

8. THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST TO EPHESUS

UNTO THE angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things said He that holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou cannot not bear them which are evil. And thou has tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars: and has borne, and has patience, and for My name's sake has labored, and has not fainted.

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love. 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. But this thou has, that thou hates the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Revelation 2:1-7.

The epistle of Christ to the church of Ephesus is the first of seven that He dictated to His scribe John and sent to the seven churches of Asia. While the entire Apocalypse was sent to all seven, to each church Christ wrote a personal letter to give the whole book a more personal application. The word church means a company who have been “called out of” or “from among.” It is an assembly of those who have been called out of the world and from among unbelievers and then sent back into the world as Christ's ambassadors. The church of Ephesus was composed of the Christians of that city, who had been called out of Judaism and heathenism by the gospel. The Greeks used the word church to denote a select assembly of free citizens to transact business. In Christianity the church is the organized society of the called, or elected, to transact business for the Lord.

Sevenfold Division

Each of these seven letters is divided into seven parts, indicating that it contains a perfect and complete message to the church and period to which it applies, containing all the warnings, reproofs, counsels, and promises necessary to correct the prevailing conditions. These divisions are (1) the superscription, which names the recipient, or the church addressed; (2) the identification of the writer, or divine Author; (3) a description of the spiritual condition that was praiseworthy, or commendable. (4) The things to be reproved, censured, or condemned; (5) the exhortation- to repent in view of the need; (6) the appeal to hear, and the identification of the Holy Spirit as the joint Author of the letter; (7) the promised reward to the overcomer.

The only variations in this order are that in the first three letters the appeal precedes the promised reward and in the last four it follows, and that Smyrna and Philadelphia are given no reproof and Sardis and Laodicea receive no praise.

The Author of the letter to the church of Ephesus identifies Himself in the opening statement. In harmony with the custom of the time, the writer gives his name or identity in the opening salutation rather than at the close, as we do today. See the beginning of Paul's epistles and also Acts 23:26. In each of the introductions of the seven epistles of Christ, He identifies Himself by one of the sevenfold descriptions given of Him in the introductory vision, the one that is the most appropriate to the needs of that particular church. The sum of the seven introductions makes up the complete picture of the glorified Christ in His mediatorial ministrations in the heavenly sanctuary. “The seven different types of delineation to our Lord contained in the second and third chapters are in the first chapter combined in one. Each

salutation of the seven epistles is thus part of the description of the Son of man in the first chapter of the book.” (Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, Page 29.)

Speaking of this point, Sir William Ramsay says: “Corresponding to this sevenfold division in the Church, the outward appearance and envisages of the Divine Author of the Seven Letters is divided into seven groups of attributes. And one group of attributes is assumed by Him in addressing each of the Seven Churches, so that the openings of the Seven Letters, put together, make up His whole outward and visible character.” (Page 177.) This fact is stated by A. T. Robertson as follows: “Each of the messages to the seven churches picks out a metaphor in the first picture of Christ in chapter 1 and there are frequent other allusions to the language in this picture.” (Page 276.)

In other words, in each of the seven introductions is recalled one or more of the characteristics of Christ as recorded in the first vision, the seven completing the whole. Also that part of the imagery of the introductory vision is selected which is most appropriate to the needs of the particular church addressed and the nature of the message sent to it.

The Seven Stars

Jesus identifies Himself as “He that holds the seven stars in His right hand.” “In the grasp of His right hand.” (Weymouth.) Anderson Scotty in the Century Bible, says: “In the image before the eye of the Seer the seven stars probably appear as a chain of glittering jewels hanging from the hand of Christ.” These stars may have been in the form of a star-studded “crown of glory” or “royal diadem” in the right hand of Jesus. (Isaiah 62:3.) In Jeremiah 22:24 we read, “As I live, said the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon My right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence.”

Trench declares that “in all the typical language of Scripture stars are symbols of lordship and authority, ecclesiastical or civil.” Of Christ, the prophet said, “There shall come a Star out of Jacob”; and when Jesus was born the event was announced by a star that guided the wise men to the place of His birth. He is called “the bright and morning star”; and Lucifer before his fall was called “the day star” (margin), or “sun of the morning.” In the dream of Joseph the twelve patriarchs were represented-by twelve stars, and in Revelation 12 the woman symbolizing the church is crowned with twelve stars, representing the twelve apostles, the twelve leading lights of the church of Christ, and the twelve kings of the nations of the saved. In Daniel 12:3 faithful teachers of the gospel are represented as stars, that shine forever and ever; and in Jude 13 false teachers are called “wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” Just as the literal stars are placed in the heavens to shed light on their respective planets, so God has placed stars in the firmament of the spiritual heavens to shed light on mankind groping in darkness. These spiritual stars shine as long as they remain in the right hand of Christ. When they stray from Him they become “wandering stars,” and eventually disappear in the darkness.

It is evident that the seven stars in the right hand of Christ represent the elders, or ministers, of the seven churches. “Messengers of the seven Congregations,” is the rendering in the Emphatic Diaglott, and “The ministers of the seven churches,” is the Weymouth translation. The word angel means “messenger,” and in the Scriptures is applied to priests and ministers as well as to celestial beings. (Haggai 1:13; Malachi 2:7; 3:1.) As angels are called saints in Deuteronomy 33:21 it is not inappropriate for saints to be called angels in our text. The angels

are likewise called stars. (Job 38:7; Revelation 12:4.) They are also called “ministering spirits” in Hebrews 1:14.

Trench declares that “the angel must be some person or persons in the church on earth” (page 58); and Plumptre says: “That these bishop-angels of the Churches should be represented by the symbol of the stars must have seemed, as soon as the key was once given, to be simple and natural enough. They too were set in the firmament of heaven, of the kingdom of heaven, to give light upon the earth.” (Page 48.) Since but one copy of the Apocalypse was written by John, it was only natural that it should be sent to the minister, or pastor, of each church who would in turn read it to the congregation. Timothy was doubtless the angel, or minister, of the church of Ephesus at that time, for according to tradition he was martyred at Ephesus in AD 97.

These letters were each addressed to “the angel of the church,” but it is evident that the instruction was intended for the entire church. The two are inseparable, because the minister represents the whole church and is held responsible for its spiritual condition. Commenting on this text, an old writer said, “He makes one person of the angel and the church.” In other parts of the Revelation the church proclaiming a heaven-sent message is symbolized by an angel from heaven. (Revelation 7:1-3; 10:1-7; 14:6-9; 18:1-6.)

Swete declares that “in this symbolical book the angel of a Church may be simply an expression for its prevailing spirit, and thus be identified with the Church itself.” (Page 22.) There is no contradiction or inconsistency between these two positions.

The right hand is the symbol of power and authority. (Isaiah 41:10-13.) Of those who follow Him Jesus said: “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” John 10:28. Jesus “hath” or “holds!” His ministers in His right hand while they preach His Word as His spokesmen. “He holds the stars as one who rejoices in their brightness so long as they shine clearly, who sustains, protects, and guides them as He guides the stars of heaven in their courses, who can and will cast them away, even though they were as the signet on His right hand, should they cease to shine.” (Plumptre, Page 61.) This symbolic representation is a great encouragement to the ministers of

Christ, to whom He has given “the ministry of reconciliation” so that as “ambassadors for Christ” and “in Christ’s stead” they plead with wayward men and women to be “reconciled to God.” Ministers of the gospel should never forget their “high calling” as the angels of the churches, with the fearful responsibility and solemn implications involved in the term.

The Lamp Stands of Gold

But Christ is the supreme head and bishop of the church universal. He is seen walking about among the seven golden candlesticks, or lamp stands. He who “walks to and fro among the seven lamp stands of gold.” (Weymouth.) This symbol carries us back again to the introductory vision. The candlesticks, or lamp stands, of the Mosaic tabernacle were not tallow candles, but lamps with bowls for oil and wicks for the flame. There can be no question but this symbol is borrowed from the Old Testament, as are many of those used in the Revelation. In the holy place of the Mosaic tabernacle was a lamp stand with seven branches of pure gold. It was made in the likeness of an almond tree, with a central lamp with three lamps on each side in opposite pairs. The entire standard was elaborately ornamented with engraved figures and flowers. (Exodus 25:31-39.)

