

Bible Lessons



*“He that overcometh shall inherit all things;
and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”*

Revelation 21:7

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Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR THIRD QUARTER, 2018

He That Overcometh

A Study of Revelation 1-4

The message and vision given to the apostle John as he was in exile on the island of Patmos began with individual messages for the seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. For our third quarter I was inspired to study these more in-depth; to find out more about the “He that overcometh” challenge given to each church. After this we are shown the glorious throne of God and introduced to the elders and the four living creatures. We may or may not delve into the rest of the book of Revelation in future quarterly studies; that will be as God will lead. For now, let us open our hearts to the truths, warnings and spiritual treasures revealed to us in the first four chapters of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

JULY 1, 2018

JOHN THE APOSTLE

Matthew 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. [They were partners with Simon Peter and Andrew in fishing; see Mark 5:7-10.]

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

Mark 3:14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,

15 And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

16 And Simon he surnamed Peter;

17 And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:

18 And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite,

19 And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.

MEMORY VERSE: This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. —John 21:24

CENTRAL THOUGHT: John, fisherman son of Zebedee and brother of James, was chosen by Jesus as one of His twelve apostles. He walked very closely with Jesus and later wrote the fourth Gospel, three epistles and the book of Revelation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Smith's Bible Dictionary gives us this summary of John's life:

"John the Apostle was the son of Zebedee, a fisherman on the Lake of Galilee, and of Salome, and brother of James, also an apostle. Peter and James and John come within the innermost circle of their Lord's friends; but to John belongs the distinction of being the disciple whom Jesus loved. He hardly sustains the popular notion, fostered by the received types of Christian art, of a nature gentle, yielding, feminine. The name Boanerges (Mark 3:17) implies a vehemence, zeal, intensity, which gave to those who had it the might of sons of thunder. The three are with our Lord when none else are, in the chamber of death (Mark 5:37), in the glory of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), when he forewarns them of the destruction of the holy city (Mark 13:3), in the agony of Gethsemane. When the betrayal is accomplished, Peter and John follow afar off (John 18:15). The personal acquaintance which existed between John and Caiaphas enables him to gain access to the council chamber, praetorium of the Roman

procurator (John 18:16,19,28). Thence he follows to the place of crucifixion, and the Teacher leaves to him the duty of becoming a son to the mother who is left desolate (John 19:26,27). It is to Peter and John that Mary Magdalene first runs with the tidings of the emptied sepulchre (John 20:2), they are the first to go together to see what the strange words meant, John running on most eagerly to the rock-tomb; Peter, the least restrained by awe, the first to enter in and look (John 20:4-6). For at least eight days they continue in Jerusalem (John 20:26). Later, on the Sea of Galilee, John is the first to recognize in the dim form seen in the morning twilight the presence of his risen Lord; Peter the first to plunge into the water and swim toward the shore where he stood calling to them (John 21:7). The last words of John's Gospel reveal to us the deep affection which united the two friends. The history of the Acts shows the same union. They are together at the ascension on the day of Pentecost. Together they enter the temple as worshippers (Acts 3:1) and protest against the threats of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13). The persecution which was pushed on by Saul of Tarsus did not drive John from his post (Acts 8:1). Fifteen years after St. Paul's first visit he was still at Jerusalem, and helped to take part in the settlement of the great controversy between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians (Acts 15:6)."

From *Wikipedia*: "According to Church tradition, after [Mary's death] John went to Ephesus. From there he wrote the three epistles attributed to him. According to Tertullian (in *The Prescription of Heretics*) John was banished (presumably to Patmos) after being plunged into boiling oil in Rome and suffering nothing from it. It is said that all in the audience of the Colosseum were converted to Christianity upon witnessing this miracle. This event would have occurred in the late 1st century, during the reign of the Emperor Domitian, who was known for his persecution of Christians.

"When John was aged, he trained Polycarp who later became bishop of Smyrna. This was important because Polycarp was able to carry John's message to future generations. Polycarp taught Irenaeus, passing on to him stories about John... [also] Ignatius of Antioch, who was a student of John and later appointed by... Peter to be the bishop of Antioch. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus relates how Polycarp told a story of John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, 'Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.'

"It is traditionally believed that John was the youngest of the apostles and survived them. He is said to have lived to an old age, dying at Ephesus sometime after AD 98."

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Partners*: Name the four fishermen called by Jesus.
2. *Boanerges*: Where did James and John get this name, what did it mean, and by what actions did they demonstrate this?
3. *An Unlikely Pair*: Which other disciple seemed so opposite of John, yet was so close to him?
4. *A Martyr's Courage*: According to tradition, John miraculously survived what torture?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

After the death of the emperor, John returned to Ephesus from Patmos and began visiting outlying Gentile congregations as they would send for him. In one city he noticed an outstanding young boy, recognizing in him the qualities of a leader. Drawing the pastor aside, John motioned toward the youth. "This one I commit to you in all earnestness in the presence of the Church and with Christ as witness," he said, and the pastor accepted the charge and promised to mentor him. John then returned to Ephesus.

The pastor took the boy home with him and faithfully reared him, baptized him and trained him as his own son. Thinking he was securely within God's protection, he relaxed his careful vigil—too soon. An unruly group of young people began to entice him to join them in their entertainment. It wasn't long before they took him with them on their nightly robbery sprees. It became easier for him to give in when they dared him to participate. He soon became so involved that he, with all the aggressiveness of his character, plunged violently into all forms of vice, despairing of any return to virtue, and became a leader of the bandits, the most violent and cruel of them all.

About this time John once again visited the congregation and enquired of the pastor concerning his charge. The pastor burst into tears. "He is dead," he anguished. "How? What kind of death?" John wanted to know. "He is dead to God!" was the answer, "He turned wicked and abandoned, and at last a robber. And now, instead of the church, he haunts the mountain with a band like himself."

John tore his clothes in great grief and called for a horse. He rode straight toward the

robbers' outpost and was taken prisoner. "Take me to your captain!" he commanded.

The hardened chief waited, armed, but when he recognized John he turned and ran away in shame into the mountain wilderness. The old apostle, forgetting his age, followed hard in pursuit. "Why do you run from me, your own father? I have no weapon, and I am old. Have pity on me! There is still hope for you! Don't be afraid, I will answer to Christ for you! I will even die for you! Stand! Believe! Jesus has sent me!"

The youth stopped and lowered his head. Then, trembling and crying bitterly, he threw down his weapons. As John came nearer, he threw his arms around him. With tears raining down, he still concealed his right hand, ashamed of the violence it had done. John fell on his knees, kissing the hand vehemently, assuring the penitent man forgiveness from the Savior.

"And making intercession for him with copious prayers, and struggling together with him in continual fastings, and subduing his mind by various utterances, he did not depart, as they say, until he had restored him to the church, furnishing a great example of true repentance and a great proof of regeneration, a trophy of a visible resurrection" (Taken from *What Rich Man Can Be Saved* by Clement of Alexandria).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

John, the youthful comrade of Jesus, and traditionally considered to be close to Jesus in age and possibly his cousin, was a member of the innermost circle of Jesus' disciples. In his gospel, he even referred to himself as the "disciple that Jesus loved." By reading the scriptures carefully, one can decipher his youthful exuberance and zeal, as well as his tendencies toward exclusivity and entitlement.

To me, it is no accident that John and his older brother James were given the name "Sons of Thunder" by Jesus. Just look at John's "thunderous" personality. In one instance, he tried to stop someone who wasn't a part of the group from casting out devils in Jesus' name (Luke 9:49); he offered, with James, to call down fire from Heaven like Elijah because Jesus wasn't received by the people of one village (Luke 9:51-56); and again with his brother, along with a little assistance from their mother, he tried to get a seat at either the right or left hand of Jesus "in his glory" (Mark 10:35-41; Matthew 20:20-24). Yet, Jesus obviously trusted him, as he and Peter were the ones tasked with making preparations for the Lord's Supper (Luke

22:8-13), and it was to John that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother upon His death.

I have heard it mentioned how remarkable was the transformation of Peter, John's close friend, from a brash, impulsive, and crude fisherman to the bold and learned apostle who gave the chief address on the day of Pentecost, but I would consider John's transformation to be just as notable.

He matured from a somewhat entitled and cliquish young man to a warm, inclusive old man, who in his later years is traditionally thought to have travelled from congregation to congregation admonishing the early morning church to love God and one another, as stated in I John 3:18, "...in deed and in truth". What a great example of the Holy Spirit working in a man's life that allowed him to be used as such a great vessel for the kingdom!

—Bro. Fari Matthews

JULY 8, 2018

GREETING AND BENEDICTION

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

MEMORY VERSE: I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. —Revelation 1:8

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The introduction and greeting of the book of Revelation, which includes a description of the author, his source of inspiration and a benediction of worship and praise to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 1:1 “Revelation”: *apokalupsis* (Greek); an uncovering; an unveiling; a revealing; a spiritual manifestation. “Angel”: a messenger or delegate – either human (Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:24, 9:52; Galatians 4:14; John 2:25) or heavenly (a celestial angel); someone sent (by God) to proclaim His message (*HELPS Word Studies*). “Shortly come to pass”: “Not that they were all to be completely fulfilled within a short time, but that the series of special events predicted were soon to begin. Thus, we speak of a century or eternity as near at hand, by which we mean that the events of the period spoken of are about to commence, although the end of the series may be very far off” (F. G. Smith, *Revelation Explained*).

Revelation 1:2 “Testimony”: record; report; from the Greek root *martus*, meaning witness or evidence; from which we derive the English word *martyr*. This root word is also used in verse 5.

Revelation 1:3 “Prophecy”: the gift of communicating and enforcing revealed truth. “What is clarified beforehand; prophecy which involves divinely-empowered forthtelling (asserting the mind of God) or foretelling (prediction)” (*HELPS Word Studies*).

Revelation 1:4 “Seven Spirits which are before his throne”: “The number seven in Scripture often has the figurative meaning, ‘God's perfect, finished work.’ Indeed, this symbolic sense is often key to interpreting texts that use the number seven, both in the Old Testament and New Testament” (*HELPS Word Studies*). “The number seven is used, as elsewhere in the sacred volume, to denote fulness or completeness...The seven spirits before

His throne describe the third person in the Trinity, as will appear clearer hereafter; seven being used as a sacred or perfect number designating His dignity and excellence. Some have supposed that seven angelic spirits were here described; but it is not consistent with the honor due the God-head to suppose that created intelligences should be exalted to a plane of equality with the supreme Deity. Moreover, they would probably have been described as seven angels, and not as seven spirits" (F. G. Smith, *Revelation Explained*).

Revelation 1:6 "Kings and priests": "Christ has made believers kings and priests to God and his Father. As such they overcome the world, mortify sin, govern their own spirits, resist Satan, prevail with God in prayer, and shall judge the world. He has made them priests, given them access to God, enabled them to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices, and for these favours they are bound to ascribe to him dominion and glory for ever" (*Matthew Henry*).

Revelation 1:7 "They also which pierced him": John is the only Gospel author who recorded the piercing of Jesus (John 19:31-37). This allusion offers proof of the apostle being the author of the Revelation.

Revelation 1:8 "Alpha and Omega": the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, meaning eternity to eternity; used to express the whole of a matter, from beginning to end.

LESSON BACKGROUND

During the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96), John was banished to Patmos, a small, rocky, desolate island ten miles long and six miles wide in the Aegean Sea, near the coast of Asia Minor. Church historian Eusebius records that the Jews were heavily taxed and both Jews and Christians were persecuted during Domitian's reign. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* accounts that the bishop of Jerusalem, Simeon, was crucified during this time, John was boiled in oil, but miraculously survived and exiled to Patmos, and Dionysius, a learned bishop at Athens who had documented the supernatural eclipse at the time of the Savior's crucifixion, was martyred, among others. Flavia, the daughter of a Roman senator, was banished to the island of Pontus.

