

# Chapters 2–3

## Christ's Messages to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor



### The Church in Ephesus — 2:1-7

**Verse 1**—*“To the angel*—The revelation of Jesus was given by God to Jesus, *and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John (1:1).* So it seems to me, the message to the churches was from God, given to Jesus, who communicated it by His angel, one of whom was over the group of believers in each city, who then communicated it to John, who wrote it to the churches. The word “angel” is used 71 times in Revelation. No one disputes who they are later in the book, and there is no reason to change the meaning of the word to something else in these chapters. [The angel of each church is not the “pastor.” There was no such thing in the New Testament church. That is to not only read our time but our American culture into the New Testament time.]

- *of the church*—Paul wrote, *...the church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23).* By definition, the church is believers in Jesus. The “local church” as we know it today is impossible because it is made up of both believers and unbelievers. Also, the church should not be defined as a “gathering.” Paul wrote *...if the whole church should assemble together (1 Corinthians 14:23).* Gathering is something the body of Christ does, it does not define who they are.
- **The City:** *in Ephesus*—This letter is being sent to all the believers (the church) in the whole city of Ephesus. Ephesus was a seaport on the western coast of Turkey. Paul had visited Ephesus about 43 years before this letter was written to them. He remained there several years and preached the Gospel to them (see Acts 19–20). After that, the Apostle John (who wrote the book of Revelation) lived in Ephesus before his exile to the island of Patmos, off the coast of Ephesus (Rev. 1:9). It was from Ephesus *that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10).*
- *Write*—John was commanded by Jesus to *write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches (1:11).*
- *The One*—The glorified Jesus, as described in 1:13-16.
- *who holds the seven stars in His right hand—the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches (1:20).*
- *the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands—the seven lampstands are the seven churches (1:20).* Jesus is also described as *in the middle of the lampstands (1:13).* It is from this perspective that He is observing everything they do and don’t do.
- *says this*—Jesus is the author of this message. He alone is the authority in our lives. We are all accountable to Him.

**Verses 2-3—Their Commendation:** *‘I know*—Gk. *oida*, lit. “complete and full knowledge.”

- *your deeds and your toil*—their labor was to the point of exhaustion. They were hard workers.
- *and perseverance*—emphasizes patience, a courageous acceptance of hardship and suffering
- *and that you cannot tolerate evil men*—Paul had written to the Ephesians to not *give the devil an opportunity (Ephesians 4:27)*, and they held to that standard. They had spiritual discernment.
- *and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false*—Paul had told them, *...after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things,*

to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert (Acts 20:28-31). The Ephesian believers were doctrinally sound.

- *and you have perseverance and have endured*—They remained faithful to the Lord and loyal to His Word and to the work He called them to do.
- *for My name’s sake—God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2:9-11). Salvation comes by His name (John 1:12; Romans 10:13) and by His name comes persecution (Matthew 10:22).
- *and have not grown weary*—It does not mean to become physically tired, but to not give up the fight. *Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary* (Galatians 6:9). Remember the example of Jesus. *For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart* (Hebrews 12:3).

**Verse 4—Their Condemnation:** *‘But I have this against you [i.e., the church, the believers], that you have left your first love—Paul wrote of the first generation of Ephesian believers, ...having heard of...your love for all the saints* (Ephesians 1:15) and *...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able...to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...* (3:17-19). Evidently, these second generation believers kept the doctrine that was taught them and had maintained a high level of service, but they were increasingly lacking in love for Christ and others. Jesus said, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”* (Matthew 22:37-39).

**Verse 5—** He urged them to do three things:

- *‘Therefore remember from where you [believers] have fallen—lit. “keep on remembering,”* recall and reflect on the past and the joy of the Lord they used to have.
- *and repent—*to change one’s mind or direction. It includes confession of sin with the view of stopping the bad behavior so it can be replaced with what is right.
- *and do the deeds you [believers] did at first—i.e., repeat.* This can’t mean Christian service because Jesus already said they did that well. So these deeds have to do with their first love from which they have fallen, i.e., the love and joy of fellowship with Jesus Christ, focusing our life on Him and who He is. Good doctrine and service for Christ is important, but it should be done because of our love of Christ and who He is.
- **Warning:** *or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent—*The lampstand is the light of a Christian witness, removing the believers themselves.

This, of course, was tragically fulfilled ultimately. The city, now uninhabited, is one of the important ruins in that area, located seven miles from the sea due to accumulation of silt which has stopped up the harbor of this once important seaport (Walvoord).

Today, Ephesus is an Islamic area.



**Verse 6—‘Yet**

*this you do have,*

*that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*—Also mentioned in the letter to Pergamum, it's not clear exactly who they were. In the Pergamum letter, they are linked with Balaam's false teaching that led Israel into sexual immorality. Clement of Alexandria wrote that the Nicolaitans "abandon themselves to pleasure like goats...leading a life of self-indulgence." To hate something is to not choose it, to not love it (see Romans 9:11-13). The Ephesians believers did not choose a life of self-indulgence and sexual immorality. Jesus had said, "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*" (Matthew 16:24).

**Verse 7—Appeal:** *'He who has an ear, ...* Although the letter is to the group of believers in Ephesus, it's the individual who responds and can change. No group appears before Christ for judgment—only individuals (1 Corinthians 3; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10). The text says, *He who has an ear,* not "those who have ears."

- *let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*—Hearing is not merely listening, or even agreeing with what is said. It is understanding and responding. Making a difference in your life.
- **To him** *who overcomes*—again, it is an appeal to the individual person. *Overcomes* what? The problem He addressed for the Ephesian believers, i.e., those who did not remember that Christ is the object of all doctrine and all Christian service. Overcoming is to grow in their love of Him. As Solomon wrote, *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life* (Proverbs 4:23).

