

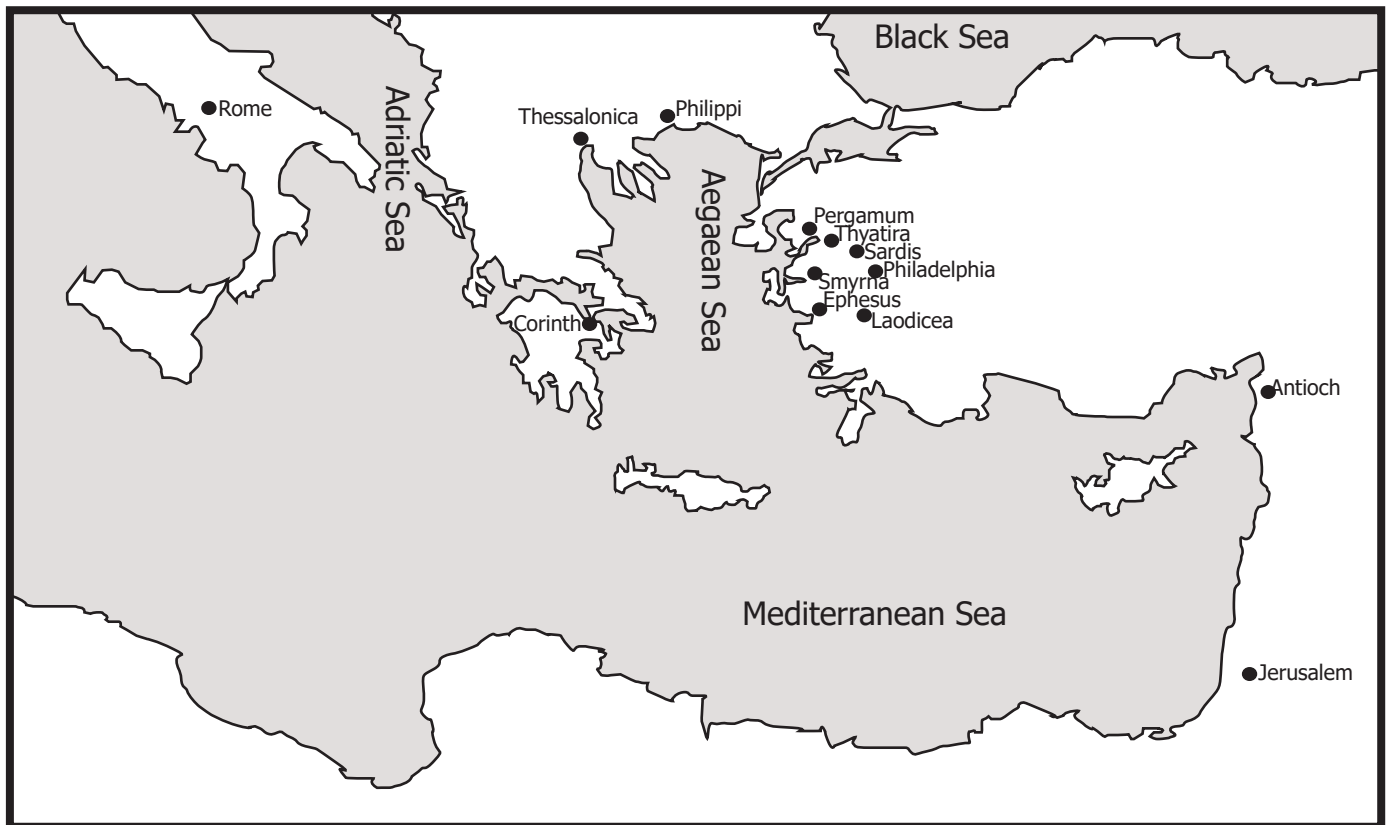
***The Lord's Church***

**Profiles  
of  
New  
Testament  
Congregations**

**By: Charles Willis**

# Table Of Contents

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Jeruslaem    | 8. Smyrna        |
| 2. Antioch      | 9. Pergamum      |
| 3. Corinth      | 10. Thyatira     |
| 4. Philippi     | 11. Sardis       |
| 5. Ephesus      | 12. Philadelphia |
| 6. Thessalonica | 13. Laodicea     |
| 7. Rome         |                  |



Photos of Bible locations courtesy of  
[www.Padfield.com](http://www.Padfield.com)  
Used By Permission

Copyright © 2009  
Charles Willis

# Jerusalem

READING: Isaiah 2:2-3; Daniel 2:36-45; Acts 2

Jerusalem lies in the middle of barren and rocky plateau in one of the least hospitable regions of Palestine. It has shallow soil with many outcrops of bare limestone. It is so exposed to the sun that it would be barren in it's natural condition. Cultivation has brought greenery to the city. The only fruit tree which has ever been productive in the area is the olive tree.

The city is surrounded by three slightly larger summits. The Mount of Olives is about 300 foot above and to the east of the ancient city. A ridge line runs to the West of the city, and to the southwest lies to the "Hill of evil counsel" (Jabel Deir abu Tor). Within the valleys formed by the hills, the city lies fortified with walls. There are five small hills inside the city which have been given various names such as "upper city" and "fortress of David".

The Lord's Church began in Jerusalem. Jesus told the disciples "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). He went on to tell them to, "stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Jesus tells the disciples, and us, that the first place people would hear the gospel proclaimed was Jerusalem. We understand the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles clothing them with divine power in Acts 2, and that on that day of Pentecost the good news of forgiveness in the name of Jesus was first proclaimed. The Lord then added those that were being baptized to the number of the saved (Acts 2:47). They were

added to the Church, though the word Church is not found in Acts two.

We are correct to study carefully how men became a part of the Lord's Church in Jerusalem, for what saved men then still saves men today. We must do the same things they did. Acts 2 records how Peter and the apostles preached the truth of Jesus Christ to the people. They heard the gospel taught (Acts 2:22-36). They were taught they needed to "repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). To be "saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40), "those



who received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). Three thousand people understood this truth and obeyed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). In the next chapter, Peter tells the people "to repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away" (Acts 3:19). We are told that many were becoming obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). We

also must hear, repent and be baptized, becoming obedient to the gospel. In this way the Church in Jerusalem serves as a model or example of how men enter a saved relationship with God.