Domitian insisted upon strict observance to the ancient Roman religious worship of idols. Under this revived pagan influence, when Roman provinces suffered earthquakes, famines or pestilences, blame was laid upon the Christians because they would not worship

the pagan gods. When Christians were brought before the magistrates, they were required to take a test oath. If they refused to take it, they were put to death; if they confessed Christ, their judgment was the same. The law was made "that no Christian, once brought before the tribunal, should be exempted from punishment without renouncing his religion."

"The mouth which persecution closes God opens and bids it speak to the world. So St. Paul, through the Epistles of his Captivity, still speaks. Luther, by his translation of the Bible, spoke from his confinement at Wartburg; and Bunyan, by his divine allegory, shows how feeble were the walls of his cell at Bedford to silence the voice of God. If speech be silver and silence golden, it is also true in the history of the Church that from the captivity of her teachers she has received her most abiding treasures" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*).

This was a time when the church needed answers from God. How precious that the lonely island became a place of holy visitation, as John received encouragement and enlightenment for the days ahead!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Messenger*: How was the Revelation sent to John?
2. *Record*: Of what three things did John write?
3. *Blessing*: What three things bring about the "Blessed are they"?
4. *The Father*: What three things are described about God?
5. *The Holy Spirit*: What terms are used to describe Him and what do they mean?
6. *The Son*: What three things describe Him and what three things has He done for us?
7. *Second Coming*: What four things will happen at that time?
8. *Name*: Which two letters of the Greek alphabet were used to describe Jesus?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

So many precious truths are revealed just in this introduction and salutation. The first which resonate with me are the references to the triune God: three distinct persons, yet

operating as One. There are many heresies which deny the deity of Jesus. Yet it is made very clear right here, as the names and attributes of the Father are also ascribed to the Son Jesus. He is called the Almighty. There is allusion to the beginning words of John's gospel—"And the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The salvation message—Jesus' sacrifice and death, His resurrection, His cleansing us from sin, His making us kings and priests, all He has done for us—is brought out so clearly as well.

His second coming—whether with clouds of the sky, as those that enveloped Him as He ascended, or clouds of saints—is clearly described in this passage. It won't be a secret event, as you hear false teachers of the "rapture" propose. Every eye will see Him, and those in their sins will be mourning their doom.

What a sublime truth on which to meditate—the grace and the peace which come from the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son. And all this in just the greeting of the letter!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

There is no other book in the world that gives us the daily inspiration for life and the accurate details of the future and the past like the Bible does. How great is our God to let His servants know what lies ahead of us!

I will admit some of the reading of the book of Revelation is hard to understand; but it says, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." Let us be challenged to be ones who read it and are blessed by it.

Perhaps the lonely island of Patmos was a blessing in disguise for John because it was void of distractions. The Revelator had all the time he needed to focus on the visions and translate them onto paper most accurately. One can't even imagine, but only the Lord knows how John reacted when seeing the visions and how he felt once he was brought back to his regular mind after all those revelations.

John may have been sick and hungry after they dropped him off there. He most likely

felt lonely and useless because there were no people to minister to. He probably thought that because of his isolation he would never be of any benefit to the gospel work. How could he be fruitful in such an isolated and forsaken place? But God's Word would not return void. All the things that he saw have been and will be very useful for ages clear to the end of time.

—Bro. James Bell

JULY 15, 2018

THE VOICE AND THE VISION

Revelation 1:9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me,

saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

MEMORY VERSE: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. —Revelation 1:18

CENTRAL THOUGHT: John describes the voice and the vision of the glorified Christ, Who gave him instructions and explanations concerning the things he would see.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 1:9 “Brother”: from the same womb; begotten again by a common Father, God; “Companion”: partaker with; co-partner; joint sharer.

Revelation 1:10 “On the Lord’s Day”: the day the Lord rose from the dead, which is the first day of the week. This was the day the early Christians met for worship, commemoration of the Lord’s Supper, singing of hymns, reading of God’s word, prayer and service (almsgiving). The Jewish Sabbath had never been called “The Lord’s Day”; this was only a New Testament term.

Revelation 1:12 “Candlestick”: lamp stand.

Revelation 1:13 “Paps”: the breast or chest of a man.

Revelation 1:18 “The keys of hell and of death”: “The ever-living One entered death’s domains and permitted Himself to be bound with chains; but at His pleasure He broke them asunder, conquered death, and rose triumphant, carrying with Him the keys of hell and of death; and He has ascended on high, alive forevermore; and at His voice all the dead will arise

at His appearing, for the grave can no longer hold its victims” (*Revelation Explained*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The vision John saw of the glorified Lord Jesus makes us think back into the Old Testament when He appeared to different individuals in a majestic form.

Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders “saw the God of Israel,” but only what was under His feet, which Moses described as “a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness” (Exodus 24:10).

Isaiah saw the Lord “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1-5). Mostly he described the seraphim and the smoke which filled the house. He doesn’t mention details about the Lord’s head, eyes, mouth, feet or clothing. Yet the awesome glory caused him to respond, “Woe is me! For I am undone!”

Ezekiel saw visions of God. He saw a throne “as the appearance of a sapphire stone,” and upon it was “the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.” He saw the color of amber and fire round about within it, both upwards and downwards from the loins of the man; fiery glory and brightness that resembled a rainbow. He heard the voice of the Almighty, as the noise of great waters, but he mentions no physical features; yet the glory and brightness affected him as it did John, Isaiah and others. He fell upon his face in awe and fear (Ezekiel 1:26-28).

Daniel saw and described “The Ancient of Days.” He spoke of the fiery stream, fiery flame, and burning fire (Daniel 7:9-10). He did relate details about his garment, which was “white as snow,” and his hair, which was “like pure wool,” but again, there were no facial features which he could describe.

John had been with his Lord in the Mount of Transfiguration. He had seen the dazzling brightness, raiment which was “white and glistening” (Luke 9:29), “white as the light” (Matthew 17:2), and “shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them” (Mark 9:3). Truly that was a glimpse of the glory that would follow Jesus’ death and resurrection; now as he turned around to see the Person of the Voice there could be no doubt. It was his Lord clothed in all of His glory. No man had ever seen Him as John was seeing Him. No wonder he fell at His feet as one with no life left in him!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Your Brother*: John identified himself as just one of the brethren in what three ways?
2. *The Place*: Where was John when he received the Revelation and why was he there?
3. *The Voice*: John compared it to two different things. What were they?
4. *The Churches*: List the seven churches of Asia.
5. *The Person*: Describe the characteristics seen by John.
6. *The Candlesticks*: Jesus explained their meaning; what was it?
7. *The Stars*: What do they represent?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

I'm glad Jesus got right to the point here and told us that the stars represented the angels—messengers, pastors, ministers—of the different congregations, and the candlesticks, or lampstands, represented the churches or congregations themselves.

The Lord in the midst of the lampstands corresponds with verses throughout the scriptures saying that the Lord is in the midst of Zion, His people. He is a light shining out; a burning fire, like the pillar of fire, the Shekinah glory. Zion is composed of the redeemed ones and in the midst of each individual is the presence, the Spirit, of God; each of them are lights in the world, shining in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. They are also “builted together”; together they compose a building which God inhabits and a city that is set upon a hill that cannot be hidden, out of which God shines. What happens when my lamp has gone out? The oil that fuels it is gone and I walk in darkness? And if that happens to you, and you, and you? What a dark hole is left in the world!

In His right hand He had the stars—those who preach the Word, provide an example and pattern by the lives which they live and give courage and guidance to those seeking to know the way. Daniel said, “They that turn many to righteousness [shall shine] as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). In reference to the light that we have shining out of us, a star is no different than a lampstand. But a special calling—to preach the word, evangelize souls, be

a watchman, overseer, and shepherd of souls—that is a greater responsibility. A fearful one! The comforting thing is that the stars are in His right hand. “That strong grasp of that mighty hand—for the word in the original conveys more than ‘holds;’ it implies a tight and powerful grip—sustains and guards His servants whose tasks need special grace, and whose position exposes them to special dangers. They may be of good cheer, for none shall pluck them out of His hand” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

But what if I go away from God’s hand? Then I’m a star on my own, a rogue star; a wandering star. Off in the blackness, alone, not used, tempered or stabilized by God’s own hand, I will finally burn out. My desire is to stay in God’s hand.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The revealed glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is vital for overcoming grace. Jesus once asked his disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” Then following this question He asked them personally who they thought He was. Were they simply following or believing the conservative bloc of public opinion or did they have something deeper? Christ went on to explain that flesh and blood had not revealed this to them, but it was the Father; and the solidity of this revelation is where the Lord would build His church and the gates of hell should not prevail against it.

I am also reminded of John 14:21. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed...” (II Corinthians 3:18).

Stephen, on the great day of his trial, “being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). Whether our trials be great or small, let us fasten our gaze heavenward in faith and sincerity. The Lord can be revealed to us in so many different ways; let us not limit Him!

—Bro. Bob Wilson

JULY 22, 2018

TO EPHESUS

Revelation 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

MEMORY VERSE: He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

—Revelation 2:7

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Christ commended both the “angel” (pastor) and the congregation at Ephesus for good works but gave stern admonition for departing from its first love, commanding repentance lest judgment should be given.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 2:1 “Angel”: Many believe this to be Timothy, who was pastor here after Paul’s execution. “Holdeth”: to be strong; rule; to place under one’s strong grasp; put under one’s control; master.

Revelation 2:2, 3 “Labour” and “has laboured”: labor unto weariness.

Revelation 2:4 “Somewhat”: The *Authorized Version* adds this, but it is not in the original, which says, “I have this against thee, that thou hast...” “Left”: send away from; release; be remiss. “Thy first love”: “It is the regretful cry of the heavenly Bridegroom, recalling the early days of His Bride’s love, the kindness of her youth, the love of her espousals (Jeremiah 2:2. Comp. Hosea 2:15). It is impossible not to see some reference in this to the language of St. Paul (which must have been familiar to the Ephesian Christians) in Ephesians 5:23-33, where human love is made a type of the divine” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

Revelation 2:6 “The Nicolaitans”: “These were, as is commonly supposed, a sect of the Gnostics, who taught the most impure doctrines, and followed the most impure practices. The Nicolaitans taught the community of wives, that adultery and fornication were things indifferent, that eating meats offered to idols was quite lawful; and mixed several pagan rites with the Christian ceremonies” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). Peter, in his epistles, combats the teachings of this Gnostic sect, describing them as “following the way of Balaam.” The doctrine of Balaam, in Revelation 2:14, was to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit fornication. Since Balaam in the Hebrew is the same name as Niclaus in Greek, the followers of Balaam’s doctrines are called by John “Nicolaitans.”

LESSON BACKGROUND

The church at Ephesus began when Paul was passing through the area and found some disciples of the Lord. They had been taught by Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria who was eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, but only knew of the baptism of John the Baptist. Paul taught them about the Holy Spirit and stayed with them over two years, during which the church there grew mightily. Later, after being with them another three years, he prophesied that there would be grievous wolves—false prophets—who would come to devour; also false

teachers would rise up from among their own people and draw away disciples. Paul also mentioned in his epistle to the Corinthians about fighting with “beasts” at Ephesus—a spiritual battle, no doubt, with both pagan foes and heretics. After Paul’s death early writers show that Timothy became pastor of the church there. We can recall Paul’s warnings and pleadings with Timothy, as a young man, to keep that pure gospel that had been committed unto him. He charged him to preach the word, to be an example, to be diligent.

