

Rev 25-10-08b

We're ready to resume looking at the letter from the Lord Jesus to the church at Smyrna. And there are some things that are important in terms of our answer to the question, what do I do with this? It applies to me in some form or fashion. What is it? First of all, I'm not a huge one for supplying extra biblical information that wouldn't be known to somebody on a desert island that's reading their Bible and wanting to understand, and doesn't have access to a history book.

But I think it is somewhat significant. And it was known in the ancient world that Smyrna had been leveled, utterly destroyed some centuries earlier by the Lydians. It was wiped out and was no more.

It kind of reminds you of Jericho that laid fallow until a guy rebuilt it and set up its gates. And I remember there was a prophecy that whoever rebuilt that city would pay with lives of their sons and so on. But Smyrna was destroyed in the sixth century BC and later rebuilt.

So it was a city that died and came to life again and had that as its reputation. And the new life in Smyrna isn't just that their city was rebuilt, but that believers who formed this church are now a kind of life there. And there is an attempt and an endeavor to snuff them out, but God is going to ensure that they have a crown of life.

And in the same way that the city was not extinguished by its destruction, the faithful believers of Smyrna are not going to be extinguished either. If anything, they are going to reflect God's glory even more brightly. The synagogue of Satan indicates that there is a religious aspect to this oppression and this hardship that they are experiencing.

They perhaps are being blacklisted, being denied access. You could think of the oppression of black people in our country after the close of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation where they were declared to be free, but those who thought they were better than excluded them and made them second-class citizens and worse. And to be treated this way is a genuine hardship.

But the black church in the latter part of the 19th century, the early part of the 20th century, despite this oppression, thrived spiritually. And there were many wonderful believers who endured this social outcast and hardship and even outright persecution and physical persecution. You're well familiar with that, especially in the South.

And God was able to turn that cursing to blessing. There are gonna be many stars in the crowns and crowns of life for those who endured that hardship. Success in life isn't achieving all of the things that people associate with temporal happiness.

It is pleasing the Lord, despite what is thrown at us by way of hardship and testing. The 10 days that are mentioned here, you could say, well, is this a literal 10 days? Is it symbolic in some fashion? We saw this in Daniel chapter one. If you wanna keep your finger here in Revelation

chapter two and just turn back quickly to Daniel, this is a direct reflection of Daniel's faith, his and that of his friends, when they are taken captive and put to the strictures of the eunuch overseer.

You can pick up in verse nine of chapter one of Daniel. God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. The chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my Lord, the king who has appointed your food and drink.

Why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king because many of the foods that were being prescribed and required violated the dietary laws of the law of Moses. So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, test your servants for 10 days. Let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.

These are not the rich foods, not the high fat, high nutrition, high carbohydrates diet that would be associated with health and the best of appearance and so on. And this is something of a competition. If you don't thrive, you would be weeded out of this group.

Test your servants 10 days and we will be essentially impoverished. We will eat this very limited diet. Then let our appearance be examined before you and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies.

If you compromise with the world, if you go along to get along and you get seated at the banquet table and everybody is happy and welcoming and you taste the finer things by compromising spiritual principles, Daniel says, compare us to these. And as you see fit, so deal with your servants. So he consented with him in this manner and tested them 10 days.

The period is repeated. At the end of the 10 days, that's three mentions, their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. So the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

As for the four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in literature and wisdom. Daniel had an understanding and visions and dreams. At the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar, the king interviewed them and among them all, none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Nazariah.

Therefore they served before the king. If we want to serve before the king, don't compromise with the world. Don't let oppression or hardship by way of testing cause compromise or giving in.

10 days, testing is 10 days. Just think of these young men as a wonderful example of God's gracious provision. Maybe kind of tough to eat the limited diet for a time, but afterward yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness, as does discipline from the Lord of many different kinds,

many different areas of life.

So be faithful unto death, I will give you the crown of life. Smyrna was one of the cities that hosted athletic games. The Stephanos, the crown was awarded yearly at their stadium.

So when the Lord Jesus mentions the crown of life, they know exactly what this is, the Stephanos of life. You have prevailed in life. You have finished the course.

You have fought the fight. You have won the race. So the real victor's crown, the spiritual crown is more real than the ones they saw awarded at these athletic competitions.

Later on, there is going to be a very famous martyr, Polycarp, who is from Smyrna. And again, that delves into church history a little bit. You can look up Polycarp, but he is from Smyrna.

And he seems to have taken this message from the Lord Jesus to heart. And what appears to be defeat and a martyr's death ends up qualifying one for that eternal weight of glory that we have seen. So this confidence, we've seen the exhortation, let no one take your crown.

