



SEVEN LETTERS  
TO THE CHURCH



AEGEAN SEA

ASIA  
MODERN



PERGAMUM



THYATIRA



SMYRNA



SARDIS



PHILADELPHIA



EPHEBUS



PATMOS

MEDITERRANEAN SEA



MINOR

DAY TURKEY

PHIA

AODICEA

RANIAN SEA

# SEVEN LETTERS TO THE CHURCH

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Read just a couple of chapters of Revelation and most people are struck. On one hand, we notice how different the book seems compared to other parts of the New Testament, and on the other, we are drawn-in to understand more of its curious and strange images. Where is it going? What is it trying to say?

In the earliest days of Christianity, the Roman world was confused about this new “sect” that followed one called “Christ,” and Judaism began to separate themselves from these new religious rebels who worshipped a false Messiah. So, for Christians, it was a time of uncertainty and eventually turned into a time of persecution from two sides. These seven letters at the beginning of Revelation were written to this world. John writes from prison about a vision, and in that vision, the resurrected Jesus speaks to local churches in a way that is unfamiliar and even frightening. Conquering seems to be the theme and the “one like the son of man” has challenging words for these young churches. External forces are pressing in. Sin and compromise are eating away inside and spoiling the witness of the church. Compromise or conquer.

John’s details of his vision bring together imagery and language from all over the Bible, and wise readers will be aware of this. Not to mention, it is written to a people in an ancient place (see map). In fact, the letters read like a progressing traveler walking through the memory of his visits to a series of churches along a real route in the province of Asia Minor, which is part of modern-day Turkey.

Two thousand years removed, what is the message we should take from this letter to churches that seemed so different from ours? Are we really that different? As we study together, let us listen to Jesus as ultimate Judge, encouraging and admonishing his people to ignite their passions and live holy lives that witness to His reign—then, now, and forever.

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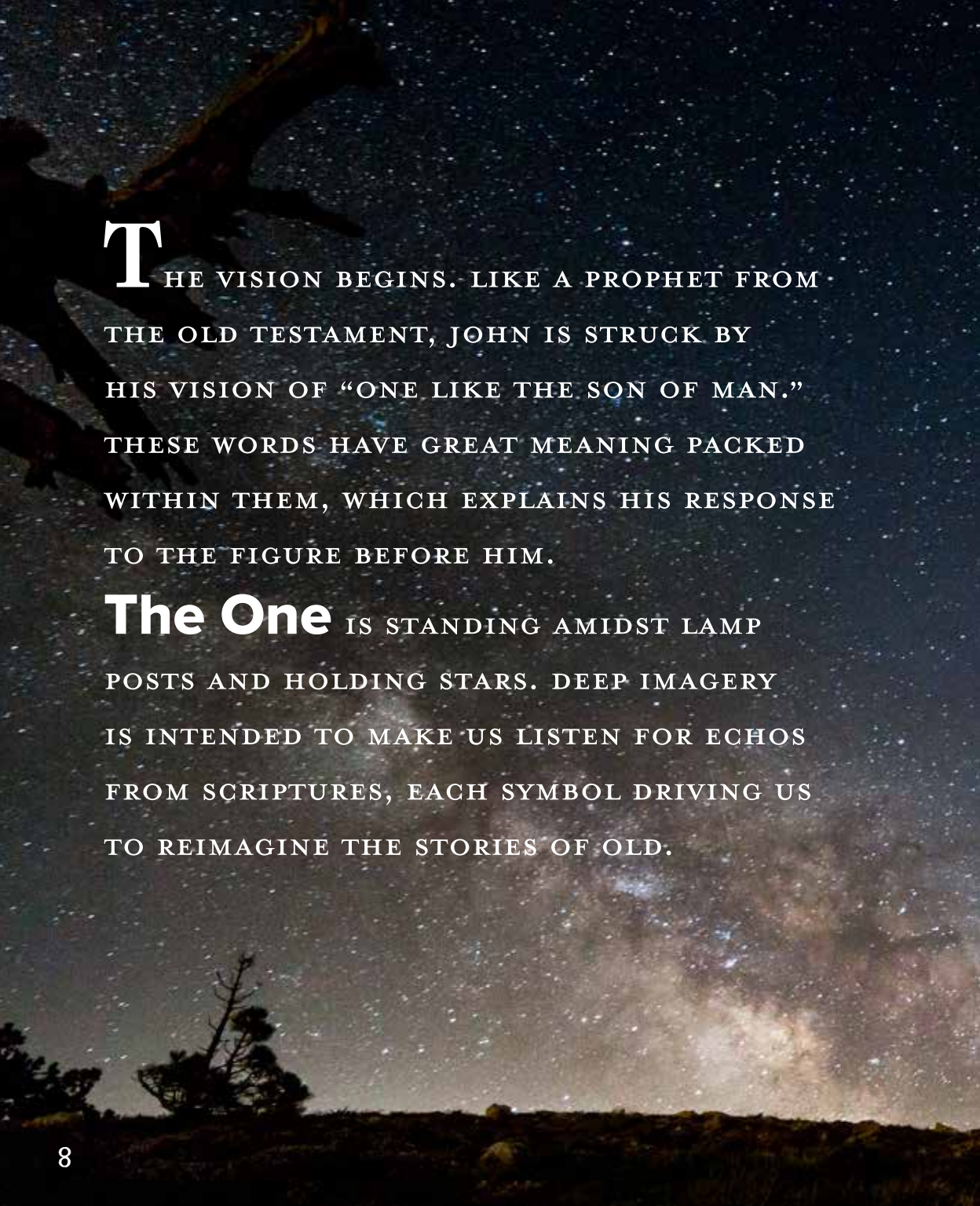
Session I

THE VISION OF ONE  
**LIKE THE SON OF MAN**

# REVELATION 1:9-20

<sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." <sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were

like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. <sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. <sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. <sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.