That was A.D. 68. This was 95, and if the “angel” of Ephesus was indeed Timothy, as many Bible scholars believe, then he would now be fifty years old. He had been faithful. He had labored until he was weary. He had fought tooth and nail with the false apostles. The intense pressure had taken its toll. But Christ did not give up on Timothy or the church there. He is the One who walks in the midst of the churches. He holds the ministers in His strong right hand. The One who loves with an everlasting love also rebukes and chastens those He loves. He commended them for their labor and patience. But their strong stand against false doctrine and idolatry had eaten away at the original zeal and ardent love for Christ and for each other. He commanded them to repent; to turn around and go back to what they had at the first.

Two years later, Timothy, still faithful and evidently renewed by his obedience to this message, rebuked the idolaters who paraded past him in their lewd celebration. In their anger they beat him with clubs so severely he died from his wounds. How gracious the mercy, how tender the love of the Savior Who rescued him from burnout and restored his love so that he could face his final day!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Good*: List the things for which the Ephesian church was commended .
2. *“Nevertheless”*: What did Christ have against Ephesus?
3. *The Nicolaitans*: What were their teachings and to what Old Testament person were they similar?
4. *The Angel*: Who was most likely the pastor of Ephesus at this time, and what happened to him soon afterward?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The truths taught by this message to the church at Ephesus are applicable to us today. We too can be so zealous for the truth that we don't realize the fresh, tender, eager love for our Savior has gone into remission. Before long, our experience is just bare orthodoxy, and the essence is missing. It's easy to do *things*, be super-correct in our theology, and depend on those *things* for our spiritual security, but be lacking in intimate communion, "just-for-love-of-You-Lord" worship and fervent devotion to Christ Himself. When we have fought hard, endured much affliction and opposition, and labored until we are bone-weary, the tendency is to grow jaded, hard, and cynical toward God and toward people.

Jesus' call was for repentance. Remember those days of sweet "newlywed" love (recall Paul's lesson to the Ephesians about the bride of Christ?), and let your heart return to close communion with the Lord. This is what it means to "overcome" a heart condition of love in remission. They who overcome are promised access to the tree of life. This refers to Eden where Adam and Eve walked with the Father in the cool of the day in sweet, intimate communion, does it not? The leaves of the tree of life, described in detail in Revelation 22, are for the healing of the nations. When you wear yourself out laboring and fighting, you need renewal, healing and wholeness. That's what is there for you when you renew your ardent pursuit of Christ. Not only here in the midst of the battle, but on into eternity when you've fought your last fight, you can rest in the paradise of God.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

There are many people in loveless relationships. They perform the duties of marriage without the love to accompany it. They may be excellent providers or homemakers or caregivers but somehow their affections are not part of the equation and love is no longer their motivation.

They may feel as though they're under a moral obligation or do this for various other reasons. But whatever has replaced their affection is just not strong enough to sustain the relationship. Any close observer would be able to see the stress cracks, the wearing away, the drudgery of duty and know that unless something changes soon, it will be just a matter of time before it all crumbles.

Our relationship with God is initiated by His love for us. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. We in turn love Him because He first loved us. Our Christian experience is sustained by His love for us and our love for Him. It is the glue that binds us together. It is a two part scenario, each part being of equal importance. He loves us and we must love Him in return.

Love is what activates our faith and brings pleasure to our Lord, for without faith it is impossible to please Him. But love has to be maintained and it must be guarded. Every moment of every day there are “passive” foes vying for our affection—“harmless” things that lead to harmful conclusions that can separate us from the God of love.

The saints at Ephesus had many things right. But they had lost the most vital thing—the proper motivation for their actions. The ultimatum was given—reactivate the love or risk separation.

No one wants to be in a loveless relationship—not even God.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

JULY 29, 2018

TO SMYRNA

Revelation 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

MEMORY VERSE: Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried,

he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. —
James 1:12

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The second church Christ addressed was Smyrna, a poor but spiritually rich congregation whom He commended and encouraged.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelations 2:9 “Them which say they are Jews”: Adam Clarke suggests: “There were persons there who professed Judaism, and had a synagogue in the place, and professed to worship the true God; but they had no genuine religion, and they served the devil rather than God. They applied a sacred name to an unholy thing: and this is one meaning of the word blasphemy in this book” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). F. G. Smith offers: “In all probability the term Jew is applied in its spiritual sense. Paul declares that ‘he is not a Jew which is one outwardly...but he is a Jew which is one inwardly’ (Romans 2:28, 29), and that ‘if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise’ (Galatians 3:29). These persons professed to belong to the true ‘Israel of God’ (Galatians 6:16), but they were without salvation; and the Smyrnaen church would not recognize them as belonging to the congregation... therefore the only name that could be applied to them was ‘the synagogue of Satan’ ” (*The Revelation Explained*).

Revelation 2:10 “Ten days”: a prophetic term probably meaning ten years and referring to the persecution under Diocletian, from 302-312, which was the “greatest persecution that the primitive church ever endured, most grievously afflicting all the Asian, and indeed all the eastern churches” (*Benson Commentary*). “Crown” (as also in James 1:12 and Revelation 4:10): that which surrounds; a garland; a wreath awarded to a victor. This is different from the word *crown* in Revelation 19:12, where Christ has “many crowns.” Here the word means diadem or a royal crown, referring to the infinite majesty and royal kingship of Christ. This mention of crown could be alluding to the crowns given to the Dionysian priests at the expiration of their year in office, or those given during the Olympic games held at Smyrna.

Revelation 2:11 “Second death”: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14). “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power...” (Revelation 20:6). A promise which

has its pledge in the Lord's own life after death, as in Revelation 2:8. The lake of fire is for those who do not overcome (Revelation 21:8).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Smyrna, located about thirty-five miles north of Ephesus on the Aegean Sea (now Izmir, Turkey), was a Roman commercial port with a population of an estimated 100,000 during the time of apostles John and Paul. Acts 19:10 records that from Ephesus, during Paul's third missionary journey, the gospel was spread to "all they that dwelt in Asia," which may have been the time when the church at Smyrna was established. There was a strong Jewish influence in the city which presented much opposition to the Christians. The poverty which was described was most likely due to the fact that when individuals embrace Christianity in an idolatrous land, they usually suffer discrimination, being shunned by society and family and disinherited by parents; are denied public employment, heavily taxed by the government and cut off from any form of assistance.

Great persecution was predicted for these already in tribulation and poverty. The ten days' tribulation, although most likely referring to the severe time of persecution under Diocletian, could also mean "completeness: the test would be thorough. The exhortation, 'Be thou faithful (even) unto death,' seems to favour this last [definition]; while the mention of 'ten days' was, perhaps, designed to remind them that the period of trial was limited by Him who knew what they could bear, and would be but a little while when compared with the life with which they would be crowned" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*). We do know that the pastor, Polycarp, a disciple taught by John, was put to death some years later (the dates have been debated, as either A.D. 155 or as late as 167). This account is given in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*:

"Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna, hearing that persons were seeking for him, escaped, but was discovered by a child. After feasting the guards who apprehended him, he desired an hour in prayer, which being allowed, he prayed with such fervency, that his guards repented that they had been instrumental in taking him. He was, however, carried before the proconsul, [to be] condemned, and burnt in the marketplace.

The proconsul then urged him, saying, 'Swear, and I will release thee; reproach Christ.' Polycarp answered, 'Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?' [The Jews were zealous during the

persecution of Polycarp, eagerly bringing wood for the fire in which to burn him.] At the stake to which he was only tied, but not nailed as usual, as he assured them he should stand immovable, the flames, on their kindling the fagots, encircled his body, like an arch, without touching him; and the executioner, on seeing this, was ordered to pierce him with a sword, when so great a quantity of blood flowed out as extinguished the fire. But his body, at the instigation of the enemies of the Gospel, especially Jews, was ordered to be consumed in the pile, and the request of his friends, who wished to give it Christian burial, rejected. They nevertheless collected his bones and as much of his remains as possible, and caused them to be decently interred.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *“Was Dead, and Is Alive”*: How would these words have bolstered the courage of the suffering congregation?
2. *The Poor-Rich Church*: Explain how this applies to Smyrna.
3. *Used by Satan*: What groups took part in the persecution against the Smyrnaen Christians?
4. *Unto Death*: What “angel” would have been persecuted unto death? Describe his manner while suffering.
5. *The Second Death*: Explain this concept.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

How may we apply the truths from this message? First of all, it is a good reminder to us that financial prosperity is not always a sign of God’s blessing or of deep spirituality. As was explained, many times following Christ means the loss of all material wealth. Truly, having God’s commendation is better than having the fleeting riches of this world.

Secondly, what a great comfort it is to know that Christ is monitoring the length and severity of the tribulation. He knows the end from the beginning. He’s already been there ahead of us and knows the deepest extent of suffering we may endure. He knows when it is too much for us, and He keeps the power to stay its hand and say, “It is enough.”

It is so encouraging to read about Polycarp. We can be assured that God's promises were true; these things actually took place to real people, and they are witnesses to us who search for our own overcoming grace.

What did it mean for the Smyrnaens to overcome? It most certainly meant having determination and resolve to not give in to the persecutors' demands, even when it cost suffering—they were stretched upon racks, made to lie on beds of sharp shell fragments, were scourged until bones and sinews lay bare. Our faith in Christ may lead us through the vale of death. But the promise is, although suffering unto death—the first death, the death of the body—we, overcoming fear and boldly standing for Christ, will not be hurt by the second death, the lake of fire. Be an overcomer!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

This reminds me of one of the saddest stories I ever read in *"Foxe's Book of Martyrs,"* page 15. This happened under the seventh great persecution of the Church, around the year 250 A.D. I quote:

"Nichomachus, being brought before the proconsul (Optimus of Asia) as a Christian, was ordered to sacrifice to the pagan idols. Nichomachus replied, 'I cannot pay that respect to devils, which is only due to the Almighty.' This speech so enraged the proconsul that Nichomachus was put to the rack. After enduring the torments for a time, he recanted; but scarcely had he given this proof of his frailty, than he fell into the greatest agonies, dropped down on the ground, and expired immediately.

"Denisa, a young woman of only sixteen years of age, who beheld this terrible judgment, suddenly exclaimed, 'O unhappy wretch, why would you buy a moment's ease at the expense of a miserable eternity!' Optimus, hearing this, called to her, and Denisa avowing herself to be a Christian, she was beheaded, by his order, soon after."

Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Also, in Luke 17:32-33, "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." Lord, help us to be faithful unto death!

—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

AUGUST 5, 2018

TO PERGAMOS

Revelation 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

MEMORY VERSE: For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

—Hebrews 4:12-13

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Pergamos, the third church Jesus addressed, was commended for not denying Jesus' name and faith, but commanded to repent for allowing false doctrines and loose practices to remain among them.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 2:12 “Pergamos”: (the proper Greek or Latin name is Pergamum or Pergamon) a town of Mysia, situated on the river Caicus, north of Smyrna and Ephesus. It was the royal residence and seat of the Eumenes and Attalian (Hellenistic Greek) dynasties. It was anciently famous for its library, which allegedly contained two hundred thousand volumes; and was home to a huge temple of Aesculapius, the healing god, who was worshipped in the form of a living serpent fed in the temple and was called the God of Pergamon. He appeared on their coins with a rod encircled by a serpent. Pergamon was described as a sort of union of a pagan cathedral city, a university town, and a royal residence. It was said that here the *membranae Pergameniae* (Pergamenian skins) were invented; from which we derive our word *parchment*. Pergamon was the birthplace of Galen, a Greek surgeon, physician and philosopher. It is now called Pergamo and Bergamo, in what is now Turkey.