**Reward:** *I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*—This is a literal tree (Rev. 22:1-22). This is not equivalent to salvation nor is it necessary for maintaining eternal life, because that comes from receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior. So it seems to mean a reward, a heavenly blessing for those who love Christ.

**Application:** Doctrinal knowledge and service for God are important, but loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind is first and foremost.

## **The Church in Smyrna — 2:8-11**

**Verse 8**—"*And to the angel of the church*— see 2:1

- **The City:** *in Smyrna write*—Smyrna was a large and wealthy city, 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was, and still is, a seaport. Today it is called Izmir, with a population of about 200,000. This city is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. All that is known about the believers in Smyrna is contained in this letter. Smyrna is the Greek word for myrrh, often used in anointing the dead (John 19:39). Myrrh had to be crushed in order to give out its fragrance. So the believers in Smyrna were persecuted and crushed by the Romans.
- *The first and the last*—With respect to time, Jesus was first in that He was the Creator and existed as God before creation (John 1:1-2; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13). And He is the last because He is the Judge of the Great White Throne judgment, where the unbelieving dead will be judged at the end of time (Revelation 20:11-15).
- *who was dead, and has come to life, says this*—These are descriptions of Christ taken from 1:17-18. Jesus, in His humanity, did die, but He rose from the dead, to never die again. He is alive forevermore. This should encourage the believers in Smyrna to have an eternal perspective.



**Verse 9—Their Commendation:** *I know your tribulation*—Jesus knows when we suffer. It's part of our age. Jesus said, *...In the world you will have tribulation* (John 16:33). In the Millennial Kingdom, the believers will have peace in the world, but not now.

- *and your poverty*—Gk. lit. “extreme poverty,” what a contrast in a city that was known for its wealth.
- (*but you are rich*)—physically they were poor, but spiritually they were rich. A lack of material wealth does not prohibit spiritual wealth. James 2:5 says, ...*Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith?*...
- *and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not*—Paul wrote, *He is not a Jew who is one outwardly...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly* (Romans 2:28-29). So probably these were Jews by race but were spiritually pagan.
- *but are a synagogue of Satan*—Satan is mentioned in four of the seven letters (2:9, 13, 24; 3:9). Speaking of religions, especially of sacrifices, Paul said ...*they sacrifice to demons, and not to God* (1 Corinthians 10:20). To worship and believe in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ, as described in the Bible, is blasphemy and of Satan.

Along with the church in Philadelphia, Smyrna did not receive a condemnation.

**Verse 10—Appeal:** *Do not fear what you are about to suffer*—Already Jesus acknowledged their suffering and their faithfulness to Him, but He warned them that more suffering was coming. But they were not to be afraid. As David wrote, *In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?* (Psalm 56:11).

- *Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you [believers] into prison*—God is allowing Satan to do this to the believers, similar to Job (Job 1–2) and the future tribulation saints.
- *so that you will be tested*—God’s purpose is to test their faith, to give greater glory to God. Satan’s purpose is to get them to curse God. As with Job, Satan thinks God is buying our faith, and if there is suffering, we will turn away from God.
- *and you will have tribulation for ten days*—evidently, for ten days the persecution will be very severe. We don’t know when that ten days was.
- *Be faithful*—Greek present tense, “continuous or repeated action.” Middle voice, the subject performs an action upon herself for her own benefit. Imperative mood, a command to make each attitude/action our habitual practice.
 

“We may never be martyrs but we can die to self, die to sin, die to the world, die to our plans and ambitions. ...But do we consent to that? Are we willing to be God’s wheat to be planted where He wills? Can we honestly say, “Whatever the cost, by the grace of God, I will not fear but will be faithful to Christ, come what may?” ~Vance Havner
- *until death*—The most famous martyr from Smyrna was the early church father Polycarp, who was killed about 50 years after John:
 

“...when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, “Leave me as I am; for He that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile [of wood]. Looking up to heaven, he said, ‘O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee...I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs...Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as an acceptable sacrifice...I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with Thy beloved Son, with whom to Thee be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen.’ When he had pronounced this amen, they kindled the fire and the flame blazed forth in great fury...”

**Reward:** and I will give you the crown of life—the reward for faithfulness to Jesus, even in suffering. True Christians persevere (Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 4:13-20; John 8:31; Colossians 1:21-23; 1 John 2:19). James 1:12 says, *Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has passed*

*the test, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. “Salvation is a free gift, but rewards, for those who are saved, are earned. The **quality** of our service is the criterion. Rewards are often spoken of as crowns” (Ryrie). ...each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the **quality** of each man’s work (1 Corinthians 3:13).*

**Verse 11—Appeal:** *‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches [believers]—The message is addressed to all the believers in Smyrna, but the response is individual.*

**Reward:** *‘He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death’—The second death is described in Revelation 20:14. It is conscious, eternal damnation in the lake of fire. *If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15).**

**Application:** The characteristic of our dispensation is suffering and persecution. But do not fear the persecution of the world. It is a test. Be faithful until death, and you will be rewarded in eternity.