The seven-branched candlestick of the tabernacle contained a talent of gold, valued at about \$25,000. It was five feet in height and three and a half in width and weighed more than one hundred pounds. The lamps were supplied with pure beaten olive oil, and the lights were kept continually burning. (Exodus 27:20,21.) In Solomon's temple there were ten candlesticks. (1 Kings 7:49.) The seven-branched candlestick was carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, and was used by Belshazzar to help light up his banquet hall the fatal night of Babylon's doom. It was later carried to Rome by Titus to help grace his triumph, and when the Vandals captured the city of Rome they took it with them to Carthage, whence it disappeared.

Every article of furniture in the typical sanctuary was symbolic, and in the vision of John we are given the significance of the seven golden candlesticks. "The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." Revelation 1:20. This language cannot be misunderstood. What more appropriate symbol could be found of the church which Jesus declared to be "the light of the world?" Jesus spoke of the church as a lighted candle on a candlestick so that "it gives light unto all that are in the house." (Matthew 5:14-16.) The church of Christ is the light bearer to those who are in darkness. It is God's agency for the dissemination of the gospel light. Christians are represented as "lights in the world; holding forth the word of life." Philippians 2:15,16. The wise man declared that "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." Proverbs 20:27. "Lamp" is the marginal reading. A lamp stand such as John saw in vision was an accepted symbol of the people of God, who, when filled with His Spirit, give the light of divine truth to a world in gross darkness.

It is interesting to note that the only means of lighting the holy place of the typical sanctuary was the light from the seven-branched candlestick. In order to show that the light that makes the church the light of the world is that of divine grace rather than of nature, and that Christ is the source of all light, the light of day was excluded from this apartment of the tabernacle. The church is Christ's appointed witness, or light bearer, on earth. Aside from her teachings, there is no other source of light and truth in spiritual things. "A candelabrum was a light-bearer. Seven of these are exhibited in vision to the eye of John, to signify to him, as the sequel shows, that the church of the living God is the divinely constructed and completely equipped light-bearing institution of the world." - WILLIAM J. McKNIGHT, *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*. Page 24.

Seven is the symbol of unity in diversity. It represents perfect unity in the manifold operations of the church, or body, of Christ. The seven branches composing a single candlestick or lamp stand represent the church universal in all its branches, or congregations, throughout the ages of the Christian Era and in fact in all ages of the reign of sin. A well known Christian writer declared that "all of God's people upon the earth are one body, from the beginning to the end Of time. They have one Head that directs and governs the body." (White.) The seven lamps of the typical sanctuary had for centuries borne their testimony that God is Light, and that that "Light revealed itself in manifold variety growing out of central unity." (Plumptre, Page 33.)

The stars and candlesticks are both spoken of as a "mystery" in Revelation 1:20, which doubtless has the meaning of symbol. It is something previously hidden and now being revealed. It is paraphrased, "The hidden divine truth, now made known, but made known to God's favored ones only." (Cambridge Bible.) Only a few things are called mysteries in the Apocalypse, and these are explained. The seven candlesticks represent the seven churches of Asia, and they in turn the universal church. "The seven golden candlesticks of the Patmos vision represent seven churches, the mystery of which is that they in turn represent a sevenfold unfolding in regard to

the entire history of Christendom.” - W. LAMB, Studies in the Book of Revelation, Page 33. “The seven churches represent for us the whole church. There were many other churches in Asia that might have been used but it was sufficient for the purpose to select seven, and these representative of various aspects of the whole historical church.” - HERBERT H. GOWEN, The Revelation, Page 15.

Gold is symbolic of purity and glory. The most precious of all metals is often mentioned in the Revelation. We read of the “golden girdle,” “golden crown,” “golden vials,” “golden censer,” “golden altar,” “golden reed,” and the city of “pure gold.” Gold was both the sacred and the royal metal of the ancient world. Trench declares that “throughout all the ancient East there was a sense of sacredness attached to this metal.” (Page 33.) The golden candlesticks indicate the high estimation in which Christ holds His church. It is “the apple of His eye,” “the object of Christ’s supreme regard.” Nothing on earth is as dear to Christ as His church, which is represented as His “body,” and His “wife,” or “bride.”

Jesus is seen in vision walking about “in the midst of the seven lamp-stands of gold,” indicating His ceaseless service and unwearied activity and vigilance in behalf of His people. That His work is that of a priest is evident from the description of His garments. He wears “a priestly garment down to the foot.” (See Exodus 28:1-8, Rhemish Translation.) It is the garment worn by Aaron and his sons. Jesus is here represented as the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, where He carries on His mediatorial work in behalf of His people on earth. “The book of Revelation finds Christ just where the book of Hebrews leaves Him.”

The location of the golden girdle indicates that Jesus is more than a priest. He is the Priest-King. (Isaiah 22:21, 22.) He has a “girdle of gold across His breast” (Weymouth), or “a long robe, and a belt of gold around His breast” (Moffatt.) (Daniel 10:5.) The girdle of the high priest was only interwoven with gold. The antitype always exceeds the type. It is the girdle of Christ’s righteousness and faithfulness mentioned in Isaiah 11:5. The gold is the emblem of both regal and sacerdotal dignity. Inasmuch as a king was more exalted than a priest, the kingdom of Christ is spoken of more often than His priesthood. Jesus, as He ministers among the churches, is prophet, priest, and king.

In the Holy Place

It is also evident that the ministry Of Christ as seen by the prophet in vision is that represented by the holy place rather than the most holy, as some contend. The position of Jesus among the candlesticks positively identifies the phase of ministry upon which He entered after His ascension. You are ushered right through the Outer Court into the Holy Place. The theme to be studied is the spiritual life of the church-its development, expansion, growth in grace, its sanctification. The golden candelabra make us conscious that we are in the vicinity of the table of ‘show bread’ and the ‘altar of incense.’ The church is being considered as a body of men and women who are feeding on ‘the bread of the Presence,’ and who through the intercessions of their great High Priest at the golden altar are being kept in constant communication with Him who sits within the veil upon the Mercy Seat, in order that they may become, by means of these provisions, the joyous, consistent, triumphant light bearers of the world.” (McKnight, Page 52, 53.)

In the Mosaic tabernacle service the high priest and his assistants were types of Christ. As they served in the court, the priests represented God in their ministry to the people. In the holy and most holy places they represented the people before God. Because Christ is the God-man He

is the representative of both God and man in His ministry in the court on earth and before the Father in heaven. In the introductory vision He is pictured in His priestly ministrations in the heavenly sanctuary, and in His letters to the seven churches He is described as ministering among the churches on earth. It is one ministry in both places. "While Jesus ministers in the sanctuary above, He is still by His Spirit the minister of the church on earth." WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, Page 166. In the vision Jesus is seen moving about among the symbolic lamps, supplying them with the oil of His grace so that they can accomplish their light-bearing mission in the world.

One of the duties of the typical priests was to keep the lamps trimmed and burning, and so Christ is seen in the garments of a priest, walking among His churches, speaking messages of warning and reproof, His piercing, blazing eyes seeing everything, and with His right hand upholding His messengers, who preach His Word. Supplied with the heavenly oil, the churches shed a celestial radiance in the midst of terrestrial darkness. The light is the Word of God. (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23.) Jesus is declared to be the living Word, the Truth, the Light of the world. The church is only the light bearer.

The representation in the apocalyptic vision seems to be borrowed from Zechariah 4, where "the two anointed ones" are symbolized by "two olive trees" which stand by the "seven lamps" and through "two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves" into the "bowls that feed the lamps and keep them burning. A well-known Christian writer says: "When the anointed ones empty themselves through the golden pipes, the golden oil flows out of themselves into the golden bowls, to flow forth into the lamps, the churches." (White.)

