

Presented by Ryan White

I would propose that whatever message we discern for today is grounded in the message understood by the original audience, just like the rest of Scripture.



Order of the Seven Churches

Ephesus (2:1-7)

Smyrna (2:8-11)

Pergamum (2:12-17)

Thyatira (2:18-29)

Sardis (3:1-6)

Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Laodicea (3:14-22)

To the Seven Churches



Seven Real Congregations - Cultural Setting

- Ekklesia: citizen's assembly of Greek polis
- Each congregation emerged from within or in close proximity to long-established Jewish communities. This set the stage for conflict as messianic and non-messianic Jews became alienated from one another, and as the Christian sect attracted a growing number of Gentiles.
- Each of these cities were regional centers of Imperial cult: temple, altar, priest
- Three specific issues - persecution, compromise, assimilation

Imperial Cult in Asia Minor

City	Imperial Temple	Imperial Altar	Imperial Priests
Ephesus	X	X	X
Smyrna	X	X	X
Pergamum	X	X	X
Thyatira		X	X
Sardis	X	X	X
Philadelphia	X		X
Laodicea		X	

Seven Real Congregations - Cultural Setting

- Reality behind appearances - Revealing the truth (your poverty, but you are rich)
- Promises fulfilled in the New Jerusalem “to he who overcomes” - what does it mean to “overcome”?
- Finding yourself in each of the churches, not just picking the one you want to be.
- Each church’s letter uses symbolism familiar to the local setting. This informs us that the rest of the book will use symbolism familiar to those in the Greco-Roman world.

Summary of Historical Situation

- Christians could stay out of trouble if they accommodate to society around them. There is little officially-sanctioned persecution, rather it was stigma in society that pressured believers
- There was high tension between Christians and Jews in some cities. Twice the letter refers to the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9, 3:9). This probably indicates that John believes local Jewish congregations are collaborating with Rome and thus in league with Satan.
- Some Christians in Asia Minor are compromising by being involved in trade with Rome. John sees this as fornication with Babylon/Rome and cries for the people to come out of her.

Summary of Historical Situation

- Some congregations are poor and powerless, others are rich and comfortable. It is these two congregations (Smyrna/poverty, Philadelphia/powerless) that receive no rebuke. Since business people felt they had to participate in emperor worship and/or pagan rituals, presumably believers in Smyrna and Philadelphia have refused to compromise and thus suffer economically and politically as a result.
- False teachers among the churches advocate syncretism and urge believers to participate in pagan society. Both Balaam and Jezebel were spiritual two-timers, who blended pagan worship with the worship of Yahweh.
- John understands that widespread persecution is imminent. “Do not fear what you are about to suffer”

7 Churches Represent the Whole

- Not 7 letters to 7 churches, 1 circular letter to 7 congregations
 - 7 represents the whole of the church; Col 4:16
- The 7 messages are an introductory to the rest of the book. Promises of salvation which find their fulfillment in the New Jerusalem.
- Each congregation is called to be victorious, but the meaning of victory is unexplained. What it is to conquer becomes clear only from the rest of the book, in which the conquerors appear and it is revealed what they conquer and in what their victory consists.
 - Thus the rest of the book is the way in which Christians can be victorious

Each letter ends with a promise to those who “conquer” that finds later fulfillment in the book. Notice what it means to conquer:

Rev 3:21 “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

Rev 12:11 “And they have conquered [the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

Impact of the Letter

- 30-40 years after Revelation was received by the congregation at Ephesus, the population of Christians jumped from a handful to ~90% of the quarter-million inhabitants being Christian. Asia Minor soon followed...
- Christianity continued to grow in the face of persecution and suffering. WHY?
- By focusing only on future predictions, we rob this letter of its power to speak truth to power, to empower us to resist evil, and console us in our sufferings.

Do governments we know today act more like “God’s servant” (Rom. 13:4) or like the beast “uttering haughty and blasphemous words” (Rev. 13:5)?

Is it possible that part of a given government or society might be doing God’s will, while another part is acting beastly?

If so, should followers of Jesus Christ accept the authority of government in one area of society while rejecting it in another?

Ephesus

Assimilation

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lamp stands.

“ ‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how **you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested** those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that **you have abandoned the love you had at first**. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the **Nicolaitans**, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers **I will grant to eat of the tree of life**, which is in the paradise of God.’

Ephesus

Cultural Background

- The crown jewel of the city, the Temple of Artemis. This temple, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, measured 420 feet long by 240 feet wide and its ornate roof was held aloft by 117 Corinthian columns 60 feet high. The centerpiece was a gigantic statue of the fertility goddess Artemis (Diana), open to the sky. Silver statues and amulets of her image were sold in large numbers, especially as good luck charms for women who wished to have children, and contributed greatly to the wealth of the city
 - Paul wrote to the Ephesians “you (not the temple of Artemis) are the Temple of the Living God
- The cultural values were submission to nature and its forces, so relationship with this all-powerful personage offered all sorts of options for living.



Ephesus

Cultural Background

- Seaport city more powerful than Pergamum politically and more favored than Smyrna for the imperial cult. It was THE center of imperial cult in Asia minor
- Augustus allowed Ephesus to build two temples in his honor.
- Huge temple to Domitian built late 1st century that won the city a *neokoros*.
- “Right to eat of the Tree of Life”
 - The foundation of the holy place of Artemis was built over an ancient tree-shrine. The tree (date-palm) has been found on coinage and other artifacts as the emblem for the city and the goddess.
 - Fulfillment of this promise found in Revelation 22:2, 14, 19

Ephesus

Cultural Background

- The temple of Artemis was a place of “salvation”, a right reinforced by Domitian. Criminals could flee to its inner sanctum to find refuge from the law. The words of the epistle contrasted with a **shocking parody which the pagan cult of the city offered**. At the heart of its changing fortunes was the theocratic power of **the Artemis temple, marked by the fixed point of the ancient tree-shrine which was the place of ‘salvation’ for the suppliant**, surrounded by an asylum enclosed by a boundary wall. **But this ‘salvation’ for the criminal corrupted the city**
 - There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatsoever worked abomination, or makes a lie’ (Rev. 21:27).
- Large Jewish presence that had gained special privileges with the city. If there is a large conversion of Gentiles, it would likely have resulted in a loss of status for the Jews and caused an upset

Ephesus

Teaching of the Nicolaitans

- The Nicolaitans probably taught that Christians could participate in the idolatrous culture of Ephesus (similar to Balaam). The city was dominated by the cult of the goddess Artemis, goddess of fertility, and **her temple had thousands of priests and priestesses, with heavy involvement in prostitution**. Part of the **prosperous economy of the city was dependent on trade associated with the temple** (Acts 19:23–41). The city had also been declared a “temple warden” of two temples dedicated to the imperial cult (worship of Caesar), which meant that this cult also played an essential part in the city’s life. Therefore, the church’s resistance to internal pressures to accommodate aspects of this idolatrous society was very commendable.
- Yet all that these Ephesians were doing right is not a sufficient excuse for what they are doing wrong. Losing their love - remember love for God is shown by love for one another

Ephesus

Context for Today

- This reminds us of how easily churches can reflect the values of the culture if we do not remain vigilant against those values.
 - Remember not all values are bad, we must be discerning.
 - We strive for truth, but truth doesn't trump love. Often there isn't an absolute truth that we can understand (Marker Perspective Example)
- The church, no matter how powerless in a given society, is a guardian of its culture. Remember the presence of the righteous in Sodom.
- Ephesus is estimated to have been ~90% Christian 40 years after this letter.

Smyrna

Persecution

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

“ ‘I know your tribulation and **your poverty (but you are rich)** and **the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not**, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what **you are about to suffer**. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and **I will give you the crown of life**. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.**’

Smyrna

Cultural Background

- “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give a crown...”
 - The concept of a crown or wreath is in fact extraordinarily prominent in materials relating to Smyrna. Variations of the motif occur on every pre-Imperial coin listed in BMC (Nos. 1–119), and sometimes three times on the same coin
 - allusion to the physical appearance of Smyrna as compared by the orators with a bejewelled statue rising symmetrically from the sea to the ‘crown’ of Pagus
 - Smyrna’s characteristic boast of ‘faithfulness’ originated before the advent of Roman power to the Aegean. In 195 BC, before the preeminence of Rome, Smyrna built a temple to worship Rome
 - στέφανος (crown/garland) in the New Testament frequently alludes to the prize of athletic victory and so to the eternal reward of the faithful (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; cf. also 2 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 12:1)



SMYRNA.