**T**HE VISION BEGINS. LIKE A PROPHET FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT, JOHN IS STRUCK BY HIS VISION OF “ONE LIKE THE SON OF MAN.” THESE WORDS HAVE GREAT MEANING PACKED WITHIN THEM, WHICH EXPLAINS HIS RESPONSE TO THE FIGURE BEFORE HIM.

**The One** IS STANDING AMIDST LAMP POSTS AND HOLDING STARS. DEEP IMAGERY IS INTENDED TO MAKE US LISTEN FOR ECHOS FROM SCRIPTURES, EACH SYMBOL DRIVING US TO REIMAGINE THE STORIES OF OLD.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. John calls himself “brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.” How does the idea of tribulation and endurance mix with the idea of kingdom (or reigning)? For a Christian how do they go together? Does it seem active or passive? Explain.
2. John hears a “voice like a trumpet.” Read Exodus 19:9-25 and Numbers 10:1-10. What is the significance of the trumpet to the Israelites? How might this relate to John’s vision here?
3. Read Daniel 7:9-14, Mark 10:42-45, and John 8:28-30. What is the significance of the words “one like a son of man”?
4. Read Genesis 17:1-3, Leviticus 9:22-24, Ezekiel 1:22-28, and Isaiah 6:1-7. These verses reveal the response to coming face-to-face with the LORD. Along with John’s posture in Revelation 1:17, how does this challenge some of the contemporary pictures of Jesus? How about your own picture of Jesus?
5. Read Exodus 25:31-40. What was the purpose and significance of the lampstand? Where was it located? How might this relate to the use of “lampstand” in the introduction to the letters?
6. In Jesus’ self-description in Revelation 1:17-18, what stands out? What seems to be of importance? What image is supposed to be carried in our mind as we approach the rest of the book?
7. Revelation 1:13-15 uses descriptions that can echo back to the Old Testament. Remember the description from Daniel 7 above. Discuss what you recall about a story of a furnace in Daniel 3.
8. The word behind “angel” in Revelation 1:20 can mean “angel” or “messenger.” What do you think seems to be better and why?
9. Sometimes mysteries are not always explained in scripture. Revelation 1:20, however, gives insight into the symbols of stars and lampstands. How does this help us read Revelation 1:12-16?

TO  
THE  
ONE  
WHO  
CONQUERS



The description of the person that John faces and the allusions to the Old Testament bring this vision into full focus. This One is not to be trifled with. He is bearing the description of the Ancient of Days, but He is also a "Son of Man," His voice roaring like waters and also like the trumpet that would move Israel to worship and to battle. It is no wonder that John falls to his face as if dead. This is how the book begins. In one sense, this should shatter our pictures of the soft and safe Jesus so often depicted within our minds eye. This is the Resurrected King! This is the One who will bring justice. He holds the keys to Death and Hades. How does your image of the eternal Son fail to do justice to who He is? Is it possible that when we attempt to lay our sin before the cross of Christ, we fail to recognize that His sacrificial enthronement on the cross leads to His royal enthronement over all creation? We must remember that the Old Testament says over and over that the **fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.**

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Session II  
LETTER TO  
EPHESUS

## REVELATION 2:1-7

<sup>1</sup> “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup> “‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. <sup>3</sup> I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

# HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET THEM HEAR....

There is a pattern to the seven letters. You will recognize it. Start by answering the basic questions posed every week and then dig into the questions specific to the letter.

What is the description of Jesus in the beginning of the letter? How does it relate to the first chapter of Revelation? How might it relate to the situation/problem in this church?

Identify the commendation(s) from Jesus (if any).

Identify the warning(s) from Jesus (if any).

What is the promise at the end of the letter? Identify the imagery and discuss its possible purpose.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. Read Isaiah 42:6-7; 60:1-3 and Matthew 5:14-16. What is the purpose of light in these passages? What does it say about the people of God?
2. Who was responsible for the lampstand in the tabernacle? What does Revelation 2:1, 5 say about responsibility for the lampstand? Read Hebrews 8:1-2.
3. Read Acts 20:17-35 where Paul admonishes the Ephesians as he departs. What is the core of his example and exhortation? Considering this letter, how has his exhortation worked out so far? Explain.
4. Read Matthew 24:3-14. How does this passage related to “the end of the age” speak to the problem in the church in Ephesus?
5. Define what you think “patient endurance” means here. What does it require? Is it active or passive? Explain.
6. What might be caused by having good theology and protecting it well, but having a lacking or ineffective witness?
7. The promise at the end of the letter includes access to “eat of the tree of life.” Read Genesis 2:5-9, 15-17. What are the implications of this promise considering these passages? Now read Revelation 22:1-2, 14-15.