Although Christ upholds the angels, or ministers, responsible for the oversight of His flocks, He is Himself the Chief Shepherd. Commenting on the Revelation vision of Christ, the same writer says: "This figure illustrates the eternal vigilance of our Savior. Christ is in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks walking from church to church, from congregation to congregation, from heart to heart. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." - *The Watchman Magazine*, May 19, 1908.

Again we read from the same author: "With untiring wakefulness and unremitting vigilance, He watches to see whether the light of any of His sentinels is burning dim or going out. If the candlesticks were left to mere human care, the flickering flame would languish and die; but He is the true watchman in the Lord's house, the true warden of the temple courts. His continued care and sustaining grace are the source of life and light." - *Acts of the Apostles*, Page 586.

The Seven Epistles

The seven letters of Christ to the seven churches of Asia represent a complete gospel message to the universal church of Christendom. These prophetic letters constitute a foundation for the entire Apocalypse. They are not merely historical portraits of the apostolic church, but prophetic types of conditions in the church universal to the end of time. "These letters hang before our eyes not only literal photos of those seven churches, but types also of churches and of believers throughout the present militant career of God's children, as they march through the

path of tribulation, besetment and peril till the end of the high priestly dispensation of the glorified Jesus.” (Stevens, Page 63, 64.)

Dr. Bengel placed these seven epistles of Christ above everything else in importance and commended them to the special study of young ministers. Seven times the command is repeated to hear the instruction contained in them. And yet no other portion of the Bible receives so little study. Although they are of equal importance with the other epistles of the New Testament they have not received a tithe of the attention. Hundreds of books have been written on the discourses of Christ as recorded in the Gospels, whereas there are scarcely tens devoted to His seven epistles, even though they were written under His direct dictation and their truths attested to by His own signature, and every Christian is urged by a sevenfold admonition to hear and give serious consideration to the revelations they contain.

Each of these seven letters has a threefold application. It contains a prophetic history (1) of the city in which the church was located, and (2) of the church itself, and (3) of the period of the church universal represented by the church addressed. All seven together picture the Christian church between the ascension of Christ and His Second Advent. Though the chief application of the message to the church of Ephesus is to the initial period of Christian history, we will notice now the history of the city and of the local church which first received the Apocalypse from the exiled apostle. Ephesus was the home of John, and according to Polycarp he died and was buried there. The mother church of the province received the introductory epistle.

City of Ephesus

The word Ephesus means “desirable.” It is also said to carry the meaning of “having relaxed” or “let go.” It was considered the most desirable city of the province and of Asia Minor. Ephesus was built in the eleventh century before Christ, probably by Androclus, the son of the last king of Athens. It was located at the mouth of the Cayster River on the slopes of the hills overlooking the Aegean Sea. Its beautiful location, together with the fertile soil and excellent climate, made it a very desirable place to live. During its earlier history Ephesus had one of the finest harbors of the world, which was protected by high hills and a narrow channel easily guarded from enemy ships. The ships of all nations visited this harbor, and Ephesus became one of the chief commercial centers of the west coast of Asia. By imperial edict it was made the gateway to the province of Asia for Roman officials.

Stamped on coins found in the ruins of Ephesus are the titles, “First of all the greatest,” and “The first and greatest metropolis of Asia.” Strabo called Ephesus “the greatest emporium of Asia west of the Taurus.” Sir William Ramsay pictures two coins indicating the prominence of Ephesus. One of them shows “a Roman war-vessel, propelled by oars, not sails, lightly built, active and independent of winds. The legend ‘First Landing’ marks it as the ship that conveys the proconsul to his landing place in Ephesus.” The other coin pictures “a ship under sail”; it indicates “the maritime trade that frequented the harbor of Ephesus.” (See Ramsay, Letters to the Seven Churches.) The city was known as “the light of Asia” and “the first City of Asia.” Ephesus was the meeting place of several important Roman highways. One of these was the great trade route from the valley of the Euphrates which ran through Colosse and Laodicea. Another came from the province of Galatia through Sardis. And the third was the great coastal highway running northward through Smyrna and Pergamos and southward through the Maeander valley. Since the emperor of Rome visited the provinces through his representative, the proconsul, “Ephesus was

the spot where the Majesty of Rome first set foot on the soil of the Province.” (McKnight, Page 81.)

Archaeological Discoveries

Archaeologists have traced thirty-six thousand feet of the wall built by Lysimachus enclosing one thousand and twenty seven acres within the city of Ephesus. The wall was ten feet thick, with towers every one hundred feet and with six gates. From the harbor to the city was a very wide and beautiful boulevard entering the city under a triumphal arch, and lined with monumental buildings. The city was adorned with magnificent temples built by Nero, Hadrian, and Severus, besides the famous temple of Diana (Latin), or Artemis (Greek). The city was consecrated in the minds of the people by many myths and legends of gods and goddesses, making it one of the sacred cities of the pagan world. It was also a city of festivals and pleasures. The floor plan of its principal theater has been uncovered and is still intact. It extends up the slope of the hillside, rising tier upon tier. Its estimated seating capacity was twenty-five thousand.

The Temple of Diana alone made the city famous. This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The earliest temple was a century in building, and was completed in 480 BC, Or about the time the Jews under Ezra were returning from Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem. This temple was burned in 356 BC, on the night Alexander the Great was born. It was later claimed that Artemis, the goddess of childbirth, was away from the temple attending the birth of Alexander, and the temple was burned because left unguarded by its goddess. Alexander offered to rebuild the temple at his own expense, but the offer was refused. It was rebuilt by donations from all Asia, and its erection required two hundred and twenty years. The second temple was destroyed by the Goths in AD 262 and was never rebuilt.

The location of the Temple of Diana was unknown in modern times until discovered by archaeologists in 1869. Mr. J. T. Wood led the expedition that started searching for the temple site on May 2, 1863. Through an inscription found in the ruins of the city it was learned that the temple was not located in the city itself, where all others had been searching for it. The searchers discovered a magnificent gate, through which ran a street thirty-five feet wide paved with stones of fine marble. Following the roadway, they found the boundary wall of the temple on May 2, 1869. Later the same year they discovered the foundations of the temple at a depth of twenty feet. Mr. Wood spent five years excavating among the ruins of the temple, employing from one hundred to three hundred men. He found six sculptured drums from ancient columns, each of which was twenty feet in circumference and six feet high. The temple was built of white, red, blue, and yellow marble of the finest quality. At least part of this material had doubtless been brought to Ephesus from Patmos, where large marble quarries were located.

The foundation on which the temple stood was four hundred and twenty-five feet long and two hundred and twenty feet wide, and was reached by a flight of ten steps. The temple itself was one hundred and sixty feet by three hundred and forty feet, and was supported by one hundred and twenty seven pillars sixty feet in height. This left a porch surrounding the building proper between thirty and forty feet wide.

Instead of mortar, gold was reputed to have been used between the joints of marble blocks. The interior, like that of most Grecian temples, was open to the sky. The temple was a place of worship, a museum, a place of refuge, and a treasure house. Kings and wealthy men stored their riches in the temples of their gods and goddesses. (Daniel 1:2.) The Temple of Diana was

therefore a bank where treasure was kept under the protecting care of the great goddess. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of priests were connected with the temple ritual. There were also multitudes of priestesses dedicated to prostitution in the service of the temple.

The greatness of the Temple of Diana in Paul's day is indicated by its description in Acts 19:27. In the margin of Acts 19:35 Ephesus is called "the temple keeper," and various inscriptions have been found in the ruins declaring that the city was the "temple-keeper of Diana," "the temple-keeper of the divine emperor." One inscription reads: "The first and greatest metropolis of Asia and twice temple-keeper of the Emperors, according to the decrees of the sacred assembly of the temple-keepers of Artemis." Artemis was not only the chief deity of the city and province but one of the principal goddesses of the pagan world. This is indicated in Acts 19:27, 28. It was the temple "whom all Asia and the world worshipped."