Ionia Coin from Smyrna

150-143 BC

Smyrna

Cultural Background

- Smyrna is from the word “myrrh”. Myrrh was used in burials and John’s Gospel has him being buried in 75 lbs of it. Thus, related to death and resurrection
- Smyrna was elegant and prosperous, boasting associations of goldsmiths, winemakers, textile producers, and merchants.
 - The fact that the Christians were poor implies they refused to participate in the pagan trade guilds.

Smyrna

Synagogue of Satan

- John often uses irony (“you have a reputation for x, but you are actually 1/x”).
- It is likely that the local Jews were collaborating with the local authorities, telling everyone that the Christians were not Jews, thus endangering the religious protections/exemptions Jews enjoyed within the Roman empire. Only Jews were exempt from worshiping the emperor, for Rome knew that Jews were monotheistic and were an ancient, ethnic religion that merited tolerance.
 - John reverses the charge, saying that they are actually the false Jews and moreover the congregation of Satan.
 - This charge is similar to the DSS community’s claim that outsiders were not true Jews and were actually sons of Belial.
- Smyrna 155AD: the Jews gathered fuel on the Sabbath for the burning of Polycarp (Mart. Polyc. 13, 21) - They were the ones who turned him in to the authorities.

[Pliny said that after Christians were denounced to him, he asked them]

“in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and a third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished”

**Pliny, a Roman official who worked in Asia Minor not long after Revelation was written
Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96.3–4)**

Smyrna

Context for Today

- Beware of Serpent seed doctrine that is espoused by violent white supremacists movements. They claim Jews are the literal offspring of Satan and Eve.
- John's audience considered themselves Jewish, the converts naturally regarded themselves as converts to the truest form of Judaism. While we do not today need to claim we are "Jewish", as this has different connotations, we need to read ourselves into those groups in the OT and NT.
- Smyrna would face great suffering while the other persecuted Church, Philadelphia would be delivered. James was executed while Peter was released. Same today; some are preserved, others are martyred. It is not our place to question God on the why of this. It also doesn't mean one is loved and the other is not.

Pergamum

Assimilation

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the **sharp two-edged sword**.

“ ‘I know where you dwell, where **Satan’s throne** is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might **eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality**. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with **the sword of my mouth**. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the **hidden manna**, and I will give him a **white stone, with a new name written** on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

Pergamum

Cultural Background

- The Great Altar of Zeus Soter built here (120x112 ft)
- Temples to Athena (Pergamum's patron deity), Dionysus, Asclepius, and of course Augustus.
- Worship of Asclepius whose symbol on Pergamum's coins was the serpent
- Long history of ruler-cult. The city's kings were called "savior" and "god". The king's wife was described as the wife of a god.
- First to receive a *neocorate* (Temple guardian) award. First to receive a 2nd and 3rd *neocorate*.







Pergamum

Teaching of Balaam and the the Nicolaitans

- Balaam enticed Israel through their desires - sexual relationships with women, partying, and general immorality.
- Much of the meat offered in the markets then came from altars where it had been sacrificed to pagan gods.
- Meat was often distributed for free with civic festivals. These celebrations were important for public life and participation showed loyalty towards the emperor.
 - Refusing to eat this meat would be like kneeling for the national anthem at a conservative political rally.
- Social and trade associations in cities were held in the pretense of the patron deity and thus often had a religious component. Christians would face the question of being able to buy and sell if they refused to participate in such honors to the god of the city. What compromises were they willing to make to be part of society.

