

Matthew's Gospel

Chapter 13c

The 7 Communities (Rev. 2-3) Represent:

- 1. 7 Literal communities in Asia Minor**
- 2. 7 types of communities found in the world today**
- 3. 7 types of believers in the world today**
- 4. 7 phases in “Church History”**

1. NAME: *Ephesus* (“desirable”)

A.D.33-100

MESSIAH: holds 7 stars, walks in the midst of the 7 Menorahs

PRAISE: works, labor, patience, intolerance of evildoers, testing of false teachers, persistence, endurance, strength

FAULT: “You have left your first love.”

INSTRUCTIONS:

- (a) remember from where you have fallen,
- (b) repent,
- (c) do the first works or else your menorah will be quickly removed from its place.

NOTES:

- Ephesus was considered the “Market of Asia” and was extremely immoral.
- The citizens worshipped Diana (Roman name, Acts 19:23), also known as Artemis (Greek name) who was goddess of fertility and the patron goddess of prostitutes.
- This community was extremely well taught by Paul, Apollos, Timothy and John.
- The Nicolaitans was a group who abandoned themselves to a life of pleasure; thinking that what affected the body did not affect the spirit.
- Paul warned of trouble (Acts 20:29)

Application:

- The danger of putting all stress on doctrine and knowledge is legalism:
 - A) living by a fear/threat motive
 - B) thinking God's favor is entirely dependent on my performance & behavior
 - C) serving God in the flesh instead of in the spirit
- Legalism robs of joy and causes guilt.
- Hatred for sin does not equal love for God
- Yeshua describes Himself so as to remind them of His constant presence, protection and love.
- Yeshua offers them the fruit of the Tree of Life in contrast to that of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil, the principle by which this community was living and operating.

2. **NAME:** *Smyrna* ("myrrh")

A.D.100-312

MESSIAH: the first and last, which was dead, and is alive

PRAISE: works, tribulation, poverty (spiritual riches),
endurance

FAULT: (none)

INSTRUCTIONS:

- a) Fear none of the things "which you shall suffer",
- b) Will be tested for "10 days",
- c) Be faithful unto death and "I will give you a crown of life."

NOTES:

- Myrrh was used in the holy incense and was crushed to give off its fragrance
- The “10 days of tribulation” may also refer to 10 periods of persecution they suffered under the reigns of 10 antagonistic Caesars:
 - Nero (64-68)
 - Domitian (90-95)
 - Trajan (104-117)
 - Aurelius (161-180)
 - Severus (200-211)
 - Maximus (235-237)
 - Decius (250-253)
 - Valerius (257-260)
 - Aurelian (270-275)
 - Diocletian (303-312)
- This is the shortest of the 7 letters and also the shortest of the 7 phases of “Church history”.

3. NAME: *Pergamos* (“married”)

A.D.312-590

MESSIAH: He who has the sharp sword with two edges.

PRAISE: works, steadfastness, martyrdom

FAULT: Tolerance of the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans

INSTRUCTIONS: Repent or they will be destroyed.

CHALLENGE: The overcomers will receive hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written upon it.

NOTES:

- Pergamus was the center of paganism (“Satan’s seat”)
- Location of the temple of Aesculapius, a god of healing whose symbol was a serpent.
- Antipas (“*against everyone*”) was burned to death for his faith.
- The “doctrine of Balaam” was being embraced in the community.
- The hidden manna and secret name refer to the Greek fraternities and their secret rites and esoteric knowledge.

Application:

- This is the period when Christendom became “married” to the state under Constantine in 312 A.D.
- *Pergamos* also means ‘exaltation’. This is the period when the clergy class was created and elevated over the laity.
- During this period it was difficult to distinguish between church and state.
- During this period church buildings began to be built.
- The laity was robbed of rights and ordinances such as marriage, immersion, scripture interpretation, blessings over bread & wine, etc.
- Believers were forced to deny their Jewish roots and to adopt a new “gentile” way of worship sanctioned by Rome.
- The bishop of Rome took prominence over the bishops of other cities.
- Biblical simplicity was replaced by a complicated organizational system, which substituted human creeds for true biblical doctrine.
- Antipas is figurative of a martyr during this period whose dying words were, “If the whole world is against, me, then I am against the whole world.”

4. **NAME:** *Thyatira* (“continual sacrifice”) **A.D.590-1517**

MESSIAH: Son of God, eyes like fire, feet like brass

PRAISE: works, charity, service, faith, patience, increase in works

FAULT: Tolerance of the false prophetess “Jezebel” and her system of beliefs

INSTRUCTIONS: Those who have not “defiled themselves” with her will have no greater burden.

CHALLENGE: The overcomer and who maintains until the end will receive power over nations, and will be given the morning star.