Diana was reckoned as the daughter of Jupiter and the twin sister of Apollo. She was known as the moon goddess, and was doubtless one of the many manifestations of Semiramis, the "Mother of the gods." Inscriptions call her the "Savior goddess" and the "Mother of God." She is represented as a many-breasted goddess seated with an infant in her arms.

She is sometimes represented as holding a tambourine in one hand and a cup in the other. In AD 431 a great council of the Christian church was held at Ephesus, at which time the phrase "Mother of God" was applied to Mary. "For fifty generations or more the people of Asia Minor had worshipped a great mother goddess, often with her consort son. It was at Ephesus, the center of the worship of Diana, that ecclesiastics, many of whom had but a slight training in Christianity, adopted this article into their statement of religious faith."—The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 1, Page 282, art. "Asia Minor." Thus at the reputed home of Mary, who lived with John till the time of her death, the pagan Madonna became the emblem of the virgin mother of Jesus.

Acts 19:23-41 records the persecution that resulted from the preaching of Paul, and the consequent loss of faith in paganism and loss of business in the selling of shrines of the goddess. Traffic in shrines was one of the principal industries of Ephesus. The sale of these idols, or shrines, to pilgrim worshipers from all parts of the world resulted in an enormous profit. Not only were they worshiped as gods but they were supposed to charm away evil spirits and protect the devotee from danger of all kinds. An inscription has been found with the name of "Demetrius son of Menophilus," which indicates that he was president of the board of magistrates, or city fathers. This probably accounts for his great influence and authority and explains his ability to stir up the whole city against Paul.

Hundreds of shrines have been discovered, with inscriptions indicating that the shrine business constituted one of the chief industries. Records of gifts of gold and silver shrines valued as high as \$850,000 were found on inscriptions. One inscription was found written on black marble, giving rules of magic. This throws light on the statement in Acts 19:18, 19. These books of "curious arts," magic, charms, and incantations were sold to visitors at fabulous prices, and constituted another lucrative source of income that helped make Ephesus wealthy and famous.

City of Change

The message to the church of Ephesus and the subsequent history of the city indicate that the "desirable city" would become the city of change and decay, the declining city. After the destruction of the temple in the third century and the filling up of the harbor with sediment from

the Cayster River, Ephesus rapidly declined. Efforts to hold the water back and deepen the harbor were made by making narrower the channel between the harbor and the sea, but this only seemed to hasten the in filling process. All dredging operations proved unavailing.

Today the site of the once proud and prosperous Ephesus is six miles from the sea, and what was once the entrance to the spacious harbor, is a shallow, sandy beach unapproachable by ships. The harbor was abandoned in the fourth century, and its wide expanse is now a pestilential morass covered with mud and rushes, or windswept plains overgrown with weeds. The city soon suffered the cruel fate of the temple and harbor, and is now a part of the desert waste. The city has literally been moved “out of his place,” as Christ threatened to do with the candlestick of the church of Ephesus.

The candlestick was removed, and “the first city of Asia” was no longer a brilliant light in the commercial and political world. “The Light of Asia” went out in total darkness. Silence, malaria, and death now brood over the ruins of the once-magnificent city. The heavy masonry of her ruined temples and walls lies scattered in profusion where the metropolis of Asia once reveled in her pride and glory. “Remnants of cyclopean walls, causeways, temples, streets, and houses, line the plains and hills and mountain-sides of a vast area which was once filled with their glory; but the whole place is a complete desolation, enveloped in a poisonous atmosphere, and tenanted only by things unclean and vile.” (Seiss, Page 122.)

9. EPHEBUS THE ERA OF WANING LOVE

THE MESSAGE of Christ to the church of Ephesus is prophetic not only of the history of the city, which began in a desirable condition and ended in a heap of ruins, but also of the local church in Ephesus. The charter members of the Ephesian church were a small group of the disciples of John the Baptist. The church was later visited by Apollos, who also knew only the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla were doubtless the first Christians in Ephesus, and Apollos was their first convert.

When Paul visited Ephesus in AD 56 he reorganized the church, with a membership of about twelve, who after their rebaptism received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The entire city was mightily stirred by Paul’s message. According to Acts 20:31, Paul remained in Ephesus for three years. Since Ephesus was the metropolis of Asia, the message during this period spread over the whole province. It was doubtless during this time that the other churches of the province were established. (Acts 18:24-28; 19.)

The church of Ephesus had received the labors of Apollos, Paul, John, and Timothy. It was the home of John, and the ruins of a church still remain where it is said he was buried. The mother of Jesus doubtless lived here till the time of her death, for Jesus gave her into John’s keeping just before He died on the cross. Here Timothy died a victim of mob violence because of his protest against the unbridled licentiousness during one of the festivals in honor of the goddess Diana. Paul said he labored in Ephesus three years “night and day with tears,” and wonderful were the results.

The modern preacher may be cultured and eloquent, yet there are but few tears in either the pulpit or the pews. Paul’s ministry of tears produced great results, stirring all Asia with the gospel message. The power and progress of Christianity in the city was so great that it threatened the supremacy of the great goddess Diana and the shrine industry under the control of Demetrius

and his fellow craftsmen, and mob violence was the result. It would be far better if modern preaching met with such a reception rather than the present lifeless indifference.

Jesus enumerates seven marks of faithfulness in the Ephesian church, which He commends. Their love, faith, and zeal were manifested by their works, labor, patience, hatred of evil, zeal in testing false apostles, perseverance under persecution, and steadfastness to the faith. The Ephesian Christians demonstrated their love and faith by their works. "I know thy works" is common to all seven letters, but it does not always mean good works. It has the meaning of "life," "character," or "conduct." The statement indicates that, Christ is omniscient and that His piercing eyes see all. Nothing escapes His vision.

Labor in the Greek carries the meaning of "labor unto weariness," and patience means "persevering endurance" or "the brave and persistent endurance of the Christian." The patience of the Ephesians, however, did not indicate indifference to sin. Though these early Christians could not bear evil and evil men, they could bear persecutions, ridicule, and reproaches for Christ's sake. They were intolerant of evil, but tolerant of all else. They could bear anything except the presence of evil and impostors in their membership. They had the discerning of spirits, and had taken to heart Paul's warning concerning the coming of false apostles. (Acts 20:28-30.)

A careful reading of Acts 19 and 20 is enough to convince anyone of the unparalleled zeal of the members of the local church of Ephesus. When they accepted Christianity they burned in the public square before "all men" their books of magic. This is a worthy example for modern Christians in disposing of the filthy and trashy literature which is far more demoralizing than the Ephesian books of magic. These books could have been sold, but these earnest believers did not intend that others should be corrupted by them. They were not ashamed of their faith. Mighty miracles were wrought among them—some of the greatest recorded in the Scriptures.

To the Ephesian church Paul wrote one of the best and most spiritual of all his epistles, containing some of the deepest and most sublime of his revelations of divine truth. It contains practically no reproofs, and indicates that a splendid spiritual state existed at that time. Ephesus was located on the highway between Palestine and Rome, and through it passed a continual stream of visitors and strangers, and the church often had to discriminate between pretended believers and apostles and those who were genuine. For their ability and carefulness in this respect Jesus highly commended them.

But the desirable condition of the church of Ephesus did not long continue. The early love, zeal, patience, liberality, and spiritual power waned, and strife and dissension took the place of unity and brotherly love. The prediction of Paul came true, and false teachers and counterfeit doctrines multiplied. Worldliness crept into the church, and evil men were tolerated. Miracles and missionary work diminished and finally disappeared. Paul's warning recorded in Ephesians 4:14 was no longer heeded. The church began to decrease in membership with the decline of the city, and was finally disbanded. One who visited the ruins of Ephesus less than a hundred years ago found near by a few miserable huts. Among the inhabitants were three professed Christians, and they were so ignorant that they scarcely had heard of the names of Paul and John. Like the city, the local church began in a desirable condition and ended in ruins.