Pergamum

Context for Today

- For Christians in Pergamum, to “overcome” means to stand against teachings of compromise with the world.
- We need to make sure that we are influencing the world with the kingdom’s values, not embracing the world’s values (materialism, celebrities, etc) where they conflict with those of the kingdom.
 - This is where we need the Spirit for guidance, and not the spirit of social media.
 - Like Balaam and Jezebel, we can sanctify worldly values by attributing them to God. During the Civil Rights Movement, the Bible and Christianity were exploited by Klan leader Sam Bowers to justify violent Klan activity, while popular Baptist pastor Douglas Hudgins used them to ignore the segregation and violence being promoted even by members of his church
- If we affirm what the world affirms, or, more often, live as the world does, to what then do we invite them in conversion that differs from what they already experience?

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CRAIG S. KEENER



Thyatira

Assimilation

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

“ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to **practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols**. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and **those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation**, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him **I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron**, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And **I will give him the morning star**. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Thyatira

Cultural Background

- Local patron-god Apollo Tyrimnaeus whose bronze statue was in town
- The townspeople were grateful that the Romans maintained the roads, which facilitated commerce, and they dedicated a colonnade to Caesar Augustus as “son of god.”
- Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira, became the first christian convert in Macedonia (Acts 16:14)
- Known for variety of trade guilds who met in temples
- Yeshua reminds the hearers of his feet like bronze, specifically in a city where metal-working was a prominent industry



Thyatira

Jezebel

Assimilation

- Thyatira - syncretism with guild-feasts
 - Unable to buy and sell without being part of a trade guild (cf. Rev 13:17)
- Queen Jezebel was not a prophet, but supported 450 prophets devoted to Ba'al and another 400 devoted to Asherah (1 Kgs 18:19)
 - John probably uses her as a metaphor for spiritual infidelity, because those who “commit adultery” with Jezebel are those who accept her teachings
 - She is never accused of literal harlotry, but she sponsored spiritual harlotry by leading Israel away from its God (2 Kings 9:22, where her religious activity is also compared with witchcraft; cf. Rev. 9:21; 18:23)
 - Thyatira becomes the local embodiment of the larger system of “Babylon”.

Thyatira

Jezebel

Assimilation

- There is a social and economic dimension, as Revelation later links fornication with the accumulation of wealth through cultivating good relations with Babylon the harlot (Rev 17:2; 18:3, 9)
- Parody of her probable claim to teach the “deep things of God” by calling them the “deep things of Satan”

Thyatira

Assimilation

Context for Today

- Economic pressure to compromise - Does your job bring joy and life into the world?
- What one group regards as legitimate, compassionate concern another Christian group regards as legalism and cultural irrelevance. Where is the line? Do we divide over end-time teachings, women's ministries, spiritual gifts, etc? At one time, to consider slaves as deserving freedom was considered cultural assimilation
 - We must recognize and publicly affirm that those who sincerely hold different views can be committed Christian, brothers and sisters.

Thyatira

Assimilation

Context for Today

- Other matters involve spiritual life and death, such as participation in idolatry. Jesus' deity, for instance, is an implication of his lordship, a teaching central to the original apostolic proclamation of Christ
- One commentator cautions, "For some people today tolerance is the only real virtue and intolerance the only vice"; another that "while the message to Ephesus warns the church about the dangers of loveless orthodoxy, the message to Thyatira warns against the dangers of a 'soft' love that tolerates all things and judges none."