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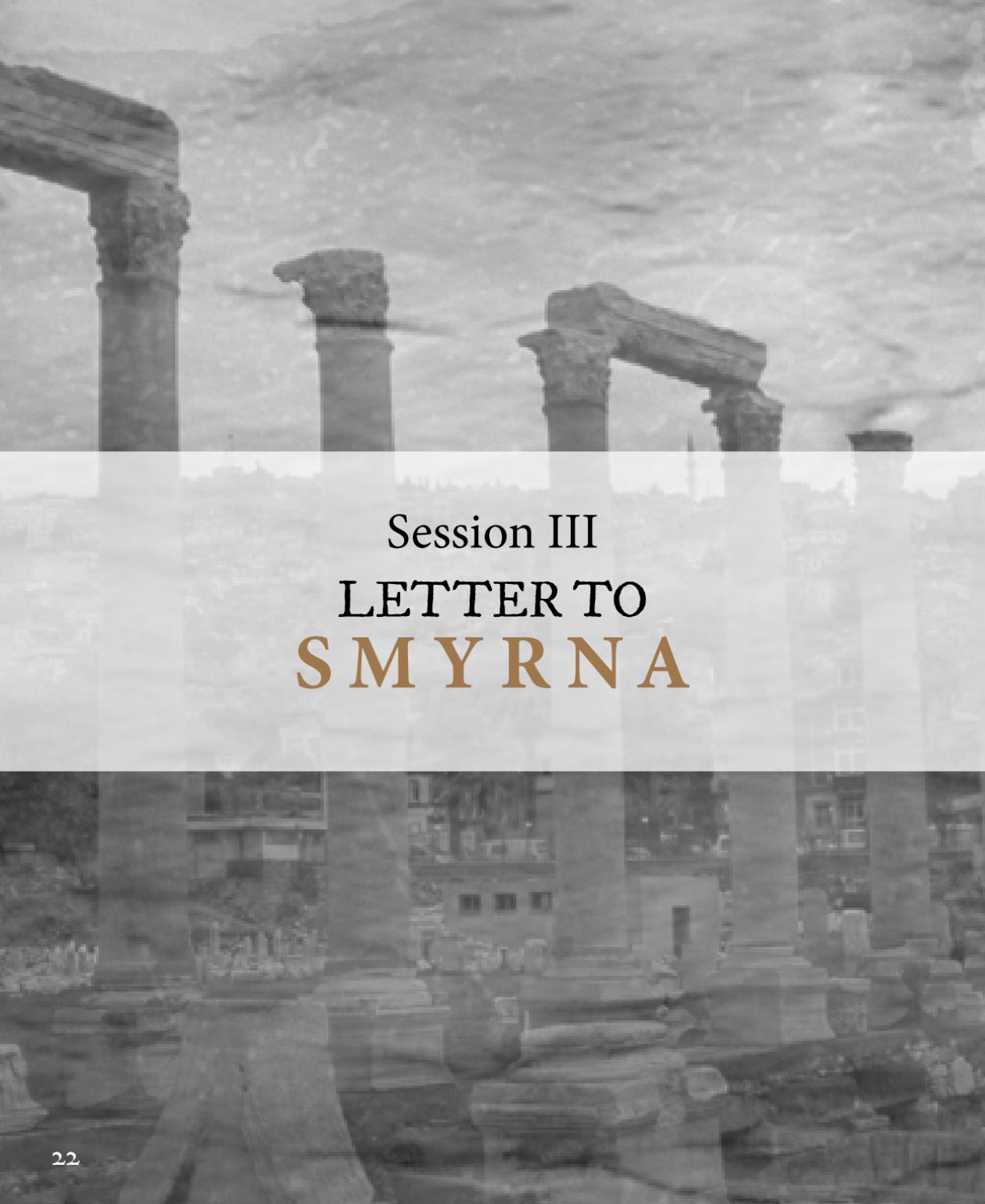


If you are a Christian, seeing Jesus as “Savior” has likely been beaten into you since you first came to the Christian faith. What about Jesus as “Judge”? If a king has deciding power over everything in his kingdom—no checks, no balances—then he is ultimately the judge. Jesus is our King and thus our Judge! Sometimes we recoil at this idea, but it is absolutely true and necessary. How would justice be done without a good and perfect judge? How would the world be put right without One who knows what right truly is? The problem with these letters is that they cause us to question ourselves, personally and corporately. A lampstand that has no light, is no longer a lampstand just like a church without witness is no longer a church. Jesus removes lampstands. So, like the church at Ephesus, we have to ask if we have solid theology and morality, but fail to witness to the glory of our King and Judge? Do we know the King and his rules really well, but fail to reveal His goodness to those around us no matter what the cost?

# NOTES

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The background of the page is a grayscale photograph of ancient ruins. The top half shows several tall, weathered stone columns with Corinthian capitals, some of which are partially broken. The bottom half shows a dense field of rubble, including large blocks of stone and smaller fragments, with some low-rise buildings visible in the distance. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the middle of the image, containing the text.

Session III  
LETTER TO  
**SMYRNA**

## REVELATION 2:8-11

<sup>8</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. <sup>9</sup> “ ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

# HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET THEM HEAR....

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What is the promise at the end of the letter? Identify the imagery and discuss its possible purpose.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. What are the three challenges with which the church in Smyrna is struggling?
2. How is suffering portrayed in this short letter? Now read Romans 8:12-17. How does Paul's vision of suffering help us understand?
3. "Satan" and "devil" are used in this letter. From these references, what do they tell you about what Satan can do? Do you think these are references to Satan's actions or to actions based upon his influence? Explain.
4. How do the ideas in Revelation 2:8 and Revelation 2:11 connect?
5. When you hear "do not fear" what are you expecting to hear next? Is your expectation positive or negative? Explain.
6. What does faithfulness entail?
7. What do your fears and anxieties keep you from doing?
8. What is the "second death"? Read Revelation 20:6, 11-15.