The Ephesian Period

Of the Ephesian period of the church of Christ, Joseph A. Seiss says: "In the first place, the seven Churches represent seven phases or periods in the Church's history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ, the characteristics of which are set forth partly in the names of these Churches, but more fully in the epistles addressed to them. There has been an Ephesian period—a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others, and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and Church officers." (Page 142.)

The name of Ephesus and the Ephesian message are prophetic of the universal Christian church during the days of the apostles, or the first century of Christianity. The beginning and history of the apostolic period of the universal church are strikingly similar to those of the local church of Ephesus. The Christian church began with twelve charter members, several of whom had received the baptism of John, the forerunner of Christ. As a result of the upper-room experience this little group received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. With this power they went forth conquering and to conquer. Jerusalem was mightily stirred, and was filled "with their doctrine," just as was the city of Ephesus. The disciples of Jesus went "every where preaching the word," and multitudes accepted the faith. Mighty miracles were wrought, and the progress of the Christian religion was phenomenal. According to the historian Gibbon, there were between five and six million converts in the empire alone by the close of the first century. The gospel went to all the world in a single generation. (Colossians 1:23; Titus 2:11.)

The early church was noted for its unflagging zeal and patient endurance under persecution, its uncompromising attitude toward evil and evildoers, its ability to put pretending apostles to the acid test of Scripture, and its fearless exposure of lying claimants to fellowship and leadership. Their ability to detect and expose false apostles indicates that there were other apostles besides the twelve. Paul declared that the faith of the early Christians was "spoken of throughout the whole world." They were noted for their love, unity, pure faith, missionary zeal, and abounding liberality. The Lord supplied all the men and means needed for evangelistic endeavor. Miracles were performed even greater than those wrought by Christ Himself, as He had promised. (John 14:12; Acts 2:43-47; 4:31-35; 5:12-16; 9:31.) "The Church, however, throughout the whole of Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria, had peace and was spiritually built up; and grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord and receiving encouragement from the Holy Spirit." Acts 9:31, Weymouth.

Just as the progress of the gospel in Ephesus diminished the income of the silversmiths and brought persecution, the progress of the gospel during the Ephesian period threatened the prestige and authority of the Jewish leaders and diminished their income through the sale at exorbitant prices of sacrificial offerings in the temple service. Joseph and Nicodemus, two of the members of the Sanhedrin and among the wealthiest men of the nation, became Christians and poured their riches into the coffers of the church. Saul of Tarsus soon followed their example, and the persecutor became the persecuted. The gospel seeds were watered by the blood of martyrs. Christ commended the patient endurance of the early Christians under trials and tribulations. Jesus said, "I know your doings." (Weymouth.) The Ephesian message is given from the viewpoint of Christ's close scrutiny and intimate knowledge of the spiritual state of His people. He perceived all, and appreciated their virtue, especially their ability to detect wolves in sheep's clothing and put them to the Scriptural test. They had "found them liars." They were the agents of Satan masquerading as the apostles of Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15.) Wherever it

was possible in the seven letters, Jesus gave praise, and wherever necessary He gave reproof. But He always recognized and mentioned that which was praiseworthy first, indicating that He is more interested in finding the good in His people than in discovering evil. This is a noble example for all who have to deal with the erring. After praising the virtues of the Christians of the first century, like a faithful friend Jesus points out their faults. He is able to see much to admire where human beings see much to deplore and condemn. Jesus has a very keen eye for that which is good. (2 Chronicles 16:9.)

After commending them Jesus added, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.” This notwithstanding their good qualities. Their greatest fault was that they had left their first love and love works. They had “relaxed,” or “abandoned,” their first love. “You no longer love Me as you did at first.” (Weymouth.) Their love for Christ had not been entirely extinguished; it had diminished and become half-warm. When Paul wrote his epistle to the same church more than thirty years before, they were still in their first love. (Ephesians 1:15.) At that time there were apparently no signs of spiritual declension.

The Lord can never forget the first love and love works of His people. To ancient Israel He said: “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of your espousals, when thou went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of His increase.” Jeremiah 2:2, 3. His love for His people was unchanged; the coldness was wholly on the part of the early Christians. He had commended them for their works, labor, and patience. What was wrong? It was not the “work of faith,” the “labor of love,” the “patience of hope.” (1 Thessalonians 1:3.) Of faith, hope, and love Paul says that “the greatest of these is love.” Love was lacking, and works without love are dead and useless. Love is the fountain of all true service. “For the love of Christ constrains us” declared the apostles regarding the motive and compelling power of their zeal and works.

A Serious State

When Christian love diminishes,- it is evident that some other person or attraction has superseded Christ in the affections. The Ephesian church had not abandoned the doctrines of Christ or the form of godliness. Her failure was in becoming untrue to the Person who is the very center and substance of Christianity. She had deserted her Lord in the pathway of love. In spite of the orthodoxy and doctrinal purity of the church, her love had cooled. The warmth of affection had given way to cold and lifeless orthodoxy. The machinery of a church may be in perfect working condition and at the same time love and love works be on the decline. Missionary activity was displacing Christ, and programs and ceremonies were endangering spiritual experience and fellowship. The church was busy doing for Christ rather than being like Him.

Commenting on this loss of love, Charles Spurgeon said: ‘Thou has left thy first love.’ ‘Is that serious,’ said one. It is the most serious ill of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth; if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my brethren, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with Him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a church, we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the Great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and deliver us from it. No peril can be greater than

this. Lose love, lose all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy and holiness.”

Love is the sign and evidence of Christian life. Zeal for mere doctrines may degenerate into hatred for those who differ in belief. A church may be sound in doctrines and patient under bitter persecution and yet be guilty of relaxing the love once manifest. “The great fault lies not in the outward but the inner life, visible only to Him ‘Who sees in secret.’ The task, the work, the organization, the bands of workers, the crowd of worshipers—all as great and splendid as ever, but that which made the whole to be living and true had gone. And only Christ sees it. Is it, in any measure, so with ourselves? It is so easy to offer our Lord the head the hands, the feet, while the heart is far from Him. It is easy to drift into being an earnest and devoted Church worshiper and worker, devout in our services, busy in various departments of Church work, teaching, visiting, speaking, praying, and yet to have left the first love.” - A Devotional Commentary, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Page 29.

The Warning

“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,” is the solemn warning. “Remember the height from which you have fallen,” is the Moffatt translation, and Weymouth gives it, “Be mindful, therefore, of the height from which you have fallen.” The loss of love for Christ is a fall from a high spiritual plane to a depth far below. It represents a back sliding condition that needs to be repented of. When the church ceased to be occupied with Christ and fervent in her love for Him, she fell, and great was the fall thereof. The church had fallen from love, and “God is love,” therefore the church had fallen, or back slid from God. The “first works” had come out of their “first love,” and when love diminished, the works did also. “Repent and live the life you lived before,” or “Repent, at once and act as you did at first,” are other translations. There can be no love works without love. A return to the first-love experience is the prerequisite to a repetition of the first love works. Works do not produce love, but genuine love shows itself in works. The relation between Christ and His church is illustrated in the Scriptures by that of a bridegroom and bride, or a husband and wife. Loss of love in the home, if not regained, will eventually prove fatal, and end in divorce.

The only remedy for waning love is to “remember” the first-love experience and then never be satisfied till it returns. Christ can never forget the first-love relationship. He remembers the beautiful love experience, and regrets its departure. The fault, however, is not His. It is the church that has relaxed her affection. A remembrance of the happy love state that once existed is sure to create a desire on the part of a Christian to return to it. The return journey, however, requires more effort and time than the fall. Looking back on the height of affection and experience once achieved, we must with slow and often painful steps begin the ascent again. The very memory of the ground lost produces humble contrition and persistent effort.

The Threat

Unless there took place a speedy reformation, the candle stick would be removed and the church would cease to be the light of the world. This was no idle threat, for Christ had already removed the candlestick from the Jewish church and given it to another. To the Jews, Jesus said, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” It is the loss of love that forfeits the light and privilege of light bearing, of witnessing

for Christ. The testimony of loveless members value and power. God values the service of love, and when this is lacking the mere round of ceremony is offensive to Him.

