#51 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation chapter 1-2

BRC
Read the Bible. Follow Jesus

Bible Reading Class Pastor: Warren Wang

A Bible Reader's Conviction

- *All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*. (2 Tim. 3:16-17, NIV)

A Blessed Journey

1. May you study God's Word with a reverent heart and walk in His will.
2. May the Word of the Lord prosper, and may He add to the church those who are being saved.
3. May the Lord bless your days of reading Scripture.

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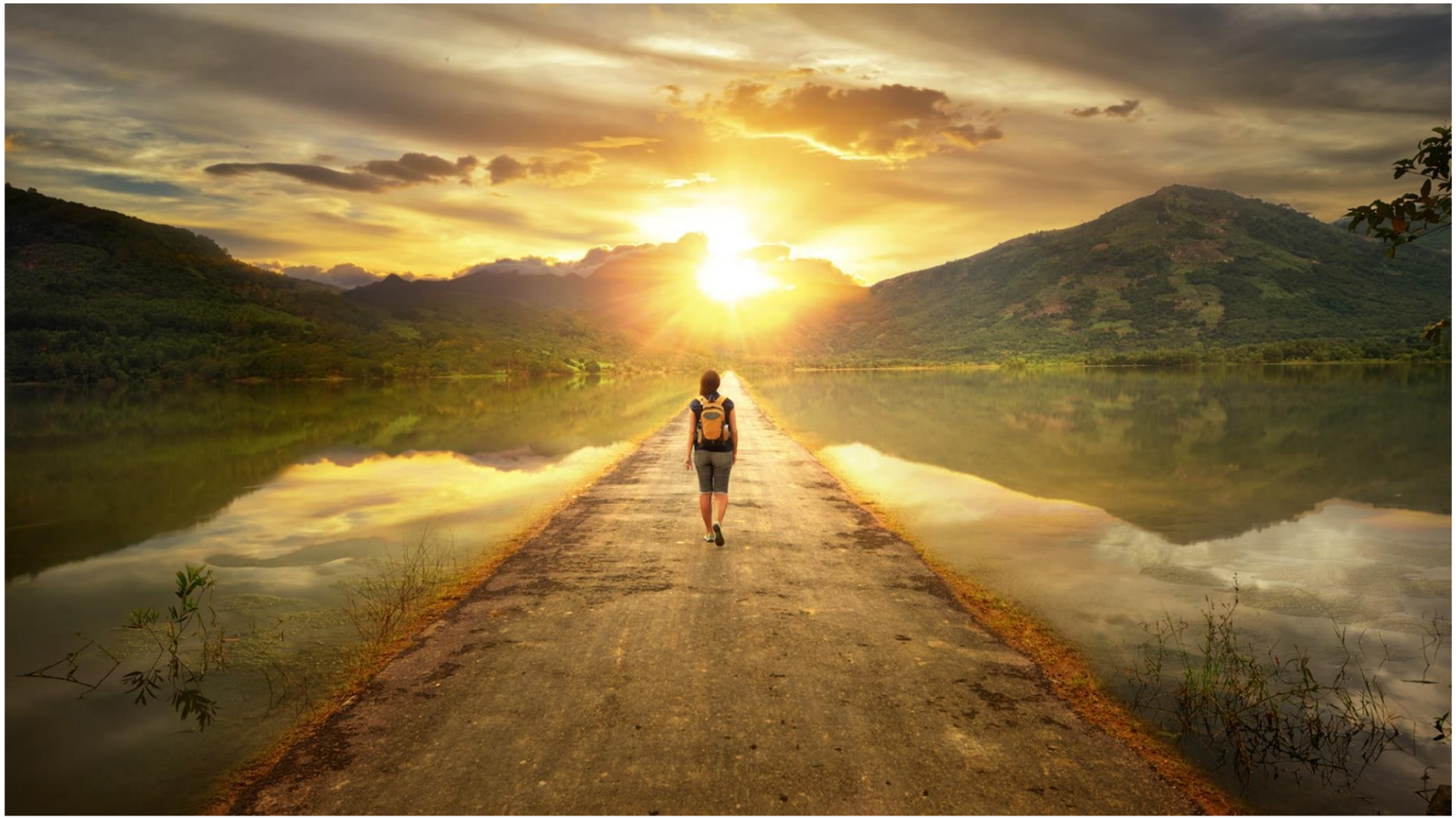


