Challenge is Declared (12-13)

12 He who overcomes [conquers, the Greek is the verb form of the English word Nike (meaning victorious)], **I will make him a pillar** [symbolic of stability and permanence—Paul refers to Peter, James, and John as pillars in **Galatians 2:9**] **in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more** [meaning to never leave that place like the Philadelphians had to do because of the constant earthquakes and tremors]. **I will write on him the name** [name, cause] **of My God and the name** [name, cause] **of the city of My God, the New** [unused, unworn, a new kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of] **Jerusalem, which comes down** [descends] **out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new** [unused, unworn, a new kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of] **name** [name, cause]. [The Philadelphians wrote on the pillars the names of those that were special because they thought the pillars would last a long time. God writes on us His name because we will last forever and we will be able to reflect His glory with His name on us.]

13 “He who has [holds, possesses] **an ear, let him hear** [an imperative] **what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

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Background on Laodicea (Geography)

Laodicea means “justice of the people” (or “rule of the people”)

Wikipedia: Built by Antiochus II Theos, in 261-253 BC, in honor of his wife Laodice [her nephew was Attalus II—the man whose brotherly love was the reason for Philadelphia being named Philadelphia].

Wikipedia: Laodice had Berenice (her husband’s next wife) and her son murdered, which began the Third Syrian War (also known as the Laodicean War).

Wikipedia: Antiochus III the Great transported 2,000 Jewish families to Phrygia from Babylonia. Many of Laodicea's inhabitants were Jews.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Laodicea was . . . a highly commercial and wealthy city.

Laodicea was primarily known for banking, manufacturing, and medicine.

Ray C. Stedman: A particular breed of black sheep were raised around this area, and the glossy, black wool was woven into special clothes that were sold here.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: In 60 AD Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake. Being highly resourceful and self-sufficient, the people restored their own city rather than receive a Roman government loan.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Laodicea received its water through an aqueduct coming from a spring four miles to the south. The waters of neighboring Hierapolis, however, were famous as hot springs and would have provided a contrast with the tepid aqueduct water in Laodicea. By contrast also there was Colossae which had ice cold springs, but nothing like this was known in Laodicea.

David Guzik: Poor water supply: If an enemy army surrounded the city, they had insufficient water supplies in the city, and the supplies coming into the city could be easily cut off. The leaders of Laodicea were always accommodating to any potential enemy, and always wanted to negotiate and compromise instead of fight. Laodicea lies in ruin today.

Laodicea is mentioned five times in Colossians—the most significant is Colossians 4:16.

Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV): Lackadaisical Laodicea

The City is Distinguished (14a)

14 “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

The Christ is Described (14b)

‘**These things says the Amen** [an expression of absolute trust and confidence], **the Faithful** [used of persons who show themselves faithful] **and True** [real, true, genuine] **Witness** [a witness who proves the genuineness of their faith in Christ by undergoing a violent death—used of Jesus in **Revelation 1:5**; used of Antipas (from Pergamos) in **Revelation 2:13**], **the Beginning** [beginning, origin, leader, active cause, extreme corner, first place—like a bookend] **of the creation** [the act of establishing] **of God:**

The Commendation is Delivered (N/A)

The Condemnation is Disclosed (15-17)

15 “**I know** [I have perceived it because I have seen it] **your works** [business, employment, what you’re occupied with, what you make, what you are doing], **that you are neither cold nor hot** [boiling hot]. **I could wish** [used when you wish a thing to happen but know that it will probably will not be done—example: teenager cleaning his/her room] **you were cold or hot.** **16** **So then, because you are lukewarm** [tepid, lukewarm], **and neither cold nor hot, I will** [intend to] **vomit** [not spit, vomit] **you out of My mouth.** **17** **Because you say, ‘I am rich** [abounding in material resources or eternal possessions], **have become wealthy** [richly supplied], **and have** [hold] **need of nothing** [no thing, no one]’—**and do not know** [to have perceived because you have seen it] **that you are wretched** [afflicted with enduring toils and troubles], **miserable** [worthy of pity], **poor** [destitute to the point of being reduced to begging], **blind** [mentally or physically blind—the root word means to be blinded by pride], **and naked—**

The Counsel is Directed (18-20)

18 **I counsel you to buy** [to go to the market and buy] **from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich** [richly supplied]; **and white** [white, light] **garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame** [confusion, disgrace, shame, dishonor] **of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint** [rub; an imperative] **your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.** **19** **As many as I love** [*phileo*, brotherly love, fondness], **I rebuke** [convict, correct, punish] **and chasten** [to cause to learn, to scourge]. **Therefore be zealous** [burn with zeal; an imperative] **and repent** [change of mind leading to a change of actions; IFAAI]. **20** **Behold** [See; an imperative], **I stand at the door and knock.** [David Guzik: Philadelphia was “The Church of the Open Door,” . . . Laodicea is “The Church of the Shut Out Jesus.”] **If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to** [near or towards] **him and dine** [J. Hampton Keathley, III: the main meal of the day . . . for hospitality and fellowship] **with him, and he with Me.**

The Challenge is Declared (21-22)

21 **To him who overcomes** [conquers, the Greek is the verb form of the English word Nike (meaning victorious)] **I will grant** [grant, give] **to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame** [conquered] **and sat down with My Father on His throne.** **22** “**He who has** [holds, possesses] **an ear, let him hear** [an imperative] **what the Spirit says to the churches.””**