Jerusalem serves as a model church in many other areas, which will be explored in some depth in this lesson. As we study in each of these areas we learn how the Lord's Church was established and how it functioned in the very first congregation. The more we work to imitate the faith and obedience of the people in this congregation, the more we will be the Church that Jesus desires us to be. Throughout the writings of the New Testament, the Jerusalem congregation is held up as being a strong and

<p><b>From The Text...</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is said about Jerusalem in Isaiah 2:2-3?</li> <li>2. When are the "last days"? Demonstrate from scripture.</li> <li>3. When would the "kingdom" come (Mark 9:1)?</li> <li>4. What is the difference between the "kingdom" and the "church" (Matt. 16:16-19)?</li> <li>5. When does Daniel 2:36-45 indicate the "kingdom" would be established?</li> <li>6. What was the "power" that clothed the apostles (Luke 24:49)?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Thought Questions</b></p> <p>How does the congregation in Jerusalem serve as an example of unity?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acts 2:32, 46</li> <li>2. Acts 4:24; 12:5-12</li> <li>3. Acts 2:44; 4:32-37</li> <li>4. Acts 2:42</li> <li>5. How well does our congregation follow this example?</li> </ol> <hr/> <p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p>How does the Jerusalem congregation serve as an example of...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stewardship (Acts 2:42; 4:32, 34-35)</li> <li>2. Loyalty (Acts 2:42; 5:17-39; 7:8; 12)</li> <li>3. Growth (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7)</li> <li>4. Organization (Acts 15:6, 22; 11:29-30)</li> <li>5. Evangelism (Acts 8:4, 14; 11:22)</li> </ol>
--	---

# Antioch

READING: Acts 11:19-30

Seleucus Nicator founded the city of Antioch in 301 B.C. naming it after his father, Antiochus. It was located about fifteen miles from the sea. It was built to be a capital city. In 64 B.C. it was annexed to Rome by Pompey where it was the capital of the Syrian province.

Antioch was wealthy, influential and important. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, called "the queen of the East", with a staggering population. Politics, commerce and religion were all important aspects of the city. About five miles out of town was the suburb of Daphne, a spot sacred to idolatry. The Romans built temples and baths in this location, as well as gardens, groves and fountains. It was the pleasure resort of the city and "Daphnic morals" became a by-word.

The city was populated with many Jews, Syrians and Greeks. In later times many Romans also inhabited the city. The people were known for being pushy, notorious in commercial trade, of great wit and licentious. The large Jewish population made Antioch a natural field to sow with evangelism which grew to become a hub of evangelism in the early church.

We are told the Church in Jerusalem dispersed as a result of the persecutions of Saul (Acts 8:1-4). Some of these saints came to Antioch to preach to the Jews (Acts 11:19). Men of Cyprus and Cyrene also came "preaching the Lord Jesus" to the Gentiles (Acts 11:20). When the church in Jerusalem heard of this, they sent Barnabas – a first example of a preacher being sent to a different location (Acts 11:22). He rejoiced with the faith and obedience of the saints in Antioch

and "began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord" (Acts 11:23). As a result of the efforts of Barnabas and these men, the congregation in Antioch grew to "considerable numbers" (Acts 11:24). Evidently the work in Antioch grew to be more than Barnabas and these men could satisfy – a good problem. Therefore, Barnabas "left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:25-26).



Not only is Antioch the first place the Apostle Paul works for an extended period (that we know of), it is where disciples are first called Christians. A name prophesied in scripture, which is only given to the disciples. It is not a name given to the Church (Acts 4:11-12; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:6). Being a cosmopolitan modern city, Antioch is the first

congregation generally composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

This congregation serves as an example to us of how to accomplish evangelism to the world. So many today hold strongly to missionary societies, and other man-made organizations which accomplish the work. Not so in the first century. The Church in Antioch was the missionary society. Evangelism was a work of that congregation both locally and abroad. If we hold ourselves to the example of the congregation in Antioch, we will also be blessed with the spiritual and numeric growth which they enjoyed.

### **From The Text...**

1. What does scripture say about the "new name"?
  - Is. 62:1-5; 65:14-16
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Rev. 2:17; 3:12
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - 1 Peter 4:14-16
2. Why did the church in Jerusalem send Barnabus to Antioch (Acts 11:22)?
3. What do we know about Barnabus (Acts 11:24)?
4. Why not send one of the Apostles?
5. Why did Barnabus look for Saul instead of going to Jerusalem for one of the other Apostles?

### **Thought Questions**

1. What was the state of the congregation in Antioch which allowed them to reach out in evangelism to other locations?
2. Should it be a goal of congregations to reach this state? How is it accomplished?

### **Discussion**

1. Of what importance to Paul was the congregation in Antioch?
  - Acts 13:2-3; 14:26-28
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Acts 15:35-36; 18:22-23
2. What was the attitude of the congregation about benevolence (Acts 11:27-30)?
3. How does the congregation in Antioch demonstrate a respect for God's organization of the church (Acts 11:30; 15:1-2)?

# Corinth

READING: Acts 18:1-11

The city of Corinth burned in 146 B.C. and was rebuilt by Ceasar in 46 B.C. It was a very import commercial city, located at a crossroad of major highways and shipping routes. It is situated on an isthmus of land connected to the mainland of Greece by a strip of land only 10 miles wide. Ships would travel from the Aegean Sea and off-load their cargo at Corinth, travel the Diolcus (a special road for dragging ships or cargo) and load a different ship to continue their journey through the Corinthian Gulf and on into the Adriatic Sea. No other ancient city had two sea ports on different seas. Corinth actually had three sea ports and became the leader in commercial sea traffic. Because of this unique geographical position, the Corinthians became very wealthy. This wealth was enhanced by ship yards which built military vessels.

The arts excelled in Corinth. They prided themselves at adorning their architecture with more elaborate embellishments than other Greek cities. The Romans admired the order of Corinthian architects, though the Greeks did not. There were many celebrated painters. It is believed Corinth was first to use a choir in singing a hymn to Dionysus (musical arranging), and the city founded the Ishtmian games, held every two years, the forerunner of our Olympic games. A commercial and materialistic spirit prevailed in the city.

The skyline of the city is dominated by the Acrocorinthus. This 1800 foot acropolis was the location of the temple to Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of love. There were 1000 sacred priestesses who served as temple prostitutes. This

made the city a very popular port with sailors. The citizens of the city were morally corrupt. If a Corinthian was ever portrayed on stage, it was always as a drunk.