## **The Church in Pergamum — 2:12-17**

**Verse 12—***“And to the angel of the church—see 2:1*

- **The City:** *in Pergamum write—This city was located about 45 miles north of Smyrna. It was a wealthy and wicked city, with cults worshipping the Greek gods Athena, Dionysus, and Zeus. But it was most known for its several temples devoted to Roman emperor worship. It was also well known for its university, with a library of about 200,000 volumes, rivaling the library at Alexandria, Egypt (the largest in the known world). It was a very evil city, filled with idols.*
- “Pergamum is credited with being the home and namesake of parchment. Prior to the creation of parchment, manuscripts were transcribed on papyrus, which was produced only in Alexandria. When the Ptolemies of Africa refused to export any more papyrus to Pergamum, King Eumenes II commanded that an alternative source be found. This led to the production of parchment, which is made out of a thin sheet of sheep or goat skin. Parchment reduced the Roman Empire’s dependency on Egyptian papyrus and allowed for the increased dissemination of knowledge throughout Europe and Asia. The introduction of parchment also greatly expanded the holdings of the Library of Pergamum” (*wikipedia*).
- *The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this—Jesus is describing Himself as the Judge (see v. 16). At His Second Coming, it says, *From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty (Rev. 19:15).* This is the first negative introduction of Jesus. It is a warning of coming judgment for those who forsake God. “Here there is added emphasis by the repeated use of the article before the word sword and before each adjective. Christ is described as having *the sword, the two-edged one, the sharp one*” (Walvoord).*



**Verse 13—Their Commendation:** *I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is—This could refer to the rampant idol worship in this city. For example, the “altar” of Zeus was a colonnaded court in the form of a horseshoe, 120 by 112 feet. The podium was 18 feet high. Many of these have been excavated. Another temple to Asklepios, the “god” of healing was full of snakes. People would lay in the temple, hoping to be touched (and healed) by one of the snakes. But the worst of them was the Roman emperor worship. Failure to worship the emperor frequently resulted in death. The word*

*throne* indicates a master or lord. Satan was ruling in Pergamum. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German engineers dismantled the so-called “Throne of Satan” and it went on display in the city’s Pergamon Museum in 1930, just in time to inspire one of the most brutal dictators the world has ever seen (Robertson, “The Seat of Satan: Ancient Pergamum”).



- *and you hold fast My name*—We are instructed to *hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end* (Hebrews 3:6); *hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end* (3:14); *let us hold fast our confession* (4:14). Cling to Christ’s name.
- *and did not deny My faith*—The believers were faithful to Christ.
- *even in the days of Antipas, My witness* [Gk. *martus*, i.e., “martyr”], *My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells*—Nothing else is known of him except he was martyred for his belief in Christ, and he was faithful to death. It was a time of great testing for the believers.

**Verse 14— Their Condemnation:** An Old Testament heresy—*‘But I have a few things against you [the church, i.e., believers], because you have there some [unbelievers] who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel—*

1. *to eat things sacrificed to idols and*
2. *to commit acts of immorality.*

Numbers 22–25 and 31 tell us the story of Balaam. He was a non-Israelite prophet, whom the Moabite King Balak hired to curse the Israelites (who were on their way to the land of Israel from their Egyptian bondage). But on his way to curse the Israelites, an angel of the Lord used Balaam’s donkey to bar his way, and Balaam struck his donkey because it would not go forward. Then God caused the donkey to speak to Balaam. God kept Balaam from cursing the Israelites. But later, Balaam came up with another scheme where he sent Moabite women into the Israelite camp, and the *people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.* As John wrote, there were some **among the believers** in Pergamum who were enticing the believers *to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality*, to abandon the teachings of Christ. “I have never gone out to mingle with the world without losing something of myself” (Albert the Great, friend and mentor of Thomas Aquinas).

**Verse 15—A New Testament heresy—***‘So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.* As mentioned in the letter to the church in Ephesus, Clement of Alexandria wrote that the Nicolaitans “abandon themselves to pleasure like goats...leading a life of self-indulgence.” To hate something is to not choose it, to not love it. Israel had false prophets and the church has false teachers—all with the goal of getting believers away from God and His Word.

**Verse 16—Appeal:** *‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth—*obviously, this is talking about unbelievers. John had written, *They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us* (1 John 2:19). The believers were allowing in their midst **so-called** believers who held to false teaching, who were encouraging the believers to live a self-indulgent lifestyle, even worshipping idols and committing acts of immorality. Paul wrote, *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump...clean out the old leaven...I wrote to you...not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world,...for then you would have to go out of the world. But*

*actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person...—not even to eat with such a one (1 Corinthians 5:6-11).*

**Verse 17—Appeal:** *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (believers)—Once again, the message is to the group but the response is by the individual person.*

**Reward:** *To him who overcomes—Christ promises three things to the faithful:*

1. *to him I will give some of the hidden manna—Perhaps this refers to Christ as the Bread from heaven, the believer's spiritual food, as the Israelites had physical manna for physical food.*
2. *and I will give him a white stone—It's unclear what the white stone refers to. In the Bible, white usually means righteousness, so this somehow represents our salvation and the righteousness we receive from Christ.*
3. *and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it'— God told the Israelites a similar thing, that the ... foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord ... and choose[s] what pleases Me ... To them I will give ... a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off (Isaiah 56).*

**Application:** The warning is clear: Do not tolerate false teaching that leads you *astray from the singleness and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).*

## **The Church in Thyatira — 2:18-29**

**Verse 18—***And to the angel of the church—see 2:1*

- **The City:** *in Thyatira write:* Thyatira was about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum. Unlike Smyrna or Pergamum, Thyatira was located in a river valley and lacked an acropolis, the usual site of temples to idols. It was known for its wool and purple dyeing industry (a dye taken from the madder root, a perennial climbing plant with evergreen leaves and small pale yellow flowers, the roots can be over three feet long, and are usually harvested in the second or third year of growth. Considered an ancient or heirloom dye plant, madder has been used throughout history for the brilliant orange and red hues it can produce.) Lydia, *a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.* She was from Thyatira, was converted by Paul when he was in Philippi, and he and those with him stayed in her house when they brought the Gospel to Thyatira (Acts 16:14-21). This is the smallest of the cities, yet it has the longest letter.
- *The Son of God—*The only time this phrase appears in Revelation. Here the emphasis is especially on the deity of Christ.
- *who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this—*The description of Christ in 1:14-15. Nothing can be hidden from His sight. *It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17).*



**Verse 19—Their Commendation:** *'I know your deeds, and your love—*contrasting to those in Ephesus, Thyatira is the first group of believers to be commended for their love.