Do not fumble away your heritage as Esau did for, again, a sumptuous meal, something that smelled good when he walked in, he was hungry. And that self-gratification cost him his inheritance, sold it for a mess of pottage. And the Smyrnans are encouraged by these Old Testament examples to stick it out, trust the Lord Jesus.

He is the one who will personally award the Stephanos of life. There is no formal rebuke in this letter. And that is something that is paralleled.

And I want to now suggest to you one of our favorite motifs, one of God's oft-used structural clues to help us gain insight into his word. The seven letters are a chiasm. We have here a chiasm.

And I thought about waiting until we cover the letters and then covering this, but we have covered them in the past. You're familiar with the gist of each of these letters, and we will get more out of them, I think, in the same way that when we did the gospel of John, we had done the other three gospels. And so we compared and contrasted the content of the synoptics as well as what is in John.

And we did that in Luke when we would look back at Mark and Matthew. In the same way, we know enough, we're familiar enough that I think this will be helpful to us as we traverse the letters. So you could imagine if there is something with seven elements, you're going to have three leading in, you're gonna have one at the center and three as you work your way back out.

And these are concentric brackets or parallels. So just as an overview here, and this is not the only way that these letters reflect asymmetry, but this is a prominent and visible way. So let's take Ephesus.

We just reviewed that. You understand that they are working hard, but the core, the center, the

love that should be the measure of their works and their faith has somehow been lost and they have fallen away from it. And so they're going through the motions and they're still doing a lot of good things and they are doctrinally pure.

Jesus says, I've got the stars in my hand. You reject those that are trying to perpetrate false apostolic witness and so on. Good job you, your doctrine is sound, but that doesn't get you into the overcomer category.

You've got to focus on, recover and maintain your foremost love. Well, the outside of this bracket is the seventh church and that's the church at Laodicea in chapter three, verse 14 through 22. So let's just quickly review Laodicea.

To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, these things says the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. Notice the emphasis here on the truth, faithful and true. Witness, this witness that the Ephesians of Laodicea have touched on to and they don't let anyone corrupt it and that's a good thing.

I know your works, verse 15, chapter three, but you're neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot. I will vomit you out of my mouth because you say I am rich, I've become wealthy.

I have need of nothing. And you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy for me gold refined in the fire that you may be rich and white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.

Anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

The issue in Ephesus was love. Here, be zealous and repent. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.

This rebuke and chastening is a reflection of Jesus' love for them. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice, opens the door.

I will come in to him, dine with him, he with me. To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on my throne as I also overcame and sat down with my father on his throne. So this tepidness, they're not beneficial the way hot water is.

They're not refreshing and crisp like cold water is. They're tepid. And that is a reflection of a loss similar to what you have in Ephesus.

You come to, and we'll see this in detail, especially when we get to Laodicea. But you look at this next inner bracket. Smyrna, which we're looking at now, is parallel to or symmetrical with Philadelphia.

This is chapter three, verses seven through 13. To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

these things says he who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, opens and no one shuts, shuts and no one opens. I know your works.

I sit before you an open door. No one can shut it. You have a little strength.

You have kept my word and not denied my name. This endurance in hardship is reminiscent of Smyrna. I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, can't get much more of a parallel than that.

This is the second mention of the synagogue of Satan, parallel to Smyrna, who say they are Jews and are not. Same thing in the letter to Smyrna. I will make them come and worship before your feet and to know that I have loved you.

This theme of Jesus' love is here and in the last letter to Laodicea. Because you have kept my command to persevere, be faithful unto death, he tells those in Smyrna. Persevere, I will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth.

This is comparison contrast. Smyrna, Satan is going to test some of you, throw you in prison, you'll be tested 10 days. Be faithful unto death.

Here, because you have been those who keep my command to persevere, I will keep you from the hour of trial, which comes upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. I'm coming quickly, hold fast what you have that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, he shall go out no more.

I will write on him the name of my God in the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and I will write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. So, faithfulness in testing, perseverance under trial, and there is a reward for this perseverance.

In the center bracket, you have Pergamos. This is coming up next. In verse 12 of chapter two, these things says he who has the sharp two-edged sword, I know your works, where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, you hold fast to my name.

You do not deny my faith, even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr. We just saw the Smyrnans challenge to be faithful unto death, and the potential for martyrdom. Faithful unto death, give the crown of life.

Here in Pergamos, there has been someone who was martyred for the faith. He was faithful unto death. Antipas, killed among you where Satan dwells.

And both in Smyrna and in Pergamos, and in the parallel in Philadelphia, Satan is specifically mentioned. And Satan's presence and his influence and his policy is reflected in those who follow his example of falsehood and accusation, persecution. Verse 14, chapter two, I have a

few things against you.

You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, eat things, sacrifice to idols, commit sexual immorality. You have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. And now we are harking back to the church in Ephesus.