The very continuance of the testimony of the church depends on her love for Christ, to whom she belongs. The removal of the candlestick indicates removal from high standing and special privileges in the sanctuary of God. Love and light are closely related, for "God is light" and "God is love." When the church loses her love she will soon also lose her light, as well as a sense of duty to let it shine. Inasmuch as "love is the fulfilling of the law," the first works of obedience disappeared with the first love. "God is Light because God is Love. It is a case of cause and effect. Therefore, the light of the church must fail when the love fails; and there is no remedy but to 'repent and do the first works.'" -PHILIP MAURO, *Of Things Which Soon Must Come to Pass*, Page 94.

Love is the supreme grace of the Christian religion, and the cooling of that love is the first sign of decay and the first step toward a general apostasy. From the decline of love the early church marched steadily onward away from God, till apostasy climaxed in the scarlet woman, Babylon the Great. The church that started out as the light of the world finally plunged the world into the Dark Ages. The candlestick was removed, and darkness covered the earth till the blazing torch of gospel light was again held aloft in the great Reformation of the sixteenth century. "The candle of the wicked shall be put out" is a Biblical statement.

After ministering this severe rebuke Jesus added some more praise to mitigate the sting: "Still, you have this in your favor: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, and I hate them too." (Moffatt.) The bringing forth of a new virtue after giving such severe reproofs and dire threatening is an evidence of the most tender love and sympathy. All feelings of righteous indignation against evil which lead to a loathing of those things which defile is welcomed by Christ as an evidence of life. There is hope where hatred of evil prevails. To love the things Christ loves and hate the things Christ hates is indeed praiseworthy. The Ephesian church did not fall into the common error of believing that doctrine can be divorced from obligation and that an intellectual acceptance of the gospel is superior to moral character. Failing in love was their only error.

There has been much conjecture regarding the origin and identity of the Nicolaitans, but they are doubtless included among those whom Paul predicted would arise in the church of Ephesus and "draw away disciples after them not sparing the flock." (Acts 20:29-31.) Paul declared that "the mystery of iniquity" had already begun to work in his day. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7.) It is believed by some that the word Nicolaitan comes from Nicolas, meaning "conquering the people," and indicates the danger of supplanting Christ and Christianity by false and counterfeit systems of religion. The exaltation of the clergy exercising lordship over the laity was one of the developments that appeared at an early date in the apostolic church.

According to Acts 6:5 one of the seven deacons was a man by the name of Nicolas, who was declared to be "a proselyte of Antioch." Some believe that this indicates that he was not a Jew. Irenaeus says that this Nicolas was the founder of the sect of the Nicolaitans. Clement of Alexandria declared that Nicolas was a man of strong passions and principles, who was willing "to do violence to the flesh," but unable to conceive the higher ideal of "the flesh being subdued by the Spirit." He adds that Nicolas was not really responsible for the excesses of his followers. Some of the best modern students question the reliability of the testimony of these early writers regarding the origin of the Nicolaitans.

This sect is mentioned again in the epistle to the church of Pergamos, and the statement indicates that they were gaining headway in the church. They seem to have been liberals or modernists, who felt that the church was too strict in its standards, and they advised compromise. They were known as libertines, and were doubtless of the Gnostics, who arose to plague the early church. They seemed to have practiced immorality on the ground of spiritual liberty. Such a false conception of freedom from law early invaded the church, and is still popular in many quarters. Many believe in continuing in sin "that grace may abound." The Nicolaitans believed in and practiced polygamy, and taught that it was lawful to eat food sacrificed to idols. The genuine Christians hated their evil deeds. Hate is the reverse of love, and there is a hate that is true to love. Jesus loved righteousness and hated iniquity. (Hebrews 1:9.)

Appeal and Reward

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The appeal to hear the voice of the Spirit is seven times repeated in the epistles of Christ. While Christ revealed Himself to John as the author of the Apocalypse, it was the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophet to write it. The voice of Christ is also the voice of the Holy Spirit. They two are chief of the witnesses through whom God speaks to man. The term churches indicates that all seven churches were to profit by each of the seven epistles.

It is a dangerous thing to refuse to listen when the Holy Spirit speaks, to close the ear to His appeals. In Zechariah 7:11-14, refusing to hearken and pulling away the shoulder and stopping the ears are said to lead to serious consequences. The heart finally becomes as hard "as an adamant stone," on which no impressions can be made. "To day if you-will hear His voice, harden not your heart" is the admonition of Scripture in regard to the voice of the Spirit. The appeal to hear the message of the Apocalypse applies with special force to the church of this last generation. A refusal to hear and obey will lead to the unpardonable sin. It constitutes a rejection of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Ears as here used must include "faith, the ears of the soul." Only those who are born of the Spirit have spiritual ears.

The seven promised rewards make up the sum of all the good things that were lost through disobedience, and that are to be regained through faith. "The word overcomes implies that the Christian life is a warfare from which there is no discharge, but it is a warfare, our author teaches, in which even the feeblest saint can prove victorious." - R. H. CHARLES, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, Page 53, 54. Continuous overcoming brings to the victor a continuous supply of the fruit of the tree of life, for Paradise must begin here. The Scriptures in a symbolical sense constitute the leaves of the tree of life, and "its branches hang over the wall," providing spiritual fruit to the saints on earth as a pledge and foretaste of the privilege of the Paradise restored.

Paradise is definitely located in Revelation 22:1,2,14 as being at the headquarters of the government of God. Man lost his right of access to the fruit of the tree of life and the blessings of Paradise through disobedience. The overcomer will return to his long-lost Eden home and again have a right to its glories untold. The tree of life disappeared from the earth because of sin. It will reappear when Paradise is restored. What was lost through the disobedience of the first Adam will be restored through the obedience of the second Adam. Paradise is a Persian word adopted in both Greek and Hebrew. It means a park, or pleasure ground. It is called "the garden of God," and "the garden of the Lord." Paradise is "the garden of all delights." This promise to the

members of the church of Ephesus constitutes a mighty and eloquent appeal for repentance and faithfulness, to “hear what the Spirit said unto the churches.” Thus the first promise of the first epistle of Christ is of the restoration of the first thing lost through sin-access to the tree of life and its life-giving fruit.

10. SMYRNA THE PERIOD OF SUFFERING AND MARTYRDOM

AND UNTO the angel of the church in Smyrna write; “These things said the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. 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. Fear none of those things which thou shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches; He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.” Revelation 2:8-11.

Smyrna was the next city and church of importance in the province of Asia, and was the nearest to Ephesus, being about forty miles to the north. For this reason the church of Smyrna was the second of the seven to receive the Apocalypse. It was probably delivered to the minister or elder of the church in Smyrna by some member of the church of Ephesus after it had been read there. A copy may have been made and kept in Ephesus for further study. This epistle also has a threefold application, namely, to the city, to the local church, and to the Smyrnan period of the universal church of Christendom.

Smyrna is synonymous with myrrh, which was an aromatic substance used sometimes as a healing ointment but more especially for embalming the dead. According to Psalms 45:8 and Canticles 3:6, myrrh seems to have been the special perfume of Christ as King and Bridegroom. One of the chief ingredients of myrrh was made by crushing and bleeding a plant of the same name. This thorny plant, or tree, grows about eight or nine feet high, and is found in Arabia and to some extent in Palestine. It is very bitter to the taste but has a fragrant odor, and the more the plant is crushed and bruised the greater the fragrance. The name Smyrna, therefore, indicates suffering and persecution which prove a blessing. Smyrna would be crushed by cruel persecutions, but as a result of her sufferings would be anointed for a death and burial that would end in a resurrection and renewal of life. Although the afflictions would be bitter to the victim, they would result in releasing to the world the perfume of heaven.

