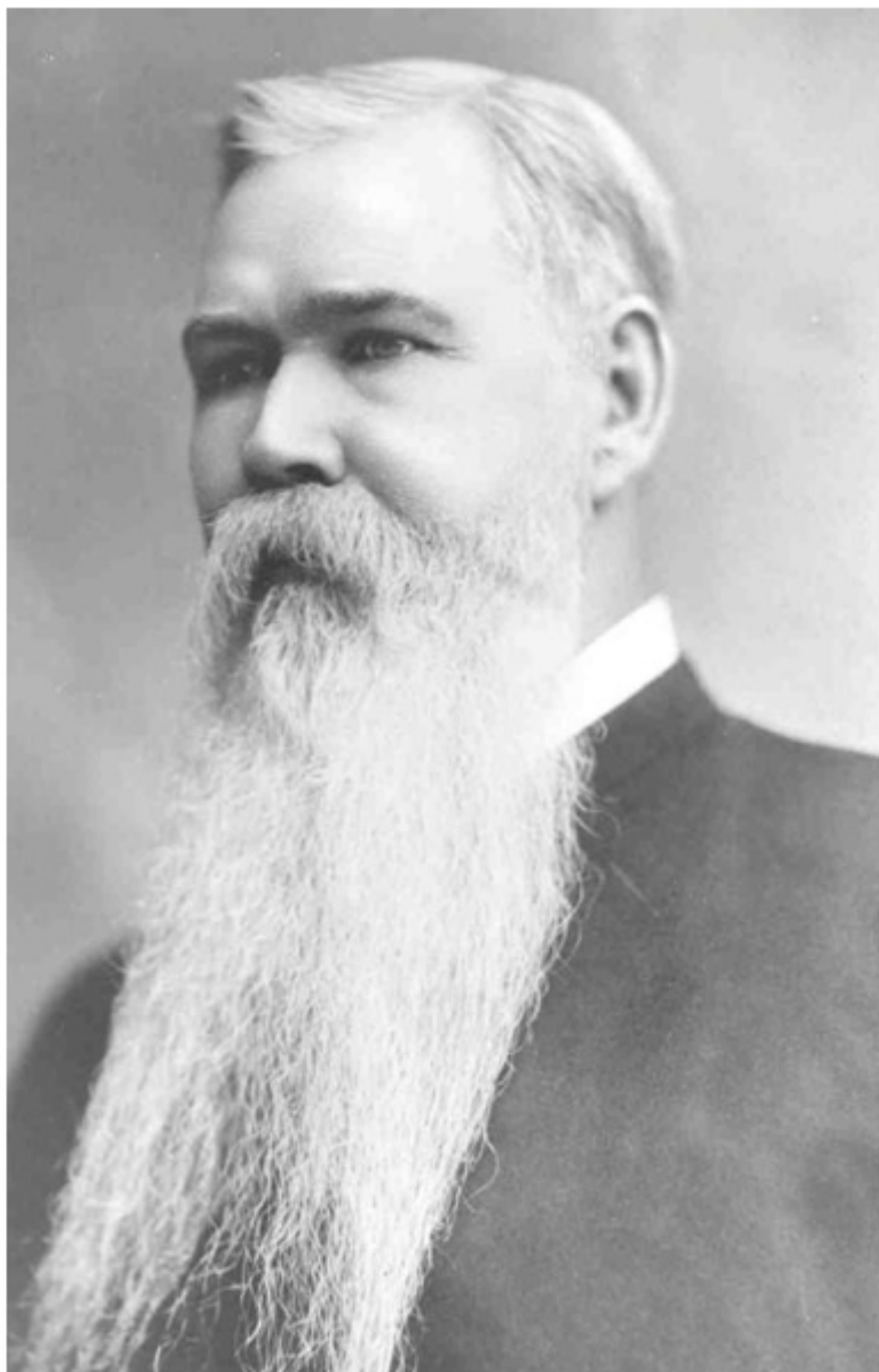


The Seven Churches of Asia

B.H. Carroll



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BY

B. H. CARROLL

INTRODUCTION

The first word in this book, as in the Old Testament books, gives its name: Greek, *Apocalupsis*; Latin, *Revelatio*; English, *Revelation*. They all mean literally an unveiling of that which is hidden.

The source of the revelation, as you see from the text, is God the Father. The medium of the revelation is Jesus Christ. The agent employed in signifying it is an interpreting angel. The revelation is made to John the apostle for the people of God. Notice that the word "signify" is appropriately used, since the revelation is to be made known by signs or symbols. The angel, who signifies it, is the author of the great voice as of a trumpet in verse 10. We hear his voice again at the beginning of chapter 4, and he reappears on the scene in the last chapters of the book. Verse 2 tells us which John received this revelation in these words: "Who bare witness of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw." It is quite important to know when John bare witness of the word of God. The tense is the "aorist" and usually, according to grammatical construction, refers to something in the completed past. Following this sense of the aorist we are bound to construe verse 2 as identifying the John to whom this revelation was made and the bearing witness would refer to the witness that he had already borne in his Gospel. This construction would conclusively establish the authorship of the book. It would prove that the author of the Gospel is also the author of this book, and that the Gospel was written first.

The only escape from this conclusion is to make the witness bearing refer to what John now does concerning this revelation which he is receiving. Many great scholars insist on making this the meaning, and calling the tense the *epistolary* aorist. I see no necessity for adopting this latter construction. By reference to John's Gospel, and indeed to his first letter, we see that he there claims to have borne witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all things that he saw and heard.

In verse 3 we have the words: "*Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy.*" We know that in later times the churches had readers who would read to them any communication received and explain the communication. The rest of the church would hear. We have already found that Paul gave directions that his letter to one church should be read to another church, and the letter to that church be also read to the first church named. So it is unnecessary to go to a later date to find the origin of a reader to the churches. The New Testament itself gives the origin.

From Revelation 1:4-6 we have John's greeting to the seven churches of Asia, to whom the entire book is addressed. Not only all of chapters 2-3 are specifically devoted to special messages for the churches named, but at the end of the book, Revelation 22:16, we have these words referring back to the whole book, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches." It is important to note in this connection our Lord's use of the word *ecclesia*. In Matthew 16, he says: "I will build my church," using the term to signify the institution. In Matthew 18, he says, "tell it to the church," referring to whatever particular congregation the decision of the case of discipline belongs. Many times in the book of Revelation he uses the word "church," and in every case the reference is to particular churches. Our Lord's usage of the word knows nothing of a now existing universal church, whether visible or invisible. He does not say to the church of Asia, but the seven churches of Asia. There is nothing in His use of the word to indicate the existence of church in any provincial, national, worldwide, or denominational sense. On the contrary, he seems to guard very carefully against such a use of the term. It is true that in chapter 12, without using the term "church," he does present the idea of the church as an institution under the symbol of the woman arrayed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, which woman later becomes, in chapter 19, the bride of Christ or the church in glory.

We have a remarkable vision which is the key passage to the interpretation of the whole book of Revelation in verses 12-16. The elements of the vision are, first, seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the candlesticks a vision of Christ as the Sun of Righteousness. He holds in His right hand seven stars and out of His mouth proceeds a sharp two-edged sword. This vision He explains himself: The candlesticks represent the churches; the stars represent the messengers or pastors of the churches; the two-edged sword represents His word, or the gospel. The whole vision is one of light. The central light—Christ, the Sun of Righteousness; the lower lights—the churches and the preachers; the instrumentality of dispensing the light—the Word of God.

In the next chapter we see that while Christ is in the midst of the churches, He is not there in person, but through the other Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who is His "alter ego," His vicar here upon earth. John in his Gospel had previously represented Christ as the light of the world, but since He ascended into heaven this light is reflected in the churches and preachers through the Spirit and by the Word. The object of the vision is to show that the whole world will be illumined by the churches and the preachers in the dispensation of the gospel, which dispensation is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, for when Christ speaks to the churches He says: "If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit sayeth to the churches." The doctrine of this vision is of incalculable importance. It teaches that the Spirit dispensation, or Word dispensation through the churches and the preachers, is to accomplish the whole work of the application of the salvation achieved by our Lord's vicarious death. We will find in every subsequent revelation this ruling thought; the world to be illumined by these light-bearers. There is no hint of any other source or medium or instrumentality of light. There is no hint that the churches will fail on the earth and that some other divine interposition must take place to finish the mystery of the kingdom of God. This is in accord with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20

"Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo! I will be with you all the days, even unto the end of the world."