Revelation 2:13 “Satan’s seat” and “where Satan dwelleth”: Some manuscripts have, “I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s throne is.” Some scholars maintain this description is because of the many temples to various gods which were in Pergamos, especially the temple of Aesculapius, where people from all over the world resorted for cures from their diseases; where lying wonders were performed and curious arts were practiced; where the god’s symbol, the serpent, was displayed and his name meant “Savior” or “Preserver.” It was a city sacred to the gods, and the very headquarters of idolatry. The title could also mean that the persecution here had already extended unto death, as it cited Antipas, called the “faithful martyr.” Nothing historically substantial is known about Antipas.

Revelation 2:14-15 “doctrine of Balaam; Nicolaitans”: See definition in the July 22 lesson.

LESSON BACKGROUND

It seems that even under the duress of severe persecution, the Christians in Pergamos were still bold to take the name Christian and maintain their belief in Jesus. However, the poison working to corrupt the whole congregation was the dangerous looseness that was taught by the Gnostic sect, the Nicolaitans. We have said before: it is the *mixture* of truth and

error that is so deceptive. The Gnostics, addressed by Peter in his epistles, warned against by Paul in his letters to Timothy, and by Jude in his epistle, and judged severely by Jesus' message on Patmos, could only be dealt with by the Word of God, that Sword of the Spirit which convicts and chastens those who are tender and pliable; and condemns and cuts off those who resist admonition.

The Nicolaitans seemed to sway people with their schmoozy “have the world and Jesus too” talk. They were described as being lovers of pleasure, advocating a false freedom and a licentious lifestyle. Adultery, polygamy and fornication, so rampant among them, “furnished to the unbelieving heathen abundant opportunities for slandering the divine word, inasmuch as the reputation of these men brought infamy upon the whole race of Christians,” Eusebius said.

Jesus compares them to the Old Testament prophet Balaam, who, when not allowed by God to actually put a curse upon the children of Israel, showed King Balak how to seduce them into idolatrous worship. By placing beautiful young heathen women in view of the Israelite men, the resulting relationships led them, as prey to the slaughter, into total heathen practices. Balaam knew that when they fell into this, God would no longer bless them and they would fall to Balak in battle.

In this same way, “Christian” teachings that take “salvation by grace” way too far seduce people into thinking worldliness and loose living is “okay” with God, bringing them into satan’s snare and spiritual ruin and deception. We see this as professing Christians both approve, watch and partake in movies and other media which promote fornication and adultery, sports events where immodesty, pride and strife are on display, and immodest clothing which both leads to and encourages lust and pride.

Jesus put it simply and succinctly: God hates both the doctrines and the deeds.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Satan’s Seat:* Describe some things about Pergamos which might be the reason Jesus ascribed this name to the city.
2. *Balaam’s Doctrine:* Describe how his teaching is similar to the way the Gnostics/ Nicolaitans taught about Christianity. How are today’s false teachings similar as well?

3. *The Spirit's Sword*: How is this the only way to truly combat these false doctrines? Discuss the importance of “rightly dividing” God’s truth.
4. *The Overcomer's Prize*: Discuss what may be meant by each of these terms: hidden manna, white stone, new name.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The manna, as we can read in Exodus 16:32-34 and Hebrews 9:4, was laid up in a pot and kept in the most sacred place in the camp, deep inside the covered Ark of God, within the two vails, in the Holiest Place. This sample of the “angels’ food” which fell every morning, six days a week for forty years to feed the Israelites as they wandered through the desert, was to be a reminder to them of God’s provision and a token which pointed forward to the true bread from heaven, who was Christ. The concept of being able to eat of that portion which was so sacred that it could not be looked upon nor touched—how special, how privileged one must be to do so! What did it take to access that holy of holies? Was it not the death of the Lord Jesus which violently tore down that thick curtain which separated the sanctuary from unworthy man? To be able to touch; commune with God, upon that sacred ark, beneath the cherubim—isn’t that only afforded to those who have been blood-washed, redeemed, and have yielded themselves an offering and a sacrifice to God in holy sanctification? Here it is promised to those who overcome the temptation to loose and worldly living, the lure of fellowship with false gods and demons, and the pressure to succumb to the persecutors!

The white stone, I read, has several suggested meanings. White stones were used by ancient judges to signify acquittal, while when the judge handed out a black stone, it meant condemnation. In Roman times, white stones were given as badges, with their names inscribed, to conquerors in the games. Called *tesserae*, there were several different kinds.

One was a kind of contract between two parties, whose names were written on the stone, which was broken in half and exchanged, so that either party could come to the home of the other, and by producing the stone with the host’s name, the guest was admitted to partake freely of home, food and lodging. “But what does this mean in the language of Christ? (1). That the person is taken into an intimate state of friendship with him. (2). That this contract is witnessed to the party by some especial token, sign, or seal, to which he may have recourse to support his claim, and identify his person. This is probably what is elsewhere called “the earnest of the Spirit” (Ephesians 1:14). He then who has received and retains the

witness of the Spirit that he is adopted into the heavenly family, may humbly claim, in virtue of it, his support of the bread and water of life; the hidden manna—every grace of the Spirit of God; and the tree of life—immortality, or the final glorification of his body and soul throughout eternity. (3). By this state of grace into which he is brought he acquires a new name, the name of child of God; the earnest of the Spirit, the *tessera*, which he has received, shows him this new name. (4). And this name of *child of God* no man can know or understand, but he who has received the tessera or Divine witness. (5). His Friend and Redeemer may be found everywhere, because He fills the heavens and the earth; everywhere he may, on retaining this tessera, claim direction, succor, support, grace, and glory; and therefore the privileges of him who overcometh are the greatest and most glorious that can be imagined” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

My personal thought about the new name is that we are identified to the Lord by a name. It is who we are. When we come to Him for salvation and holiness, He works a great change in our very spirit and character, so that our spiritual name is changed, and we are no longer known to him by our old name, but by the new name. There are new gifts, abilities, and new ways of thinking and dealing with others that are entirely because of this new ID given by God. All of this is part of the overcomer’s prize!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Living in Los Angeles, one of our nation’s larger metropolitan areas, I can certainly identify with the church in Pergamos and the evils that surrounded them, as well as the persecutions that befell them for holding to the name of Christ. In the so called “entertainment capital of the world,” the modern gods of pleasure, adult entertainment, licentious and profligate living are being worshipped daily in direct contradiction to the Word of God, and anyone holding to his or her convictions of morality, modesty, simple living, and humility are ridiculed for being hopelessly old-fashioned, and sometimes even considered “bigoted” for their beliefs.

Yet, I have noticed that being surrounded by such an environment can bring about a certain desensitization to the great evils pervading our society today, and if we are not careful, we can begin to make excuses for those around us, particularly our family and friends caught up in such filth, and possibly become less vigilant against the many doctrinal heresies pervading Christianity today that make room for such direct contradictions of scripture.

Jesus was sure to point out to the church in Pergamos that His two-edged sword was ready to make a distinction between truth and error, so if we want to be on His side, we must repent of any sympathies we have harbored, perhaps internally if not outwardly, and hold to the standard that what God calls wrong is still wrong. We can stay true to God, yet still exhibit love and gentleness for those who have gone astray, praying that He in His mercy will grant them the opportunity to come back to Him.

Let us remember that, as one of our songs says, if we would be pillars in the Church of God, we “must overcome the world,” and everyone that is victorious “shall be clothed in white” and “eat the hidden manna from the realms of light” and “reign on earth as king with Jesus.”

Lord, help us to stay true to You and to Your Truth!

—Bro. Fari Matthews

AUGUST 12, 2018

TO THYATIRA

Revelation 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your

works.

24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

28 And I will give him the morning star.

29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

MEMORY VERSE: Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. —Matthew 7:15-16

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The church at Thyatira was commended for its service of charity, faith, and patience; but chastised for allowing a false prophetess who seduced people to immorality and communion with idols to remain in the congregation. Jesus promised swift judgment unless there was repentance, and spiritual authority, power and light to those who overcame.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 2:18: "Son of God": here only in Revelation is this phrase used; all other places have "Son of Man." The meaning seems to point to the authority and sovereignty, the righteous sternness; as also portrayed by His physical description. This name, along with the thought of the rod of iron breaking in pieces, comes from Psalm 2. "Flame of fire": Thyatira was a Macedonian colony which worshipped Apollo, the sun god, whom they named Tyrimnas, and whose image was brilliantly decorated. Possibly this description—also, the reference to "the morning star"— was used because of their worship of that god. "Fine brass": burnished bronze; from a compound word with meanings of the bronze or copper

used to make money or musical instruments, combined with a certain yellow colored frankincense, implying a brilliance that was fiery and metallic. Combined with the phrase “as if they burned in a furnace” from Revelation 1:15, the term could also be pointing to the offering up of the saints as a sweet-smelling sacrifice upon the altar of suffering and persecution, with Jesus right in the furnace beside them, giving them courage, strength and stability.

Revelation 2:19 “The last to be more than the first”: Some translations say, “And (I know) thy works which are last (to be) more in number than the first,” meaning that, unlike Ephesus, which had gone backwards, these at Thyatira were going forward, or doing better than before. “The two Churches are in some respects the exact opposite one of the other. In Ephesus there is much zeal for orthodoxy, but little love; in Thyatira there is much love, but a carelessness about false doctrine” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Revelation 2:20 “That woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess”: A Jezebel in character, (similar to the reference to Balaam) who was to Thyatira as the Old Testament queen was to her husband Ahab. “For letting her alone, for being timid, paying too much deference to her spiritual pretensions, for failing to see and to show that the so-called ‘deep things’ of these teachers were depths of Satan, the chief minister is rebuked. A large number of respectable critics regard Jezebel as a name applied to a faction, not as belonging to an individual. It seems best to view the name as symbolical, always remembering that the Jezebel spirit of proud, self-constituted authority, vaunting claims of superior holiness, or higher knowledge, linked with a disregard of—and perhaps a proud contempt for—‘legalism,’ and followed by open immorality, has again and again run riot in the churches of God” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). We may also consider this opinion: “Some have supposed that this appellation designated a number or class of people teaching these doctrines; but the manner in which “her children,” or disciples, are spoken of would seem rather to point out a particular woman—one who was a leader and the chief instrument of mischief” (*The Revelation Explained*). Revelation 2:21 “I will cast her into a bed”: bring her down into a bed of sickness and pain for a chastisement.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Thyatira was a river city of commerce located between Pergamos and Sardis, a little off of the main road which connected those two cities. Lydia, the seller of purple cloth who Paul

met in the Macedonian city of Philippi, was a native of Thyatira (Acts 16:14). She may have been named for her country, Lydia, the Macedonian colony founded by Alexander the Great, to which Thyatira belonged, and inscriptions found there suggest there was a guild or corporation of purple dyers, a trade for which Lydian women were noted. It may have been she who spread the gospel here after being converted at Philippi.

The false prophetess has been speculated to be the wife of the leading minister there in Thyatira, and as such, held great influence over the church. Whether or not this is true, or whether she was some other woman of influence, or whether Jezebel represents a symbolical false religious force, in practice and doctrine similar to the Gnostics; in any of these scenarios the emphasis is placed on the responsibility of the minister and the congregation to not allow this wicked influence any place; any voice; any esteem. Because it had been allowed, judgment was pronounced. He pointed out that He had already been forbearing and merciful and given space for repentance, but none was forthcoming, so he reiterated his warnings and prepared for purging.