- *and faith—in Christ*
- *and service and perseverance—*Out of love and faith come service and perseverance.

- *that your deeds of late are greater than at first*—In contrast to the believers in Ephesus, whose love now was less than before, the service for Christ by those in Thyatira were greater as time went on.

**Verse 20—Their Condemnation:** *‘But I have this against you, that you tolerate*—The Greek word *aphiemi*, which means “to send away, leave alone, or permit.” Tolerance is a sin. Tolerance is one of the three “don’ts” that are destroying believers today:

- Don’t Judge (Tolerance)
- Don’t Hate (Love Wins)
- Don’t Condemn (Universalism)
- *the woman Jezebel*—Probably not her real name, but she was like the wife of King Ahab, who was so evil, the Bible describes King Ahab’s marriage to her as the most wicked thing he did (1 Kings 16:30-31). Through her influence, Baal worship became widespread in Israel.
- *who calls herself a prophetess*—claiming to receive new revelation from God.
- *and she teaches and leads*—A violation of the clear biblical teaching that women are not to be teachers of men or leading men (1 Timothy 2:12).
- *My bond-servants astray*—she is leading the true believers away from God and His Word, condoning sin.
- *so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols*—True Christians can fall into sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:15-20) and idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:21). But to lead other Christians into false doctrine or immoral living is a very serious sin (Matthew 18:6-10).

**Verse 21—‘I gave her time to repent**—A gift of God’s grace

- *and she does not want to repent of her immorality*—The Greek words are first aorist active indicative, indicating an action in past time. Probably this means there was a “definite visit or message of warning to this woman” (“Word Pictures in the New Testament”). But she loved darkness rather than the light (John 3:19). Peter described unrepentant sinners as, *They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having...loved the wages of unrighteousness* (2 Peter 2:13-15).

**Verse 22—‘Behold, I will throw her on a bed** [of sickness—not part of the Gk text]—more likely the bed is death and hell, for those who do not repent.

- *and those who commit [spiritual] adultery with her into great tribulation* [distress, trouble], *unless they repent of her deeds*—because they are believers who are committing the spiritual adultery, if they don’t repent, they are thrown into great tribulation, but not into hell, as she was.

**Verse 23—‘And I will kill her children with pestilence** [lit. “death”]—Those believers who follow her false teaching and don’t repent, will get trouble from God, even death, as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11; see also 1 Corinthians 5).

- *And all the churches* [believers] *will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts*—An Old Testament reference to God (1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 7:9; Proverbs 24:12; Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; 20:12). Nothing can be hidden from the eyes of God.
- *and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds*—What you do reveals what you believe!! (See Matthew 7:16; 16:27; Romans 2:6; 2 Timothy 4:14.) Works do not get you saved, but they are the basis for divine judgment. Works cannot save, but they do damn.



**Verse 24**—*‘But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching—true believers, who kept the faith in Christ and His Word*

- *who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—*The believers in Smyrna faced hostility from the “synagogue of Satan” (unbelieving Jews), the believers in Pergamum existed at the site of Satan’s throne (2:13), but the believers in Thyatira were exposed to *the deep things of Satan*.

—*I place no other burden on you—*comfort and hope to those whose faith is genuine. The burden of being exposed to the *deep things of Satan* was enough burden to bear.

**Verse 25—Appeal:** *‘Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come—* This is our encouragement even today. The Tribulation and antichrist will not be revealed until *the apostasy* [falling away from the faith] *comes first* (2 Thessalonians 2:3). So we can expect to see this falling away even now, as we approach the End Times. That means we may feel alone as we see those around us falling away from the faith. Believers will need to hold fast until the Second Coming of Jesus.

**Verse 26—Reward:** *‘He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS—*Reigning in Christ’s earthly Millennial Kingdom.

**Verse 27—***AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES—*Now, Jezebel’s rule is in the world of Satan’s domain, but in Christ’s kingdom, righteousness will rule. If humans break the rule of righteousness, they will be broken, like a piece of pottery.

- *as I also have received authority from My Father—*see John 5:22, 27.

**Verse 28—***and I will give him the morning star—*Jesus Himself (Rev. 22:16). Christ promised believers Himself in all His fullness (1 Corinthians 13:12).

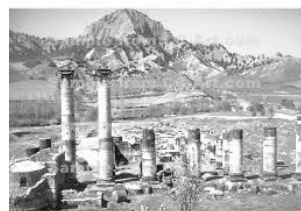
**Verse 29—Appeal:** *‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’—*Again, the group gets the message, but it’s the individual person who can respond to the message.

**Application:** Hold fast to God and His Word. Don’t be led astray by false teachers claiming to be from God, especially if they are women who are leading and teaching men (already disobeying the Bible).

## **The Church in Sardis — 3:1-6**

**Verse 1—***“To the angel of the church—*see 2:1

**The City—***in Sardis write—*Sardis was about 50 miles southeast of Thyatira. “It was an important and wealthy city located on the commercial trade route running east and west through Lydia. Much of its wealth came from its textile manufacturing and dye industry and its jewelry trade. Most of the city practiced pagan worship, and there were many mystery cults or secret religious societies. The magnificent Temple of Artemis dating from the fourth century B.C. was one of its points of interest and still exists as an important ruin. The church to which the letter was addressed continued its existence until the fourteenth century. Today only a small village known as Sart exists amid the ancient ruins.”