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

This chapter on the analysis is the second revelation, chapters 2-3, an earth scene of "the things that are." It consists of the letters to the seven churches, and is a revelation of their condition in God's sight. Now, upon these seven letters I wish to make some general observations.

My first is that you should find a map—generally the last map in your Bible—of the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. That will show you the province of Asia - the southwestern part of Asia Minor. And on that map you must locate the seven churches. Commence at the southwestern coast of Asia Minor—there you will find the first church, Ephesus, a seaport, or used to be, situated on a little river that flows into the Aegean Sea. Follow the coast line north until you come to Smyrna, another seaport. Still going north you come to Pergamum, or Pergamos (either is correct). That is not a seaport, but is close to the sea. The first three churches, then, are found by following up the coast going north. The other four churches are inland, and you will find them by commencing a little north of where Pergamos is located, and by following a line south you come to the other churches in the order named: Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. Now, look a little off that coast from the southwestern part of Asia Minor, and you will find a little island, barely discernible on the map, called Patmos. That is where John was. So, my first observation is that the reader should locate on a map the province of Asia, the seven churches (noting which are seaports and which are inland) and Patmos.

My next observation is based upon what we considered in the last chapter, that is, the key passage of the book (Revelation 1:12-16), representing Christ as the original light, the Sun of Righteousness, shining as the sun in its full strength, reflecting His light upon the churches, and through them here on earth His reflected light is to illuminate the world. The description of this glorified Christ shows Him in the garb of a high priest, and invested with kingly rule—a royal priest. If that be the key passage, then the whole of this book up to Revelation 20:11, where you strike the climax of the book - the whole of the book up to that point is what is called the Spirit's dispensation, or the dispensation of the churches, or the dispensation of the gospel preached. Everything up to Revelation 20:11, where Christ comes to raise the dead and judge the world.

Now take that key passage of Christ as the light of the world, and trace its connection through this section we are studying, chapters 2-3. In order that you may trace it, open your Bible and read the following verses—the beginning of each letter to a church—Revelation 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14. As you read these verses introducing what is said to each church, you will see that the titles or appellatives applying to Christ, through whom this light comes, are all citations or allusions to the first revelation. So all of this section shows that this key passage unlocks everything said to the churches. In the same way we may trace the key passages through the whole of the book unlocking the meaning of every vision. The connection, therefore, between this section and the first revelation is evident in these verses.

To impress that on you perhaps you had better read these verses. Begin at chapter 2 and read only the beginning of each letter to the churches: "To the angel of the church at Ephesus write, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." Now that is a quotation from chapter 1, where the key passage is given; Christ is seen walking in the midst of the candlesticks; Christ is holding the seven stars in His right hand.

Verse 8: "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These things saith the first and the last, who was dead and liveth again."

By reading the first chapter you will find these allusions to Christ: "The first and the last, who was dead but liveth again to die no more."

Verse 12: "To the angel of the church at Pergamos write, These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword."

In that first revelation a two-edged sword is represented as issuing from His mouth, standing for His word of judgment.

Verse 18: "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These things saith the Son of God, who hath eyes like a flame of fire and feet like unto burnished brass."

That is the description of His eyes and feet as seen in the first revelation.

Now Revelation 3:1: "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars."

Evidently that is an allusion to the first revelation.

Verse 7: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none can shut, and he that shutteth and none can open."

These things are alluded to in the first revelation.

Verse 14: "And to the angel of the church of Laodicea write, These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

My third general observation is based upon Christ's own uses of the word "church" as found in Matthew and Revelation. There are twenty-three instances of Christ's using the Greek

word *ecclesia* ¾ church." In Matthew 16:18, He says, "I will build my church." In Matthew 18:17, He says, "Tell it to the church." The references in Revelation where He uses the term church or churches are the following: Revelation 1:4, 11, 20, and again Revelation 20: 2:1, 7-8, 11-12, 17-18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6-7, 13-14, 22; 22:16.

Now here are twenty-three examples of the use of the word *ecclesia* - church – as spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and it is evident from a study of these twenty-three instances of the use of the word, that Christ never said anything about an invisible or universal church. His teaching is to the contrary; He does not say the church in Asia, but "the churches in Asia." He does not use the word church in any provincial sense, or state sense, or national sense, or denominational sense. This is a very convincing exhibit of the uses of the word, as coming from the lips of our Lord, rebuking the contention of many people of the present day who talk about a universal church here on earth, whether visible or invisible—the New Testament does not know anything about either one. It is true that in Revelation 12:1 under the symbol of a woman, also in Revelation 17:3, under the symbol of another woman, He presents first the church as an institution and then the apostate church as an institution, and it is equally true that in Revelation 9:7-8 He presents the church in glory, under the symbol of a bride, and in Revelation 21:9, under the symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem, a city. So that we may say that Christ used the word to describe the time church as an institution, and to name the concrete example of this institution particular churches, and to foreshadow the coming glory church—something which does not yet exist.

My fifth general observation is the significance of Christ walking amid the candlesticks, knowing, revealing, rebuking, threatening, promising. The body of each letter will show their condition: "I know thy works," or "where thou dwellest" – and the rest of the terms to the churches telling the condition of each church. He tells the things favorable, and the things unfavorable, He rebukes, exhorts to amendment, and closes each with a precious promise. This unseen presence, this exercise of actual omniscience, this authority to rebuke or remove, this diversity and wealth of promise, tend to produce extraordinary results: it encourages the faithful that He knows and will reward; it stimulates the backslidden to revival and amendment; it alarms the unworthy and terrifies with certain and speedy judgment.

My next general observation is that this presence of Christ in the churches is not a *personal* presence—He is up in heaven, but He is present through the Spirit, His *alter ego*, the one that came down according to His promise to be His vicar, His vicegerent here on earth. Now, as proof that this is the meaning, read Revelation 2:7: "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; verse 11: "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; verse 17: "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; verse 29: "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; Revelation 3:6: "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; verse 13: "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; verse 22: "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." So that every time He says anything to any of these churches, He closed by calling it "what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

That teaches that Christ is present with His people here on earth, not in a personal sense, but through the Holy Spirit, whom He sent after He ascended into heaven. So in the Great Commission, "I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world." He is not with us in person: we cannot see Him, touch Him, feel Him, but He is present in the Spirit. That also shows that this whole book comes in the Spirit dispensation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit all through the book, up to Revelation 20:11. Christ stays up in heaven until the time of restoration of all things. While He stays up there the Spirit represents Him down here. When He comes (Revelation 20:11), the Spirit dispensation is ended, the gospel dispensation is ended, the gospel preaching is ended.

My seventh general observation is that the condition of no two of these churches is exactly the same. Look and see that the deficiency of one is not the deficiency of another. Ephesus is sound in doctrine, but deficient in love. Smyrna was poor but rich. Laodicea rich but poor. Pergamos was faithful in persecution, but wanting in discipline. In Ephesus the first works were greater than the last, while Thyatira the last works were greater than the first, and in Sardis none of its works, first or last, was perfect in God's sight. Smyrna was attaining to a crown of life, while Thyatira, having a name to live, was dead. Philadelphia glowed with fervor while Laodicea was lukewarm. I ask you to note this diversity of condition in the seven churches, that you may apply it to any seven churches in Texas. The same examination of the First Church in Fort Worth, in Dallas, Austin, Houston, San Antonio, Waxahachie, Galveston, or of the seven leading churches in any one city, would reveal similar diversity of conditions in God's sight. This application goes to confirm what is evident, namely, that these are real letters to seven contemporaneous churches. My eighth observation, that Christ's titles, and Christ's threats, and Christ's promises are adapted to meet the specific condition of each church as it comes up: He does not use the same threats, He does not use the same titles; He does not offer the same promises, but in every case there is an adaptation to the need, showing the infinite diversity in Christ so as to suit the diverse needs.