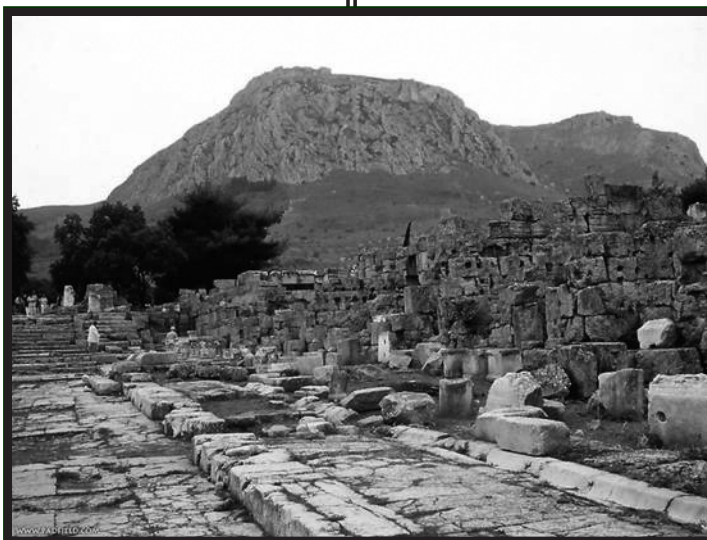
The Church in Corinth was established by Paul. It was here that he met Aquila and Priscilla. He went to Corinth because there was no church in the city and he set forth to establish one. He found more success with the Gentiles, specifcally we know of Crispus "the leader of the synagogue" who believed with all his household, "and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized"

(Acts 18:8). Paul was told of God not to fear the opposition in the city, that no one would be able to harm him in Corinth. Emboldened by the vision from God, Paul remained for 18 months (Acts 18:11).

The church had many problems as revealed in Paul's two letters. It was on the verge of a division caused by allegiances

to men. There was incest among the brethren, saints were going to law against one another, there was confusion about marriage, the Lord's Supper was abused, women were out of place, and there were many problems related to the use of spiritual gifts.

Despite these problems the church grew strong and became faithful. There are great lessons to be learned from a study of the church in Corinth, both from how to overcome some of their problems, but also from how to move on after problems are resolved and get busy in the Kingdom.



**From The Text...**

1. What was the work like in Corinth when Paul first arrived? To whom did he preach first?
2. How did the work change when Silas and Timothy arrived?
3. What nationality was Crispus (v.8)? How does this compare with the attitude in verse 6?
4. How was Paul encouraged by God's vision?
5. Reading further into verse 12, what legal action was brought against Paul? What was the result?
6. From 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 relate what the Corinthians heard from Paul about salvation.

**Thought Questions**

1. What positive traits are related about the Corinthian Christians? (2 Cor. 7:6-11; 8:9-11; 9:1-5; 1 Cor. 15:1)
2. Provide two examples of how worldly influences invaded the Corinthian congregation. What similar specific dangers do we face from our society?

**Discussion**

1. The congregation in Corinth had many problems. What is Paul's attitude toward them, despite the problems? (Provide example references)
2. How are Paul's exhortation in these passages applicable to us?
  - A. 1 Corinthians 15:58
  - B. 1 Corinthians 16:13-14
  - C. 2 Corinthians 7:1
  - D. 2 Corinthians 8:10-11

# Philippi

READING: Acts 16:11-40

Philippi was conquered by the father of Alexander the Great who named it after himself, King Philip II of Macedonia. When the Roman Empire took the region, Octavian turned the city into a colony and military outpost. The citizens were regarded as Romans with all the privileges of Roman citizenship. The Romans connected Philippi to the Roman world by the Egnatian Way, the main highway the Romans built through the known world. This enlarged the importance of Philippi making it the main overland route between Asia and the West. The city was a military outpost and not so much a commercial center, which may account for a lack of a Jewish Synagogue when Paul came.

The apostle Paul, during his second missionary journey, was told in a vision to go preach the gospel in Macedonia, the Roman province where Philippi was located. Paul understood this would be the first place on the European continent where the gospel was preached. Philippi was the first location in Europe where a congregation of the Lord's church was founded. Initially the congregation began with Lydia, the jailer and their households. This took place around 51 A.D.

Paul visited the Philippians again during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1, 6). Twice they helped Paul with financial support (Phil. 4:16). Later when Paul was imprisoned in Rome, this congregation sent Epaphroditus with additional financial help (Phil. 4:18). While in Rome Epaphroditus grew very ill. After his recovery he

returned home, most likely carrying the letter to the Philippians (Phil. 3:25-30).

Paul's great letter to the Philippians gives us four portraits of Christ. In chapter one Paul sees Christ as his life, "to live is Christ" (1:21). In chapter two Jesus is the model of true humility, "have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (2:5). Chapter three presents Him as the one "who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (3:21). In chapter four, Jesus is the source of Paul's power over circumstances, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (4:13).

Throughout the letter Jesus is central to the teaching.

It is fitting that Paul should send a letter of thanks for the support that was sent to him. He takes the opportunity to include some instruction in the letter about unity. He indicates that real unity is only possible in Christ. He is our model of humility and service.

By following this model we can enjoy a oneness of purpose, attitude, goal and labor. Within the congregation fellow-workers were at odds which hindered the effectiveness of the work. Paul exhorts the congregation to "stand firm ...live in harmony ...rejoice in the Lord always ...by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known ...and the peace of God ...shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (4:1,2,4,6,7).



From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why did Paul and those with him go to the riverside at Philippi?</li> <li>2. Who did they find at the riverside?</li> <li>3. How did God open her heart? (Acts 16:14)</li> <li>4. Why were Paul and Silas thrown in jail?</li> <li>5. How much about the gospel did the jailer know before he was baptized?</li> <li>6. Why were the chief magistrates concerned about having imprisoned Paul and Silas?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What was the congregation's attitude about giving? (2 Cor. 8:1-5; Phil. 4:10-20)</li> <li>2. How does Paul describe the faithfulness of the congregation? (Phil. 1:5, 25-30)</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paul said the Philippians "first gave themselves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5).             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Why should this be our attitude? What does this mean?</li> <li>B. What are the results or consequences of this attitude?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). What does this mean for us today?</li> <li>3. How do we "work out our own salvation"? (Phil. 2:12-16)</li> </ol>

# Ephesus

READING: Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesus was three miles from the coast, opposite the island of Samos, near the mouth of the Cayster river. It boasted an artificial harbor able to take the largest ships. When coupled with the excellent highways and connections overland to the city, Ephesus was well suited for commerce and travel. It was the most easily accessible city in Asia Minor. This location favored its development as a center of commerce, religion and politics.