~Walvoord. Ancient Sardis was built on an acropolis with cliffs on three sides. They thought they were impregnable and didn't even keep watch on the cliff sides, from which the armies came and defeated them. It came under Roman rule in 133 B.C., and was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 17. Emperor Tiberius rebuilt the city, and they made a temple in his honor, as well as a temple to Diana, but by John's day, it was a decaying city.

- *He who has the seven Spirits of God*—mentioned in 1:4, it probably refers to the fullness of the Holy Spirit (see Isaiah 11:2).
- *and the seven stars*—*The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches* (1:20).
- *says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive*—They had a reputation that they were doing effective ministry. Men would commend them, but Christ did not.
- *but you are dead*—But God *sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7). And what Jesus saw in their hearts was—*you are dead*. It's like a museum with stuffed animals in their natural habitats. They look alive, but they are actually dead.
  - Some think these people are unbelievers, but, for several reasons, it seems to me that they are carnal believers. First, Jesus is addressing the believers in Sardis. And, Jesus tells them *remember what you have received and heard*, which indicates they are believers. It also seems like their reputation was based on religious deeds that impressed others. But Paul described these kinds of deeds as *wood, hay, and straw*, the kinds of works that don't impress God, that will be burned up at the Bema judgment, that will not be rewarded in heaven (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

**Verse 2**—*'Wake up*—do something. Are you a maturing Christian or a sleeping Christian? ...*examine yourselves* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

- *and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die*—Hebrews 2:1 says, *we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it*. Do nothing to grow and mature, and you will drift away from what you already know of God and His Word. There is no standing still!! Strengthen what you do know before you drift away from that, too.
- *for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God*—mature. Hebrews 5:11–6:1 says, *...by this time you ought to be teachers, ...you have come to need milk and not solid food...but solid food is for the mature...let us press on to maturity*. There is unfulfilled potential.

**Verse 3**—*'So remember what you have received and heard*—It reminds me of the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:10-23). Maybe you hear the Word with joy and agree with it, but you go home and the things of life snatch it away, so you don't even remember what you heard. Or the worry of the world or the deceitfulness of riches choke out the Word. Paul talked about *weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth* (2 Timothy 3:6-7).

- *and keep it*—*by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:3-4). You do not **know** Jesus unless you **obey** Jesus!
- *and repent*—have you ever repented for forgetting the Word? For not obeying the Word?
- *Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you*—We do not know how much time we have on the earth to prepare for eternity. At any moment, you could have a stroke, go blind, .....or die. And—Jesus said, *we will not know at what hour I will come to you*. Don't think you have lots of time and you'll repent and live right in God's eyes later. You may not have a "later." There's an urgency to be obedient to God today (2 Corinthians 6:2).

**Verse 4—Their Commendation:** *‘But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments—they were obedient, repentant, mature believers.*

- *and they will walk with Me in white—white garments (v. 5).* Those who refused to spiritually defile their garments on earth would have new white garments in heaven. *For the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:8).*
- *for they are worthy—salvation is not based on works, but rewards are based on works.* Those who live in obedience to Christ, will be rewarded in eternity.

**Verse 5—‘He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments—19:8**

- *and I will not erase his name from the book of life—*Some say this implies that our names can be erased, but that is NOT what it says. [It might imply that if a human was saying it, but here it’s Christ who is saying it—it’s His promise to us, and God is able and does keep His promises!] It’s a strong promise that those whose names are in the book of life, have eternal security. No one, not even Christ, will erase their names from that book. And it’s the people whose names are in the book of life, *from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; 17:8)*, who have received Jesus as their personal Savior, who will go to heaven to be with Him. *And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).*
- *and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels—*Jesus also said this during His earthly life: *Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven, and ... also before the angels of God (Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8).* This word “confess” is the Greek word *homologeō*, which means “to speak the same, to agree, to acknowledge.” It’s not about religious works that impress men, it’s about acknowledging Jesus as God and Savior and living a moral life that speaks the same as He does, to live in agreement with Him.

**Verse 6—‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’—**Again, the message goes out to all believers, but the response is by individual believers.

**Application:** You spiritually snooze—you spiritually lose!!

## **The Church in Philadelphia — 3:7-13**

**Verse 7—***“And to the angel of the church—see 2:1*

- **The City:** *in Philadelphia write—*This city was about 28 miles southeast of Sardis and 65 miles east of Ephesus. The king of Pergammum built the city in 189 B.C. and named it “Philadelphus,” the nickname of his brother, for whom he had great love and who became his successor because he had no children. It is similar to the Greek word meaning “brotherly love.” The city was destroyed in an earthquake in A.D. 37 and suffered many aftershocks. As with other Asia Minor cities, the Roman emperor helped them rebuild, and temples were made in honor of him and to worship him.
- *He who is holy—*Jesus is the righteous One, *...who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).*
- *who is true—Jesus said..., “I AM...the truth” (John 14:6).* There are at least three important things about truth: (1) Truth is always absolute, not relative. True things are always true. (2) Truth always corresponds to reality. Truth is the way things actually are. (3) Truth is always non-contradictory. Truth is logical (a thing and its opposite cannot both be true).



- *who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this*—This is a quote of Isaiah 22:22. In that passage, the key of the house of David was given to Eliakim. He then had authority over all of the king’s treasure. It seems that Jesus is making a parallel—as Eliakim controlled the king’s treasure, so Jesus has the authority over our spiritual treasures. *He knows your deeds and I have put before you an open door which no one can shut.* As a believer, God has opened spiritual doors for us, and nothing man can do can close those. Jesus also said He has *the keys of death and Hades* (Rev. 1:18) and the *key of the abyss*—the dwelling place of the worse of the demons and where Satan will be bound for 1000 years (Rev. 9:1; 20:1-2). It indicates power and authority.