My ninth observation is that you may gather up into one sentence the promises made to the faithful ones in all of the churches - make one sentence of it. A special succeeding chapter will expound these promises to you. Let us make up that sentence now (Revelation 2:7): "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life"; verse 11 (latter part): "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death"; verse 17: "To him that overcometh will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon that stone a new name written which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it"; verse 26: "To him that overcometh and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also received of my Father, and I will give him the morning star"; Revelation 3:5: "He that overcometh shall be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels"; verse 12: "He that overcometh I will make a pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go out thence no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is the new Jerusalem which cometh down out of the heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name"; verse 21: "To him that overcometh I will give to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne." Only by grouping all of these promises into one great sentence do we understand the riches of the heavenly reward to the faithful.

My next observation is that a calm survey of the imperfect conditions of the churches and pastors makes it seem impossible that such instrumentality can bring about the glorious results set forth in Revelation 11:15 - "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." There are, however, two elements of hope in the picture: Christ is walking in the midst of the churches, leading to repentance, and the Spirit is directing and enabling. I know the first time I very carefully studied the condition of the seven churches in Asia, and then applied the revelation to any seven churches around me, with their seven pastors, I found no perfect pastor and no perfect church. Every church had some fault or faults and every pastor had some weakness or faults. So I said in my heart: "How are preachers like these and churches like these to capture the world?" and I never got over that discouragement until I read chapters 4-5, when the heaven scene of the "things that are" revealed the throne of grace with agencies and activities helping the churches and preachers on earth.

My next observation is: That the doctrine of this book of Revelation necessitates the perpetuity of the churches. The doctrine is just this: Christ will appoint no other instrumentality for the evangelization of the world; the world is to be lighted through these churches, and that when a candlestick is removed, another church is raised up, and that in every age of the world there will be some churches faithful to the Lord. That is the teaching of this book, and particularly do you find it when you come to that view of the church presented as an institution under the symbol of a woman, and the apostate church presented under the symbol of a woman. You will see the woman that represents the true church driven into the wilderness, where she is in hiding for a long time; just like Israel led out of Egypt wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years, and as historians would have a hard time tracing every day's steps of Israel in the wilderness, so a church historian now has a hard time in putting the surveyor's chain on the trace of the true churches in this wilderness period. There is no difficulty in tracing the New Testament history. Nor is there any difficulty from the Reformation period to the present. It is easy to prove that there are now churches similar in faith, doctrine, ordinances, officers, and purposes to the New Testament churches.

My next general observation is, that a candlestick be removed—that is, a particular church organization be dissolved—has no bearing on the preservation of the true Christians who are members of that church. Sardis, as a church organizer, was declared to be "dead," but "thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." The church was blotted out, but "I will in no wise blot out their names from the book of life." My last general observation is this: Since Christ has appointed these churches for the evangelization and illumination of the world, what is the law on the preacher or the member that destroys one of these churches? Paul answers that question for

us. He says to the church at Corinth: "Ye are God's building, ye are the temple of God, and him that destroys the temple of God will I destroy." And I tell you that is a very solemn thought for a preacher who so ministers that he destroys a church, or for any deacon, or deacons, who so act as to blot out a church of our Lord. The candlestick is indeed removed, but woe to him that causeth its removal. You would do a thousand times less harm to reach up and blot out the most brilliant planet in the sky than to blot out the feeblest little church here on earth which is trying to do good. Every pastor ought to bring this question up in his own heart: Is my ministry of this church building it or pulling it down; is it strengthening or destroying? What a solemn responsibility upon anybody who takes charge of a church. You may track some preachers by a trail of decayed, divided, or dissolved churches. You may track some other preachers by a trail of growing, illuminating churches - every one they labor with prospers.

I put my hand on a man's shoulders, once, when he asked me to congratulate him on being called to a certain church. I said to him: "I will give you just six months to split it into shivers." He said, "What do you mean?" I said: "Is not that the result wherever, so far, you have preached? Go back over your ministry and name a church that you really built up." To my astonishment that man still thinks a great deal of me, and the last talk I had with him he promised that if he was ever a pastor again he would prove by his pastorate that he did not split things.

CONDITION OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA

I will begin this chapter with some additional general observations. My first observation is that in each city of these seven churches there are three competing religions—heathen, Jewish, Christian. In every part we see evidence of the conflict.

My second general observation refers to the meaning of the term "angel"—each letter commences: "to the angel." Some people have wrongly supposed that each church has a guardian angel. They fail to tell us how these guardian angels communicated these messages to the churches. There are quite a number of Greek words like "apostle," "deacon," "angel," that have both an etymological meaning and an official meaning. Officially, the term "angel" refers to these messengers from God—from the upper world—but the word means messengers or representatives, and in this book—particularly in the cases of the angel in the churches—it means pastor who is the representative of the church. If I were to write a letter to the church at Austin, I would direct it to the pastor of the church, and through him as the representative it would be communicated to the church.

My third general observation relates to the doctrine of Balaam, to which reference is made in the letters to two or three of the churches. You will remember the analogue in the Old Testament where Balaam was called upon to prophesy against Israel, by Balak, the king of the Moabites, and God would not let him prophesy any evil, but he coveted the big pay that Balak offered him, and later suggested how Israel could be destroyed - by bringing about the alienation from God, telling Balak to introduce to the Israelites the most beautiful of the Moabitish women, and let them seduce the Israelites to partake of the festivals of the heathen religion as well as of the Jewish religion, and this open communion with the heathen religion resulted in the worst form of immorality and idolatry that brought about the alienation between Israel and Jehovah. Now there were two men and women living in these churches, or in these cities, who taught that doctrine. They preached open communion between the Christian religion and the heathen religion: "You come to my festival and I will go to your festival: I will partake of your Lord's Supper with you if you will partake of the heathen feast with me." Paul had already said: "You cannot partake of the cup of the Lord and the cup of the devils; you cannot eat at the table of the Lord and at the table of devils." That was the teaching of Balaam as found in these churches – and very hurtful to several of them, as you will see in the exposition.

My next general observation relates to the meaning of Nicolaitans, at least twice referred to in our letters to the churches. Some people suppose that Nicholas, who was ordained one of the seven deacons in the Jerusalem church, mentioned in Acts 6, afterward founded the doctrine here referred to, and hence those who adopted the doctrine were called "Nicolaitans." There is no particle of evidence to connect Nicholas in Acts 6 with these Nicolaitans. There was a Nicholas, doubtless, who did teach the doctrine that is here mentioned, but what you want to know is not who started the doctrine, but what was the doctrine. It was a form of Antinomianism: If election be true, and you are saved by Christ and not by works, then it does not make any difference what sin you commit; you are all right. I have seen in Texas a preacher who was a Nicolaitan, who boldly taught in private that immorality committed by a Christian cannot possibly result in any harm to him, and based his seduction to evil upon that theory. But it is the doctrine of the devil, no matter if it be a preacher who holds it, or somebody else.

My next general observation is to show Paul's connection with these seven churches of Asia. All of them were established either directly or indirectly by Paul. You will find the history in Acts 19, where he held his great meeting at Ephesus, in which all of the province of Asia heard the word of God. The next part of the history is in Acts 20, where Paul delivers his memorable address to the elders of the church at Ephesus. Then, during his first Roman imprisonment, he wrote to churches in this section concerning the Gnostic philosophy. These letters are to the Colossians and the Ephesians. Then to Philemon, who lived in this section, he wrote concerning Christianity's attitude toward slavery. Then, still in the first Roman imprisonment, he wrote to its Christian Jews—the letter to the Hebrews. After he escaped from that Roman imprisonment, he wrote the first letter to Timothy, who had charge under Paul's direction of the church at Ephesus, and when the second time he was imprisoned at Rome and had been condemned to death he wrote the second letter to Timothy, still at Ephesus. So that up to A. D. 68, when Paul was martyred, all these churches were under his apostolic jurisdiction.