The Guiding Principles of BRC

- Christ-Centered
- Bible-Based
- Mission-Minded

BRC: A Gentleman's Agreement

- I'll complete weekly reading assignment
- I'll watch weekly teaching video in its entirety
- I'll complete weekly quiz (closed book)

The Structure of the 27 Books of the New Testament

three Synoptic Gospels

John

Four Gospels

Acts

Thirteen Pauline Epistles

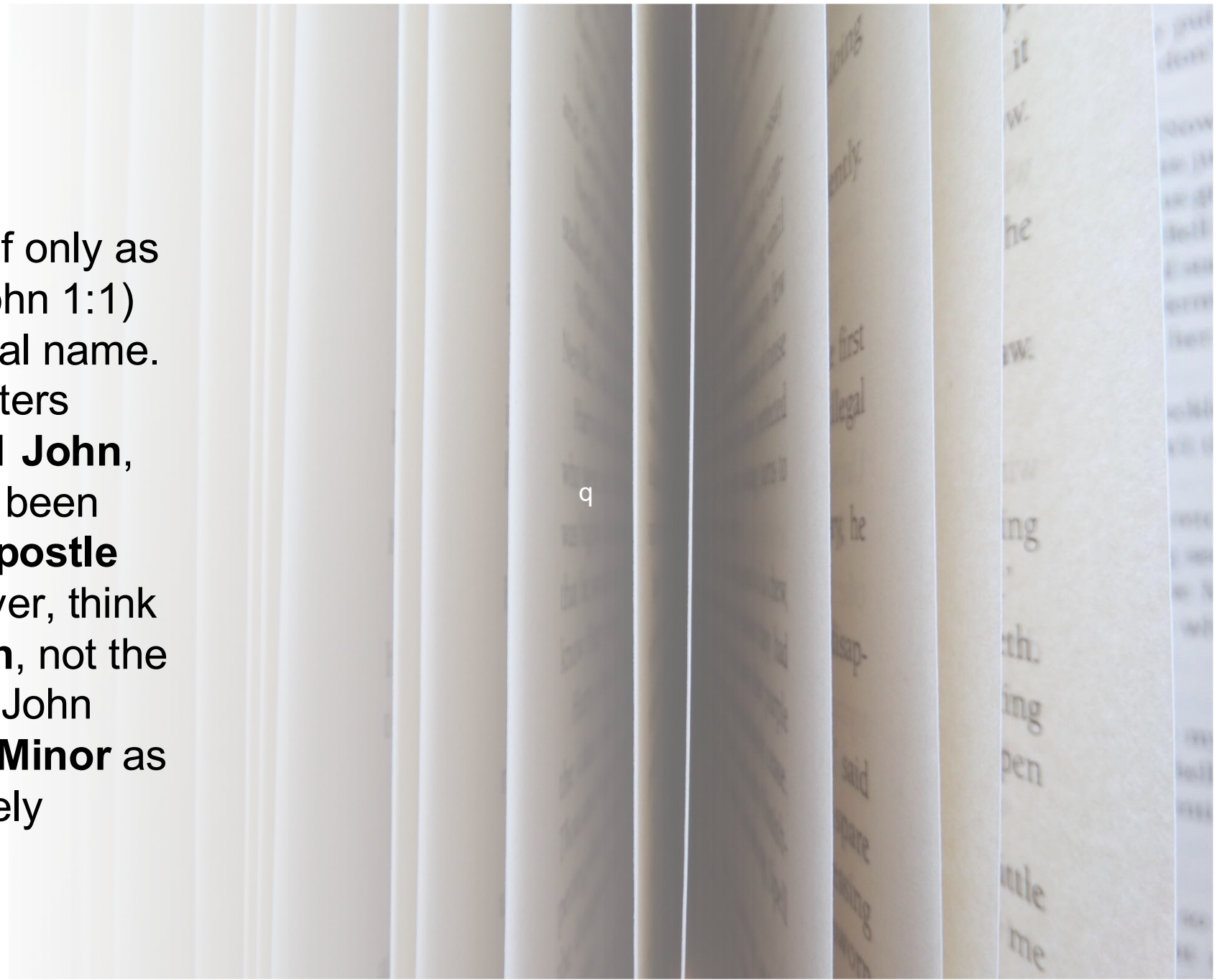
Other Nine Epistles

Five Books of Historical Narrative

Twenty-two Books of Doctrinal Teaching

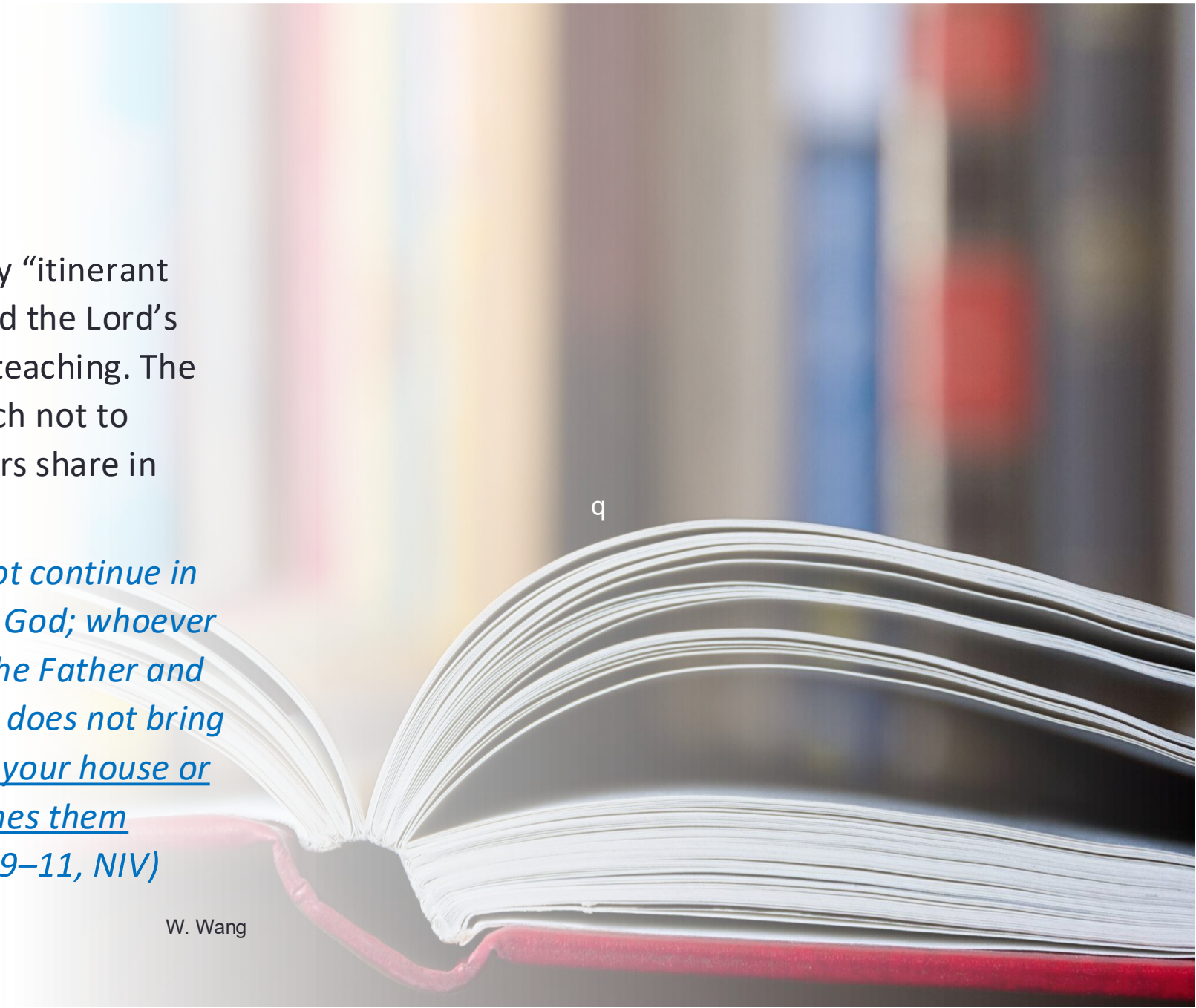
2 and 3 John

- **Author**
- The author identifies himself only as **“the elder”** (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1) and does not give his personal name. The contents of these two letters share many similarities with **1 John**, so traditionally all three have been regarded as written by **the Apostle John**. Some scholars, however, think the author was **another John**, not the Apostle John. In his old age, John served the churches in **Asia Minor** as an elder. The letters were likely written around **A.D. 85–95**.



2 and 3 John

- **Theme of 2 John**
- In the first century, there were many “itinerant preachers”. Some faithfully preached the Lord’s message, while others spread false teaching. The theme of 2 John is to warn the church not to welcome false teachers, lest believers share in their wicked work.
- *Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work. (2 John 9–11, NIV)*