Sardis

Complacency

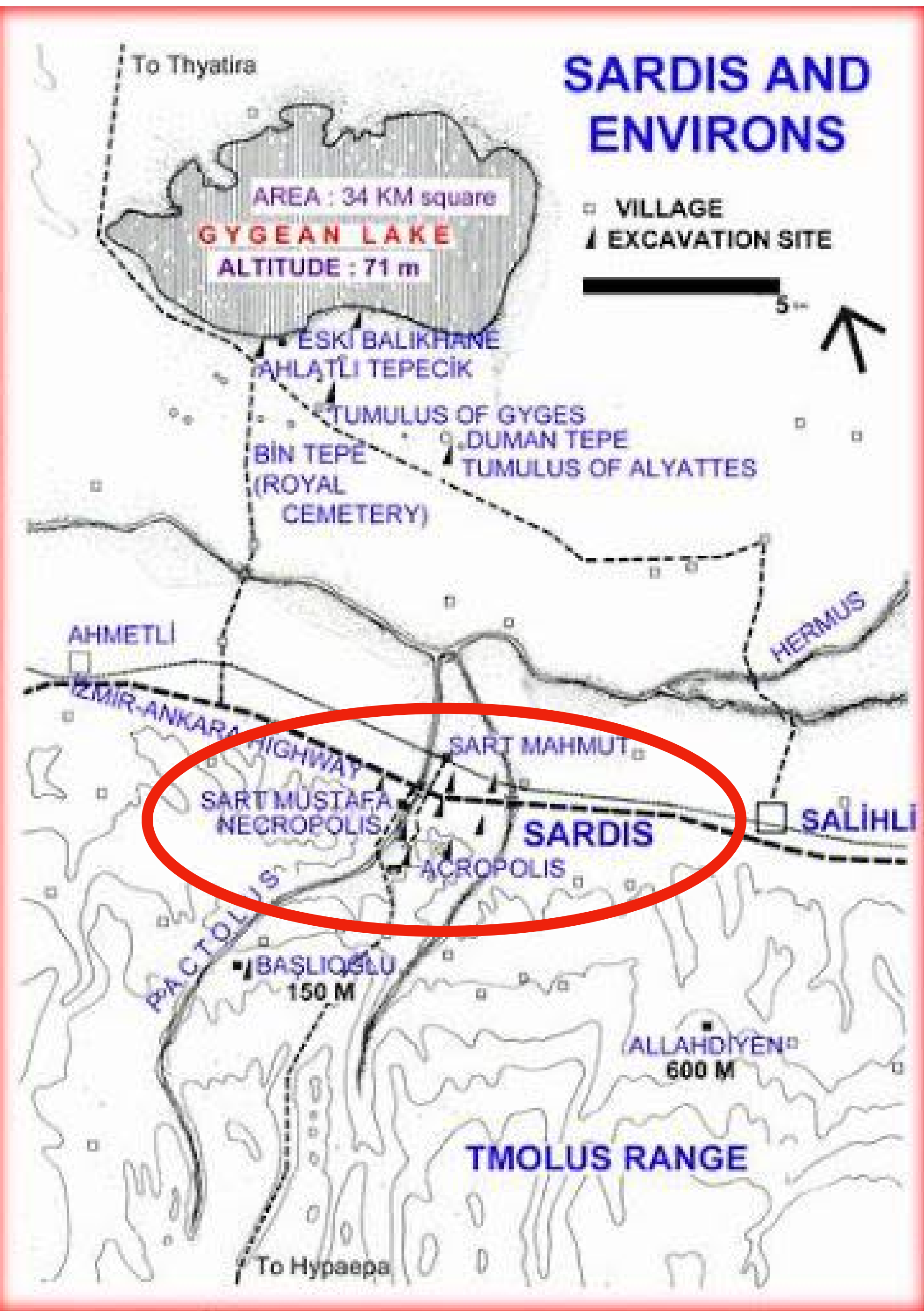
“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of **being alive, but you are dead**. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have **not found your works complete** in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, **I will come like a thief**, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers **will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name** before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Sardis

Cultural Background

- Large temple to Artemis and Zeus, plus local cult of deified Augustus. After an earthquake in AD 17, Rome rebuilt Sardis and the people showed gratitude to the emperor by naming Tiberius the Founder of the City
- Local religion had a preoccupation with themes of death and resurrection
 - Opposing hills of Sardis, the Acropolis and Necropolis, so that the Christians there appear lively like the Acropolis but are actually dead like the city's almost equally visible necropolis
- Clothing industry town. Roman citizens wore a pure white toga at holidays and religious ceremonies, but especially at a triumph



Sardis

Cultural Background

- “Book of Life” - citizen register in the town. Sardis, the western capital of the Persian and Seleucid empires, housed the royal archives relating to an extensive area.
 - Later, John will speak of those who have their name written in heaven’s registry from the foundation of the world.
 - Large Jewish community since ~546BCE. Many Jews were part of the citizen body.
 - The curse of the Minim: ‘May the Nazarenes and the Minim suddenly perish, and may they be blotted out of the book of Life and not enrolled along with the righteous’
 - Some cities blotted the names of those who were executed out of the citizenship rolls (Dio Chrysostom, Discourses 31.84–85)