**Verse 8**—*I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut*—the emphasis is on Christ’s sovereign power. What is the “open door”? Possibly the open door for testimony and ministry, that cannot be shut by any persecution.

- **Their Commendation:** *‘because you have a little power*—Perhaps this has to do with their impact on the culture around them, influencing people with the truth of Jesus.
- *and have kept My word*—Like Job, who said, *I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food* (Job 23:12).
- *and have not denied My name*—especially by martyrdom

**Verse 9**—*‘Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie*—As in Smyrna, Christians in Philadelphia faced hostility from unbelieving Jews. Racially and culturally they were Jews, but spiritually, they were not (see Romans 2:28-29).

- *I will make them come and bow down at your feet and make them know that I have loved you*—probably meaning at the Great Throne Judgment, where all unbelievers will bow before Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11), and they will know that God loves His chosen people.

**Verse 10**—*Because you have kept the word of My perseverance*—They have persevered through many trials, but have kept God’s Word and have not denied His name. In our church age, Jesus said, *...In the world you will have tribulation* (John 16:33). But Jesus will keep the church age believers from the tribulation that will come on the **whole** world.

- *I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth*— This seems to refer to the testing John is about to describe in chapters 4 to 19. Jesus also referred to this as a tribulation that will come upon the whole earth before His Second Coming (Matthew 24). To those who believe in Jesus, He promises, *I also will **keep you from** the hour of testing.* This cannot mean just the believers in Philadelphia because He said the testing is to come upon *the whole world*. So it must mean that those believers in Christ in the Church Age, who are alive when it is the time for this worldwide testing, will be **kept from** it.

“He could not have stated it more explicitly. If Christ had meant to say that they would be preserved **through** a time of trouble, or would be **taken out** from within the Tribulation, a different verb and a different preposition would have been required” (Walvoord, *Revelation*).

Believers are taken to heaven at the Rapture, thus **kept from** the Tribulation to come (see John 14:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:9).

— Also, significant is the Greek phrase *tereo ek* (**keep from**). Some think the English means that the church will go through the tribulation judgments and that God will preserve them in the midst of it. However, the meaning of *ek* is “from,” “out from,” or “away from.” If Jesus meant the church would be preserved through the tribulation, He would have used the words *en* (“in”) or *dia* (“through”). But *tereo ek* means just the opposite: continuous existence outside.

**Verse 11**—*I am coming quickly*—the Rapture, Jesus coming for His bride.

- *...hold fast what you have*—*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful* (Hebrews 10:23). John also wrote, *Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward* (2 John 2:8).
- *so that no one will take your crown*—You can gain and lose crowns, or rewards, in heaven. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 says, *each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

**Verse 12**—*He who overcomes*—The true believer, who will be rewarded.

- *I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God*—a pillar is a stability, also a place of honor “This perhaps had peculiar significance to those who were in Philadelphia because of their historic experiences with earthquakes which frequently had ruined their buildings and left only the pillars standing. They are assured of continuance throughout eternity because of their faith in Christ as the One who enables them to overcome the world” (Walvoord).
- *and he will not go out from it anymore*—security in heaven
- *and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name*—In the tribulation to come, the 144,000, *...having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads* (Rev. 14:1). Also, the antichrist has his name on the people who worship him (Rev. 13:16-17). This is a sort of branding, indicating ownership and protection.

**Verse 13**—*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*’—Again, the message is to the group of believers, but the response is by the individual.

**Application:** Hold fast to God’s Word, persevere under trial, live like Jesus could return at any moment...

## **The Church in Laodicea — 3:14-22**

**Verse 14**—*To the angel of the church*—see 2:1. There are some who say these people are unbelievers. But Jesus here calls them the “church” [*ekklesia* “called out ones”], by definition, the “body of Christ,” “those who believe” (Ephesians 1:19, 22-23). [The only way you can claim these are unbelievers is to have an institutional definition of the “church,” which does include believers and unbelievers. But that’s not the Bible’s definition of “church.”]

**The City: in Laodicea**—“This city founded by Antiochus II in the middle of the third century before Christ and named after his wife Laodice. It was situated about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia on the road to Colossae. It was located on a plateau several hundred feet high. Under Roman rule Laodicea had become wealthy and had a profitable business arising from the production of wool cloth, medicine, and banking. When destroyed by an earthquake about A.D. 60, it was able to rebuild without any outside help. Its economic sufficiency tended to lull the church to sleep spiritually; and though there is mention of the church as late as the fourteenth century, the city ... is now in complete ruins.” ~Walvoord

- The New Testament does not record the beginning of the believers at Laodicea. Paul wrote to the Colossians, *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face* (2:1). Since Paul’s co-worker Epaphras evangelized the people in nearby Colossae (1:6-7), he may



have done so in Laodicea also.

- *Write: The Amen*—This is the only place in Scripture that describes Jesus as “The Amen.” But in Isaiah 65:16, God is twice called the “God of truth [Heb. *amen*].” The Hebrew word means “truth,” “affirmation,” or “certainty.” That which is firm, fixed, and unchangeable. *Amen* is often used in the Bible to affirm the truthfulness of a statement. In 1 Corinthians 1:20, Paul writes concerning Jesus, *For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes [confirmed]; therefore also through Him is our Amen [certainty] to the glory of God through us.*
- *the faithful and true Witness*—He is completely trustworthy, perfectly accurate, and His testimony is always reliable.
- *the Beginning of the creation of God, says this*—In the Greek text, it is clear that Jesus was NOT the first person God created but rather that Christ Himself is the source or origin of creation (see also John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2; Rev. 22:13).