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2 and 3 John

- **Theme of 3 John**
- In contrast to **2 John**, some true preachers came to a place but were rejected by false believers who had taken control of the church and refused to welcome them. The theme of **3 John** is to urge the church **to welcome genuine Christian workers** and to rebuke those harmful people who dominate the church.
- *It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth. (3 John 7–8, NIV)*

Characteristics of Heresy

- Heresy begins with **a doctrine, an opinion, or an ideology**, and then uses the Bible to make it fit.
- **Scripture is the word of God; ideologies are created by people.** Heresy puts human ideas first and then makes God's word conform to those ideas. This was true of Gnosticism, and it is true of other ideologies as well.
- For example, prosperity theology first appeals to the human desire for health and wealth, and then uses the Bible to support its claims.
- Sometimes a Bible teacher or a theological system is **overly revered by its followers**, who assume that whatever this teacher or system says must be right. It is elevated to such a level that Scripture is subtly used as a tool to support it, and without realizing it, people begin to move down the path toward heresy.

There are many preachers. Whom should I welcome?

- With modern media so widely available, you can go online and hear sermons anytime. Sometimes brothers and sisters ask me, **"What about this person? Is it okay for me to listen to his preaching?"** Their question is really the same as the theme of **2 and 3 John**: it is about **whether or not we should receive a preacher**.
- In John's time, there were many **itinerant preachers** who traveled from one city to another, depending on local believers for lodging and travel expenses. The question was: **there are many preachers, so whom should I receive, and whom should I not receive?** If I welcome someone, or recommend someone to other believers, and later discover that he is teaching heresy, then instead of helping people, would I not actually be harming them? **This is exactly the issue addressed in 2 and 3 John.**

There are many preachers. Whom should I welcome?

- Every age has its heresies. **Heresy** is not the same as **pagan religion**. Pagan religions are other religions, clearly different from the Christian faith, and that is usually easy to recognize. Heresy, however, claims to be Christian while preaching a different gospel and a different doctrine, which makes it much harder to discern. For this reason, Scripture often warns believers to guard against heresy.
- What is meant by "a different doctrine" is what 2 John calls **"going beyond the teaching of Christ."** True Christian faith is rooted in Jesus Christ and has two marks:
  - **In understanding:** based on Scripture, it has a right understanding of Jesus.
  - **In daily life:** it is centered on Jesus and teaches people to follow Jesus.