In the introduction to this epistle Christ identifies Himself as “the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.” “He who died and has returned to life,” is another translation. (Revelation 1:17,18.) This introduction is well suited to a church that has passed through bitter persecution. To the church of martyrs was sent a message of cheer from the One who had triumphed over death and the grave, and had the keys of the tomb in His keeping. By His death and resurrection triumph, Jesus had robbed death of its sting and the grave of its victory. In identifying Himself, Jesus uses the attributes that would bring courage and support to His people during persecution and martyrdom. If they would be “faithful unto death,” they would be given “a crown of life.”

The church of Smyrna would be crushed but not permanently killed. There would come a new life more glorious than the first. The severe trials would prove a blessing in disguise. Jesus intimates that this was true in His own experience, for He too had been persecuted and slain, but

now he is “alive for evermore.” It was persecution and suffering that made manifest the beauty of the character of Christ and made Him a worthy example of patience under tribulation. (John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 2:20-23.) “From the desert to Calvary, the storm of Satan’s wrath beat upon Him, but the more mercilessly it fell, the more firmly did the Son of God cling to the hand of His Father, and press on in the blood-stained path. All the efforts of Satan to oppress and overcome Him, only brought out in a purer light His spotless character.”- WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, Page 759.

City of Smyrna

Smyrna is one of the oldest cities of the world, with a very eventful history. It is located at the head of a beautiful bay, or arm, of the Aegean Sea about thirty miles from the coast line. On ancient coins have been found the inscriptions “First of Asia in size and beauty” and “The Ornament of Asia.” Its size, location, and magnificence made Smyrna one of the finest cities of Asia, rivaling Ephesus to the south and Pergamos to the north.

Smyrna was said to ‘be the birthplace of Homer. It was celebrated not alone as a center of wealth and prosperity but also as a center of learning and religion. It was famed for its schools of science and medicine, for its fine library, magnificent temples, sacred festivals, and athletic contests. On the slopes of Mount Pagus was a theater seating twenty thousand people, the ruins of which are still visible. In AD 23 a great temple was built by and dedicated to the worship of Emperor Tiberius.

Mount Pagus is a conical-shaped mound more than five hundred feet high, and was located in the center of the ancient city. Its summit was crowned with a shrine dedicated to Nemesis, a Greek goddess who was supposed to be a form of Artemis. Because of its splendor and its garland of magnificent buildings, this hilltop was also known as The Crown of Smyrna. Circling the base of the mount “like a necklace on a statue” was one of the finest streets of the ancient world, called The Street of Gold. When Apollonius visited the city he advised the proud citizens to prefer a crown of splendid men rather than a crown of beautiful buildings. The city itself was sometimes called The Crown of Ionia. This historical background gives significance to the promise of Jesus, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” The promise had a forceful and peculiar meaning to the suffering members of the church of Smyrna.

All through her long and eventful history the city of Smyrna has suffered from besieging armies, massacres, earthquakes, fires, and plagues. About 600 BC the Lydians captured and almost completely destroyed the city. It lay in partial ruins for four hundred years. It was crushed almost to death but was rebuilt by the Greeks and again became a flourishing city. It was restored to life and prosperity. The city was destroyed by a terrible earthquake in AD 178, only eighty years after the church received the Apocalypse. It was again crushed to death but was destined to recover, for it was “the city of life.” The city was restored to more than its former beauty and glory by Emperor Marcus Aurelius. There has seldom been a period of two years without an earthquake. The city was almost completely destroyed by a severe quake in 1688, when the earth opened and swallowed up five thousand people. In 1758 a plague almost depopulated the city, and in 1922 the Turks captured and partially destroyed the modern Smyrna.

Smyrna is the only one of the seven cities of Asia which retains anything of its ancient standing. It is today the largest city of Asia Minor, and is the commercial center of the Levant. The population was recently reported to be 154,000. The present name under Turkish rule is Izmir. More than seven thousand ships of all nations visit the beautiful harbor of Smyrna each

year, and its annual trade is valued at many millions of dollars. One of its chief exports is the famous Smyrna figs. Large quantities of woolen cloth are also exported. Thus has the city of Smyrna often risen from apparent death “to become one of the first stars in the brilliant belt of the cities of Asia Minor.”

The Local Church

The local church of Smyrna was repeatedly crushed by bitter persecutions and was several times virtually destroyed, but has always been restored to life. This church felt the full force of the pagan Roman persecutions of the second and third centuries. Smyrna was the home of Polycarp and the scene of his martyrdom in AD 168. The hillside of Mount Pagus, where he was burned at the stake, has since been reddened by the blood of fifteen hundred Christians at one time and eight hundred at another. Visitors are shown the spot where Polycarp was supposed to have been martyred and the tomb where he was buried.

Many believe that Polycarp was the “angel,” or “minister,” -of the church of Smyrna at the time the message of Christ was delivered. This is based chiefly on the statement he made just before his death. When asked by the judge to renounce Christianity with its Christ, he replied: “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong, how then can I blaspheme my king, who bath saved me?” Tertullian tells us that Polycarp was consecrated bishop of Smyrna by the apostle John, and with this conclusion agree also the testimonies of Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Jerome.

Tamerlane, the Tartar chieftain, captured the city of Smyrna in AD 1402 and massacred its inhabitants, concentrating on the Christians. Tradition says that he built a pyramid of the heads of his victims. Smyrna was the last Christian city to hold out against the Turks when they overran Asia Minor. When they finally captured it, in 1424, they put to death most of its Christian population. The destruction of thousands of Smyranean Christians by the Turks in 1922 is fresh in the memories of many. But the local church still lives. Smyrna has for some time been the headquarters of several denominational mission enterprises. Located there are a number of Christian schools. A few years ago it was said that more Christians lived in Smyrna than in any other Turkish city in the world. The local church will doubtless continue till the second coming of Christ, when all the faithful will be given “a crown of life.”

The Smyrna Period

“Then came the Smyrna period-the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection in the establishment of casts and orders, the license of Judaizing propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel.” (Seiss, Page 142.) The Smyrna period covered about two hundred years, or the second and third centuries. It was the age of martyrdom, when the pagan Roman emperors attempted to destroy Christianity with the violence of the sword, considering it a form of treason. Christians who refused to forsake their faith were threatened with the loss of all citizenship rights, confiscation of property, imprisonment, torture, and death.

During this period Roman rulers and writers bitterly denounced Christianity and reckoned Christians as the off-scouring of the earth, and Suetonius called Christianity “a novel and wicked superstition.” Christians were “hated for their shameful deeds.” Pliny declared that Christianity was “an inflexible obstinacy,” “a depraved and excessive superstition.” These false accusations

made Christians outlaws against the religion and state of the Romans, and thus brought upon them bitter and relentless persecutions.

The Smyrna period is known as the era of martyrdom. Justin Martyr, with six other Christians, was scourged and beheaded in AD 165. Irenaeus is believed to have been put to death in 202 during the persecutions of Severus. Cyprian died under the persecutions of Trajan in 258, and Victorinus in 304 during the martyrdoms under Diocletian. Eusebius said of these terrible times: "We saw with our own eyes the houses of prayer thrown down to the very foundations, and the Divine and Sacred Scriptures committed to the flames." "We . . . have observed [in Thebais] large crowds in one day; some suffering decapitation, others torture by fire; so that the murderous sword was blunted, and becoming weak, was broken, and the very executioners grew weary and relieved each other." (Ecclesiastical History, Book 8, Chapter 2.)

But the church of myrrh and bitterness was agreeable and precious to Christ. Though it was persecuted unto death, the very crushing released the fragrance of love and grace and patient endurance that is so precious in the sight of the Master. Someone has said that "during this persecution the alabaster box of Christian fragrance was broken and the perfume has filled the centuries." It is impossible to estimate the number of Christian martyrs during those days of persecution, but the persecutors were so sure that the hated sect was entirely exterminated that a coin was struck in celebration of the triumph of the pagan gods over the faith of Jesus.