The history of the city is obscure, dating back at least as far as 560 B.C. In 189 B.C. the Roman province of Asia was formed which Corinth joined. Though it was not the capital of the province (Pergamos was), Corinth eventually came to dominate as the chief city. It was the center of worship to Diana with a magnificent temple which dominated the skyline. The temple came to possess valuable lands, control the fisheries and its priests were the bankers of its revenues. Many people kept their money at the temple because it was a safe location - the concept of modern banking.

There is a lot of information revealed in Scripture about the congregation in Ephesus. The first mention of teaching in this prominent city was by the apostle Paul in Acts 18:19-21. He entered the synagogue and taught but did not consent to remain when he was asked, instead going on throughout Galatia. He did promise to return if God willed.

Apollos came to Ephesus teaching the way of the Lord. He was only acquainted with the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and taught him "the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). The brethren in Ephesus encouraged him to travel to Achaia to preach the

truth. A first occurrence of this congregation sending out a preacher.

It is in Ephesus that Paul encounters twelve disciples of John. After some discussion with them they are baptized into Christ. Paul then preaches for three months in the synagogue (Acts 19:8), but finally left the Jews due to their hard hearts and took away the disciples with him. For two years Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus so that "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

Paul's miracles were making clear the power of God in Ephesus. So mightily was this evident that the people burned all their magic books which had a value of fifty thousand pieces of silver. God's word was prevailing because of the efforts of Paul.

Not everyone in Ephesus was happy about the spread of the gospel. The idol souvenir makers were very upset. They evidently were seeing a loss of revenue because of conversions away from the idol Artemis (Diana). This led to a huge riotous mob scene in the city theatre. Paul leaves Ephesus after this event at the urging of the disciples.

The end of Acts 20 records a tearful admonition and farewell from Paul to the elders in Ephesus. He warns of false teachers rising from their midst to lead away disciples. He leaves them going on to Jerusalem where bonds and afflictions awaited him.

The text in Revelation 2:1-7 is an admonition from Jesus to the saints in Ephesus. Beyond this we must include Paul's letter to the Ephesians which reveals so much more about the saints in this congregation.



From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What deeds does Jesus “know” about the church in Ephesus?</li> <li>2. What did Jesus have “against” the congregation? What does this mean?</li> <li>3. What instructions are given enabling them to be restored in their relationship with God?</li> <li>4. For what does Jesus additionally praise the congregation?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jesus threatens to remove their lampstand out of its place (Rev. 2:5). What does this mean? (Review Rev. 1:12-20)</li> <li>2. The Ephesians were praised for not tolerating evil men. What does this indicate our attitudes and actions should be?</li> </ol>
	<b>Discussion</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can our lampstand be removed? Why would Jesus do this?</li> <li>2. What did the Ephesians do to be saved? (Eph. 1:13; 2:8-9; Acts 19:4-5) How does this relate to modern teaching about salvation through faith?</li> <li>3. Discuss how the church in Ephesus accomplished the spread of the gospel in all of Asia (Acts 19:10). How will this be accomplished in our local area?</li> <li>4. Discuss the meaning of “he who has an ear, let him hear” (Rev. 2:7).</li> </ol>

# Thessalonica

READING: Acts 17:1-9

Thessalonica was a very important city because of the great natural seaport which made it economically vital to the Romans as well as a departure and arrival destination for troops and passengers. The city was located along the "Via Egnatia" – the main road from Rome to the East. Under the Romans, Thessalonica was the capital of the second of four divisions of Macedonia, and when these were united to form one single province in 146 B.C. it became the capital and largest city in the province which was true through the time of Paul. Under Augustus, Thessalonica became a free city with its own authority to appoint a governing board of magistrates which were called "politarchs". Roman arches stood at Thessalonica's two entrances to the Egnatian Way. The one built in AD 297 to honor the Roman Emperor Galerius remains intact today. Portions of the great wall that surrounded the city still stand. It

was believed the city sustained a population in excess of 200,000 people in the first century. The city survives today under the shortened name "Salonika".

Paul visited the city during his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 17. This is believed to have been between 50 and 60 A.D. Silas and Timothy accompanied Paul and the three of them are in the salutations of each Epistle.

There was a large group of Jews in Thessalonica. Many of these were Jewish converts from pagan idol worship. The monotheistic belief of Judaism appealed to them when they tired of Greek paganism. At the same time they were repelled by its narrow nationalism and ritual requirements.

So, when Paul came to town preaching Jesus Christ, many of the gentiles were very receptive to the message. The Jews became jealous of Paul's success and organized a mob by hiring much of the low-life of the city. The mob was unable to find Paul or Silas so they captured Jason (their host) and took him before the Politarchs and accused him of harboring traitors to Rome. The authorities took a "pledge" from Jason and the others who had been taken and released them.

The Jews from Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea and stirred up such an opposition Paul

left for Athens, though Silas and Timothy remained. Acts 23 records where they join back up – but 1 Thessalonians 3:2 clearly implies Timothy had previously joined Paul and been sent back to Thessalonica. It was the return from the second trip that found them together in Acts 28:5.

The church became a steadfast congregation in

Thessalonica when the surrounding cities of Philippi, Berea and Athens apparently were not (in comparison). When Paul arrived in Corinth he began his preaching "in weakness, and often in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). But when word came of the faith of the saints in Thessalonica, Paul was much encouraged. Out of this sense of relief and assurance Paul wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians.

We later read of Paul sending Timothy to Macedonia (Acts 10:22) and he himself made two visits to that region (Acts 20:1-3). Some of the Thessalonians began traveling with Paul, such as Gaius and Aristarchus (Acts 19:29), Secundus



From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why did Paul first go the Jewish synagogue?</li> <li>2. What did he do there?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What aspects of the instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 do you see as especially applicable to us? Consider this in light of modern church division.</li> <li>2. What do we learn about evangelism from Paul's efforts with the Thessalonians? (1 Thess. 2:13, 4:9-10, 2 Thess. 1:3-4)</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What was the response to the gospel? Notice particularly the differences between Jews and Greeks.</li> <li>4. How was Paul and others upsetting the world and Thessalonica (v.6-8)?</li> <li>5. What was the pledge the authorities received from Jason and the others (v.9)?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What was the character of the church in Thessalonica? (1 Thess. 1:3-10)</li> <li>2. Compare the problem of fornication in Thessalonica with modern concerns. (1 Thess. 4:3-8)</li> <li>3. What truths are revealed to the Thessalonians regarding the second coming which we must understand in overcoming modern false doctrines? (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess. 1:7-10, 2:1-12)</li> </ol>

# Rome

READING: Romans 1:1-17

The ancient city of Rome has been studied to such an extent that volumes of books can be examined on the subject. That is not the purpose of this study; however, the impact of the city and its powerful political and economic status as the seat of the world empire certainly impacts the development of the congregation in Rome.