You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. And so these first three churches are tied together by common references, references to Satan, references to martyrdom, references to the Nicolaitans. Repent, or I will come quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it.

More about that when we get to this letter, but there's a lot going on here. All I want to point out right now is that Pergamos, or Pergamum, is chiastically related to Sardis in chapter three, verses one through six. Church in Sardis.

Write to the angel, these things says he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die.

I've not found your work perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard. Hold fast and repent.

If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments. They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments. I will not blot out his name from the book of life. I will confess his name before my father and before his angels.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. Incomplete works, heading in the direction of death. Pergamum and Sardis, Pergamus and Sardis.

The requirement is to persevere in faith in the face of compromise. Then finally, at the center, you have the church at Thyatira. Interestingly, this letter to Thyatira is the longest letter of the seven, the most fully detailed.

It sits at the center of this chiastic structure. To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, these things says the son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and his feet like fine brass, reflective of judgment, the fire of judgment, the eyes of evaluation, the feet, the walk, reflecting that everything, everywhere the Lord Jesus goes, that is going to be reflected. I know your works,

your love, your service, your faith and your patience.

As for your works, the last are more than the first. We're gonna see ties to the outside brackets here in the center. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you because you allow that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess to teach and seduce.

Once again, prophets, apostles, tying back to Ephesus, listening to the faithful and true witness when you get to the Laodiceans. We'll flesh this out and review it as we go through. I just wanna give you the outline, give you the suggestion here so you can be watching for and thinking about these parallels.

What is the point of these parallels? Why are we even looking at this chiastic structure? And there's another structural clue beyond this that we're about to cover. It is this, this is a unified message. He that has an ear should hear what Jesus says to all seven of the churches.

This is a witness that each one of us needs to take on board. I can't say, well, I'm living in the age of Laodicea, the others were nice to know, but that doesn't really apply to me. There are areas of our life, there are times in our life, there are circumstances in our life where the Lord Jesus' words to this church is absolutely vital and applicable to us.

If we overcome in this area, we will earn the overcomer reward. We will grow in grace and knowledge. We will be thoroughly equipped for every good work now and in the ages to come.

We need to be intimately aware of when these specific messages apply in our lives because there will be a time and there will be a circumstance and there will be an opportunity where this is vital. God, the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts in a way that empowers us to prevail and to overcome, to stand with our booted foot, shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace on the neck of the enemy, with the sword of the spirit, the word of God in our hand, the shield of faith, protecting us, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, our waist gird about with truth. That's what holds everything together is God's truth.

All of this is pertinent. All of it is applicable. All of it is going to help us understand the remainder of this book.

So important to review these letters, to analyze ourselves. Where are we in the faith? Where are we in our walk? Where are we being challenged? Where is it that we need to be faithful no matter what? If it's unto the death of relationships, if it's unto the death of bad habits, if it's unto the death of that which offends in our lives, our eye, our hand, our foot, whatever it may be, faithful unto death, ensuring that we do what we do out of love for God. If our love starts to flag and fade, look at the word of God where he is revealed.

He is altogether lovely. He is worthy to be praised and worshiped. Read the Psalms, the Psalms of praise.

David loved God beyond all things. And it's reflected in his Psalms. The other Psalmists

understood the character of God.

They would go back and rehearse his actions in history. If we have a problem remembering that we love God and we are motivated when we get up in the morning to live our lives to please him, to do what we do to serve him and to infuse our energy, our efforts, our labors, our words, our thoughts with our love for God and the burning desire to be pleasing in his sight. If that ever starts to fade or flag, get into the word.

Dig up a notebook, look at a devotional. I was tuning a piano yesterday. And when I went into the home, there was a mezuzah on the doorframe.

And I thought, you know, this is one of the Jewish traditions I love, even though they're literalizing something that God meant metaphorically. You know, put my word on the doorframe so that when you go out, when you come in, you'll remember. But that's a wonderful reminder.

And I thought, well, this is gonna be a Jewish household. So I got in, I was tuning away. I select my test songs sort of based on, almost everybody is a Christian.

And so I'll play a couple of hymns because they're simple and I can play them. But when I'm in a Jewish home, and there's a handful of those, I'll play Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen or, you know, something innocuous. I don't rip out with There's Power in the Blood or, you know, At Calvary or Old Rugged Cross.

I don't want to offend. But I was tuning away and I was mostly done. And I glanced over at the bookshelf and here's Wiest's Word Studies in the Greek New Testament.

You've heard me suggest that before. I think a lot of you have gotten a copy. Many times when I get up in the morning, first thing I'll do is grab my glasses because I'm blurry eyed, but I will open either that or C.H. Macintosh and just read a half a chapter or a chapter.

I told the lady, there is gold in them there hills. When you read Wiest, he is always, that's W-U-E-S-T, Kenneth Wiest. Word Studies in the Greek New Testament.