The True Riches

Jesus declared that He was fully acquainted with the tribulation and poverty of His people during this period, but He said they were rich in spiritual things. The poverty was doubtless the result of their tribulation, which often ended in death. Their earthly possessions had been confiscated 'by the state. They had suffered "the spoiling of their goods." Jesus assured them that He fully sympathized with them in their tribulation and poverty because of His own experience. The original word for tribulation means "to be in straits." It is distress resulting from being hard pressed, or hemmed in on every side.

Jesus comforted the Smyrneans with the assurance that their poverty in temporal things could not rob them of their spiritual riches. "But thou art rich" is His message to them. They were rich in grace and faith, and had laid up "treasure in heaven." (Romans 8:32; Colossians 2:3; 1 Timothy 6:18; James 2:5; Matthew 6:20.) During the first three centuries the church was characterized by material poverty and spiritual power Whereas the modern church is noted for its material wealth and spiritual weakness. She claims to be "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," but in God's sight she is spiritually "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and in need of all things that would qualify her to be the light of the world. Trench says that in the sight of Christ "there are both poor rich men and rich poor-men." (Page 107.)

Spiritual riches constitute the true wealth-that which alone will endure. Many of the most wealthy in material things are moral paupers and spiritual bankrupts. Jesus alone can furnish spiritual treasure, and this He offers to the poverty-stricken church of our generation. He says, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich; and white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that thou may see." Revelation 3:18.

Smyrna was a rich poor church and Laodicea a poor rich church. It is far better to be poor in the estimation of the world and rich in spiritual things than to be rich in one's own esteem and the world's but poverty stricken in the sight of Christ. Persecution and physical suffering usually bring material poverty, but they also have a tendency to increase spiritual riches. Persecution for the sake of righteousness has always been a blessing in disguise. The crucible and the burning fiery furnace are the purifying instruments of love and grace rather than the obnoxious weapons of torture.

The psalmist beautifully sets forth the beneficial results of divinely permitted trials: "For Thou, O God, has proved us: Thou has tried us, as silver is tried. Thou brought us into the net; thou laid affliction upon our loins. Thou has caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou brought us out into a wealthy place." Psalm 66:10-12. Here is the secret of a spiritual experience that leads out of the barren desert into a spiritual oasis.

Church of Satan

Christ also had knowledge of those false disciples who claimed to be "Jews," but were rather of the church or "synagogue of Satan." Although we know upon the evidence of the Scriptures and profane history that the Jews in general joined the heathen in hating and persecuting Christians, the term Jew is here used to depict the disciples of Christ. The term is sometimes used in the Scriptures to represent the true people of God in contrast with the Gentiles, or unconverted. (Romans 2:28, 29; Revelation 2:9; 3:9.) The usual term however is Israel, or Israelite, which is synonymous with Christian. Paul declared that the children of faith are the true children of Abraham, and that if we are Christians then we are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:7, 29.) The term Israel had its origin the night Jacob wrestled with the angel. This is the term used in most instances, and the one more appropriate than Jew, yet we should not be too prejudiced against the latter, because Jesus was a Jew and so also were all His apostles and prophets. Jesus declared that "salvation is of the Jews."

The false brethren were not really members of the church of Christ even though their names were enrolled on the church records. They were of "the synagogue of Satan." Synagogue and church are virtually synonymous terms, meaning "congregation," or "assembly." Ancient Israel is called "the church in the wilderness" in Acts 7:38, and "the congregation of the Lord" in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Christian church is called a "synagogue" in the marginal reading of James 2:2. Satan, the great deceiver and imitator, has a church, or synagogue, which God designates as "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the earth." Revelation 17:5. There are but two churches, and they are rivals. Between them there is no neutral ground. All who are not of the church of Christ are of the synagogue of Satan. The apostasy that began through the loss of love in the latter part of the Ephesian period, continued to develop, and false apostles and disciples multiplied in the church. "The mystery of iniquity" was working even in "the congregation of the Lord."

Future Persecutions Foretold

In verse 10 future trials are predicted, including imprisonment. Jesus said, "And you shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." In love and mercy He foretells what is coming, and promises deliverance. Regarding the experience of Paul, Jesus said: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:16. Christ never entices recruits for His cause by promises of an easy task and a pleasant life.

In our text the persecution of the saints is traced to the agency of the devil, the great adversary. The devil cast some into prison that they “may be tried,” or rather tempted. The persecution was a temptation from the devil to cause them to become discouraged and give up their faith and hope rather than a trial or test from God, although the Lord often permits temptations to come to us from the enemy in order to test our powers of endurance and to separate the chaff from the wheat. If we take the proper attitude, what the devil designs for our ruin will result in his defeat, our good, and God’s glory.

Practically all the Roman emperors during the Ephesian and Smyranean periods persecuted the Christians, but ten of them were more pronounced in their enmity. These were Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian. As the Pontifex Maximus of the religion of the state, the emperor was the “protector of the Roman gods.” It was therefore his duty to guard the religion of the empire against the inroads of other systems.

For ten prophetic days the persecution was to continue, and during that time Christians would be put under pressure and given “the third degree” of torture. As the result of this the persecutors were finally convinced that it would be useless to prolong the process. The last and most bloody of these ten persecutions took place under Diocletian, and lasted ten years from AD 302 to 312. Dr. Adam Clarke and other commentators believe that the “ten days” refer especially to this ten-year period, the conclusion being arrived at on the basis of a day representing a year in symbolic prophecy.

The “ten days” of trial mentioned in the Smyranean letter represent a period that would test God’s people to the limit of their endurance both in severity and duration. Christians were to pass through a complete baptism of suffering and martyrdom with the assurance of the fullness of Christ’s love and sympathy and the promise of a “crown of life” as the reward of loyalty and steadfastness.

The Promised Reward

The reward offered the church of Smyrna was not only “a crown of life,” but the voice of the Spirit adds the promise, “He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.” “Be faithful to the end even if you have to die, and then I will give you the victor’s wreath of life,” is the Weymouth translation. The promise is not alone to those who maintain their faithfulness to the end of life in a natural sense, but especially to the persecuted when death was the price of their loyalty. The reward is for those upon whom the enemy inflicts his worst tortures, ending even in death itself. The recompense for faithfulness even unto martyrdom is “a crown of life.” Elsewhere Christians are promised “a crown of glory,” “a crown of righteousness,” and a “crown of rejoicing.”

The crown of our text is not a crown of royalty but rather a “garland of life” or a “victor’s wreath.” Smyrna was noted for its athletic contests, when garlands of victory were given to the successful contestants. During this period of persecution millions of Christians died for their faith, but more millions still became Christians as the result of their steadfastness “even unto death.” The ‘blood of martyrs was the seed that produced a bountiful harvest of souls.

To the church of martyrs Jesus declared Himself to be the One who had also suffered martyrdom, but was again alive, with a life that would never end. His death was a triumph, and

all who are faithful unto death will be given the crown of everlasting life. Nero lost his crown and Paul his head, but the latter died a victor, with the promise of “a crown of righteousness” and a part in the Paradise restored. Polycarp remained faithful even unto martyrdom, and a crown of life and glory awaits him at the resurrection of the just.

Those who maintain their loyalty unto the first death will escape the second death, which will be eternal and from which there will be no resurrection. We need not be too much concerned about the first death, which is temporary and comes to all alike, provided we have maintained that union with the Life-giver by which we can escape the second death. On the other hand those who are born only once must die twice.

The candlestick of the church of Smyrna was not removed. It is the only church of the seven that exists today and is still letting its gospel light shine. Smyrna has been known to the Turks as “Infidel Smyrna” because of their inability to destroy the local church. Nor were the emperors of pagan Rome able to extinguish the light through the agency of persecution. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only two of the seven churches that received no reproof or condemnation, and they are the only two of the seven cities that retain anything of their former importance and glory. The Christians of the Smyrna period needed encouragement. There were things that needed to be corrected, but they had about all they could stand without reproof. The fires of persecution had purified the church, and much of the lost love and works had been regained. Tribulation will also play an important part in the purification of the remnant of the church in preparation for translation. Of them it is said: “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9, 13, 14.)