There are many preachers. Whom should I welcome?

- To discern heresy, we must look at its teaching about Jesus. First, does it proclaim Jesus Christ? Does it call people to follow Jesus? Second, is its understanding of Jesus consistent with what Scripture reveals?
- In John's time, the most influential heresy was Gnosticism. It accepted only that Jesus had spirit, but denied that he had a physical body—in other words, it denied that the Word became flesh. This was an error in the understanding of Jesus and therefore a heresy in basic doctrine.
- Modern heresy is often different. If you look at its published doctrinal statements, they are often quite orthodox on paper. But if you look at its actual practice, you may see a very different picture. It speaks very little about Jesus, very little about the cross, discipleship, or taking up one's cross to follow the Lord. Instead, it speaks much more about personal experience, human relationships, psychology, the social gospel, theological positions, religious activities and rituals, cultural traditions, and the blessings that come from believing in Jesus. People may hear many sermons, yet read little Scripture; have many opinions, yet little truth; hold strong ideologies, yet lack a firm resolve to follow Jesus. It appeals to the human desire to be blessed and promotes a man-centered religion, in which Jesus becomes part of the background, or only an occasional tool to be used.

In Truth and Love

- **“Truth”** and **“love”** appear together several times in **2 John**. This pairing is not accidental:
  1. *“To the lady chosen by God and to her children, **whom I love in the truth**” (2 John 1, NIV)*
  2. *“—and not I only, but also all **who know the truth**—” (2 John 1, NIV)*
  3. *“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will **be with us in truth and love**.” (2 John 3, NIV)*
  4. *“It has given me great joy to find some of your children **walking in the truth**… And now, dear lady… I ask that we **love one another**.” (2 John 4–5, NIV)*

Truth and Love

- What is the relationship between **truth** and **love**? They are closely connected. Take **Gnosticism** as an example: because it spiritualized everything and emphasized attaining special knowledge to become more "spiritual," the **physical body was considered unimportant**. But loving one another belongs to daily life and involves care for the body, so it too became unimportant.
- **A distortion of truth leads to a decline in love.** Likewise, **a distortion of love** (for example, emphasizing loving one another but neglecting Scripture) leads to a decline in truth.
- **The Son of God became flesh, full of grace and truth**. Only by giving equal importance to both **grace and truth**, and expressing them fully and in balance in life, do we reflect the true way of Christ. This applies both **personally** and **in the life of the church**.

3 John

- **A verse heavily promoted by the prosperity gospel (success theology):**
  - *"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." (3 John 2, NIV)*
  - **Analysis:**
    - This is **a greeting**, not a statement of central doctrine. A very ordinary expression of well-wishing has been elevated by prosperity theology into a core teaching. In this verse, "**go well with you**" corresponds to ***prosper***, and "**good health**" to ***health***. These have been turned into slogans such as **"prosperity gospel"** and **"health and wealth,"** and are strongly promoted as if they were central biblical promises.

- **Analysis:**
  - Such an emphasis not only **violates sound principles of biblical interpretation**, but also goes against **common sense**. Central doctrines should come from **the whole teaching of Scripture**, not from one or two isolated verses. To ignore the full witness of the Bible and elevate a single verse is both **poor hermeneutics** and unreasonable.
  - A troubling phenomenon in Christianity: not proclaiming **Jesus Christ in the Gospels**, not teaching **justification by faith in Romans**, not presenting the **superior Christ in Hebrews**, not emphasizing **faith and works in James**, not preaching **repentance and forgiveness of sins**, and not proclaiming **the cross of Jesus Christ**. Instead, the teaching of the whole Bible is neglected, and a single verse is elevated—turning a greeting into a central doctrine. This approach, though flawed both interpretively and logically, is widely accepted because it **appeals to the human desire for health and wealth**.
  - Brothers and sisters, **truth often has aspects that are not convenient**. Jesus commanded His disciples to preach **repentance and forgiveness of sins**; those who believe must **repent, confess their sins, and receive Christ** in order to be saved. The prosperity gospel, however, emphasizes the **benefits of believing in Jesus**, making it easier for people to accept.