However, there were some there who had obviously disapproved and would have nothing to do with this false ministry. As the deception had given place to gross immorality and feasting with idolaters, these kept themselves free and pure from loose living. They, being faithful in the little things, were to be made ruler over all. What all did this mean? And what was the morning star to be given them?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Commended:* For what things did the Thyatirean church receive praise from Jesus?
2. *Known:* The verse from Matthew lets us know how we might discern false teachers: By _____.
3. *Judged:* Explain what was to happen to “Jezebel” and her “children.”
4. *Spared:* Jesus said He would put on the faithful ones no other burden because they had not known the _____ of _____.
5. *Awarded:* Describe what was promised to the overcomers. To what Old Testament scriptures are they referring, and what do you think they mean?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

To the “him that overcometh” phrase in this place, I note that He adds, “And keepeth my works unto the end.” There seems to be more emphasis on “works” in the message to Thyatira. He had also said “I will give unto every one of you according to your works.” And the now familiar, “I know thy works.” To add emphasis to this, His “eyes like unto a flame of fire” and He “searcheth the reins and hearts” are also mentioned. Could He be emphasizing this because the tendency in the human heart to gloss over blatant transgressions and heresies for the sake of “not offending” or “showing love?” Overcoming this common human fault would take extreme carefulness to make sure our works were pure and our hearts were totally honest before God; and courage to confront even those we love with the truth.

In this way, we need divine power over the nations. We need rule over our own spirits. We need divine authority and the backing of God’s Word in what we say or do. He has promised this to the missionary to foreign lands combating the darkness and error ruling heathen tribes for centuries; or confronting confusion resulting from false prophets; or prevailing over curses and threats placed upon the gospel worker from angry and superstitious medicine men; or conquering the enemy back on the home front working to afflict, deceive and enslave the missionary’s own family.

The morning star. Is He saying, “I give you *Myself*?” Because later in chapter 22 He is called the “bright and morning star.” Although some may disagree, that is enough meaning for me at this point! To have Him personally revealed to me deep in the midst of the battle; to personally experience His presence so real and unmistakable—there could be no greater gift!

It could also mean—to overcome timidity, fear and slothfulness; to open up and admit failures and weaknesses and be healed of them. To work out the issues honestly and in carefulness and the fear of God—and have God give me the promise of hope: “Here’s the morning star, the bright harbinger of dawn and approaching deliverance and victory! I am coming to save you! Be faithful! The morning approaches, you who weep through the night!”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Thyatira, along with other congregations, had commendable areas but also had areas of real lack and need that were throwing things out of balance. The definition of balance is stability produced by even distribution of weight on each side; mental or emotional steadiness; to bring into harmony or proportion. A good balance should not be underestimated in our Christian life.

Wrestlers often try to throw off their opponent or catch them off balance. If you lose balance, your opponent definitely will have the advantage and you are very likely to be looking up from the ground. Have you been there spiritually? We can all probably relate to a tire that has gotten out of balance. The car shakes and shakes and makes you think it is on the verge of totally falling apart.

Spiritual failures are many times the result of being out of balance and there are shaking consequences that affect families and congregations. I remember a portion of a message in which Bro. Mart Samons stated, “If the devil can't pull you back into the world, he will try to push you to extremes in religion.” Satan knows that if he can get you out of balance he will have an advantage.

Some personalities, like Peter, tend to pendulum extremes. At first one extreme—“Thou shalt never wash my feet”—swinging past to the other extreme—“Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” There are machines that spin tires and that can detect where a counterweight needs to be added. The Holy Spirit also has a keen sense of detection and can give us a good spouse to help balance us out. The Holy Spirit also has access to numerous weights that he can bring into our lives to give us the balance we so desperately need.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

AUGUST 19, 2018

TO SARDIS

Revelation 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he

that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

MEMORY VERSE: The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.

—Proverbs 21:16

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Although a few members of the congregation in Sardis were undefiled, the pastor and many of the professing Christians were spiritually dead. They were urged to repent lest they be caught unaware at the Lord's coming.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 3:1 "A name that thou livest, and art dead": A reputation among the churches of piety and spiritual life.

Revelation 3:2 "Perfect": to fill to capacity; fill up; complete.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Sardis, once the capital city of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, was located south of Thyatira, lying along the little river Pactolus, where gold dust from Mount Tmolus was found in the early years of Sardis' history. During the reign of King Croesus, metal workers in Sardis found out how to separate gold from silver, thus producing metals with a purity which could be trusted. Sardis was the first city to mint pure gold and silver coins, causing an economic revolution and bringing wealth to Sardis. The term "rich as Croesus" seems to refer to this.

The art of wool dyeing was said to have been invented in Sardis, and it was a trading port for carpets and other woolen goods. When it was taken by Cyrus (548 B.C.) during the reign of Croesus, it was one of the most splendid and flagrantly wealthy cities of the East. Later under Roman rule, it sank in wealth and importance. During Tiberius' reign, (AD 17) Sardis and twelve other cities were demolished by earthquakes and then troubled by pestilences, but were later rebuilt by the emperor. Sardis flourished again as a wealthy trade city at the time of this epistle.

Conquered by the Byzantines in 1097, Sardis continued its decline until its destruction in 1402 by the Turco-Mongol warlord, Timur. Now the ruins lie near the Turkish village of Sart.

The people of Sardis worshipped the goddess Cybele, whose temple ruins may still be seen, but heathen worship was not even mentioned in Jesus' address to them. There seemed to be no persecution from Jews or pagans; nor grave immoralities, nor heresies, such as the Nicolaitan doctrines, mentioned—only that they had a reputation for being a viable Christian church, but in reality were formal and lifeless, and didn't seem to know it. "The surest sign of spiritual death is unconsciousness. Paralysis is not felt. Mortification is painless. Frostbitten limbs are insensitive. They only tingle when life is coming back to them" (*MacLaren's Expositions on the Holy Scriptures*).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Beginnings*: What verses make us know there had been spiritual life at the first?
2. *History*: What seems to be a common thread in the history of Sardis? Explain how this could have been a cause for the spiritual death.

3. *Exhortation*: What five things did Jesus tell this church to do?
4. *He That Overcometh*: What were promised to those who were undefiled and who overcame?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Although grievous heresies or evils weren't addressed in the letter to this church, there was something that had defiled most of the congregation. What could it have been? Good works had been started in many people, but they were not continued until completion. Again, something hindered; something stifled spiritual growth.

They weren't being crushed by persecution. A dead church isn't making much disturbance in the wicked culture around it, so the culture leaves it alone.

Could the long period of wealth, the busy commercial life, the luxury and ease be the defiling element? It isn't hard to imagine. Jesus mentioned how that riches are deceitful. It is easy to begin thinking that my spiritual life is just fine because I am so "blessed" by lots of income. People also begin to feel that wealth "adds status to our church because it just looks good in society; it makes people think well of your religion when they see how nice your home is," which is actually another deception.

Jesus' admonition was to remember their beginnings and repent. Turn around and go back to humility, fear and submission to God. Stop the busy lifestyle and take time for your soul. Pick up the forsaken outreach endeavors and begin weeping for souls again. Wait, we are talking about a first-century congregation...or could we also be needy of this wake-up call in our generation?

Jesus promised white robes—true, Christ-life righteousness—if they would overcome, and even more than that; instead of them having a dead, formal "name" here on earth, they would have a "name" of which He would not be ashamed. He would not blot it out of His book, but would point it out to His Father and to the angels. A good name, a name that is owned— "It is my people"—by the Lord, is rather to be chosen than great riches.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Have you ever had your feelings hurt by someone who spoke too plainly? Maybe you asked for their advice or perhaps they just volunteered it. Either way, you were offended by what they said. When this happens our human nature often seeks to discredit the message or the messenger, particularly when it comes to spiritual matters.

God puts people in our lives to help us maintain a proper perspective. We all have blind spots and cannot see ourselves objectively. So God uses the eyes of others to help us see who we really are and how we really are. Just because we identify ourselves in a certain way does not mean that our self-assessment is accurate. There may be times when we are shocked to discover our true spiritual identity.

We thought ourselves to be a certain way but find that the opposite is true. Spiritual decline can be subtle. The grace of God slowly dissipates and there is little to no effort made to strengthen and replenish it. What was once alive and thriving becomes dead and empty.

God sees us for who we are. But no matter where we are on the spiritual spectrum, it is not God's desire to leave us there. It is His will to draw us ever closer to Him. And for that to happen we, too, must know where we stand. So in His faithfulness He speaks plainly—through His word and through His people.

Brutal honesty can be painful but it is also practical, and at times, necessary. It may offend initially but if we embrace its truth we are better off for doing so. When someone who loves us tells us the truth about ourselves, may God help us to take heed.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

AUGUST 26, 2018

TO PHILADELPHIA

Revelation 3:7 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 no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut

it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

MEMORY VERSE: And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. —Isaiah 22:22

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Philadelphia, a church that was small in number and faced opposition from both Jews and pagans, but had kept Jesus' Word and had not denied His name, was promised an open door to proclaim the gospel through the ages, winning power against the troubling religious elements, keeping power from the hour of temptation, stabilizing power in the church of God, and a three-fold inscription of a spiritual name.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 3:7 "He that is holy": The Holy One of Israel, a frequent Old Testament name for God; here it is equating Christ with God. "He that is true": *True* is a term John commonly used; occurring nine times in the fourth Gospel, four times in John's First Epistle, and ten times in Revelation.

Revelation 3:9 "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet": "Most interpreters refer to the Jews. Others explain more generally, of the bowing down of the Church's enemies at her feet. Trench refers to a passage in the Epistle of Ignatius to this

Philadelphian church, implying the actual presence in the midst of it of converts from Judaism, who preached the faith which they once persecuted” (*Vincent Word Studies*).”

LESSON BACKGROUND

One of the first of the ancient cities which bore the name Philadelphia, this one was established in 189 BC by the Pergamon King Eumenes II, who named it for the love of his brother, Attalus II, who became his successor. Attalus III, the last of the Attalid kings of Pergamon, bequeathed the city to his Roman allies in 133 BC. Philadelphia became part of Asia when the Romans combined the Kingdom of Pergamon with Ionia in 129 BC.

Located southeast of Sardis, Philadelphia was constantly suffering from earthquakes due to its position on the volcanic slopes of Mount Tmolus, and was destroyed along with Sardis in the earthquake of AD 17. The Roman emperor Tiberius rebuilt the cities and relieved them of having to pay taxes. Because of its fertile volcanic soil, the area around Philadelphia was particularly suited for growing grapes. Early coins depict Bacchus, the wine deity. A sixth century nickname for the town was “Little Athens” due to the many festivals and temples which could be seen there. One can gather that there was heathen opposition in Philadelphia; in the second century twelve Philadelphians were martyred there at the same time as Polycarp of Smyrna.

There was also Jewish opposition. Possibly Jews fleeing the destruction of Jerusalem came to Philadelphia for relief, but gave persecution to the Gentile Christians there. The epistle of Ignatius to Philadelphia spoke of “Judaism as one of their chief dangers. There were men among them who questioned the authority of Gospels and Epistles, and admitted only the Old Testament Scriptures as binding” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

What was meant by Christ keeping the Philadelphian church from the hour of temptation that would come upon the whole world? F. G. Smith, in *Revelation Explained*, quoted from Gibbon’s *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* about the longevity of the church at Philadelphia, even through the world-wide rise of Islam and Turkish rule: “The captivity or ruin of the seven churches of Asia was consummated [by the Ottomans] A. D. 1312, and the barbarous lords of Ionia and Lydia still trample on the monuments of classic and Christian antiquity. In the loss of Ephesus the Christians deplore the fall of the first candlestick of the Revelation. The desolation is complete; and the temple of Diana and the church of Mary will equally elude the search of the curious traveler. The circus and three stately theatres of

Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes. Sardis is reduced to a miserable village. The God of Mohammed without a rival is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamus; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant sons defended their religion and freedom above fourscore years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the path of honor and safety may sometimes be the same" (*Vol. VI., p. 229*).