NOTES:

- Thyatira was well known for the manufacture of purple dye (Lydia – Acts 16:14-15).
- Jezebel, like the wife of King Ahab (1 Kings 16) urged the believers to commit spiritual adultery with the pagan gods of the day.
- The biblical Jezebel killed practically all the prophets of the Lord and tried to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:2)

Application:

- Although Messiah commends this church for love (which is not the case with the three preceding churches) He has more to say of its immoral character than any of the other six.
- Just as this is the longest of the seven letters, it represents the longest phase of church history, best known as “the Dark Ages”.
- During this period of time the bishop of Rome claimed supreme authority.
- Also during this period of time idols began to be seen in Christian places of worship.
- According to verse 22, this system of belief will continue on into the Tribulation.
- In this period the church became corrupt as it sought to strip away the faith’s “Jewishness” and replace it with pagan philosophy and heathen religious rites. Most of these rituals are traceable to the Babylonian religious system. Thus the Babylonian system of worship (as described in Rev.17) is depicted as a great whore, like Jezebel.
- Yeshua describes Himself as having:
 - A) “eyes like fire” = seeing things as they truly are (speaks of judgment).
 - B) “feet of brass” = in Scripture brass symbolizes judgment.
 - Just as doctrine and teaching are no substitute for love, charity is no substitute for doctrine/truth.

5. NAME: **Sardis** (“those escaping”)

A.D.1517-1700

MESSIAH: Having the 7 spirits of God, and the 7 stars

PRAISE: (none – “a few faithful ones”)

FAULT: They appeared to be alive but were dead.

INSTRUCTIONS: Be watchful, strengthen what little life remains, remember how they had heard and received, hold fast, repent.

CHALLENGE: “If you don’t watch, I will come to you as a thief.” The overcomer will be clothed in white raiment, his name will not be blotted out of the Book of Life.

NOTES:

- Thyatira had twice fallen in battle because of overconfidence and failure to watch.
- Sardis was in a period of decline when this letter was written.

Application:

- This type of community will continue until Messiah’s return as described in verse 3.
- Yeshua describes Himself as having the “seven spirits” because this group was so spiritually lacking.
- Good advice for this kind of community is found in Ephesians 5:14-18.

6. **NAME:** *Philadelphia* (“brotherly love”)

A.D.1700...

MESSIAH: Holy, true, key of David, opens and shuts

PRAISE: Little power, kept His words, has not denied His name, kept the word of His endurance

FAULT: (none)

INSTRUCTIONS: “Hold fast what you have, ... let no man take your crown.”

CHALLENGE: The overcomer will be made a pillar in the temple of God and shall no more go out, God’s name will be written upon him.

NOTES:

- Believers in Philadelphia were persecuted by the legalizers, who Messiah claims are not really Jews.

Application:

- This period saw the greatest surge of missionary work and evangelism of any period of church history.
- This period will continue until Messiah’s return (v.10).
- Yeshua uses the expression “a little strength” (v.8) because Torah was neglected. (Joshua 1:8)
- The ‘open door’ refers to the open door to share the Gospel.
- The “Key of David” may be a hint that Torah would be restored to this period of the Church, and/or the Temple would be rebuilt during this time. (Based upon Isaiah 22:22 and b. Talmud Taanit 29a.)

7. NAME: *Laodicea* (“people ruling”)

Last Days

MESSIAH: The “Amen”, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

PRAISE: (none)

FAULT: Were lukewarm, blindness to their true condition

INSTRUCTIONS: Buy gold tried in the fire, white raiment, anoint eyes with salve, be zealous and repent, invite Yeshua into their life.

CHALLENGE: The overcomer will sit with Messiah in His throne.

NOTES:

- Laodicea received its water supply from the mountains through a series of aqueducts, thus producing lukewarm water.
- Laodicea was a trade center notorious for its fine wool and eye salve.
- Most of the believers were wealthy.

Application:

- This community shows every indication of not being believers at all as Messiah is depicted as being outside rather than inside. Lukewarmness means their spiritual “temperature” was determined by the surrounding world.

- Though there is no praise for this church, there is no catalog of sins or immoral acts either. It would appear that Messiah was more concerned with just making a basic connection with them.
- Messiah describes Himself as the “Amen”, thus this phase is the last phase of church history.
- Messiah promises to the overcomer a place with Him on His throne. Another indication that these were unbelievers since Ephesians 2:6 accords this privilege to all believers.

Matthew 13 & Revelation 2-3 Compared:

1) Sower & Seed	EPHESUS	Time of sowing, growth, and evangelism
2) Wheat & Tares	SMYRNA	<i>Persecution, the enemy revealed</i>
3) Mustard Tree	PERGAMOS	<i>Worldly alliance, great external growth, birds of the air</i>
4) Leaven	THYATIRA	<i>Papal domination, doctrinal corruption, the “woman”</i>
5) Treasure	SARDIS	<i>Empty profession, rise of the state church</i>
6) Pearl Seeker	PHILADELPHIA	<i>The faithful ones of the Last Days</i>
7) Dragnet	LAODICEA	<i>Apostasy, final judgment</i>