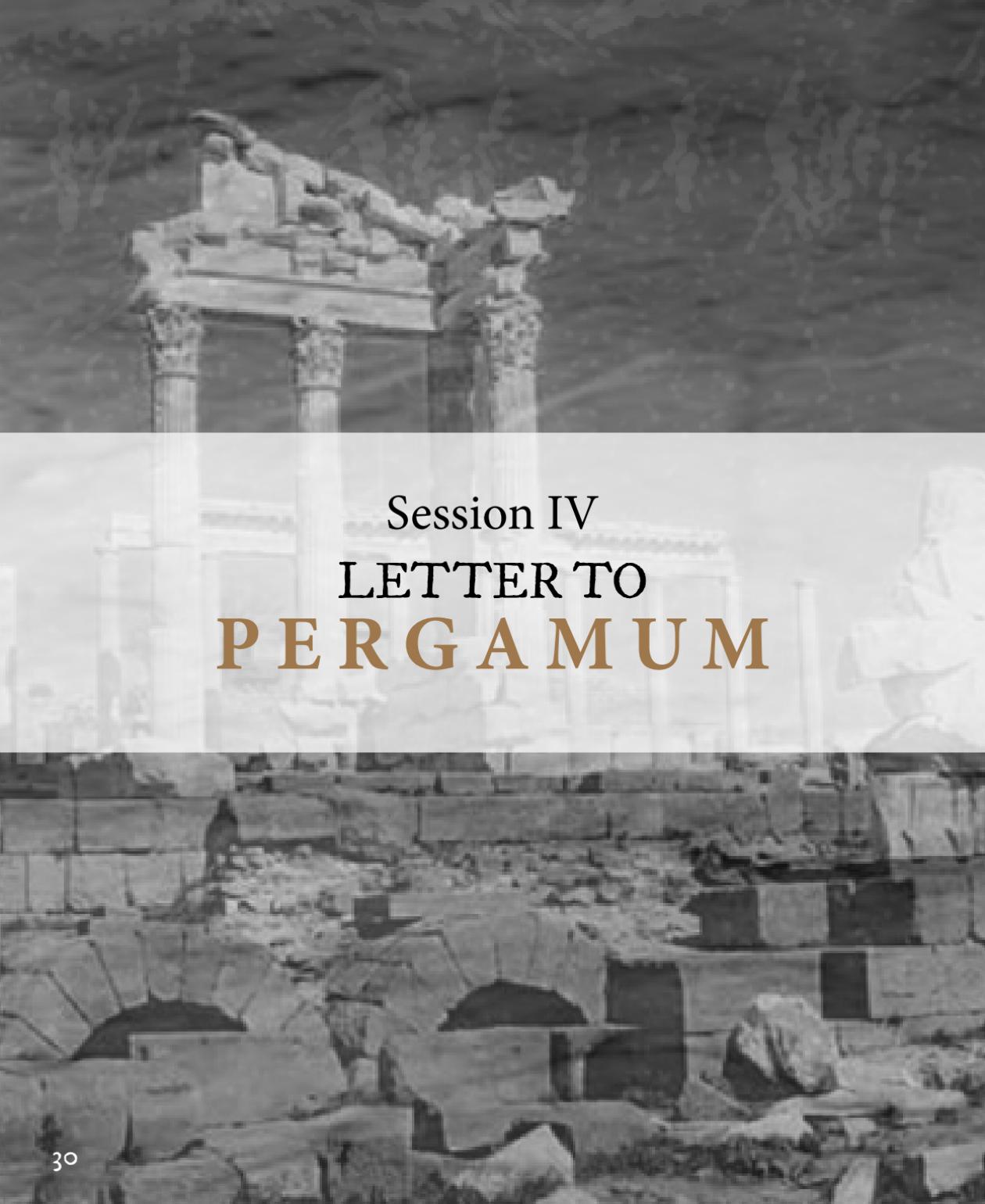
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- We might be shocked that this is the only place that the Greek word used for “suffer” exists in the whole Book of Revelation. The word behind “suffer” is the same word that the Greek translation of the Old Testament would use for “Passover” lamb. So, it is used for a sacrificial lamb and used as a translation for “suffering.” It seems clear that John’s vision presents an understanding and hopeful view of suffering. For Smyrna the suffering may be “unto death” but in the vision that is not the last word. As Christians, we look to the true Passover sacrifice of Jesus, once for all. The question remains whether we rely on His death enough to trust Him with our lives. How can you reveal this trust in Jesus through your actions this week?

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Session IV  
LETTER TO  
**PERGAMUM**

## REVELATION 2:12-17

<sup>12</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. <sup>13</sup> “‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. <sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

# HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET THEM HEAR....

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Identify the warning(s) from Jesus (if any).

What is the promise at the end of the letter? Identify the imagery and discuss its possible purpose.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. Pergamum is called the “place where Satan dwells” and the place “where Satan’s throne is.” Imagine living in a city you called home because you wanted to be there. How would these words hit you?
2. Revelation 2:14 refers to the Old Testament story in Numbers 22-25. Read Numbers 31:16 to understand the bottom-line of what happened. How does this connect to the warning to the church at Pergamum?
3. Nicolaitans are mentioned for the second time here. Using Revelation 2:6, 14-15, how would you describe the “sin” of the Nicolaitans? Are they inside the church or outside? Explain.
4. Antipas was killed among them. He is called a “faithful witness.” With no information about the situation, what is the purpose of the example? You may have been part of a church body when one of the church family passed away. What might be your response if the one who died was killed for their faith?
5. With all of the failure that seems to be present, the one with the two-edged sword says “repent.” From what are they repenting?
6. “Hidden manna” is one of the rewards. What does this refer to in the Old Testament? How does this relate to the sin of Pergamum?
7. A new name is given in Revelation 2:17. Read Isaiah 62:1-4. Discuss how “name” is used in this letter (2 places) and how the Isaiah passage can help understand. When are the times that you know of a person receives a new name in our culture?