The beginning of the church in Rome is obscure. Catholicism teaches it was founded by Peter, but it does not appear that any apostle was involved. Peter never wrote to the congregation in Rome, and never wrote while in Rome. He never claimed or considered himself to be the head of the church (as Catholics teach). He instead taught that all members of the church comprise a "holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

It would seem logical that Paul may have started the congregation as he was the apostle to the gentiles, but his writing disagrees. He desired to go to Rome (Acts 19:21) but did not go. He wrote to the Romans but had never visited with them (Rom. 1:10-13). He says "I have often been prevented from coming to you" and that he longed to go to them for many years (Rom. 15:22-23). When he finally did go to Rome while under arrest, the brethren from Rome went out more than fifty miles to welcome his arrival (Acts 28:15). Surely Paul did not start this congregation.

It seems much more Biblical to believe that brethren returning from Jerusalem began the work in Rome. On the day of Pentecost there were visitors from Rome, "both Jews and proselytes" (Acts 2:10). These believers may have remained in Jerusalem studying at the feet of the apostles until the death of Stephen till the commencement

of the persecution by Paul. "Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The scattering is limited to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:2), but those from all the other nations at some point also had to have returned home. They also would have been preaching the word. It is very reasonable to conclude that the believers who returned to Rome established a congregation.

We know when Claudius passed a decree driving the Jews out of Rome (Acts 18:2), among the number who left were Aquila and Priscilla. Suetonius records the decree was a result of



tumults raised among the Jews, especially one named Chrestus. Many believe this was a reference to Jesus (Christus) and the facts were actually Jews persecuting the Christian Jews. The Romans at this point viewed Christianity as merely another sect of the Jews (like Pharisees or Sadducees). All the Jews were expelled.

The Roman concern was in keeping the peace. Scripture does not tell us if Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when they met Paul.

Most of what we know of the congregation comes from Paul's epistle to the Romans. The believers were made up of Jews and Gentiles which led to some problems. Because of the focus of the world on Rome, the congregation became influential in the decades immediately following the apostles. How great was the good they could have done in standing for the truth. How sad to know of their leadership in apostasy which led to Catholicism. We also must guard against human innovations and stand for God's truth in our generation.

From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How was the “obedience of faith” brought about (v.4-5)?</li> <li>2. How does Paul refer to the believers in Rome (v.7)? Why is this significant?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is revealed about the congregation in Rome by examining all the folks Paul knew, though he had never been there (Romans 16)?</li> <li>2. How does Romans 1:18-2:11 indicate the city’s influence within the congregation?</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What reputation did this congregation have (v.8)?</li> <li>4. What do we learn of Paul’s personal attitude and desires (v.10-15)?</li> <li>5. How does Paul’s familiar statement in verses 16-17 fit in the context?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did the congregation gain their reputation? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Romans 15:14</li> <li>B. Romans 16:17-19</li> <li>C. How does our congregation gain a similar reputation?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Compare Paul’s arguments of equality between Jews and Gentiles (Romans 3:29-20; 10:12-13) with modern racism and socioeconomic status. (See also James 2:1-13).</li> <li>3. What disturbed the congregation in Rome (Romans 16:17-18)? How does this lead to divisions today?</li> </ol>

# Smyrna

READING: Revelation 2:8-11

Smyrna was located about 30 miles north of Ephesus at the mouth of the river Meles. This emptied into the head of a gulf extending 30 miles to the Aegean Sea. Alexander the Great conquered this city and his successor in this region, Lyschimus, rebuilt the city a little to the southwest of the original (which had been destroyed).

By Roman times the city was deemed one of the greatest of the ancient world. It's streets were wide and paved, possessing perhaps the best streets in the ancient world. It had a well established coinage which was recognized by all.

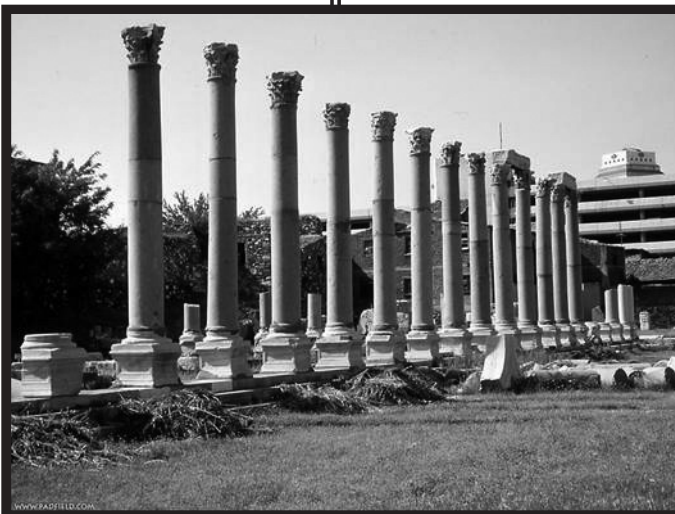
The city was celebrated for it's schools of science and medicine. A theatre existed which sat 20,000 spectators. The architecture was such that the city was deemed "the crown city", perhaps because of the way the idol temples surrounded Mount Pagus providing a spectacular view down to the Aegean Sea.

Smyrna was an enthusiastically Roman city. They became allies of the Romans by 200 B.C. After much competition, the Roman government chose Smyrna as the site to receive a new temple in Asia Minor for the worship of the emperor Tiberius. This was a much coveted honor.

Smyrna was a very important economic center for Asia Minor. The natural port facility, coupled with the ancient trade route through the Hermes Valley brought great wealth to the citizens through trade and taxation. The region was fertile and the citizens were known for growing figs, grapes, cotton and other crops. This is the modern city of Izmir in what is now Asiatic Turkey.

Of most significance to a consideration of the text in Revelation is the fact that Smyrna was the

center of worship to Dionysus, also known as Bacchus. Originally known as a god of crops, he became known as the god of wine. His worship extended all over the Greek and Roman world, but was centered in Smyrna. Worship to Dionysus consisted of several "special days" in which various traditions were maintained. Several of these included drunken parades through the city displaying all sorts of immoral conduct. The vine was an emblem of this idol, as were oil and wheat. He was the god of ecstasy, the giver of physical joy and excitement.



During the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (about 200 B.C.), he forced the Jews to march in the parade in honor of Dionysus wearing wreaths of ivy. This in connection with the great immorality exhibited during the parades was extremely offensive to the Jews. There is no question but this contributed to their rebellion against his reign in what is now

called the Maccabean Revolt. The attitude of Antiochus was contemporary with Greek society - everyone worshipped Dionysus.