"It held out against the Ottoman power until the year 1390 A. D., when it surrendered to Sultan Bayazid's mixed army of Ottoman Turks and Byzantine Christians. This was six years after the death of Wycliffe, 'the morning star of the reformation,' who opposed the corruptions of the Papacy, gave the world the first English translation of the Bible, and sowed the seeds that soon grew and produced a Huss, a Jerome, and a Luther. So God preserved the Christians of Philadelphia in the East until He began raising up others to herald His truth in the West, whose labors soon ripened into the glorious Reformation of the Sixteenth Century" (*Revelation Explained*).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Word of My Patience*: What may this mean?
2. *The Key of the House of David*: Who has this key, and what prophet foretold this?
3. *The Open Door*: After reading Philadelphia's history, what do you think is meant by this?
4. *The Pillar*: What did this mean to Philadelphia, and what does it mean to us?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

What an encouraging story of God's power! When God says, "I will keep you," He literally means against ALL odds! When He says, "I will keep the door open," He means just that. But what did He mean by making the overcomer to be a pillar in the temple of God?

Individually and as a community, believers in Christ make up the temple of God, or the church of God, which is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 2:20-22). Also, later in the Revelation, Christ is said to be the temple of the New Jerusalem. Here is a precious truth: Christ makes His abode in us; we are His habitation through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. But we also dwell and abide in Him!

And he shall no more go out. He speaks of permanence and of strength, as foreshadowed by two pillars in Solomon’s temple (II Chronicles 3:17) named Jachin (He shall establish) and Boaz (In it is strength). Here is our eternal security. As long as we are abiding in Him and He in us, we shall no more vacillate between sin and serving God. That can be the child of God’s experience in this life; and in the eternal abode, even the possibility of going “out” is permanently closed. No more temptation, no tests, no trials, no tribulation.

The triple inscription. Oh, Lord of glory, help us to more fully comprehend and experience what it means for You to write your Father’s Name upon us! To be completely owned by Him and possessed by Him! To bear His image and His seal! And to have the name of Your New Jerusalem, which also is “The Lord our righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:16), “The Lord is there” (Ezekiel 48:35), “Zion,” “The faithful city,” “The holy city,” “City of truth,” “Bride of Christ,” and never the designation of fallen, apostate religion, the “mark of the beast”!

It is becoming a pattern as we read in these epistles that whatever Christ is, that is what He makes us; He causes us to be partakers with Him. He was highly exalted with glory and honor after His submission and obedience to the cross, upon His ascension; and given a name which is above every name (Philippians 2:8, 9). Now He promises this glory (John 17:22) and this new name to every overcomer. Let us also endure the cross that we too might ascend with Him to gates of glory!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

What a blessing it is when the Lord Jesus sets before us an open door, whether it be a door of knowledge and understanding or a door of opportunity! In the 24th chapter of Luke we read of two of Jesus’ disciples journeying toward Emmaus, on the day of His resurrection, confused, bewildered, and discussing the news of the day. “And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them” (Verse

15). At length, “their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Verses 31-32).

In Acts 16:14 we read of Lydia, woman of Thyatira, “whose heart the Lord opened.” Are there any attitudes or actions on our part that would cause the Lord to be inclined to open doors or to shut them on our behalf? Evidently, Christ set an open door before the church in Philadelphia because they had been strong, kept His Word, and not denied His name. Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

On the other hand, we read in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 of those who, “because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved...God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” To such the door of opportunity, knowledge, and salvation is shut.

It is imperative that we earnestly “seek” and “knock” at the appropriate time. “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near” (Isaiah 55:6). The five foolish virgins failed to get in earnest enough about what was available to them until “the door was shut.” Then, they came crying, “Lord, Lord, open to us,” but it was too late. Likewise, in the days of Noah, when God shut the door of the ark, no man was able to open it and enter. Christ has set before us an open door: “... Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Let us take full advantage of our opportunity.

—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

SEPTEMBER 2, 2018

TO LAODICEA

Revelation 3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 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.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

MEMORY VERSE: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

—Colossians 2:8

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Laodicean church and its pastor had fallen into spiritual lukewarmness, poverty, wretchedness, blindness, misery and nakedness; yet were vainly deceived into thinking they had no need. Jesus, in love for them, counseled, rebuked and chastened them and continued knocking at their heart's door, promising sweet communion and a place with Him in His Father's throne if they would overcome.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Near to Colosse, east of Ephesus, and southeast of Philadelphia, Laodicea was a wealthy manufacturing and banking city. It was founded by the Syrian Antiochus II (261-246 B. C.) who named it for his wife, Laodike. It came into industrial prominence when Rome formed

Asia in 190 B. C. Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 A. D., but was so wealthy that the citizens rejected Roman aid and rebuilt the city themselves.

In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul directed some of his admonitions specifically to the Laodiceans and to Archippus, who was evidently the pastor there, and most likely the “angel” to whom the Revelation epistle was addressed. Paul ordered the Colossian epistle to be read to the church at Laodicea (Colossians 2:1; 4:16-17). Our memory verse contains some of the warnings Paul gave them, which echo distinctively in our minds as we read of the condition the congregation was in when the epistle from Patmos was given. Paul’s “great conflict” indicates the burden and fervent desire he had for them, although it is not certain that he had personally visited Laodicea.

There are no particular inner heresies nor outward enemies listed in the message to Laodicea. It evidently received no terrors of persecution. Like Sardis, the inhabitants of the city were extremely wealthy. They trusted in their riches, the traditions which they held and the absence of opposition as signs that they were spiritually prosperous. They interpreted the “knocking” of Christ—blessings and mercies He would send, help He would give in need, warnings and spiritual stirrings—as proof that He was dwelling within, when in reality, He was a forgotten stranger standing outside the door. “Such are neither earnest for God nor utterly indifferent to religion. They are, perhaps, best described as those who take an interest in religion, but whose worship of their idol of good taste, or good form, leads them to regard enthusiasm as ill-bred, and disturbing; and who have never put themselves to any inconvenience, braved any reproach, or abandoned any comfort for Christ's sake, but hoped to keep well with the world, while they flattered themselves that they stood well with God; who were in danger of betraying their Master, Judas-like, with a kiss” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Titles*: What three did Christ ascribe to Himself?
2. *Temperature*: How did Christ describe the spirituality of the Laodiceans?
3. *Truth*: How did the Laodiceans describe themselves, and what was reality?

4. *Trade*: What steps were they to take to get rid of their complacency and pride and acquire Christ's communion and righteousness?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Jesus tenderly but masterfully counseled the complacent congregation to buy the real gold and the true righteousness, and to anoint their spiritual eyes. The result of obeying this command would be a burning zeal and a complete change of mind (repentance). They were to hear His knock and voice and open the door to Him.

This is what it took to overcome. In the commands to other churches, the intimate, personal communion with Christ was the prize given to the overcomer. Here He goes a step further. The communion ushers us into a final promotion—a grant to sit with Him on His throne. “Even as I also overcame”—what thoughts are evoked by this? The temptations of the devil; the weakness of His flesh, the rejection by His brethren, the battle in the garden, the tortures of the cross...He overcame by completely submitting to His Father's will. So shall we.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

As a young boy attending services at the Church of God chapel in Fresno, California, I can remember a set of paintings hanging behind the pulpit by the American artist Warner Sallman, one of which I later learned was titled "Christ at Heart's Door." Those paintings struck a chord with me then, and as I got older I marveled at the subtleties conveyed by the artist, such as there being no handle on the outside of the door, conveying the concept of Jesus only being allowed in if the heart's owner would open to Him.

However, imagine what a revelation it was to me when I later came to understand that Christ wasn't knocking on the heart's door of sinners, He was knocking on the heart's door of those who considered themselves to be a part of His Church! Imagine Jesus standing on the outside, a stranger to those who claim to know Him. They believe they are following Him and His commandments, and yet He is on the outside knocking, waiting for them to open the door and let Him in!

This realization was a bit startling, and it shows just how easy it is for complacency to creep in, causing us to be less zealous and "on guard" than when we first came to Christ. There are many going about doing things in His name, and yet at the Judgment He will say to them, "Depart...I never knew you..." These illustrations confirm just how necessary it is that we are truly listening and heeding His call, and following Him closely with a fervency that never abates. I am reminded of a few lines from the old hymn, "Let Him In:"

"Hear you now His loving voice? Let the Savior in, O let the Savior in;
Now, oh, now make Him your choice, Let the Savior in, O let the Savior in.
He is standing at your door; Joy to you He will restore,
And His name you will adore, Let the Savior in, O let the Savior in.

Now admit the Heav'nly guest, Let the Savior in, O let the Savior in;
He will make for you a feast, Let the Savior in, O let the Savior in.
He will speak your sins forgiv'n, And when earth ties all are riv'n,
He will take you home to Heav'n, Let the Savior in, O let the Savior in."

—Bro. Fari Matthews

SEPTEMBER 9, 2018

THE THRONE

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

MEMORY VERSE: Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. —Revelation 4:11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: John's vision continues as a new scene unfolds—the throne of God and its surroundings. The elders and the living creatures round about the throne are symbolic of the redeemed of all ages and the ministry of both Old and New Testament dispensations.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 4:1 “After this”: after these things. “I looked”: I saw. “And behold, a door was opened in heaven”: “The angel with trumpet voice gave summons for him to ascend to heaven ‘in the spirit’ (or under the influence of the spirit of prophecy) to behold the events of

the future, passing before him as a vast moving picture. This fact of John's ascension to heaven to behold certain visions of the future (which begin properly with chapter 6) will serve to explain many allusions to things said to occur in heaven, merely signifying that John was in heaven when these things were revealed to him, although their fulfilment was intimately connected with the affairs of the church on earth, for whose benefit the Revelation was given and unto whom it was sent" (*Revelation Explained*).

Revelation 4:2 "A throne": a symbol, not of God, but of His power and authority. "No symbol of God is given, for the reason that there is no analogous object that can be chosen as his representative" (*Revelation Explained*).

Revelation 4:3 "And he that sat upon was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone": not symbolizing God, but "like" or describing his glory. Most likely the jasper stone refers to a diamond, as described also in Revelation 21:11 as "a stone most precious, clear as crystal." The sardine stone was a brilliantly red gem. This would refer to kingly garments of a great Majesty upon his throne. "And there was a rainbow round about the throne": "These seem emblems of the excellence of the Divine nature, and of God's awful justice. The rainbow is a fit emblem of that covenant of promise which God has made with Christ, as the Head of the church, and with all his people in him" (*Matthew Henry*). "The rainbow on the cloud, to Noah and his descendants, constitutes the sure pledge of God's covenant promise not to destroy the earth with another deluge; so, also, the bow surrounding the throne is a symbol of God's covenant favor with his people eternally" (*Revelation Explained*).

Revelation 4:4 "Four and twenty seats": thrones; for those twenty-four elders who represent all the redeemed; God's people as "kings and priests" (chapter 5:10). Twenty-four is understood to be a number representing God's people from the Old Testament, as literal Israel formed from twelve tribes; plus God's people of the New Testament, spiritual Israel, formed under the ministry of the twelve apostles. Some have thought that the twenty-four-course priesthood arranged by David (II Chronicles 24:1-19) points to the spiritual priesthood of believers represented by these twenty four elders in John's vision. "White raiment": righteousness. "Crowns of gold": power and authority.