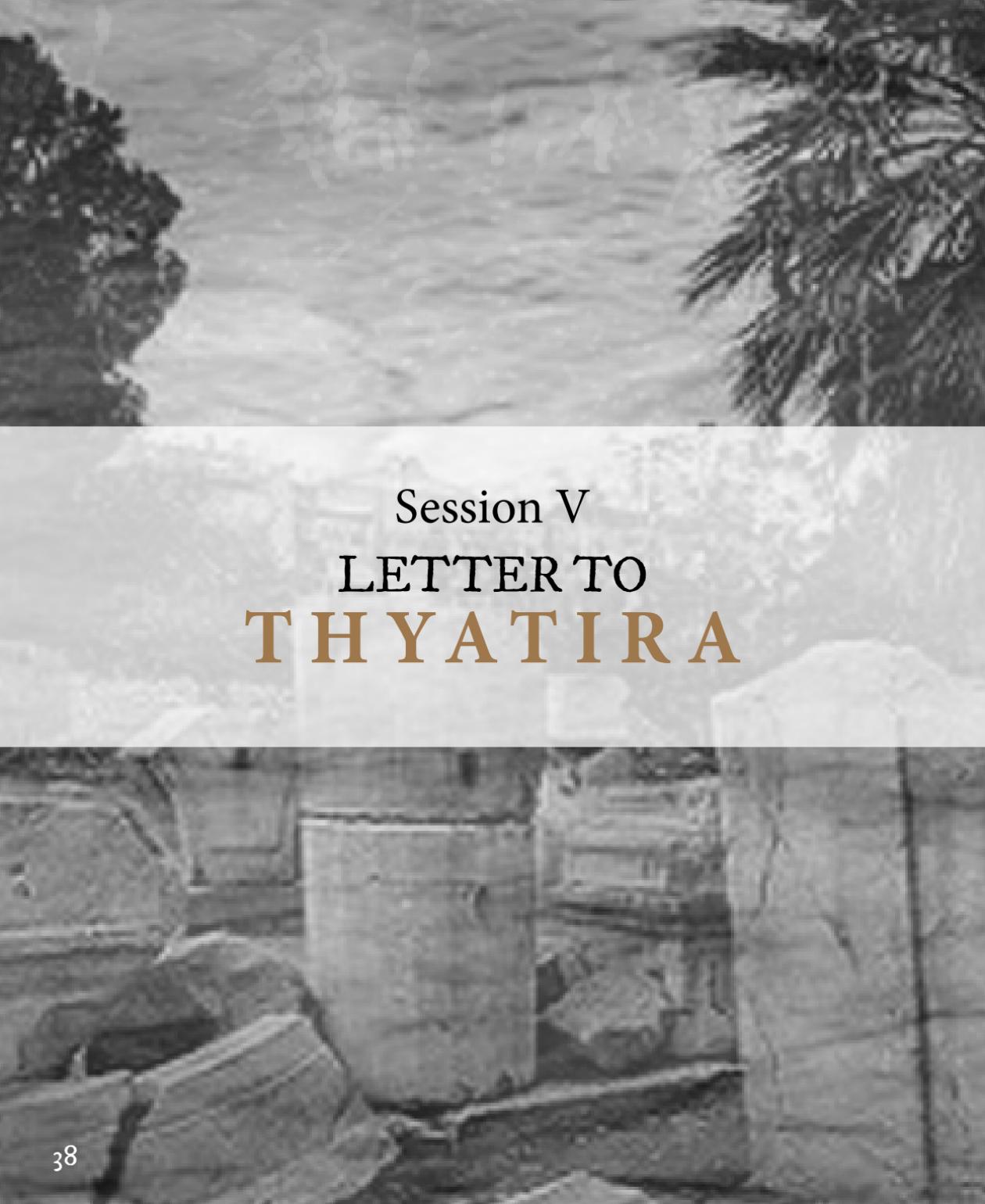
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Pergamum was the first city in Asia Minor to build a temple to Caesar Augustus, a place where people would burn incense to signify total obedience to him. The hill behind the city where many of the pagan temples were, was said to include a throne of Zeus. There was a healing cult to the pagan god Asclepius that used a serpent as its image and was prominent in Pergamum. No wonder the imagery says Satan dwells there. We should be careful in drawing too hard of a distinction between these ancient pagan images and our own. Ever thought about your phone, tablet or computer that has the image of a fruit with a bite out of it? What might that image refer to? What does our culture think it represents? Owning a piece of technology is not evil in itself, but this is an interesting illustration to show if we aren't careful, we can slowly allow what seems "normal" within culture to take over our lives, and make us compromise our witness and holiness, both personal and corporate. Like the church at Pergamum which seems to be tolerating sinful patterns and practices, we slowly and steadily become weakened, undermined. Do you have any areas where you have slowly tolerated and allowed a cultural norm to take hold and turn into a sinful pattern? Today you have the opportunity to repent with a trusted brother or sister. We are together the bride of Christ called to live differently.