- **Analysis:**
  - **The central theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ, not human prosperity:**

A. The theme of Scripture is **Jesus Christ**. The message of the gospel is **"Jesus Christ and him crucified."** A blessed life is a byproduct of following the Lord; the life of a disciple is a life centered on Jesus Christ.

B. Prosperity theology emphasizes human health and wealth, pursuing success and prosperity while downplaying the cross of Jesus Christ and the sovereignty of God. This approach places man at the center and Jesus at the margins, reversing what is fundamental and what is secondary—treating the potter as clay and committing a basic error. As the prophet **Isaiah** says:

- *"Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, 'Who sees us? Who will know?' You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!" (Isaiah 29:15–16, NIV)*

"Diotrephes and Demetrius… is it appropriate to publicly praise or criticize them?"

- *"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church." (3 John 9–10, NIV)*

- *"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true." (3 John 11–12, NIV)*

"Diotrephes and Demetrius… is it appropriate to publicly praise or criticize them?"

• Generally speaking, in the church we tend to publicly commend people, but not publicly rebuke them. If there is correction, it is usually done privately, without naming names. Yet in 3 John, John openly rebukes Diotrephes and commends Demetrius. Is such public praise and criticism appropriate? Did not Jesus say to point out a brother's fault in private? *(Matthew 18:15)*

• Notice, however, that Jesus said, "If your brother or sister sins…", which refers to a personal matter. When the issue concerns the whole church, rather than a private situation, **the biblical pattern is to deal with it publicly**. Peter's handling of Ananias and Sapphira, Paul's rebuke of Hymenaeus and Alexander *(1 Timothy 1:20)*, and even Paul opposing Peter to his face *(Galatians 2:11)* all involved matters affecting the wider church.

A Difficult Decision

- For any pastor, public rebuke is extremely difficult. The church is made up of volunteers; it is more suited to encouragement than criticism. Pastors desire the ministry to flourish and, unless absolutely necessary, do not want to offend anyone. If a pastor does rebuke someone, there should be only one legitimate reason: not for personal grievances, but for the good of the whole church.

- Sometimes, out of fear of offending others, a pastor may remain silent even when someone is doing harm to the church. This may be called “loving tolerance,” but in reality it can reflect a kind of people-pleasing compromise driven by self-interest. Scripture, however, shows a different pattern. God’s servants are full of love, yet clear in distinguishing between public and private matters—they speak when needed. They seek to please God rather than people, and when necessary, are not afraid to offend.

- The named rebuke and public commendation in 2 and 3 John demonstrate this kind of clear distinction between personal and corporate matters, an attitude worthy of our learning.

Reflection Point
A Human Perspective

A Human Perspective

The core of a person

• I recently read an article written by a theology professor in memory of his mother. She had Alzheimer's disease, her memory fading and her body growing weak. Walking with a walker, afraid of falling, she would often say, "Father, please help me not to fall."

• When a person grows old, what they have learned over a lifetime gradually fades, and what remains is the core of their character. His mother deeply believed in the Lord, and what remained in her heart was a childlike trust in the Heavenly Father. What is your core?

• When John wrote 1, 2, and 3 John, he was likely around ninety years old, near the end of his life. What is revealed in these letters is the core of John's character—and that core is Jesus Christ. Even a brief reading of these three letters makes this unmistakably clear.

Jude

Jude

- **Author:**
  - The author identifies himself as *"Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (Jude 1, NIV).* Traditionally, he is understood to be **Jude, the brother of Jesus**. According to the Gospels, Jesus had four brothers, including James and Jude:
  - *"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?" (Matthew 13:55, NIV)*
- **Theme:**
  - Since ancient times, false teachers have infiltrated the church, using distorted and deceptive teachings to lead believers away from the truth. The theme of Jude is to warn believers to **be on guard against those who have secretly slipped in**.