There's several volumes that are a compendium of things that he published separately during his lifetime. But any chapter in there, you can't miss. Crack the thing open at random and start reading.

You'll get a blessing. And your love for God will be ignited and refreshed and renewed. But that's what's going on.

There is a chiasm and right at the center in this longest letter are the problems in Thyatira. This is the son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire. These are the eyes that look at and know the works in all seven churches.

These are the feet that walk around in the midst of the lampstands. This is the son of God who

is the first and the last, who was dead and is now alive. Everything pertains here.

The woman Jezebel, the threat from without and within, she calls herself a prophetess. So she is posing as a source of God's truth inside. She's the queen of Israel, so to speak, and is claiming authority that is not rightfully hers.

Look up the history of Jezebel. She's not even a Jewess. She is the daughter of a pagan idol-worshiping king that Ahab wanted to settle disputes with.

And she's the mother of Athaliah. Look that up. But she calls herself a prophetess, but she is teaching and seducing my servants to commit sexual immorality and he thinks sacrifice to idols.

Sexual immorality in the spiritual realm is losing loyalty to God and his word and accepting as substitutes the traditions of men, the insights of latter-day re-interpreters who will tell you that the word of God has some good things in it, but there's a lot of things you really need to overlook and abandon and get away from. And it is seductive because there is gratification and being accepted and hail fellow well-met and you get the right hand of fellowship and slapped on the back and embraced by those who are liberal and are pursuing the social gospel that God's will is that everybody be happy and everybody be accepted and it's big tent Christianity and you're very close to just universalism and so on. I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality and she did not repent.

Shame on us if we are confronted by the word of God and the spirit of God and don't change our minds, don't take it to heart. The word of God, three quarters of what it does, it instructs, but when it gives us doctrine, that instruction sets us on the right path from the wrong one. It rebukes us and calls us to account and it corrects us.

Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness. We have to know what the truth is. He who is faithful and true is giving it to us in these letters.

Anyway, be watching for insight from this symmetry. I only have time to suggest this in the minute that remains to us, but there is also an interesting suggestion because the word of God is full of sevens and you can pick sevens and start laying them side by side. This suggestion is not original to me, but I find it suggestive.

Israel's year revolves around how many appointed feasts? You get the spring feasts and the fall feasts. There are seven for your homework on your own time, if you so choose. I will review this later.

I only have time to mention it now, but list the seven feasts and beside them, list the seven churches. So Ephesus, Passover, liberation through the blood and a call to remember God's love in providing deliverance and salvation. Smyrna corresponds to unleavened bread and the Red Sea test.

Passing through the waters is symbolic of death and resurrection on the other side. Pergamum

corresponds to first fruits, provision in the wilderness, God providing the necessary nutrition, manna. Only a remnant is gonna survive that 40 years in hostile territory.

So Balaam's seduction while they're in that phase is mentioned for Pergamum. Thyatira corresponds to Pentecost and the Sinai covenant. Jezebel is the breaking of that covenant in the days of Ahab, in the days of Northern Israel.

This is the hinge of the chiasm, the center of the chiasm. Sinai itself, will you be faithful to God's law or not? Sardis, feast of trumpets. Wake up, repent, prepare for atonement.

Jesus says, wake up and strengthen what remains. You have a name that you're alive, but you're dead. Wake up, come to life.

Trumpet blast, alertness before judgment. Philadelphia corresponds to the day of atonement. I have set before you an open door.

Once a year on the day of atonement, the high priest could enter through the veil into the Holy of Holies. Smyrna and Philadelphia correspond. Smyrna may die, but they end up with the crown of life.

Philadelphia, if they prevail, they are pillars in the temple, permanence. Life and permanence, eternity are paralleled there. Then finally, Laodicea, feast of tabernacles.

God dwelling with his people. Laodicea, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice, open the door, I come in.

There's fellowship, there's presence. So two ways to gain some second and third level insight on these seven letters to the churches, the chiastic structure and an interesting speculation on the overlay of Israel's seven feasts. That's all we have for tonight, but isn't it exciting to see the treasures that are contained in God's word that are not only wonderful to perceive and to observe and to understand, but the effect, the wind in our sails, in our spiritual life, our dedication, our faithfulness, our endurance and perseverance, even in times of testing, nurtured and built up through the word and through God's Holy Spirit.

What a wonderful life we have been called to. What a wonderful savior who made all of this possible for us. You just can't help but love and desire to please the Lord Jesus and God the Father in this light.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. We'll pick our study up a week from tonight. Father, we thank you for the truth of your word.

We ask your blessing on us as we endeavor to see its pertinence and traction in our own lives. May God the Holy Spirit shine this light brightly on our path so that we can live in a way that pleases you and glorifies the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name, amen.