My next general observation is to show John's connection with these seven churches. You may see from uniform tradition that John moved to Ephesus as a last surviving apostle and had charge of all these churches at least by A. D. 80. While living at Ephesus he wrote his three letters, which we have considered. One of the fathers, Clement of Alexandria, expressly says that after the death of Domitian, John escaped from exile in Patmos, and returned to the city of Ephesus. Now we are ready to take up the churches in the order of their condition: First, Ephesus: this city was the metropolis of proconsular Asia, one of the greatest cities of ancient times, having in it one of the seven wonders of the world - the temple of Diana, whose religion, however, was not so much a Greek religion as Oriental, since the Diana of the Ephesians was represented by a wooden idol, a monstrous image that set forth the fruitfulness of nature—a very different Diana from the Diana of the Greeks.

"To the angel of the church at Ephesus." Who was he? Some claim that Timothy was the pastor at the time that John wrote this letter. There is no evidence of it, and it is very highly improbable from the fact that Timothy was not a pastor at all, but an evangelist, an apostolic delegate, and even in the second letter to him Paul is calling him from Ephesus to come to Rome. It is not at all probable that Timothy remained at Ephesus as pastor from A.D. 68 to 96, when this book was written. So we will say we do not know who this pastor was at Ephesus.

What things were commended in this letter to the church at Ephesus? If I was teaching the book of Revelation to a class in Greek, I would have much to say of the shades of meaning in the words employed. But confining myself to the English, I will say that the things commended are: "Thy works, thy toil of service, thy adherence to sound doctrine and the motive that prompted the work." All was done for Christ's sake. Another thing commended was the attitude of this church to false prophets. "Thou hast tried them that say they are apostles and are not"—and just here we find an overwhelming argument in favor of the late date of the book of Revelation. If you turn to 1 John 4:1, which he wrote from Ephesus, between A.D. 82 and 85, he gives his commandment to try the spirits, whether they be of God. Now, later, he says that Ephesus had obeyed that injunction: "Ye have tried them that say they are prophets, or apostles, and are not, and condemned them." We will find one of the seven churches that did not try them—I will tell you which one when we come to it. The attitude of that church to the Nicolaitan doctrine we have just discussed is also commended: "Thou hatest the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which also I hate." So these are the things commended in that church.

The thing reprobated was just one thing: "Thou hast left thy first love." That means: "You do not now possess that fervor of love which filled your hearts when you professed to be Christians, when you were first converted." Whoever has abated in the love that he had in his heart when God converted him, that one needs a revival. That is a condition of the Ephesus church. Sound in doctrine, sound in discipline, but they had not the love which characterized their conversion.

How would that affect you, brothers and sisters? It hits me sometimes—not all the time. I can never forget the love in my heart for God and man when God converted me. At times it has abated, but characteristically it remains with me, and many a time has even gone beyond what it was when I was first converted.

Let us look then, at the exhortation to this church: "Repent and do thy first works"—that is to say, in the spirit of the love as you did at first. The threat: "If you do not, I will come and

remove thy candlestick." We do know that the Ephesus candlestick was removed.

The church at Smyrna: Smyrna for more than two thousand years had been a city—it is a city now, as it has now a population of about 200,000, and three-fourths of the population today are nominally Christians: whether Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, or Protestants. It is the seat of great commerce, situated as it is with such a splendid harbor on the Aegean Sea.

"And to the angel of the church at Smyrna"—who was that angel? I can tell you this time. In A.D. 168 a pastor of that church, Polycarp, was martyred under the rule of Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor. As he was about to be executed he said to the proconsul who governed the province: "I have been a Christian eighty-six years." Subtract 86 from 168, and you find that he was converted in A. D. 82. Now we know that he was a pastor in A.D. 108, for Ignatius in his writings says he visited Polycarp, the pastor at Smyrna, that year. Tertullian, Irenaeus, Eusebius, all say that Polycarp was made pastor at Smyrna under the administration of the apostle John, and if he was converted in A.D. 82 he would have been a Christian fourteen years when this letter was written. That is time enough for him to become pastor of the church. He was one of John's own converts. John went to Asia about A. D. 80, and in A. D. 82 Polycarp was converted, and when he became a preacher he was installed as pastor of the church at Smyrna.

Now, what things are commended here? "I know thy tribulations and thy poverty, but thou art rich"—while in this world's goods the members of the church were poor, in spiritual things they were rich. We will find, when we come to Laodicea, the exact reverse: they were rich in this world's goods, but in the sight of God they were miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

We notice in this letter to the church at Smyrna the attitude of the Jewish religion to Christianity—"the synagogue of Satan"—those who say they are Jews and are not. That is, they claim to be Jews on account of fleshly descent from Abraham, but they are not the spiritual descendants of Abraham. So that the Jewish church existed there as the bitterest enemy of the Christian church. They are the people who accused Polycarp in A.D. 168, they brought the wood to burn him at the stake, and helped to pile the fagots on the fire as he was burning. You will notice that it makes no difference as to the mere form of organization, whether Christian or Jewish, it is the devil who is the real author of the evil, and hence it says here that "Satan shall cast many of you into prison." Satan can work just as well, or maybe a little better, through one who claims to be religious and is not, than through an outsider. There is no censure on the church at Smyrna. There is an exhortation to be faithful unto death. "They will put you to death, but I will give you the crown of life." As it is expressed in Christ's address to the apostles: "Fear not them who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," and though they kill you in the body, which is the first death, I assure you, you will not be hurt by the second death.

Pergamos: This is a city, at the present time, of about 30,000 inhabitants. One-tenth of them are professing Christians, either Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, or Protestants of some kind. The heathen religion in this city was the dominant force of evil, the patron deity was the demigod Esculapius - that is, the physician god - but there were also temples in the city to Jupiter, Minerva, Apollo, Venus, and Bacchus. Hence "I know where thou dwellest, where Satan's throne is"—that is to say, the heathen religion in the city of Pergamos was the religion of state, and enforced tests of allegiance on pain of death.

What is commended here? That they hold fast, notwithstanding the persecuting test, and do not deny Jesus Christ. Particularly was that so in the case of their illustrious pastor, Antipas, who is mentioned here. When the heathen authority demanded of him that he turn loose Christianity and avow the heathen religion, he held fast and did not deny, and suffered death.

What is reprobated in this church? That it did not exercise gospel discipline; they retained in their members Balaamites and Nicolaitans. I doubt not that it was fear that prompted many of them, after the pastor was put to death, to say this: "I will submit to the government test, at least have open communion with the heathen; I will partake of their feasts and the things sacrificed to the idols." Some of them were following the doctrine of Nicholas, saying: "If you are a Christian it doesn't make any difference what you do." The exhortation calls on them to repent, or else judgment from the sword that issues from the mouth of Jesus Christ shall come upon them. The next church is Thyatira. This inland church is commended for the following things: love, faith, service, patience, and unlike the church at Ephesus, its last works were better than its first. In Ephesus the first works were the best, and the last works not up to the mark on account of having lost their love.

What things are reprobated? They had not exercised discipline: "Thou hast that woman Jezebel, who claims to be a prophet." That demand in 1 John 4:1 to try them that say they are prophets and apostles was disregarded. In this case great trouble came to the church from a woman. When a woman is good she is better than a man, but when she is bad she is worse than a man. The woman has much to do with Christianity; she is for or against it, and the man who does not recognize the might of woman's influence is blind. That is why I rejoice to cooperate in every good work which the women undertake. I wish to assure you that Lydia, who is mentioned in Acts 16, as being a woman of Thyatira, is not the Jezebel who is mentioned here; it is a slander on Lydia. It is every way improbable that Lydia of A.D. 52 is the Jezebel of A.D. 96. I am more inclined to think she was the wife of the pastor. I do not know who the pastor was. You pastors, your wives will be mighty where you work—mighty for good or mighty for evil. Anyhow, this Jezebel claimed to be a prophetess, and that this prophetic spirit told her that open communion with heathenism had no harm in it. Now comes the great text for the preacher: "I gave her space to repent, and she repented not." As a young preacher, in every revival meeting I preached on "the space to repent," emphasizing the fact that beyond that allotted time there was no hope of salvation. This woman crossed the boundary line, she sinned against the Holy Spirit and her sin, therefore, had never forgiveness, either in this world or in the next. There is such a boundary line and then no more space for repentance.