Jude

- **Theme: Guarding Against False Teachers**
  - *“For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. …, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” (Jude 4, NIV)*
- **Key Verse:**
  - *“But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” (Jude 20–21, NIV)*

Parallels Between Jude and 2 Peter 2

- *"And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." (Jude 6, NIV)*
- *"In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" (Jude 8–9, NIV)*
- *"They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever." (Jude 13, NIV)*
- *"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment;" (2 Peter 2:4, NIV)*
- *"This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord." (2 Peter 2:10–11, NIV)*
- *"These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them." (2 Peter 2:17, NIV)*

Parallel passages: either they quote from one another (usually the longer text quoting the shorter), or they draw from a common source.

The faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people

- *"Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for* ***the faith*** *that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people." (Jude 3, NIV)*
- The word **"faith"** (Greek *pistis*) here refers to **the faith itself—the content of what is believed**, not just personal belief. This verse highlights three key points:

1. **Completed once for all:** Jesus Christ accomplished salvation once for all through the cross, and the message of the gospel was delivered once for all to believers.
2. **A sacred trust:** The gospel is a trust committed by the Lord to believers. We are called to be faithful stewards of the gospel.
3. **Contend earnestly:** If anyone distorts or alters the gospel, changing the nature of salvation, believers must not remain silent but must contend earnestly for the faith.

The faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people

An Extended Issue: Can Scripture Be Added to or Changed?

- A further question arises: Can the Bible be added to or altered? The truth of the gospel is recorded in the whole of Scripture and was delivered once for all, and therefore cannot be changed. But what about the rest of the Bible? Can anything be added, removed, or modified? Could God give new revelations for different ages, allowing us to supplement Scripture over time?
- Some claim to have received new revelations, seen visions, or heard God speaking to them. Should such revelations be added to the Bible, or should another book (such as the *Book of Mormon*) be written and regarded as equally authoritative with Scripture? The answer is: **absolutely not**. Throughout history, many heresies have originated in exactly this way.
- Believers must understand that the Bible is God's revelation, written over more than a thousand years and tested over many generations. It is not to be added to or altered. If anyone attempts to add to or change it, believers must contend earnestly for the faith.

Does believing in Christ actually make people sin more?

- *"For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord… In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings… These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage." (Jude 4, 8, 16, NIV)*
- Some people say that since Jesus has washed away all your sins, you may as well sin as much as you want, because in the end everything will be forgiven. When this is combined with the belief that whatever your body does cannot defile your soul, its influence becomes even greater. This is exactly the heresy that Jude condemns.
- These people praise the Lord on the one hand, yet indulge the desires of the flesh on the other. They creep into the church, join the saints at the love feasts, stir up factions, speak abusively against those in authority, and mock what they do not understand—yet some within the church still receive them.
- This kind of heresy and disorder existed in the past, and it still exists today.

Four Things Believers Should Do

- *"But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." (Jude 20–21, NIV)*

1. **Build yourselves up in your most holy faith:** Be continually strengthened by pursuing and grounding yourself in **the truth of the faith**.
2. **Pray in the Holy Spirit:** Pray in alignment with **God's will**, not merely your own desires—guided by the Spirit.
3. **Keep yourselves in God's love:** Live with a deep awareness that **God loves you**, and remain in that love without drifting away.
4. **Wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ:** Fix your hope on Christ **both in this life and into eternity**. The work of salvation in you begins when you believe and continues until it is fully completed at Christ's return.

How to Treat Three Types of People

- *"Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." (Jude 22–23, NIV)*

1. **Those who doubt — show mercy:** Some people are habitually weak in faith and often struggle with doubt. They need compassion, but we should not adopt their doubts or become like them.
2. **Those in danger — rescue them from the fire:** Some are not consistently weak but are facing a sudden crisis of faith. These people must be urgently rescued, like pulling someone out of a fire.
3. **Those corrupted by sinful desires — show mercy with fear:** Some indulge in sinful desires, reject authority, and refuse to repent. We should still show them mercy, but with caution and reverence, keeping distance—like fearing contamination, so that we ourselves are not influenced.