Revelation 4:5 "Lightnings and thunderings and voices": symbols of that righteous power which can show itself in judgment (Psalm 97:2) as in the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. This was also accompanied, as shown in verse one, by the trumpet-voice, as at Sinai. "Seven lamps of fire...which are the seven Spirits of God": Also referred to in Revelation 3:1 and 5:6, this represents the seven-fold operation of the Spirit of God. "May there not be allusion to the covenant with Abraham, which was ratified by fire? Lamps, or torches, of fire

went between the divided pieces of the heifer and the she-goat. If this be correct, the vision of this chapter reminds us that God is ever mindful of His covenant. The rainbow, the token of the covenant with Noah; the flaming torches, tokens of the covenant with Abraham; and the thunderings and lightnings, the tokens of the covenant at Sinai, are ever with Him” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

Revelation 4:6 “A sea of glass like unto crystal”: “a broad expanse spread out before the throne with a glassy or transparent appearance like crystal” (*Revelation Explained*). The actual Greek wording, “as it were a sea of glass,” is the same as in Revelation 15:2. This is similar to the description of the throne scene in Exodus 24:10 and again in Ezekiel 1:26-28. “Four beasts”: this Greek word is *zoon*, which means *living beings*, or *living creatures*; not *therion*, which is used for the word *beast* thirty-five times in Revelation, referring to a wild animal disposition. These creatures also represent the redeemed of all ages, as seen in their activity before the throne in the next chapter. They and the twenty-four elders fall down “before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.” They sing a new song, which contains praise to the worthy Lamb, who has made them “kings and priests” (Revelation 5:8-10).

LESSON BACKGROUND AND APPLICATION

After John’s initial vision of the glorified Christ, who gave him epistles to write to each of the seven churches of Asia, he saw, in a visionary way, an open door and heard a trumpet voice inviting him to “Come up.” Transported in the spirit (just as Ezekiel was brought “to Jerusalem” and saw, through a door in the temple, the things transpiring there), John witnessed through this open door the majestic throne and the worshippers about it.

Our lesson today focuses on the description of the throne area and introduces the elders and the living creatures. The next two lessons will zoom in on the four creatures and their meaning.

The twenty-four elders, described as sitting on twenty-four thrones “round about the throne” of God, were clothed in white raiment and crowned with gold crowns. Although both elders and beasts represent the blood-washed redeemed who sing praises around God’s throne, the twenty-four elders are separately designated from the four beasts, or living creatures. Their thrones and crowns indicate the power and authority given to them as God’s ministering servants, those among God’s people who serve by preaching the gospel

throughout the earth, healing the sick and casting out devils. The close connection between the elders and four living creatures can be found in the twenty-four wings of the four creatures (six wings on each creature, verse 8), signifying how God calls from among the redeemed ones messengers who “fly” throughout the earth proclaiming the gospel message. The characteristics of the beasts, which we will study later, are thus applicable to both the laity and the ministry as well.

The lamps of fire which are also located “before the throne” portray such a beautiful picture of God and His church: the behind-the-literal-scenes, on-going, ever-refining, ever-renewing, never-ceasing illumination, inspiration, activity, worship, ministry, and power of the Spirit of God working with His people!

The sea of glass has been variously interpreted: some say it speaks of the laver that was in Solomon’s temple; some say baptism; others are sure it means the blood of Christ; still others maintain it represents the Holy Spirit. I believe the mention of it in Revelation 15:2 gives clues. There it is “mingled with fire,” while in this 4th chapter, lamps of fire are mentioned as co-occupying the place “before the throne.” Elsewhere in Scripture, God’s judgments are described as a “great deep” (Psalm 36:6), and as a “glass” (James 1:22-25). Its close connection to the throne and the rainbow “round about” it speaks of God’s Word, promises, covenants and laws upon which His throne is established. The saints triumphant over the beast and victorious through sufferings “stand” upon this sea. If we take the position, then, that this sea of glass represents God’s Word, mingled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, that actually takes in His judgments, covenants, baptism, the blood, and the laver! We as redeemed saints of all nations and ages stand—are recognized, victorious, approved—on God’s Word because we believe it, trust in it, base our lives and convictions upon it, obey it, prove it true by our lives and proclaim it to the world.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Jasper and Sardine Stone*: What was described by these?
2. *Rainbow*: What does this symbolize?
3. *Twenty-four Seats*: To what do these refer?
4. *Twenty-four Elders*: Who do these represent?

5. *Lamps of Fire*: Explain the meaning of these.
6. *The Sea of Glass*: Discuss the precious truth portrayed by this symbol.

REFLECTIONS

“We stand upon the sea of glass, that’s mingled with Jehovah’s fire;
Our robes are white, our feet as brass, We stand upon the foe’s empire.
We bow no more to gods of men, we shout the victory o’er the beast;
Yea, o’er his mark and o’er his name, we overcome through Jesus Christ.”

The song, “If You Would Be a Pillar” in our Evening Light book also comes clearly to mind when thinking about overcoming. The song highlights several important things we need to focus on.

1. “You must overcome the world.” How? “Die to fame and reputation; take the path that Jesus trod.”
2. “You must triumph over sin.” How? “Be cleansed from every evil through the Savior’s precious blood.”
3. “You must conquer in his name.” How? “Take the holy Bible way and live beneath the cleansing flood.”

“He that overcometh shall be clothed in white,
And shall eat the hidden manna in the realms of light.
Reign on earth as king with Jesus in the Word we’re told,
And in heaven shall forever walk the streets of gold.”

One day I was meditating on a message the Lord gave me: “Our concept of grace is measured by the size of our excuses.” For example, people say, “I would overcome my weight problem but . . . I would testify more in church and at work but . . . I would be more spiritual if . . . I would be more patient if . . . I would be on time to church but . . .” and the list goes on and on.

It’s clear that people don’t overcome because they make too many excuses. May the

Lord help us all to stop making excuses for ourselves and overcome the many thoughts, feelings, temptations, and wishes that can keep one held captive. Eating the hidden manna in the realms of light is a secret treasure reserved for those who overcome.

—Bro. James Bell

SEPTEMBER 16, 2018

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES, PART ONE

Revelation 4:6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

The Lion

Proverbs 28:1 The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

The Calf

Matthew 9:37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

I Timothy 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.
And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

Philippians 2:17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I
joy, and rejoice with you all.

MEMORY VERSE: As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man,
and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side;
they four also had the face of an eagle. —Ezekiel 1:10

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The first two living creatures mentioned are the lion and the calf,
each of which have characteristics of both Christ and His church; the lion depicting boldness
and courage and the calf, or ox, depicting labor and sacrifice.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Revelation 4:6 “Full of eyes”: a term signifying sleepless vigilance and superior
intelligence and discernment. This description corresponds with Ezekiel 10:12.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our memory verse refers us back to Ezekiel’s vision which was very similar to the
apostle’s, except that each of Ezekiel’s living creatures had four faces; in John’s vision each of
the four had only one. Later in Ezekiel’s writings he names them cherubim. This also
corresponds to the seraphim which Isaiah saw (Isaiah 6:1-7). A minor difference here is that
John’s and Isaiah’s creatures each had six wings and Ezekiel’s had only four. It seems accurate
to say they each were seeing the same spiritual vision.

In several commentaries I read that each of the four ensigns or banners used by the
Israelites as they set up their wilderness camp around the tabernacle had depicted on them
one of the creatures of Ezekiel and Revelation. The description of the camp arrangement is
found in Numbers 2, but no particular description of the ensigns are given anywhere in the
Bible. The only information I found was that “Jewish tradition” or “Jewish writers” said that

Judah, with Zebulon and Issachar on either side of him, camped to the east of the tabernacle, with the ensign of the lion. Ephraim, with Manasseh and Benjamin, on the west, had the face of the ox. Reuben, along with Simeon and Gad, were located on the north side, with their banner depicting a man. Dan, with Asher and Naphtali, on the south, had the figure of an eagle. Judah, Ephraim, Reuben and Dan were considered “princes” in Israel and thus were the standard-bearers. This was pointed out by Sir Isaac Newton (*Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*, 1733) and interested me greatly; however, I could find no specific Jewish writer from which to obtain a quote. The commentators who emphasize this as important prophecy either lean heavily toward the view that Jesus’ second coming ushers in a literal millennial reign or were very much into “Hebrew Roots,” teachings which strongly advocate bringing the Hebrew diet, feasts, and holy days into Christian worship. If indeed the four faces were on the banners in the camp of Israel, their symbolic meaning would find fulfillment, then, in the New Testament church, which is spiritual Israel.

Another view which comes from the writings of early church fathers is that the four faces were pictured in the four Gospels and the way they presented Christ and His ministry. Their views varied greatly as to which Gospel writer corresponded to which creature. Some said Matthew was symbolized by the lion, others said his symbol was the man, etc.

Using the facts given in chapter five in which the twenty-four elders and the four creatures all sing the song of the redeemed, it seems best to find the meaning in that realm, using the four faces as symbols of the characteristics of Christ and also of His redeemed followers.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Four Living Creatures*: Which Old Testament prophets had similar visions?
2. *The Lion*: In the lesson we included two scriptures that show how this characteristic is displayed by both Christ and the righteous man. Can you think of others?
3. *The Ox or Calf*: In the verses referring to attributes of this creature in the lesson, who are the speakers or writers? Where in the Old Testament are the two quotes found?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

As I look into this chapter, the background of the previous chapters—the messages to the seven congregations—still in view, I am thinking once again of what it takes to be an overcomer. What does it take to stand before the throne in white robes and golden crowns, singing the song of victory and praise? Then a picture begins to form in my mind of a true child of God and all the qualities we can see in that godly life. I think of our precious Lord—the pattern, the example of a Perfect Man.

He was meek, lowly and humble; yet when faced with opposition, danger, threats, storms at sea, angry authorities, kings and death itself, He never backed down. He wasn't intimidated, discouraged or frustrated. He looked them all in the face calmly, serenely, boldly. He was a lion! He was King! He says to us all, "Follow Me." We're going down the same road. We're probably going to meet serious opposition at some time in our lives. Brother, sister, hold high your lion banner! Deep within you, even as you tremble, you've got the spirit of a lion. Christ has made you a king. "The Lion of Judah has broken every chain, and gives US the victory, again and again!"

Well, that may sound rather glamorous and exciting, but overcoming also means being like Christ in His humble servanthood and life of toil and sacrifice. He "took upon him the form of a servant." As an ox plodding its weary way around the field, pulling the plow or reaper, our labors may seem monotonous at times; lonely, thankless, dreary. Yet we only follow Him; His life in us is a servant's—a laborer's—life. We might say, "Oh, that's for the ministry to do." No, the face of the sacrificial calf or laboring ox is for all the redeemed. We all have our work to do for precious souls, for the kingdom. In this we will overcome. Let us lift up the weary hands that hang down and strengthen our feeble knees. "By the living grace of God, I will labor on."

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I like the symbolism of the four living creatures. We may not feel like a lion or that we have the strength of an ox, inwardly; but as we yield to the Spirit of the Lord in fulfilling places of responsibility there is an empowering element of the Holy Spirit that takes over. Many times I have slowly, hesitantly, and yes, reluctantly plodded to service—fighting fear,

discouragement, emptiness. Amazingly, the Lord would multiply, give, and open. It has happened over and over. I remember one of our older brother ministers mentioning that he had occasions of getting up feeling nothing, not even a verse, and the Lord would pour out. His strength is perfected in our weakness.

Paul mentioned, “I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” It appears in different places of scripture that when we are in contact with the Holy Spirit the natural man gives way and Christ becomes all in all. John, when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and saw his vision, fell down as dead.

Reading in Judges 6:12, “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.” Gideon didn't feel like a mighty man of valour. Verse fourteen says, “and the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might...” The Lord promised to bless and help and He did and He does.

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (II Corinthians 3:5).

—Bro. Bob Wilson

SEPTEMBER 23, 2018

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES, PART TWO

Revelation 4:7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

The Man

Genesis 2:7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Hebrews 2:7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with

glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

8a Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.