In a city surrounded by such unrighteousness we find a congregation of believers in Jesus Christ. They are only mentioned in Revelation chapter two. Some speculate the congregation was started by some saints that came from Ephesus. Paul never mentions going there. We simply do not know the origins of the church in Smyrna. To this congregation we find words of encouragement, not condemnation. Their persecution was not overlooked, but they were told it would worsen. Jesus' message: do not fear.

From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does Jesus describe Himself (v.8)?</li> <li>2. Why might He choose these images instead of others? Why are they important?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is meant by "those who say they are Jews and are not" (Rev. 2:9)?</li> <li>2. Why were the Jews a "synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9)?</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What does the Lord know about this congregation (v.9)?</li> <li>4. What were they told they were about to suffer?</li> <li>5. Explain the significance of "overcoming" in verse 11.</li> </ol>	<div data-bbox="581 772 787 814"><b>Discussion</b></div> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How were the saints in Smyrna rich (Rev. 2:9)?</li> <li>2. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Discuss the significance of this statement to our lives.</li> <li>3. What is meant by the phrase "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:11)?</li> </ol>

# Pergamum

READING: Revelation 2:12-17

The city of Pergamum was founded by the Greeks prior to 420 B.C. After the reign of Alexander the Great, his general, Lysimachus, possessed the town. He is reputed to have deposited nine thousand talents of gold in the city. The ruler Philetaerus (283-263) used this wealth to establish an independent Greek dynasty. His nephew, Attalus I, followed him as king. He built up the city with beautiful architecture and added the countries of Mysia, Lydia, Caria, Pamphylia and Phrygia to the young empire's borders. Pergamum became the most beautiful city of the east.

During the reign of Eumenes II (197-159 B.C.) the city became a center for arts, literature and education. Eumenes II founded a library which was said to have held more than 200,000 volumes. In later years Anthony gave this treasure to Cleopatra.

Our word "parchment" is derived from the Latin *Pergamena Charta* which literally means, 'paper of Pergamum'. Many authorities contend that parchment was invented by the library scholars in Pergamum. It is held that the library volumes were written on Parchment which was much cheaper to produce than animal hides, and easier to store than pottery tablets.

In 133 B.C. the nation was given to the Roman Empire by Attalus II. The Romans made Pergamum the capital of a new Asian province (those portions of Asia Minor which they possessed), which was later reorganized into the Province of Asia Minor. As the capital, the Romans ordered coins be struck in Pergamum which continued into the third century A.D. The city continued to hold a reputation of magnificence.

Pergamum became a center of religion by the

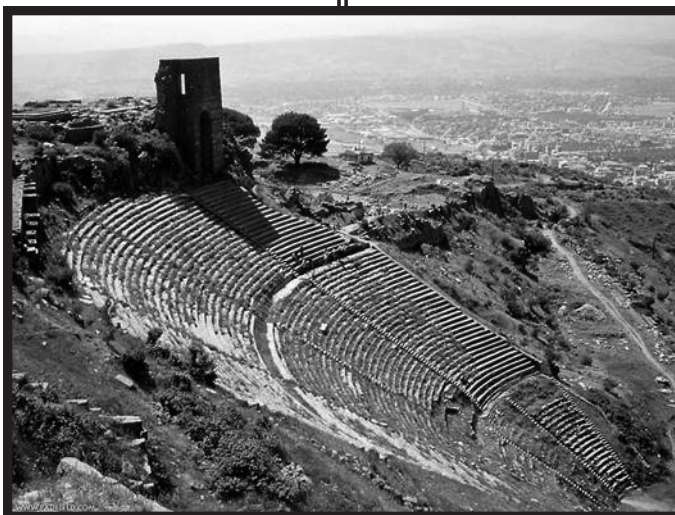
first century B.C. A thousand foot hill lay just behind the city upon which the citizens built temples to pagan gods. Temples existed to Zeus (chief of the gods), Dionysus (god of wine), Athena (goddess of wisdom) and Aeculapius (god of medicine). In 29 B.C. the Romans chose this site to erect a temple to the Roman ruler Augustus. Over the coming years two more were added honoring Trajan and Severus. In this way Pergamum bore the title *Thrice Neolorus* meaning the city which had three temples to Roman Emperors where they were worshipped as gods.

There was a school of medicine connected to the

temple of Aeculapius. Invalids from all around travelled to the temple. They would sleep there at night and the idol supposedly spoke to the priests in dreams and visions about how to heal people. There was much abuse in this system. In the second century A.D. this school of medicine was associated with the renowned physician

Galen. Aeculapius was associated with a serpent, often depicted as holding a staff with a serpent wrapped around it. To the Jews and Christians this was a repulsive emblem depicting satanic origins and worship consistent with all paganism. This emblem is a universal sign of medicine still used today.

We have no record of the establishment of the church in Pergamum. It is only mentioned in Revelation. Many contend Paul established the congregation as he travelled extensively through this region, but we must understand this is conjecture. Jesus has words of praise and words of admonition for the congregation in Pergamum.



From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jesus knew where they dwelled. What is meant by "Satan's throne" and "where Satan dwells" (v.13)?</li> <li>2. Who was Antipas (v.13)?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the imagery of Christ in this address (v.12, 16)? How does this compare with our concept of Jesus?</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What was the teaching of Balaam referred to in verse 14? How were some holding to this teaching?</li> <li>4. What was wrong with holding to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (v.15)?</li> <li>5. Of what did the believers need to repent (v.16)?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The text points to "some" who hold to these teachings (v.14, 15, 16). Does this text point to struggles within the congregation, or had they tolerated other's sin?</li> <li>2. What modern "issues" or "teachings" do men hold to today that would compare with the teaching of Balaam or the Nicolaitans?</li> <li>3. Give the meaning of the following phrases (v.17):             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Give some of the "hidden manna"</li> <li>B. Give him "a white stone"</li> <li>C. Give him "a new name..."</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

# Thyatira

READING: Revelation 2:18-29

Situated along the Lycus river in the Roman province of Asia, Thyatira was a wealthy town. It thrived as a center of commerce, but was never known for being a center of population. It was situated between a lesser road of travel between Pergamos and Sardis. It gained its wealth from the Lycus valley. Its name means "the castle of Thya".

Thyatira was especially noted for the trade guilds which were more organized here than in any other ancient city. Every artisan belonged to a guild and each guild possessed property, made contracts and wielded great influence. Some of the larger known guilds included the coppersmiths and the dyers (generally believed to produce purple dyes).