There is reference in this letter to "the depths of Satan." It is a little difficult to translate the Greek so as to convey the right idea. It is quite probable that this is the thought: The Gnostic philosophers claimed that they had a new knowledge, later and better than any revelation, as if to say: "You know what Paul says, and you know what John said, but we have the depths of a later and better knowledge." Our Lord admits the depths, but declares them "the depths of Satan."

Sardis: This city is the capital of Croesus, said to be the richest man in the world in his day. You read how Cyrus captured him and destroyed his empire. Sardis, his capital, was always a city of great wealth. There is no commendation in this letter, except toward the last he says: "There are a few in Sardis"—not many—"who have not defiled their garments," but the church was absorbed in the acquisition of wealth and swallowed up in worldly mindedness. It is distinctly stated: "None of thy works are perfect." We have found heretofore something exceptionally good to commend—especially in the case of Smyrna. But the church at Sardis had no excellence in any direction, whether in growth, fellowship, or mission work: "None of thy works is perfect," hence the exhortation to repent is accompanied by this sharp threat: "Repent, or I will come like a thief in the night and visit you with my judgment." This is a coming of the Lord, but not His final advent. It is like that coming in His other great prophecy, concerning the evil servant who said in his heart, "My lord tarrieth," and began to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunken, to whom in an unsuspected hour the lord came, cut him asunder and appointed a portion with hypocrites (Matthew 24:48-51); or like the rich fool who heard the summons: "This night shall thy soul be required of thee."

The sixth church is Philadelphia. This was the smallest and weakest, and apparently the most insignificant of the churches. Philadelphia was only a village situated on the top of a volcanic range of mountains; earthquakes destroyed the place two or three times. An open door is set before it. The persecuting Jews were to fall down before it and know that the Lord loved it. There is a sweeping promise: "I will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world to try them." It is difficult, in the light of subsequent history, to define precisely this "hour of trial." It may refer in part to the great apostasy which developed into the Roman hierarchy discussed in this book (chapter 17). Or in part to the rise of Mohammedanism, A. D. 600, and which by A. D. 1392 had conquered all the territory in which these churches were located. At any rate, Dr. Justin A. Smith, at this point, quotes from the infidel historian, Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, referring to this Turkish conquest: "in the loss of Ephesus the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the

extinction of the first candlestick of the Revelation; the desolation is complete, and the Temple of Diana or the church of Mary will equally elude the search of the curious traveler. The circus and three stately theaters of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes; Sardis is reduced to a miserable village; the god of Mahomet, without a rival or a son, is invoked in the Mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos, and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or by courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above fourscore years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in the scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honor and safety may sometimes be the same." So this church survived at least thirteen hundred years, long after the other six had passed away. Indeed, the "pillar" to which Gibbon refers still stands, as if to accentuate the promise in verse 12, "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God"—what a glorious thing for that weak church. Paul once wrote about Ephesus: "I will tarry at Ephesus until the Pentecost, for a great door is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries," but the Ephesus door had been shut a long time with the Philadelphia door still open. There on the mountaintop the faithful pastor and the faithful little village church were leading the people to Christ. The "open door" connects suitably with the words of our Lord in the first revelation: "I have the keys of death and Hades," and with the beginning of this letter: "I have the key of David."

We may also compare Matthew 16:19, "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." But the "keys" of the three passages are not the same; the ideas are different:

- 1. *The keys of the kingdom*** mean apostolic or church authority to declare the terms of entrance into or rejection from the kingdom of heaven, illustrated by the latter clause of Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; Acts 2:38; 5:9; 8:20-23; 10:43; 16:30-31.
- 2. *The keys of death and Hades*** mean Christ's authority over the death of the body and to open the state or place of disembodied souls. As when He says: "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church," i.e., the death of disciples, sending their souls into the spirit world, shall never so prevail as to leave no surviving church on earth. Or when it is said: "Thou wilt not abandon my soul unto Hades" (Acts 2:27), i.e., my soul will not continue disembodied, for my body will be raised (Acts 2:31). The same authority over the dead would not permit Lazarus to return to the earth to warn the brothers of the rich man, nor permit the prayers of the lost rich man to relieve his own condition, nor to intervene for his kindred on earth (Luke 16:23-31). This authority exempted Enoch and Elijah from death as it will exempt living Christians at His final advent (1 Corinthians 15:55-56), brings back with him the souls of the saints in heaven when He returns (1 Thessalonians 4:14), and causes both the grave to give up its dead bodies and Hades to give up its disembodied souls at the judgment (Revelation 20:13).
- 3. *The key of David*** means Christ's authority to confer great opportunities for saving men, as here in our passage, and in 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, i.e., of admitting them to the saving presence of the Lord. Compare Isaiah 22:22. The seventh church is Laodicea. Smyrna was hot—it flamed like fire in its zeal; its fidelity unto death glowed like an oven. Sardis got as cold as ice. But Laodicea was lukewarm, neither cold nor hot—it did not come out strong and openly for anything. It was like the man in the canoe who once had lost his paddle in the stream, and prayed: "Good Lord, help me—Good devil, help me." That is the weakest of all characters, and when the strong expression is here used: "I will spew thee out of my mouth," it is designed to show that this condition is nauseating to the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the Laodicean condition. And strange to say, they thought they were rich and needed nothing; whereas, as God saw them, they were miserable and poor and blind and naked.

I have heard Laodicean letters read at associations: "Dear Brethren: This year's letter reports to you that we are at peace. Baptized—none; received by letter—none; excluded—none; restored—none; given to missions—nothing." That is the peace of death. I again wish to repeat that in no age of the world have all of the churches been like Ephesus, or Smyrna, or Pergamos, or Thyatira, or Sardis, or Philadelphia, or Laodicea. And in every period of history there have been churches like all these types. What if next Sunday the recording angel should come down and write on the board of every church in Fort Worth some one of these seven names: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, or Laodicea? Some of the brethren would stand out and read the inscription, and their knees would shake like Belshazzar's when the handwriting of the Lord appeared on the wall.

We cannot in these chapters go into all the details of criticism like a commentary—the salient points must suffice. But one verse concerning Laodicea must be noticed somewhat: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." It is a mistake to preach a sermon to sinners from this text. It is addressed exclusively to delinquent church members. In walking among the candlesticks our Lord knocks at the hearts of backslidden or hypocritical members, demanding admission and promising spiritual intercommunion to those who admit Him. In this way He often rings the spiritual doorbell at the houses of professing Christians whose ears are quick to hear the calls of fashion, pleasure, ambition, or business, but so stopped as never to hear the ringing of Him who comes often and patiently stands and keeps ringing. Sometimes He rings by sickness, sometimes by financial loss, sometimes by death in the house. The sickness, loss or death are realized, but they do not recognize them as the calling of the Lord.

PROMISES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Let us recall again that the Lord adapts His titles, exhortations, threats, and promises to the varied conditions of the churches. In no two cases are they alike. This chapter is devoted to the promises. All these promises are connected with one word "overcometh" —Greek "*nikao*." The details of these promises are given in seven distinguishing series in the second and third chapters, and the sum of them expressed in Revelation 21:7, "He that overcometh shall inherit *all* things" —or better, "These things" referring back to the things enumerated in Revelation 21:1-6.

Let us group into one sentence all the detailed and distinguishing promises of the seven series: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" —and "He shall not be hurt of the second death" —and I will give to him the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it" —and "I will give him authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father: and I will give him the morning star" —and "he shall be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father and of my God, and he shall go out thence no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name" —and "I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (see Revelation 2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21).