Sardis

Complacency

Alive and Watching

- That the congregation had a “name of being alive” means to the Christian community was viewed as prosperous and favorable in the eyes of the population. They were inoffensive. They have grown comfortable in a world that lack’s opposition. However, in Christ’s eyes they are dead.
- Wake up, I’m coming like a thief in the night.
 - Conquerors had never overtaken Sardis by conventional war, but had twice conquered it unexpectedly because Sardians had failed to watch adequately. (The Greek word behind niv’s “wake up” is translated “watch” in other texts, e.g., Matt. 24:42–43.)

Sardis

Complacency

Context for Today

- They were inoffensive. What about us is offensive to non-believers?
- warning to “wake up” is especially relevant to sleeping churches—that is, to those that are guided more by their culture than by Jesus’ voice
- Satan didn’t have to persecute or tempt them. They were already comfortable with the world. Undoubtedly, the believers in Sardis dreamed that they were awake.
 - They probably took up civil issues thinking they were standing for Christ by doing so.
- Hitler wooed the German church by offering them legitimacy if they would simply acquiesce to his expansionist plans.
- Jesus does not call the righteous to leave the city or start an alternative church. They were called to be agents of change from within.

Philadelphia

Persecution

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, **the true one**, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

“ ‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that **you have but little power**, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make those of **the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie**—behold, I will make them come and **bow down before your feet**, and they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize **your crown**. The one who conquers, I will make him a **pillar in the temple of my God**. Never shall he go out **of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Philadelphia

Cultural Background

- Great earthquake in 17AD devastated the area. Caesar remitted their tribute for 5 years to help rebuild. As a thank-you, they took on a new name “Neocaesarea” to honor the emperor.
 - Thus this was a “new city” with a “new name” to honor Caesar
- Philadelphia’s volcanic soil was excellent for grapes and thus wine was a chief export. In 92AD, due to the over abundance of wine in the empire, Emperor Domitian ordered that half of Philadelphia's vineyards be cut down and not allowed to regrow. This volcanic soil was only good for grapes, not grain. Domitian broke faith with Philadelphia.
 - The character of Christ stands in implied contrast with that of the imperial god. He will never betray a church which has continued to confess his name when weak and rejected (cf. 3:8). He is the true one.

Philadelphia

The One Who Has the Key of David that Opens and Shuts

- It is Christ who is able to admit people into the kingdom of God, because of their relationship with the doorkeeper.
 - Although the local synagogue sought to exclude them, Messiah has opened the way into God's presence for them.
 - See John 9:22-34 - Healed blind man's parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.
- Yeshua is the one who truly provides access to the New Jerusalem, that is the likeliest sense of opening and shutting the door here. Some Jewish leaders felt they had authority to control access to the Synagogue and even the Temple.

Philadelphia

Context for Today

Persecution

- Those who overcome will be made a pillar. We aren't just welcome in God's house, we are invited to constitute part of God's end-time Temple
 - Ancient pillars frequently bore honorary inscriptions
- The Christians here are not excluding others or seceding from their public witness in a difficult arena, but are excluded against their will on account of their witness. Faithfulness often means being excluded from circles that mean much to us—sometimes even from family.
- Are we embarrassed to speak openly about our faith?
- Worship involves recognizing God's and Christ's true identity and work (cf. 5:9–10, 12) - “We love you but you haven't really fixed anything yet” - is this true worship?

Laodicea

Complacency

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.

“ ‘I know your works: you are **neither cold nor hot**. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because **you are lukewarm**, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For **you say, I am rich**, I have prospered, and I need nothing, **not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked**. I counsel you to **buy from me gold** refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and **white garments** so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and **salve to anoint your eyes**, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to **sit with me on my throne**, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ”

Laodicea

Cultural Background

- After the earthquake in 60AD, only Laodicea among the Asian cities refused Roman financial aid and recovered on their own wealth. They prided themselves in their self-accomplishments and financial independence.
 - with stunning bluntness, the message to Laodicea shatters the illusion of self-sufficiency when Christ declares that the congregation is “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (3:17).
- Salve to put on your eyes, so you can see (3:18). Laodicea was the home of a medical school in the first century with a renowned ophthalmologist. Eye salves were produced from local minerals.
 - Irony: The Laodiceans live in a place noted for its treatment of the eye, yet they are spiritually blind.