There is no commendation.

### **Their Condemnation**

**Verse 15**—*I know your deeds*—works do not save you, but they do indicate your spiritual state. Jesus said, *You will know them by their fruits* (Matthew 7:16; Romans 2:6-8; James 2:14f). As with the believers in the other six cities, Jesus knew exactly what they were doing.

- *that you are neither cold nor hot*—“hot” people are those “on fire” for God. “Cold” would be believers who have no interest in Christ or His Word. From God’s perspective, they are saved and their names are written in the Book of Life. From our perspective, we might call them “carnal Christians” (from “carne” meaning “of the flesh,” i.e., they *participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness*—Ephesians 5:11) or we may have no assurance they are saved.
- *I wish that you were cold or hot*—then there would be hope for their maturity

**Verse 16**—*So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth*—This does not mean they lose their salvation. It’s a figure of speech, indicating the disgust Jesus has for them. “It is apparent that there is something about the immediate state that is utterly obnoxious to God” (Walvoord).

**Verse 17**—*Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*—They had a disastrously inaccurate self-assessment. They were deceived about their actual spiritual condition. They were materially wealthy, and they assumed that meant they were spiritually wealthy, too. But they were not spiritually wealthy, and every more sadly, they didn’t even know it. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. The foundation is Christ. *Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; ...because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work ...remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved.* It seems to me these believers in Laodicea were building with wood, hay, and straw. Rather than be rewarded in heaven, they will suffer loss.

**Verse 18**—*I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich*—It’s not the desire for wealth that God is opposed to. It’s the desire for earthly wealth that He is against. We should want to be rich and *have treasure in heaven* (Matthew 19:21). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, God will test our works with fire, and it’s the gold that will remain and be rewarded.

- *and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed*—It seems like this is referring to the *fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine lin-*

*en is the righteous acts of the saints* (Rev. 19:8). How sad it would be to be in heaven but be naked, with no rewards/clothes!! “Shame” is “a loss of respect or esteem; dishonor, a regrettable or unfortunate situation or action.”

- *and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see*—Jesus compared “seeing” to “understanding.” *For the heart of this people has become dull, ...and they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes...and understand with their heart* (Matthew 13:10-17). David wrote, *Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law* (Psalm 119:18).

**Verse 19**—*‘Those whom I love, I reprove [expose, convict] and discipline*—Discipline is to steer in the right direction. It is not punishment for a wrong doing. Love (as defined in the Bible—doing the best good for the other person) requires discipline. Where there is no discipline of children, there is no love of children. For example, you shouldn’t punish a child for doing drugs, but ask what you can do to steer them in the right direction—that’s the goal. Jesus loves the believers in Laodicea, and He will discipline them to get them on the right track towards being pleasing to Him. Hebrews 12:5-11 speaks about discipline. *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness* (v. 11).

- *therefore be zealous* [Gk. “to have a warmth of feeling toward or against”] *and repent*—This could refer to being against the way they were or it could mean to have the positive feeling toward Christ—but either way, they need to repent, that is, change direction.

**Verse 20**—*‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me*—This verse is so often taken out of context, usually used in an evangelistic sense. However, it is written to believers, who need to repent and turn back to Christ. He’s waiting at the door of their hearts, but they have to open the door to Him, and He will come in and fellowship with that person.

O Jesus, Thou art standing Outside the fast-closed door,

In lowly patience waiting To pass the threshold o’er.

Shame on us, Christian brothers, His name and sign who bear,

O shame, thrice shame upon us, To keep Him standing there. ~Vance Havner

*...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God* (Colossians 1:10; see also Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16, 25; Ephesians 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15; 2 John 6). *Walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory* (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

**Verse 21**—*‘He who overcomes*—As before, the condemnation is for all the believers in Laodicea, but only individuals can respond.

- *I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne*—This is part of the reward for believers—*If we endure, we will also reign with Him* (2 Timothy 2:12).
- *as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*—*let us lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:1-3).

**Verse 22**—*‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’*

**Application:** Jesus said in Matthew 13:15, *For the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear*. Do His words go in one ear and out the other? Or do they actually

make a change in you? *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments* (1 John 2:3).

## **Four Different Views of the Rapture**

All four views of the Tribulation and the Rapture are within the premillennial camp.

### **The Partial Rapture Position**

Not all believers will be taken at the Rapture of the church but only those who are “watching” and “waiting” for that event, who have reached some degree of spiritual attainment that makes them worthy to be included (Luke 21:36; Philippians 3:11; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 9:28).

#### **Problems with This Position:**

1. The result of salvation is that the sinner is justified, made acceptable to God (propitiation), placed in Christ positionally (reconciliation) and received by God as though he were the Son Himself (redemption). So there is no spiritual attainment beyond salvation that a person could possibly reach in order to be acceptable to God.
2. They must deny the New Testament teaching on the unity of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13). If the Rapture only includes a portion of believers, it dismembers the body of which Christ is the head; the building of which Christ is the cornerstone; the priesthood of which Christ is the chief priest; and the bride of whom Christ is the bridegroom.
3. Nowhere in the teaching about rewards is the Rapture included as a reward for watching (Rev. 2:10; James 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; Philippians 4:1; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Timothy 4:8).
4. If this view is correct, the believer’s position before God would depend on his works, not on grace.
5. They deny the distinction between Israel and the church. They use Scriptures applicable for Israel and apply them to the church (Luke 21:36; Matthew 24:41-42).
6. They must place a portion of the believing church in the Tribulation. The church does not need such a purging judgment unless the death of Christ is ineffective.