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE PROMISES

1. They are all clothed in the most sublime imagery.
2. Their character, multitude, and magnitude are overwhelming, outshining any galaxy in the natural skies. The mind is dazzled by their blended brilliance. The hand of apprehension loses its grip in trying to grasp them and comprehension must wait for understanding until the realization of postjudgment experience.
3. Yet even now unstaggering faith receives them, and hope lives in their radiance. They reverse gravitation because they draw upward; they pull toward heaven and uplift. They stimulate more than wine until one is intoxicated with the Spirit. They awaken desire, develop strength, and inspire zeal.
4. Laying aside all dogmatism, comparing scripture with scripture in exceeding humility, praying fervently for spiritual guidance, let us attempt an interpretation. Inasmuch as all these promises are to him that "*overcometh*," our first concern is to know the meaning and sweep of this word, and just what or whom must be overcome, and with what means we may overcome.

Evidently the word "overcometh" is not limited to one definite transaction, but has a continuous meaning—a sweep beyond a single event. What are its terminals? When does the overcoming commence and where does it end? It commences with justification and ends at the death of the body with complete sanctification of the soul. "He that endureth unto the end shall be saved"—"Be thou faithful unto death, and thou shalt receive a crown of life." John elsewhere supplies the object of the verb. Twice he says: "Ye have overcome *the wicked one*" (1 John 2:13-14). Three times he declares *the world* as the object to be overcome (1 John 5:4-5). Only those "born of God overcome the world."

The *means of overcoming* is "the blood of the Lamb"; the instrumentality is *faith* $\frac{3}{4}$ and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Satan, his emissaries and the world that lieth in him, must be overcome. By faith the child of God goes on from victory to victory—from grace to grace—from strength to strength—from glory to glory.

Let us now look separately at the promises themselves:

1. Access to the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7) Here, evidently, there is allusion to the Genesis story. The purpose of the tree of life in the original garden was to eliminate the mortality of the body. So that, in unfigurative terms, this promise is the glorification of the body to be experienced without death by all Christians living when our Lord comes, and by all Christians who have died, after their resurrection. We may count the glorification of the bodies of the two classes as practically simultaneous, since the righteous dead are raised before the righteous living are changed, and together they are caught up to the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The promise means everything set forth in Paul's words (1 Corinthians 15:42-49,51-58):—incorruption, glory, power, a spiritual body in the image of the Second Adam; or in his other words, "Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be like the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself" (Philippians 3:21). Or as John elsewhere puts it: "We know that if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him" (John 3:2). Hence the psalmist: "I shall be satisfied *when I awake with thy likeness.*" This title to access to the tree of life arises from cleansing by the blood of the Lamb, effected in us when in regeneration and sanctification the Spirit applies the blood. After Adam's fall he was expelled from the garden lest he eat of this fruit and live forever in a body of sin (Genesis 3:22), but a throne of grace and mercy was established at the east of the garden where the sword flame, or Shekinah, dwelt between the Cherubim to keep open the way to the tree of life through vicarious sacrifices (Genesis 3:24; 4:4; Hebrews 11:4).

2. "Shall not be hurt of the second death." (Revelation 2:11) The meaning of the second death is the casting of both soul and risen body into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15). It is the final decision of our Lord at the judgment, and fixes forever the status of the lost. The lake of fire is a metaphor, of course, but expresses a reality not less fearful than the figure. Into this torment the soul of a lost sinner goes immediately after the death of the body—see the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Luke 16. But from this disembodied state of torment the soul is called to the judgment, where it is united to its risen body—"Death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them" (Revelation 20:13), i.e., the body came from the grave and the soul from its place in torment. Then on the sentence of the judge the lost man, soul and body, is cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. While both memory and conscience will afflict the lost forever, the lake of fire is *punitive*, and not the remorse of conscience, which is only consequential. That this final sentence is *punitive* appears from Matthew 25:41,46, and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. It is further described by our Lord as a destruction of soul and body in Gehenna, and directly contrasted with the first death, or the death of the body: "And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Greek *Gehenna*).

This promise was specially precious to the church at Smyrna, at that time undergoing persecution unto death. The devil, through his agents, might kill their bodies, the first death, but these martyrs should not be hurt of the second death.

3. "I will give to him the hidden manna." (Revelation 2:17) The "hidden manna" is an allusion to the memorial pot of manna hidden in the ark of the covenant. This represented Christ as the bread of life, sent from heaven—see the great discussion, John 6:27-59. Whosoever by faith appropriates the body and blood of Christ has eaten food which nourishes unto eternal life. An eater of the manna in the desert did not escape death, but the believer in Jesus Christ, antitype of the memorial manna hidden in the ark of the covenant, shall never die.

This promise is on a line with the preceding one, and particularly appropriate to Pergamos, whose heretics were eating the meat offered to idols, following Balaam, which was a food unto death, but whose faithful ones are promised the bread of life.

4. "I will give him a white stone and on the stone a new name written which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it." (Revelation 2:17) Observe that this is the second promise to the church at Pergamos. To the same person is given both "the hidden manna" and "the stone," whose inscription is *hidden* to all but the recipient. There appears to be a connection of thought between the two promises which may be helpful toward an interpretation of the white stone. Let us follow up this clue.

Satan's throne was at Pergamos. That is, he completely dominated the municipal government. This was a Greek city, subject to Greek method of judicial procedure. A test of loyalty to the government would be a participation in the idolatrous feasts. We know from Paul's letter to the Greek city of Corinth that a Christian might not eat at both the Lord's table and the devil's table, nor drink of both the Lord's cup and the cup of devils. So refraining from the heathen idol feasts was a test of loyalty to Christ. And so the same Satan who inspired Balaam to spring this test on the Israelites inspired the later Balaamites to compromise on this open communion between the two religions, and inspires the municipal government to demand like compromises of the other members of the church. Fear may have prompted the tempted to this compromise, and fear may have inspired the church to refrain from disciplining the heretical and immoral members, especially after their pastor, Antipas, was murdered for his fidelity.

A Greek city expressed judgment on persons arraigned by a kind of ballot, using shells as at Athens, or pebbles here whose significance declared for acquittal or condemnation—white for acquittal or black for guilty. Following this line of thought the promise would mean: If the devil-prompted city condemns your loyalty to Christ by a ballot of black pebbles, He will acquit you by the white stone of justification. This view gathers force from the title of our Lord when addressing the church: "These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword." (Revelation 2:12) In the vision, 1:16, this sword issues from His mouth, and hence represents His word of judgment. It is a judge symbol (Hebrews 4:12-13). Moreover, the inscription on the white stone can be made to harmonize with this interpretation. It is a "new name" unknown to the heathen judges, but well known to the recipient. If this be our Lord's own *newname* as later revealed in the book (Revelation 12-13,16) it is intensely significant in the connection: "Word of God," "King of kings and Lord of lords," i.e., the earthly judgment condemns, the divine judgment acquits, the condemnation is from earthly lords—the justification from the Lord of lords. The expression "known only to him who receives it" means the assurance of divine acceptance, the witness of the Spirit, bearing witness with His own spirit, which, being entirely a matter of personal experience, cannot be known to any one except the recipient.

5. "And I will give him authority over nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of a potter are broken into shivers." (Revelation 2:26-27)

More than any one of the other promises does this one need careful exposition. Its misinterpretation has been productive of monstrous evils in the Christian centuries, and the end is not yet. It is quoted to support the Romanist pretension that all nations are under the absolute jurisdiction of the Papal hierarchy, in the exercise of which continents have been bestowed upon favorite monarchs, kings have been dethroned, subjects absolved from allegiance, crusades preached, property confiscated, cruel persecutions waged, marriages annulled, family ties dissolved. The record of these evils constitutes the bloodiest volumes in the annals of time. Nor has its misuse been limited to the Romanists. The evils are not less evil when flowing from Protestant or Greek Catholic misapplication. They have prevailed whenever and wherever religious sectaries of any name have usurped control over states. "The mad men of Munster," the Cameronians of Scotland, the Fifth Monarchy men of Cromwell's day, the Muggletonians and Mormons of this country, all belong to the same category.