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Session V  
LETTER TO  
**THYATIRA**

## REVELATION 2:12-17

<sup>18</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. <sup>19</sup> “ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, <sup>23</sup> and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. <sup>24</sup> But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. <sup>25</sup> Only hold fast what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup> The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup> and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup> And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

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What is the promise at the end of the letter? Identify the imagery and discuss its possible purpose.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. Read about Jezebel in 1 Kings 16:29-34. What would this reference make you conclude about the “Jezebel” in this letter? From the other information about her in the letter, what do we know about her?
2. Compare Revelation 2:4-5 with 2:19. How are Ephesus and Thyatira different when considering these verses?
3. Compare Revelation 2:14 and 2:20. How are the problems similar in Pergamum and Thyatira? Which may be in worse shape? Explain.
4. Do you think when the letter says, “Hold fast to what you have until I come” and “keep my works until the end” have the same goal in mind? Explain.
5. Revelation 2:27 contains an allusion to Psalm 2. Who is the one with the “iron rod” there compared to here? From this letter, how would a person gain this “authority”?
6. Read Numbers 24:15-19 which is Balaam’s last oracle. What are the images that are in the letter to Thyatira and also connect to the previous letter to Pergamum?
7. In this letter there is an additional statement about “the one who conquers.” How does this develop the idea of “conquering” found in the letters? So far, how would you define what the letters mean by “the one who conquers”?

TO  
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There is an interesting wordplay in this letter. The Greek word under “rule” in verse 27 is the word that is most often translated “shepherd.” This double-meaning makes sense. A shepherd protects and thus destroys that which will harm the flock. Note that this “shepherd/rule” word is used to describe the “one who conquers” not the Good Shepherd Himself, in fact, Jesus is giving this role to the “conqueror,” and likening it to His authority granted by the Father. This makes it essential to understand the meaning of “conquer.” Are we to destroy others? You know, those evil ones on the other side of the fence. Or is the “rule” spoken of here more like the garden scene in the first pages of the Bible? Adam, as an image-bearer of God and a royal priest was supposed to reject and expel the unclean serpent from God’s good creation. The Book of Revelation details how Jesus is executing this plan as the second Adam. It begins in obedience to the Father by conquering through His own suffering and sacrificial death. So, are you doing the suffering work of expelling the serpent from your own life? Knowing that these letters are to whole churches, how are you helping someone else to rule and shepherd their life?

# NOTES

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Session VI

LETTER TO  
**SARDIS**



## REVELATION 3:1-6

<sup>1</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. <sup>4</sup>Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. <sup>6</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

# HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET THEM HEAR....

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What is the promise at the end of the letter? Identify the imagery and discuss its possible purpose.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. Why is reputation important? How can one's reputation be problematic?
2. How many times is "name" used in the letter? (NOTE: the word under "reputation" is also "name.") If you only consider these uses of "name," what is the problem in Sardis and what is the solution? Where has the idea of "name" come up in previous letters?
3. Read Hebrews 9:11-14. What does the author of Hebrews want us to know about Jesus' blood? What did it achieve? For what purpose?
4. Read James 2:14-26. What is James' point? What is happening in Sardis that makes it even different from what James is talking about?
5. What makes those that "haven't soiled their garments" called "worthy"?
6. Regarding "white garments," read Revelation 4:4, 6:9-11, 7:9-17, and 19:6-8, 13. How do these descriptions later in the book help us understand their reference here in the letter?
7. Regarding the "book of life," read Revelation 13:5-8, 17:18, 21:27. From these verses, what do we learn about the "book of life"? How is it related to the idea of "name" from the above question?

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CONQUERS



Imposters. Posers. These are terms no one wants to hear. How about being called “dead”? It seems Jesus is saying that making a name for oneself or even having a good reputation to the outside world is far from the goal. In the case of Sardis, they need to wake up because what they think of themselves has no weight in the kingdom. Like Ephesus, it would seem the outside world is not hearing or seeing the proclamation of God’s goodness and justice. Maybe if the surrounding culture likes them, it is a “win” for God. This is false. More likely, they are thinking if they don’t rock the “cultural boat” they will stay safe from persecution. As Paul would say in 1 Corinthians 1:23 “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” The gospel is offensive to the dead because it reveals the true condition of the human heart—corrupt, lost. Are we trying to present and protect a positive image while failing to proclaim Jesus? If so, then we should awake from the dead as well.

# NOTES

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Session VII  
LETTER TO  
**PHILADELPHIA**



The background of the page is a black and white photograph. The top half shows a close-up of a stone wall with a rough, textured surface, possibly made of stacked stones or bricks. The bottom half shows a wider view of a stone wall, with a cemetery or garden area in the foreground. There are several large, flat stones on the ground, some of which appear to be grave markers. A small, dark, leafy plant is visible in the middle ground. The overall tone is somber and historical.

## REVELATION 3:7-13

<sup>7</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. <sup>8</sup> “ ‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup> Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. <sup>12</sup> The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. <sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

# HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET THEM HEAR....

There is a pattern to the seven letters. You will recognize it. Start by answering the basic questions posed every week and then dig into the questions specific to the letter.

What is the description of Jesus in the beginning of the letter? How does it relate to the first chapter of Revelation? How might it relate to the situation/problem in this church?

Identify the commendation(s) from Jesus (if any).

Identify the warning(s) from Jesus (if any).