I Corinthians 16:13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

The Eagle

Exodus 19:4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

MEMORY VERSE: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.
—Ephesians 4:13

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The third living creature with the face as a man, symbolizes the unique qualities of a human: dominion over creation, immortality, spirituality, intelligence, the capacity for love and compassion and steadfast strength; and the fourth, a flying eagle, with its keenness of vision, speed and the capacity for soaring high above the earth, speaks to us that the redeemed also share these attributes. Both are seen in their fullness in the perfect man, who is Christ.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson today ends this particular study; the last lesson will be a quiz containing questions covering the entire series. I pray this will not be the end of our personal quest to understand more about this amazing vision of Christ and His church.

We have studied the vision of the glorified Christ and the seven churches of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. We learned about their strengths, failures and what it would take for them to overcome. We came to understand more about what was promised to the overcomers. In spirit, we stepped with John into the open door and beheld the great throne, its atmosphere and its worshippers. Finally, we have investigated the four living creatures and what they symbolize.

We look now at the third creature, which had the face of a man. The verses from Genesis and Hebrews give us clues as to man's preeminence in God's creation; he is given an eternal, living soul by God as well as dominion over the animal realm. He is crowned with glory and honor and made higher than the beasts, with superior intelligence, the capability of reason, moral volition, and a capacity for tender affection and compassion.

Our dear Lord was truly God, but He was also man. He experienced what we experience; felt what we feel. He suffered our temptations and sorrows and the penalty of our sin, yet He Himself had done no sin.

The qualities of the fourth creature, the flying eagle, include its ability to soar high above everything below; its speed, its long-range vision—four times that of a human, an eagle in flight can spot a rabbit on the ground from nearly two miles up—and its fidelity. An eagle stays with its mate for life. We can definitely see characteristics of our Lord here. He soars in complete victory over every power of the enemy. Even death could not hold Him. He sees and knows the minutest details of our lives. His eyes of flame illuminate our hearts, motives and secret thoughts. His judgments are swift and sure; His love and devotion is everlasting and faithful.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Full of Eyes*: Share your thoughts on the meaning of this.
2. *The Man*: What characteristics are essential for us to be overcomers?
3. *The Flying Eagle*: Did we miss anything? Share any attributes which should be added.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There is surely much food for thought in the symbolism of the living creatures! In applying this to our individual lives, there is great challenge as well. I think of the moral capacity that is only given to humans; animals do not share that ability to understand right and wrong. We can choose right or wrong. We don't act merely from instinct or training; rather, we exercise free will. God wants us to use this power to overcome our adversary. He

wants us to walk with Him and love Him by a free act of our will.

As the eagle symbolizes the overcoming, soaring victory of Christ, we also, as partakers with Him, may enjoy this same victory as we depend upon Him. The verse from Isaiah qualifies who experiences this renewal of strength and supernatural lift on eagles' wings. It is for the one who "waits" on the Lord. What does this mean? To patiently endure or remain. You get the thought of not giving up. It also means to eagerly look; to expect. "My soul, wait thou only upon God." We know there is no one else who has what we need. He is our only Source. So we look only to Him for comfort, strength, solace, peace, joy. Only in this position are we going to experience the lifting up, the soaring over our trials, the eagle's wings.

The other important things to note about the living creatures—they are "full of eyes," they "rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," they give "glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne"—give us challenge and instruction as well. Spiritual vision is such an important part of the Christian life. We must have the ability to see and understand the things of God; we need vision to discern the tactics of the enemy; we need to be able to understand and visualize the needs of people around us. We need a vision of holiness, of heaven, of eternity. God, make us full of eyes that see!

Unceasing praise, worship and seeking after God for His holiness are so vital to maintaining a living, overcoming faith in God. We need a settled reverence and awe of Him in our hearts that cannot be dulled by the enemy. We want to please Him, to serve Him, to praise Him in all things! Let an overwhelming sense of His worthiness and His greatness prevail in our minds at all times. May God help preserve this majestic vision in our hearts, is my prayer. Amen.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The intimacy by which God created man gives us insight into the great love that He has for us. He did not merely speak man into existence but carefully formed him from the dust of the ground; then tenderly breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, thereby infusing immortality into the soul of man—uniting within him heaven and earth.

The soul of man is eternal and must therefore be viewed, not only from a temporal perspective but from an eternal one as well; so God gives us both points of view. He shows us natural things in the spirit world and spiritual things in the natural world. He reminds us that

we are creatures of both worlds.

We must understand our responsibility, not only to care for that which is natural but even more so, to diligently maintain that which is immortal. We must understand the power that we wield, the benefits and consequences of our actions and how they relate to both realms. We have the power to resist temptation as well as the power to resist God. We may soar heavenward as on wings of eagles or plummet to unimaginable depths. We were created for His pleasure but we can also ignite His wrath.

When we consider the great lengths that God has gone to in order that He may redeem mankind, and sustain His holiness within us, honesty brings us to the realization that the stakes are extremely high.

Though we cannot fully comprehend it, God knows the solemnness of eternity and the gravity of mankind—the apex of His creation—being separated from Him forever. In His mercy, He draws back the curtain and gives us a glimpse of the eternal world. We see a scene of heaven from earth.

We are privileged to have an eyewitness account of His majesty, of His throne and of His holiness. May we, like the heavenly hosts, be inspired to shout the proclamation: holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty! And may we be challenged to live out that holiness in our daily lives.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

SEPTEMBER 30, 2018

QUIZ

1. Who was the author of the Revelation and what other books of the Bible did he write?
2. According to tradition, from what death was the apostle miraculously spared, and how/when did he finally die?
3. Where was the apostle exiled and given the Revelation?
4. Give the names of the seven churches of Asia.
5. Give the meanings of these terms: revelation, testimony, angel, seven spirits of God, Alpha

and Omega.

6. Describe the Son of Man in John's vision: A) His garment. B) His girdle. C) His head and hair. D) His eyes. E) His feet. F) His voice. G) In His right hand. H) Out of His mouth. I) His countenance
7. Tell the meaning of the seven golden candlesticks.
8. Tell the meaning of the seven stars.
9. For what did Christ commend the church at Ephesus?
10. What did He have against Ephesus?
11. Who were the Nicolaitans and what did they teach?
12. Who was the pastor at Ephesus at this time, and how old would he have been? Relate the circumstances of his death.
13. What was promised to the overcomers at Ephesus?
14. The church at _____ was very poor, but rich in faith.
15. Who was the "angel" or pastor here? Describe his suffering and death.
16. What was promised to the overcomers here?
17. In Pergamos was the seat of _____. What does that mean?
18. Discuss what may be meant by each of these terms: hidden manna, white stone, new name.
19. The church at Thyatira allowed the ministry of what wicked woman? What did she promote and what was her punishment?
20. How was Thyatira opposite from Ephesus?
21. What was promised to overcomers in Thyatira?
22. Sardis claimed a " _____ " but the church was _____.
23. Was Sardis a very poor or wealthy place, and how may that have affected the congregation?
24. Jesus said to "Strengthen _____ "
25. What was promised to the overcomers in Sardis?
26. He had set before them an _____.

27. What may be the meaning of the “hour of temptation,” and how was Philadelphia kept from it?
28. Overcomers would be made _____ in the temple of God.
29. Name the three-fold inscription God would write on the overcomers.
30. The Laodiceans were not _____ or _____ but _____.
31. What three claims did the Laodiceans make?
32. In reality, they were _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____.
33. What were they to buy from Christ?
34. Jesus said, “As many as I love, I _____ and _____.
35. What word picture describes Christ in this message?
36. What was promised to overcomers?
37. What was round about the throne, and where else in the scriptures is this description found?
38. What else was round about the throne?
39. What came out of the throne?
40. What was before the throne?
41. What was in the midst of the throne and round about it?
42. Who do the twenty-four elders represent?
43. What is the meaning of the rainbow, the sea of glass and the lamps of fire?
44. What do the four beasts symbolize?
45. Share the meaning of the lion.
46. Share the meaning of the calf/ox.
47. Share the meaning of the man.
48. Share the meaning of the flying eagle.

Answers:

1. John the Apostle. **2.** He was boiled in oil but survived; he died at an old age (100) of natural causes. **3.** The Isle of Patmos. **4.** Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. **5.** Revelation=an unveiling; a revealing. Testimony=witness; martyr. Angel=messenger, whether spirit or human. Seven spirits of God=the fulness or completeness of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Alpha and Omega=the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet denoting the beginning and the end of all things; the sum total of all things from beginning to end. **6.** A. down to the foot. B. golden. C. white like wool; white as snow. D. a flame of fire. E. fine brass as if they burned in a furnace. F. as the sound of many waters. G. seven stars. H. a sharp two-edged sword. I. as the sun shineth in his strength. **7.** Each candlestick represented a church or congregation. **8.** The seven stars are the angels, or messengers or pastors of the churches. **9.** Had labored without fainting; had patience; had borne much; could not bear them which were evil; had tried the false apostles and found them to be liars; hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. **10.** They had left their first love. **11.** The Nicolaitans were a sect of the Gnostics and taught the community of wives; that adultery and fornication were things indifferent; that eating meats offered to idols was quite lawful; and mixed several pagan rites with the Christian ceremonies. **12.** The pastor was Timothy, who would have been 50 years old. Two years later, he was beaten by the pagans and died as a result of his injuries. **13.** The privilege of eating of the tree of life. **14.** Smyrna. **15.** The pastor was Polycarp, who was tied and nailed to the stake, but the flames would not touch him. He was then pierced with the sword, but his blood ran out and quenched the fire. **16.** They would not be hurt by the second death. **17.** Satan. Probably because Pergamos was a city sacred to the gods, the very headquarters of idolatry and was filled with temples to perthe gods, especially Aesclepius, who was called "Savior." Many curious arts and wonders were performed in his healing temple, where his symbol was a serpent on a pole. **18.** Communion and spiritual feasting in the presence of the Lord; a special token of admittance to God's house and presence; a new spiritual identification because of the change wrought by redemption. **19.** Jezebel; she promoted fornication and eating of things sacrificed to idols; she and her (spiritual) posterity would suffer sickness and death. **20.** Ephesus was strictly orthodox in belief and practice but had left her first love; Thyatira emphasized charity, but was not careful to hold true doctrines and practices. **21.** Power over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron (God's Word), and the morning star. **22.** "Name that thou livest;" dead. **23.** Very wealthy; answers may vary. **24.** The things that remain. **25.** White raiment; name not blotted out of the book of life; name confessed before the Father and His angels. **26.** Open door. **27.** The invasion of the Muslims. Philadelphia was allowed to continue its Christian presence for many years when the other congregations had been wiped out. **28.** Pillars. **29.** The name of God; the name of the city of God, which is New Jerusalem; Christ's new name. **30.** Cold; hot; lukewarm. **31.** They were rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing. **32.** Wretched; miserable; poor; blind; and naked. **33.** Gold tried in the fire; white raiment; eyesalve. **34.** Rebuke; chasten. **35.** Christ is pictured knocking at the door. **36.** A grant to sit with Jesus in His throne. **37.** A rainbow; Exodus. **38.** Twenty-four seats and twenty-four elders seated. **39.** Lightnings, thunderings and voices. **40.** Lamps of fire and a sea of glass. **41.** Four beasts or living creatures. **42.** The redeemed of all ages and specifically those called to minister the gospel, who have authority (symbolized by thrones and crowns) over sickness and satan. **43.** The rainbow symbolizes God's covenants and promises; the sea of glass represents the firm plane and foundation of God's Word, which includes His promises, covenants, judgments, and laws; the lamps of fire point to the Holy Spirit. **44.** All the redeemed of all ages, who manifest the characteristics of Christ Himself. **45.** The lion symbolizes kingship, power, boldness and strength. **46.** The calf or ox portrays diligent labor, perseverance, and faithful service. **47.** The face of the man means the power of choice, valor, affection and compassion that are unique to human kind. **48.** The flying eagle refers to the ability God gives to soar above troubles and difficulties, the power of vision and speed.