In order to correct interpretation we must first understand the terms employed and their biblical usage.

(a) First of all, the promise, whatever it means, is not to any religious denomination or ecclesiastical organization, but only to the individual Christian who *overcomes*: "To him that overcometh I will give"—it is not a grant of power to any one of the seven churches, nor to all of them combined. This is a capital, fundamental, crucial, vital fact, essential to correct interpretation.

(b) The promise is not "power"—Greek *dunamis* $\frac{3}{4}$ but "authority"—Greek *exousia*.

(c) The verb "shall rule" is not *basileuo*, but *poimaino*, which means "to shepherd"—"he shall shepherd them."

(d) "The rod of iron," Greek *rabdos* $\frac{3}{4}$ rod of correction—is the shepherd's rod, iron-tipped at one end, and with a crook at the other end. See the Septuagint for the Shepherd Psalm: "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." The shepherd does not carry two things, one a rod, and the other a staff, but the same thing is either rod or staff according to its use. See the author's sermon on Psalm 23:4.

(e) The "breaking into shivers as a potter's vessel," is not necessarily for ultimate destruction (see Jeremiah 18:4-10). It becomes destructive only when impenitence becomes incorrigible (Jeremiah 19:1-11), and even then applies not to all the nation but only to its hostile elements. In other words, we miss the mark if we construe all this rule as *punitive*. The primary intent looks to correction and salvation; as the shepherd goads the wandering sheep with the iron-tipped end of his staff into a safer path, or draws him back from a precipice with the crook at the other end, or sets up the staff as an ensign for rallying the flock together in time of danger, or with it counts them each morning and evening as they, one by one, "pass under the rod" in leaving the fold for pasturage or returning to it for shelter, or in using it as a weapon of offence against the enemies of the flock.

(f) This rule, or shepherding, so far as exercised mediately *in time* by him that overcometh, is not executive, but instructive and declarative. When God, in time, "hews a nation by a prophet," the prophet simply declares, but does not execute the divine threat. As Jonah was sent, not to overturn Nineveh, but merely to declare "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). And the case of Nineveh will show the merciful intent of Jeremiah's illustration of the potter's vessel: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation or kingdom to pluck up, and to break down, and to destroy it, if that nation concerning which I have spoken turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jeremiah 19:7-10).

The overcoming Christian, like the ancient prophet, is God's mouthpiece to the nations:

"Behold! I have put my words into thy mouth: see this day I have put thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy, and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

Even in the prototype of our passage (Psalm 2:8-12), where the nations are given to our ascended Lord for an inheritance, and where it is said: "Thou shalt break them with an iron rod, and shalt dash them into pieces as a potter's vessel," the verses which follow show the merciful and instructive intent of the threat. Which passage naturally leads to our last thought in this connection:

The authority promised is derivative and limited, and not inherent and absolute, and arises from the overcoming Christian's unity with Christ and His representative function of acting mediately for Christ. This is evident from the modifying clause: "even as I have received from my Father" (Revelation 2:27).

Here it is quite important to understand the meritorious ground of Christ's own authority, how received and to what end, since what He received is that which He imparts and certainly to the same end, and which so imparted must be exercised as He Himself used it. The authority in question does not rise from His Sonship in eternity, but from His Sonship in the flesh. It is expressly said to be derived from the voluntary humiliation and vicarious expiation of sin in the flesh. See particularly Philippians 2:6-11. Hence, historically, He was invested with universal sovereignty after His resurrection. The author insists that you carefully study this proof: Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 2:1-12; 110:1; Acts 2:33-36; 4:25-27; Revelation 5:12-14. In times antecedent to His actual historical sacrifice for sin, when sin is remitted to a penitent believer or rule exercised over a nation, it is by anticipation of that sacrifice, God accepting His promise to die for man as if already it had been done, so that as this book later puts it: "A Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

In His exalted and glorified humanity He was made "head over all things to his church." It is to this He refers as the predicate of His Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth is given unto me. Go ye, therefore, disciple all the nations" (Matthew 28:18). And from this passage we gather both the method and the end of "shepherding the nations." The method is not a carnal one, by fire and sword, as rule is enforced by worldly kingdoms, but spiritual. The primary end is not destruction, but salvation. The exercise of this authority, whether by Himself *directly*, or *mediately* through His people, is to promote the interest of His spiritual kingdom. Hence the proximate result of its exercise is expressed in Daniel 2:44; Psalm 72:5-17; Revelation 11:15, and its ultimate result in Revelation 21:23-27.

6. "And I will give him the morning star" (Revelation 2:28). This is the second promise to the faithful in Thyatira. The meaning of this symbolism is obvious. As the morning star is the herald of the coming day, so to the faithful our Lord will give a premonition of the final glorious triumph. This, of course, is the inward assurance by the Spirit realized in personal experience, just as the white stone symbol of acquittal bears an inscription equal to internal assurance, known only to the recipient. As Peter expresses it, we have the surer word of prophecy shining as a lamp in the night: "until the day star arise in your hearts." Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:3-4) declares that in the day of our Lord, which comes as a thief in the night, the destruction of the wicked is sudden, and adds by way of contrast: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." There is no question that the final advent of our Lord to raise the dead and judge the world will be personal, visible, audible, palpable, and that this advent is *the great event* of the future, as His first advent was until His incarnation. Nor is it questioned that this book, as others of the New Testament, clearly discusses it. But it is equally clear, in this and other New Testament books, that signal time events, as the coming of the Spirit, and particularly great judgments—as the destruction of Jerusalem, or the removal of a candlestick, or death to an individual, are called "a coming of the Lord." In this sense He is always coming. He is only a tyro in biblical interpretation who insists that every scriptural reference to a coming of the Lord must be construed as an allusion to His final advent. The promise of the gift of the "morning star" applies as much to these time comings as to His final advent, e.g., He gave to His elect a premonitory sign which enabled them to escape the wrath of His coming in the destruction of Jerusalem.

7. "He shall be arrayed in white garments" (Revelation 3:5). This is the first promise to the overcoming few in Sardis who "had not defiled their garments." In order to a correct interpretation of this passage we must collate it with the following correlative passages: The "wedding garment" of Matthew 22:12; the "white robe" conferred on the souls of the martyrs, Revelation 7:9, 13-14; the fine linen or wedding garment of the Bride at the marriage of the Lamb, Revelation 19:7-8; and the "washed robes" that entitle to the tree of life, Revelation 22:14. Once in my early ministry, before preaching a sermon on the "Wedding Garment" of Matthew 22:12, I read Dr. Broadus' comment on the passage interpreting the wedding garment to mean righteousness in character and life, adding: "But to bring in the Pauline conception of imputed righteousness, and understand the parable to teach that, we must put on the wedding garment of Christ's imputed righteousness, is altogether out of place." Then, I read Dr. Gill's comment, taking the opposite position, insisting that we must interpret the wedding garment to mean the imputed righteousness of Christ. Whereupon a lawyer of my congregation whispered to another lawyer: "When Broadus points one way and Gill another way this darky is gwine to take to the woods." The other replied: "Before taking to the woods, let's hear the pastor."

So I say now, before taking to the woods on this promise, hear the author, for there is a middle road agreeing in part with both Broadus and Gill, and following neither altogether. Both are right in interpreting the wedding garment to mean righteousness, or holiness, rather, but this holiness is not limited, as Gill would have it, to justification, nor to character and life as Broadus has it. But Dr. Broadus is nearer right than Gill in this that the wedding garment righteousness refers not at all to the salvation done *for us* $\frac{3}{4}$ that is to say, in its legal aspects as accomplished by redemption, justification, and adoption—but altogether to the salvation wrought *in us* by both regeneration and sanctification. Every redeemed, justified, and adopted man is at the same time internally cleansed from the defilement of sin by the Spirit's application of Christ's blood. This is the first and an essential part of regeneration.