**Therefore, the Partial Rapture position must be rejected.**

### **The Posttribulation Rapture Position**

The church will continue on the earth until the Second Coming of Christ when the church will be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord who has come in the air on His way from heaven to earth for the Second Coming, to return immediately with Him.

#### **Problems with This Position:**

1. They deny the distinctions between Israel and the church because the Tribulation is a Jewish event designed to prepare Israel for the Millennium.
2. They must deny the Scriptural teaching on the nature and purpose of the Tribulation, a time of wrath, judgment, trial, and a pouring out of judgment on sin. In what sense should the church go through that (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 with Rev. 6:16-17)?
3. They deny all distinctions between the Rapture and the Second Coming, making them one and the same event.
4. They must deny the doctrine of imminence, which says that the Lord may come at any time, and substitute the teaching that a multitude of signs must be fulfilled before the Lord can come.



5. They deny any future fulfillment to the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27, claiming for it an historical fulfillment.
6. They must apply major passages of Scripture that outline God's program for Israel (Matthew 13; 24-25; Rev. 4-19) to the church.
7. Since all unbelievers are killed at the Second Coming, if all believers are Raptured, then no one is left alive to populate the Millennial Kingdom.
8. The Posttribulation Rapture position rests essentially on a system of denials of the interpretations held by the Pretribulation Rapturist, rather than on a positive exposition of Scripture.

**Therefore, the Posttribulation Rapture position must be rejected.**

### **The Midtribulation Rapture Position**

The church will endure the events of the first half of the Tribulation (which are not manifestations of divine wrath) but will be Raptured before the last 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation (which contain all the outpouring of the wrath of God).

#### **Problems with This Position:**

1. They must either deny or at least weaken the pretribulation interpretation of Scripture.
2. They deny the strict distinctions between Israel and the church.
3. They divide the Tribulation into two separate and unrelated halves so that the church can go through the first half but have no part in the last half. No such separation is made in Scripture.
4. They must deny the doctrine of imminence because all the signs of the first half would apply to the church.
5. They must deny the concept of the church as a mystery (Ephesian 3) because if the church is involved in the Tribulation, then the church is part of God's program with Israel.
6. They must depend, to a certain extent, on the spiritualizing method of interpretation.

**Therefore, the Midtribulation Rapture position must be rejected.**

### **The Pre-Wrath Rapture Position**

This view is not mentioned anywhere in church history. It is a minor view, recently invented. It was first taught by Robert VanKampen (owner of the Scriptorium) in the 1970s. VanKampen was one of the most wealthy men in America, and he had the funds to popularize his views. If he were not a wealthy individual, then very few, if any, of us would have ever heard of his view. In the early 1990s, Marvin Rosenthal published a book entitled, "The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church," which popularized this view. VanKampen subsidized the publishing of the book by buying thousands of copies and sending them to ministers all over North America. This is how the new position was spread.

This views the trumpet and bowl judgments of Revelation 7-16 as the wrath of God, from which the church is exempted (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The first six seal judgments of Revelation 6 are not considered the wrath of God but are viewed as "the wrath of Satan" or "the wrath of the antichrist." This is because there is no direct mention of God's wrath until after the sixth seal is broken (Rev. 6:17). Therefore, the church will be present to experience the first six seals. This is sometimes called the "three quarters" view, the Rapture happening "three quarters" into the tribulation. It seems (to me) to be somewhat a combination of the "partial rapture" view and the "midtribulation" view.

### **Some Problems with This Position:**

1. It divides the scroll between the first five seals and the last two seals. That means the first five seals are not the wrath of God, further dividing Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, which is the timetable of the tribulation (Daniel 9:24-27), something the Bible does not do.
2. It has many of the same problems as the midtribulation rapture view has.
3. The first four seals are sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. These same four things are described as judgments of God in Ezekiel 14:21, not judgments of man.
4. Second Thessalonians 2:4-7 states that the antichrist cannot come to power until the restraint on evil is removed, indicating the Holy Spirit's presence in believers. This happens at the Rapture. The antichrist cannot come to power while church-age believers are on earth.
5. Revelation 5 describes Jesus as the only One who can take the scroll and break its seals, and, in fact, He does that in 6:1, therefore, beginning the judgments. *No one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or look into it* (Rev. 5:3). The antichrist cannot break the first seals.
6. They say Revelation 6:9-11 are the church-age believers who have just been resurrected at the Rapture. (The passage clearly says they are only those who were *slain*). If this is correct, it would mean believers who were alive at the Rapture and had not been martyred would still be on the earth and would have to go through the sixth seal judgment. But 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says those alive are caught up into the air to be with Christ at the Rapture. This has the same problems as the "partial rapture" view.
7. Writers who have taken up the pre-wrath view and have made great sums of money through their books. Also, this has been promoted as truth by those who oppose dispensationalism (which teaches God has a separate plan for Israel and for the Christians in this church age). Among these are the Covenant theologians who teach God has abandoned Israel and now "the church" has inherited the promises God made to His chosen nation. Whereas, the Bible clearly states that the tribulation is a time of purging of the nation of Israel (such as Matthew 24) and has nothing to do with the believers of the church age.
8. Nowhere in chapters 4 to 19:7 are the church age saints mentioned. Instead, we see tribulation saints, those saved during the tribulation.

**Therefore, the Pre-Wrath Rapture position must be rejected.**

### **The Pretribulation Rapture Position**

The church, the body of Christ in its entirety, will, by resurrection and translation, be removed from the earth. This is clearly taught in the Bible. What is not as clear is the **timing** of the Rapture. But the sum of the verses indicate that the Rapture of the whole church will be before any part of the Tribulation begins. [This is the position we hold and is covered in this material.]