Laodicea

Cultural Background

- Lukewarm—neither hot nor cold (3:16). This statement probably refers to the city's water supply. The white travertine cliffs at Hierapolis, in view six miles north of Laodicea, were formed because of the nearby mineral hot springs. Colosse, about eleven miles to the east, was known for its cold pure waters. Laodicea, on the other hand, received its water supply through an aqueduct built by the Romans. Its source was an abundant spring five miles to the south. This water, which had a high mineral content, apparently arrived in the city lukewarm. Calcified pipes from the water system can still be seen near the city's water tower. "Lukewarm" does not refer to believers who lack zeal or are halfhearted, but rather to those whose works are barren and ineffective.



Laodicea

Laodicea

Making God Want to Vomit

- In today's English, he is telling the self-satisfied church in Laodicea: "I want water that will refresh me, but you remind me instead of the water you always complain about. You make me want to puke"
- In contrast to her claims of self-sufficiency, Laodicea was vulnerable to any intended be sergers who wished to cut off the city's water supply. So too, the believers claimed self-sufficiency but were in fact vulnerable.
- Laodicea specialized in black wool. Yeshua offers "white clothing" in contrast to what Laodicea has to offer

Laodicea

Context for Today

- We like to hear Jesus' harsh words for others, but are we willing to have Him speak a critical word to us?
 - Yeshua speaks tenderly to those who have truly been broken - to the weak and marginalized, to those who have suffered.
 - This rebuke is not from irrational anger, but from a broken hearth
- We have a tendency to minimize suffering in other nations because "Great Tribulation" has not come upon America yet. Our self-centered attitude denies those, for example the millions of Chinese who suffered and died under Mao Tse Tung's purges, the right to proclaim Revelation as relevant for them.

Promises Fulfilled

Promises to the Churches Fulfilled Later in the Letter

Ephesus - Those who conquer will eat from the tree of life (2:7; 22:2, 14)

Smyrna - Those who conquer won't be hurt by the second death (2:11; 20:6, 14-15)

Pergamum - Those who conquer will receive hidden manna and a new name on a white stone that no one knows (2:17; 7:15-16; 12:6; 19:12)

Thyatira - Those who conquer and keep my works will share Christ's rule over the nations (2:26-28; 20:4; 22:5) and to receive the "morning star" who is Christ himself (22:16)

Promises Fulfilled

Promises to the Churches Fulfilled Later in the Letter

Sardis - Those who conquer will receive white garments and never have their name blotted out of the book of life (3:5; 7:9, 14; 20:15, 21:27)

Philadelphia - Those who conquer will be made a pillar in the temple of God and will have the name of God, the new city, and Yeshua's new name written on them (3:12; 21:7, 12-14, 22:4)

Laodicea - Those who conquer will sit with Yeshua on his throne, *as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne* (3:21; 20:4; 22:5)

For Reflection

Revelation Speaks to Today

- Imagine the letter (based on the Revelation model) that Messiah might write to your congregation. What would Yeshua bless? What challenge might he give you for faithful living?
- What do you observe about the effect of poverty or wealth on the spiritual vitality of the church? What false doctrines or false teachers circulate today, and how do they get their message to the churches?
- What is the modern equivalent of food offered to idols? In what ways are you more like John of Patmos or the Apostle Paul in your attitude towards Christian involvement in wider society?

Summary

Message to the 7 Churches

- The Christian refusal to participate in civic honors to Caesar was unpatriotic, borderline sedition.
- Why is the message that Jesus is King not dangerous today? Why aren't social media companies and governments scared by Christians sharing the good news?
- We are called to find ourselves in the all the churches - the persecuted, the complacent, and the compromising ones. Let us not think we have arrived.
- The rest of Revelation is a manual on how to keep the faith amidst persecution, wake up from complacency, and refuse to compromise with the beast-like systems of today.