Regeneration consists of

(1) cleansing from the defilement of sin by the Spirit's application of the blood of Christ, and

(2) of *renewing*. Both of these integral parts of regeneration come at justification. Then the work of *internal cleansing*, begun in regeneration, is carried on through sanctification, which is completed at the death of the body, so that of these disembodied saints we may say with Hebrews 12:23, "The spirits of just men (justified) made perfect," or with Revelation 6:11, "And there was given them to each one a white robe"—i.e., to the soul of each martyr underneath the altar, as revealed at the opening of the fifth seal.

The cleansing part of regeneration was typified by the sprinkling with a bunch of hyssop, of the liquefied ashes of the red heifer, or water of purification (Ezekiel 36:25; Hebrews 9:13-14). This is "the washing of regeneration" in Titus 3:5, referred to also in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "Such were some of you, but ye were washed." And, if you are able to bear it, this is the "bom of water" in John 3:5, which Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, was rebuked for not understanding, so clearly was it taught in the Old Testament.

In the same way was the cleansing of sanctification applied to the penitent backslider David (Psalm 51:2,7), "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." And to the cleansing of both regeneration and sanctification does Paul refer in Ephesians 5:26-27, "That he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of the water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." The grace of this cleansing, whether in regeneration or sanctification, appears from its efficient cause, the blood of Christ: "And one of the elders answered saying unto me: These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence come they? And I say unto him, My Lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come out of great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life and may enter in by the gates into the city.

Now, this internal cleansing, this perfecting in personal holiness, is symbolized by the white robe, or wedding garment: "And it was given unto the Lamb's wife that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." Note the plural "righteousnesses," which does not mean as the Revision puts it "the righteous acts of the saints." This would flatly contradict the regeneration part of this righteousness (see Titus 3:5). And so it would contradict the many cleansings of sanctification—"Christ being made unto us sanctifications," every time as in David's case, the Spirit applies the same cleansing blood.

It is true enough that the regenerated man, progressing in sanctification, acquires personal character, exhibited in life and good works. But this is not what is meant by the wedding garment of Matthew or the white robe of Revelation, which is the same thing. The white robe means holiness, as God is holy. The means of the cleansing is Christ's atoning blood. This is applied by the Spirit and apprehended by faith. The whole of it is God's work and is of grace from the first cleansing in regeneration to the last cleansing of sanctification. That it is not character on earth is evident from Revelation 6:2, where it is bestowed after death. So with the teaching of Revelation 7:13-14, and 19:7. The glorious result is expressed in Ephesians 5:27—"that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." It will also be forever true that the elect are immune from any *lawcharge* because wrapped in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us when by faith we are *espoused* to Christ. And also forever true that the white robe of the *marriage* is another thing, being *personal* holiness wrought *in us* by the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification. It is therefore respectfully submitted that Dr. Gill is in error when he expounds the wedding garment to be Christ's righteousness imputed to us, or anything *done for us* in the legal acts of redemption, justification, adoption, and equally so that Dr. Broadus is mistaken when he interprets it to mean our character or life as the embodiment of *deeds done by us*, no matter how much they may have been the fruits of grace.

But it means personal holiness *wrought in us* by the Holy Spirit:

- (1) By the cleansing of regeneration when the blood of Christ is applied by the Spirit. Ezekiel 36:25; Hebrews 9:14; first clause of 10:22; Titus 3:5, first clause; 1 Corinthians 6:11, first clause.
- (2) By the continued cleansing of sanctification until holiness of spirit is perfected—as in the cleansing of backslidden David (Psalm 2:2,7); in the continual changes into Christ's image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

That both the cleansing in regeneration and the subsequent cleansing of sanctification are meant is evident from that one supreme proof text, Ephesians 5:26, compared with Revelation 6:11, first clause, and 7:13-14; 22:14.

The plural "righteousnesses" in Revelation 19:8, refers therefore not to acts of the saints but to the Spirit's acts in the saints.

8. "1 will in no wise blot out his name out of the book of life" (Revelation 3:5). This is the second promise to the faithful at Sardis. Two questions are:

1. What is the book of life, and
1. 1. the exact force of *not blotting out* the name?

What, then, is the book of life? By its very name it is a register of immortals. "He that believeth in me shall never die"—shall never come into condemnation—"but hath eternal life." The nature of this book may be considered from one of two views:

- (1) A list of all His elect as God saw them before the foundation of the world. This would be the list of the original divine purpose. This view has been supported largely by an interpretation of Revelation 13:8; 17:8; but this interpretation is very doubtful, since it makes the phrase "from the foundation of the world" modify "written in the book" rather than the "Lamb slain." Your Standard Revision supports this view.
- (2) A much safer view is that it is a register of judicial decisions, each name written when the owner is justified (Isaiah 4:3). It has this meaning in Revelation 20:15; Rev. 21:27, and Daniel 12:1. And because this judicial decision is irrevocable, it explains the ground of joy in our Savior's words to the seventy (Luke 10:20), and the fact that no indictment can be drawn against God's elect, since it is God that *justifies* (Romans 8:33). See also Philippians 4:3, and Hebrews 12:23.

On the meaning of this book and its use at the judgment (Revelation 20:15) is written this hymn:

When thou, my righteous judge, shalt come

To take thy ransomed people home,

Shall I among them stand?

Shall I, who sometimes am afraid to die,

Be found at thy right hand?

Oh, can I bear the piercing thought:

What if my name shall be left out?

What then is the exact force of not blotting out the name? In all Greek cities, and later at Rome, there was an enrollment of citizens as distinguished from the general population who had no rights of citizenship. Citizenship could be forfeited during life by adjudged infidelity to the city, decided by a vote of the unaccused citizens, followed by erasure of the name. Some of the best citizens were thus, by prejudice, ostracized, as Greek history shows. A Christian citizen of Sardis might thus lose citizenship on account of loyalty to Christ. Of course,

death ended this earthly citizenship. It is the object of the promise to contrast the enrolled citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem with the enrolled citizenship in Sardis. The point of contrast lies between two citizenships, the two enrollments, and particularly in the fact that heavenly citizenship, after once being enrolled, was never forfeited: "I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life." Many commentaries miss the point in supposing that the heavenly enrollment is a probationary list, subject to erasure, and that this implication inheres in the promise as well as in the threat of Revelation 22:19. Your author is fully persuaded that this position is untenable. He not only admits, but contends, that citizenship was forfeitable not only in Greek cities and in Rome, but also in the Jewish state, but utterly denies it of the heavenly citizenship, and that this very fact is the essence of the promise.

9. "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name" (Revelation 3:12).

Perhaps the most imposing, most ornamental, if not the most useful parts of a great edifice are its pillars. Only the wealth of a king could supply even one of the pillars of the temple of Diana at Ephesus. The surviving pillars in the ruins of ancient temples and cities yet challenge the admiration of the world as masterpieces of human skill and genius. It marked the prominence and importance of James, Cephas, and John to be "reputed as pillars" in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:29), and glorified the church when called "the pillar of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). To be made, therefore, an everlasting pillar in the heavenly temple is an expression of the highest honor. This honor is enhanced by the inscriptions on it by the divine architect Himself - the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem, the new name of the architect Himself, to wit: "Faithful and True ... KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:11,13,16).

10. "I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21). This is not the throne of *ruling*, expressed in a previous promise, but the throne of final *judgment*. On the last great day, earth's supreme assize, the faithful ones are placed at the Lord's right hand, i.e., on His judgment throne (Matthew 25:31,33), and shall participate with Him in passing judgment on wicked men and angels. Jesus had already promised to His apostles that in the world's regeneration (*palingenesia*, i.e., the time of the restoration of all things), they should sit on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:29). And Paul had said: "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor 6:23). What a reversal of earth condition when the Sanhedrin that tried Peter and John shall be judged by them! When Gallio, Festus, Agrippa, and Nero shall stand before Paul's tribunal. What poetic justice when Job and Peter shall judge the devil.