The guilds were closely related with the Asiatic religions of the region. The guilds supported and participated in all of the pagan immoral religious acts and expected their guild members to approve. In this way the guilds were opposed to Christians. Several gods were worshipped including: Aesculpaius, Bacchus, Artemis and Apollo. In honor of Apollo they held games. One of the multitudes worshipped was the

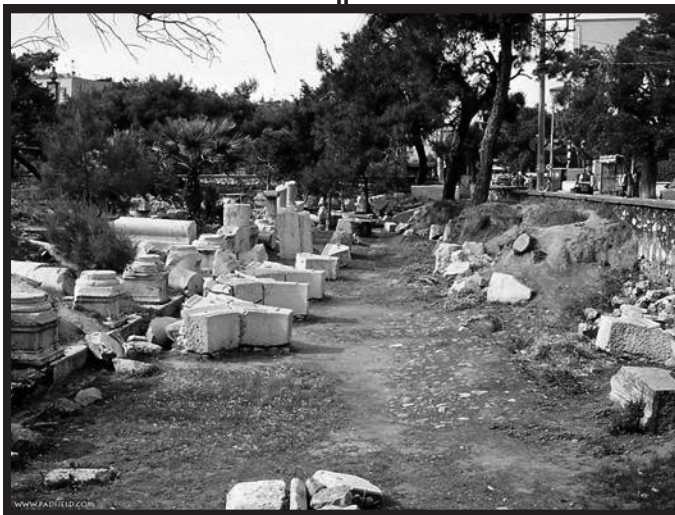
goddess named Sambethe. There was a prophetess of this shrine who taught in Thyatira, uttering supposed sayings from the deity.

It is unclear when the church in was established in Thyatira. It is held by some that Paul began the congregation while he lived in Ephesus for a few years (Acts 19:10), yet this is not confirmed in scripture. It is interesting to notice that

Lydia seemed to be a member of a guild from Thyatira. She was a seller of purple (Acts 16:14) who was converted in Philippi.

For the first time in the addresses to the churches in Asia the speaker is identified as "the Son of God".

The authority which is promised to the faithful in verses 26-27 comes from the authority of the son of God. This is given as evidence or proof for the hearers to believe the message, even us many years later. Jesus' "eyes like a flame of fire" speaks to His ability to see everything. His feet "like burnished bronze" tells of His firm footing when He comes to destroy the unfaithful. A great image of power, strength and authority. We must give heed to what He says to Thyatira.



From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. List the deeds of which Jesus knew (v.19).</li> <li>2. What did Jesus have against them?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who is Jezebel? Is this name figurative or literal?</li> <li>2. What was to be the result of God's punishment on Jezebel's house (v.23)? What does this mean for us?</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What is the condemnation and punishment spoken about Jezebel?</li> <li>4. Explain the meaning of the last half of verse 27, beginning with "as the vessels of the potter..."</li> </ol>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What lesson must we learn from God's condemnation of their toleration of Jezebel?</li> <li>2. "I place no other burden on you" (v.24). What burden did He place on the faithful?</li> <li>3. What would you imagine to be some of the problems in the congregation when some tolerated Jezebel and some did not hold that teaching? Compare this with some of today's problems.</li> <li>4. Describe how we apply God's message to the faithful to "hold fast" (v.25) and "overcome" (v.26).</li> </ol>

# Sardis

## READING: Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis was one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor. It was the capital of the kingdom of Lydia until 549 B.C. It rested on the northern slope of the Tmolus mountain with an acropolis atop one of the minor peaks. At the base of the mountain the Pactolus river served the city as a protective moat, rendering the city practically impenetrable.

Over the course of several centuries the city was nevertheless defeated, and several times it was rebuilt. It always seemed to regain its prominence. In 301 B.C. it was taken by the Selucid Kings who chose the city as the residence for their governor. By 190 B.C. it became free and joined the empire of Pergamos, and later was adopted into the Roman province of Asia.

An earthquake struck the region in 17 A.D. which leveled the city. The Roman Emperor Tiberius returned the taxes to the city and it was rebuilt. For this reason a large monument to Tiberius was erected in the city. On this occasion the city did not regain its former prominence. Sardis continued to exist as late as 1400, but was utterly destroyed at that time by Tamerlane. It was never rebuilt.

Sardis was a city for the wealthy. It was a safe, protected location, easily defended. During the Persian period, the Satraps built residences here. Many kings and nobles were buried in the city. Excavations have found many ancient objects from the numerous burial mounds. Even the local people have found objects simply by plowing fields. Many coins have been found.

It is believed that gold and silver coins were first struck in Sardis. During the Roman period, the coins of Sardis were a beautiful series of coins which are still being found in abundance. Some of the wealth of the city, and part of the reason it is known for striking coins is due to the deposits of gold and silver in the sand banks of the Pactolus river.

The acropolis of Sardis was imposing. The hill it sat upon was 950 feet high. It had triple walls around it. Much of the hill has since washed away and the resulting mud has buried structures at the foot of the hill. Many large structures have been found at the lower slope of the hill. Among them is the temple of Cybele, which only has two large pillars remaining. Cybele was a mother goddess which was worshipped in a style similar to that of Dionysis and Aphrodite. There was a eunuch priesthood, and immoral worship practices.

Living in the hills even to this day are bandits and robbers that are able to avoid capture. For hundreds of years men have raided the plains below the hills all around the region of ancient Sardis. Perhaps it is for this reason Jesus says he will come "like a thief" (Rev. 3:3). An image with which the citizens would have been very familiar.

There is no record of the start of the church in Sardis. Again, many suppose that Paul may have evangelized in the city due to his great efforts in Asia Minor. In such an unrighteous and wealthy city we find a congregation of saints.



From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What was meant by "you are dead" (v.1)?</li> <li>2. Why were they told to "wake up" (v.2, 3)? What does this mean?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "You have a name that you are alive" (v.1). What may have given the church in Sardis this reputation?</li> <li>2. How had some in Sardis "soiled their garments" (v.4)? What was the state of the congregation?</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What three things are the saints told to do (v.3)? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A.</li> <li>B.</li> <li>C.</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. What three positives are listed for those who overcome? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A.</li> <li>B.</li> <li>C.</li> <li>D. Are these true for us today?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The deeds of the saints in Sardis were not complete (v.2). Compare this with the following passages and relate how we need to be complete. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Matthew 5:48</li> <li>B. Colossians 1:28; 2:10; 4:12</li> <li>C. Ephesians 4:13</li> <li>D. 2 Timothy 3:17</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. How important is it for congregations to wake up (see v.3)?</li> <li>3. Discuss how Christians are "worthy" (v.4). Consider also: Matt. 10:37-38; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5.</li> </ol>

# Philadelphia

READING: Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia is Greek meaning "brotherly love". The city was founded in 189 B.C. on one of the highways that led to the interior of Asia Minor. It was named in honor of Attalou II because of his loyalty to his older brother, Eumenes II. He adopted the name Attalou II Philadelphus. It became a Roman possession in 133 B.C.