What is the promise at the end of the letter? Identify the imagery and discuss its possible purpose.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. After reading the entire letter, which parts of the letter help us to understand what the door in Revelation 3:8 represents for the church in Philadelphia?
2. What is the significance of the line “and they will learn that I have loved you” in Revelation 3:9. What do think is different between the hypocrites in the synagogues and those who are faithful in Philadelphia?
3. How do you respond to hypocrites? Do you ever find yourself being a hypocrite in your faith? Explain.
4. In Revelation 3:8, what does “little power” mean? Why do you think the letter to Philadelphia mentions that they have “little power” before commending them for keeping His word and not denying His name?
5. What are reasons that you can imagine that Jews who failed to see Jesus as Messiah would be against these Christians?
6. Revelation 3:10 speaks of the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world. How can we prepare ourselves spiritually for times of trial, and what reassurances does Jesus offer to those who remain faithful?
7. What are the implications of Revelation 3:11? What can a crown symbolize? Compare this to Revelation 2:10 what are the similarities? What are the differences? How is the church in Philadelphia meant to hold onto the crown?
8. Reflecting on the letter to Philadelphia, what lessons or insights can we draw for our personal faith and our church community’s faith? How can we apply the principles contained in this letter to our lives today?
9. Read Revelation 21:1-26. This is the image that Jesus is calling out for the church at Philadelphia. Is this a motivating image? Why/why not?

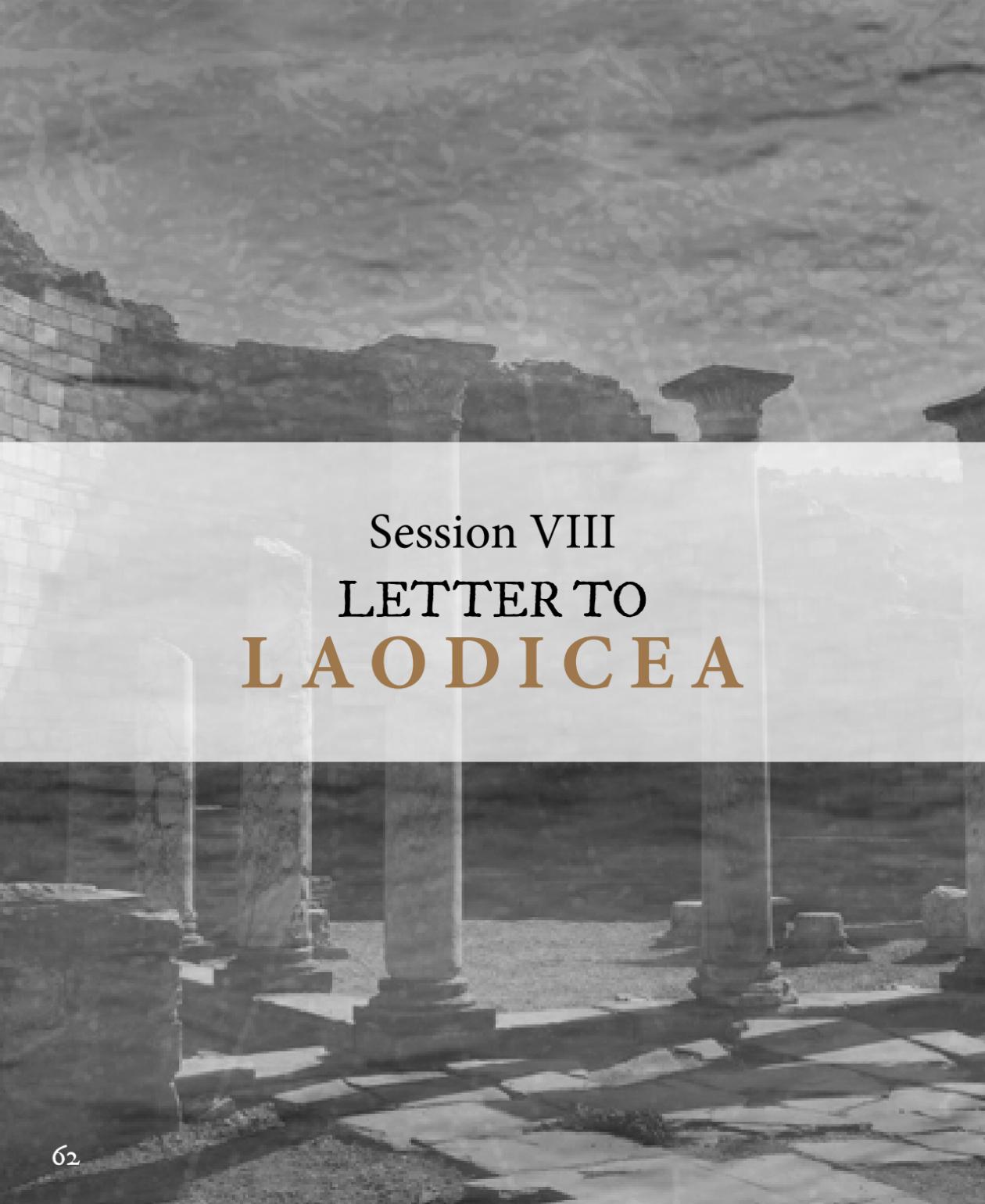
TO  
THE  
ONE  
WHO  
CONQUERS



There is no rebuke. The words “hold fast” are telling. Amid persecution from all sides, there is no promise that things will get better. Instead, He provides an image of an open door and if we continue to read, through that door is a vision of the New Jerusalem. The One who has access to the truest house of David—the true temple—holds the door open for these outsiders with “little power.” They will be pillars in that house and have God’s name written on them. Even more mind-blowing, these outsiders who have kept His word and not denied His name will be used as the “sign” on that open door for the Jews who had persecuted them. In the middle of the highs and lows of our lives, do we look to the promised hope ahead? Do we encourage each other to “hold fast” to His name? How can we create a rhythm of doing this work together no matter what the circumstances?

## This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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Session VIII  
LETTER TO  
**LAODICEA**

## REVELATION 3:7-13

<sup>14</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup> “‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup> The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

# HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET THEM HEAR....

There is a pattern to the seven letters. You will recognize it. Start by answering the basic questions posed every week and then dig into the questions specific to the letter.

What is the description of Jesus in the beginning of the letter? How does it relate to the first chapter of Revelation? How might it relate to the situation/problem in this church?

Identify the commendation(s) from Jesus (if any).

Identify the warning(s) from Jesus (if any).

What is the promise at the end of the letter? Identify the imagery and discuss its possible purpose.

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. Read Isaiah 43:10-12. Who is to be the witness? How does this set up the letter?
2. What would a faithful and true witness look like in today's culture?
3. Read Isaiah 65:13-17. The twice repeated phrase "God of truth" in Hebrew is literally "God Amen" where Amen is treated like a name. How does this shed light on our letter? How does Isaiah 65:17 fit with this letter and context?
4. How do the Laodiceans picture themselves? What is your reasoning from the letter?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 8. How might the situation in Laodicea be similar to Corinth? How might it be worse?
6. Revelation 3:17-19 paint the clear picture of the situation. The core of the solution hangs on Christ's statement of "buy from me." The term has economic connotation. How can we benefit from the same exhortation?
7. How would you compare the church at Laodicea compared to the others? Better? Worse? Explain.
8. It is not stated but assumed here. How did Jesus conquer? Are there any clues in the letter?

TO  
THE  
ONE  
WHO  
CONQUERS



There are several images in this letter that may not make sense to us. The Laodicean church is in what may be the worst condition. They think they are doing fine. They have likely compromised with the local trade guilds where worship of other gods and burning incense to Caesar may have been standard part of participation. Not participating would mean expulsion, but the Laodicean members don't even think it's wrong to participate. They have bought into the cultural ways. They are buying the lie, and Jesus has a strong rebuke. They should buy from Him! But, like Laodicea, if we don't think the "goods" that Jesus provides are valuable, we will look elsewhere. Are you doing this? Do we have one foot in the world and one foot in the church? Here it says that Jesus conquered and sat down with His Father on the throne. We must remember what His conquering looked like. It was obedience, sacrifice, witness to God's glory. Amazingly, conquering is work that comes from the throne and it leads back to the throne. We need each other to reveal where we are poor, blind, and naked in our faith.

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Session IX

THE ONE WORTHY TO  
OPEN THE SCROLL



## REVELATION 4-5

<sup>1</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, <sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of

glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" <sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their

crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, <sup>4</sup> and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” <sup>6</sup> And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four

living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” <sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

**T**HE VISION MOVES FROM AN EARTHLY  
REALM TO THE HEAVENLIES. THIS IS AN  
ESSENTIAL ASPECT TO THE PULLING-BACK-OF-  
THE-CURTAIN THAT JOHN IS DESCRIBING IN  
HIS VISION. **God rules all**, BUT THE  
HEAVENLY REALM AND EARTHLY REALM ARE  
SUPPOSED TO BE TOGETHER. READ THE FIRST  
PAGES OF YOUR BIBLE AND YOU WILL SEE IT.  
GOD WITH HIS PEOPLE, GIVING THEM LIFE  
AND PURPOSE. WHAT WILL BRING THEM BACK  
TOGETHER? WHAT CAN BRING HOPE TO ALL OF  
CREATION?

# LISTEN TO THE LETTER

1. Read the passages about doors in Revelation 3:7-8, 20. This idea comes to its fullest moment in Revelation 4:1-2. Describe how these powerful images interact in the vision.
2. If you only read the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation, what would you presume the book is about?
3. Identify all of the images in Revelation 4 and 5 that appeared in the letters.
4. Imagine being a member of one of the early churches receiving a letter. How would the divine throne room scene affect the letter you received?
5. What are the ways that our culture presses in on Christians that could lead to compromise?
6. If you imagined the King of all creation writing a letter to your local church, what might be the challenges that would be identified? Do you have a biblical basis for them? What might be the encouragement? Would you say you are a part of the problem and/or solution? Explain.
7. Conquer versus compromise. After reading these letters, have you discovered anything in your life that seems like compromise? How do you plan to handle it?

TO  
THE  
ONE  
WHO  
CONQUERS



If you read further in the book, you will see that broken humanity is snake-bitten and the powers of evil simply try to appear like God. Like Adam and Eve, humanity is drawn to counterfeits. This counterfeiting becomes obvious when you see things like the unholy trinity of dragon, beast, and prophet. But as you continue through the difficult imagery, it becomes clear that the real and the counterfeit are on a collision course. The best news is that we are told the outcome. No wonder the book is full of cautions to make sure your life is aligned with the right One. The seven churches were very real places. They had real people with real challenges. In one sense, they were very much like us. The Lamb standing as One slain who takes up the throne is the ultimate authority. Are we submitting everything to Him? Is He the One we worship or are we celebrating counterfeits of this earth that are fleeting? Is the end of this Book of Revelation a hope or hindrance for you? This answer makes all the difference in the world. If you reread all of the ending sections of the letters that say “to the one who conquers,” you will begin to see what He wants for all of us. That should solidify our answer.

# NOTES

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This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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