Situated on the lower slope of the Tmolus mountain, Philadelphia was twenty eight miles southwest of Sardis, and about one hundred miles west of Smyrna. It was located near the upper end of a broad valley which passed through Sardis and extended almost to Smyrna. Philadelphia was favorably located for commerce and became a fairly wealthy city being a center for trade even as late as the Byzantine era. Like Sardis, Philadelphia was also destroyed in the earthquake of 17 A.D. Tiberius also had Philadelphia rebuilt.



It lay at the beginning of a very fertile tract of land which was developed into renown vineyards during the Roman period. Coins of the city bore the image of Bacchus, the god of wine.

With such degrees of wealth, decadence soon followed. The worship of Bacchus included drunken parades and immoral public conduct. None of this was considered illegal or improper. It was worship to the idol. Due to its prosperity, the city of Philadelphia had many public buildings and beautiful architecture. For this reason it was also referred to as "Little Athens".

As in most of the cities of Asia Minor, there was

a large Jewish presence in the city. A synagogue existed (v.9) which is referred to as a synagogue of Satan. By the first century it was likely many of these Jews had accepted Hellenism as a way of life, which may have included acceptance of some of the societies attitudes and actions. Yet, the Christians in Philadelphia are only praised for the way they have kept the word.

The authority of Christ is seen in His own description (v.7). **"He who is holy"** is a claim of divinity. The Holy One is a name of God.

God has authority over all things. **"He who is true"**, meaning he who is genuine or real. Jesus distinguishes himself from the idols abundant in the city. He has authority where the false gods have none. **"He who has the key of David"** is a description of authority over the house of David. This is demonstrated in the following words which are a quotation

from Isaiah 22. There God speaks of how Eliakim will take the place of Shebna who was in charge of the royal household (v.15). "And I will clothe him with your tunic and tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, and he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open" (Isaiah 22:21-22). Jesus has authority over the heavenly house of David. He holds the keys of the heavenly kingdom with all authority and power. He alone determines who opens or shuts the door of admittance.

From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What deeds did Jesus know about the saints in Philadephia?</li> <li>2. What will become of the Jews who were persecuting the saints in Philadelphia?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What was the "open door" to which Jesus refers (v.8). How does this relate to verse 7?</li> <li>2. Why does Jesus call His word the "word of My perseverance" (v.10). [King James uses "word of My patience".]</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What is meant by "I am coming quickly" (v.11)?</li> <li>4. What is promised to those who overcome? Explain each point. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A.</li> <li>B.</li> <li>C.</li> <li>D.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why would Jesus keep them from the hour of testing? Is this true for us today?</li> <li>2. What principle is taught in the latter half of verse 11? Why is this important to our understanding?</li> <li>3. How do religious men "deny" Christ's name (v.8)?</li> <li>4. Why were some said to say they were Jews, but were not? What prevented them from being Jews? (see also Rom. 2:28-29)</li> </ol>

# Laodicea

READING: Revelation 3:14-22

Southwest of Phrygia, Laodicea was founded by the Selucid Antiochus II and named after his wife, Laodice. It was about ninety miles East of Ephesus and not very far from Colossae. Laodicea was a very important crossroads. The main road going across Asia Minor ran west from Laodicea to the ports of Miletus and Ephesus, and ran east on a downhill route to the central plateau towards Syria. A northern road led to Pergamum, and followed south to Attalia on the coast.

As a commercial center, Laodicea was extremely well off, especially during the Roman period. An earthquake struck the city in 60 A.D. and the citizens refused any aid from the Roman government. They repaired the city completely with local funds. This is seen in Jesus' statement about them in verse 17, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing".

Because of the commerce that passed through the city, it also became a center of exchange and banking. It's banking had tentacles which extended throughout the Roman empire. Laodicea was well known for a glossy black wool produced in the area. They produced garments with this wool which were distinctive. Yet Jesus says they need "white garments" to clothe themselves (v.18).

In addition, the city was close to an important hospital in the ancient world which specialized in a Phrygian powder which was a salve to help eyesight. People from all over the ancient world travelled to visit the doctors at this hospital, yet Jesus said the saints in Laodicea were "blind"

(v.17) and needed "eye salve" so they could see (v.18).

We know that a congregation existed in Laodicea by 60 A.D. when Paul wrote to the Colossians. This is early in the history of the church. Many speculate Paul established the congregation while he was in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Paul writes, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face" (Col. 2:1). It is unclear if Paul implies he has never been to Laodicea,

or if he sets them apart from others who had not seen him. There is much debate about this. It seems apparent that Paul knew the saints as he sends them a greeting in Colossians 4:15. Finally we see Paul's statement in Colossians 4:16, "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and

you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea." His letter to the Laodiceans has been lost. It is obvious the church there was well known.

Verse 14 has Jesus referring to Himself as "the amen", the only occurrence of this word in Scripture as a name. It means "to make firm; true or certain". Not only what He says is true, He is truth. This is another affirmation of His divine nature. Only God is truth. His nature is unchanging, which is placed in contrast to the lukewarm nature of the congregation in Laodicea.



From The Text...	Thought Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain Jesus' descriptions of Himself in verse 14 as:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. The faithful and true witness</li> <li>B. The Beginning of the creation of God</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How could Jesus wish that some were cold (v.15)?</li> <li>2. Jesus says His love is proven by His reproofing and discipline (v.19). What other New Testament passages support this truth? How does He do this today?</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. What deeds did Jesus know of this congregation?</li> <li>3. How do Jesus' statements in verses 17-18 relate to the peculiar society of Laodicea?</li> <li>4. What were they told they needed to do (v.19)?</li> </ol>	<div data-bbox="581 768 786 810"><b>Discussion</b></div> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What caused Jesus to want to "spit you out of My mouth" (v.16)? How does this happen today?</li> <li>2. What was Jesus' advice to the Laodiceans? What is His advice to us?</li> <li>3. Relate how Jesus stands and knocks at the door today. Give an explanation and application of verse 20.</li> </ol>