Doxology

- *"To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." (Jude 24–25, NIV)*

1. **Keep you from stumbling:** It is God who keeps us from falling and enables us to stand firm in the walk of faith.
2. **Present you without fault and with great joy:** That we are able to persevere to the end and arrive at a glorious outcome is entirely by God's grace.
3. **Glory, majesty, power, and authority be to Him:** Our response is to continually, through Jesus Christ, give glory, majesty, power, and authority to God the Father.

Revelation Chapter 1-2

Thanksgiving and Blessing for the Sixty-Sixth Book

- *"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." (Revelation 1:3, NIV)*

- The Bible reading class began with Genesis. After more than three years, going book by book, we have now completed 65 of the 66 books, and today we arrive at the sixty-sixth book, Revelation. Let us give thanks together—thanking God for His faithful guidance along the way and for the blessing of His Word.

Introduction to Revelation

1. Author: The Apostle John

- The author identifies himself as **"John"**, a **servant of Jesus Christ**. Traditionally, he is understood to be the Apostle John, though some hold that he may be another John.
- *"The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John." (Revelation 1:1, NIV)*

2. Date of Writing: Around A.D. 95, generally considered the last book of the Bible to be written.

3. Place of Writing: The Island of Patmos Located in the Aegean Sea, Patmos was used as a place of exile for prisoners. John was exiled there because of his preaching, and it was there that he received this revelation from God.

- *" 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 ." (Revelation 1:9, NIV)*

Introduction to Revelation

4. Historical Background

- At that time, the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96) promoted emperor worship. Because Christians refused to worship the emperor's image, they faced severe persecution, and many were martyred. John recorded God's revelation and delivered it to the churches of that time, so that they would know that Christ will ultimately reign and that God's plan will surely be fulfilled. In this way, the book was meant to comfort and strengthen believers who were suffering.

Introduction to Revelation

5. Distinctive Features of Revelation

- It is a revelation concerning the **end time**, revealing what will happen at the end of the world.
- It makes extensive use of **symbolic language**, such as the **pregnant woman**, the **great red dragon**, the **beast from the sea**, and the **beast from the earth**. Because it involves symbolic passages, Revelation cannot be interpreted entirely literally; we must seek the meaning represented by each symbol.
- It reveals scenes of **heavenly worship**, which greatly help believers in their worship on earth.
- It gives special attention to the use of **numbers**, such as **three**, **seven**, and **twelve**. The most frequently used number is **seven**, which appears **52 times**.

Introduction to Revelation

6. Outline of Revelation: A Simple Division

- *"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." (Revelation 1:19, NIV)*
- Based on this verse, Revelation can be divided into three parts:

1. **What you have seen** *(chapter 1)*: The vision of **the risen Christ**.
2. **What is now** *(chapters 2–3)*: The vision concerning **the seven churches**.
3. **What will take place later** *(chapters 4–22)*: The visions of **the end times**.

Introduction to Revelation

6. Outline of Revelation: Vision-Based Division

1. Prologue, 1:1–8
2. First Vision: The Lord Jesus' Letters to the Churches, 1:9–3:22
3. Second Vision: The Heavenly Throne and the Three Cycles of Judgment, 4:1–16:21
4. Third Vision: The Fall of Babylon the Great, 17:1–19:10
5. Interlude: From Babylon to the New Jerusalem, 19:11–21:8
6. Fourth Vision: The New Jerusalem, 21:9–22:9
7. Epilogue, 22:10–21

Methods of Interpreting Revelation

- Revelation uses **symbolic language**. In order to understand its meaning, four major approaches to interpretation have appeared throughout church history:
  1. **Idealist or Allegorical View:** Revelation was written to comfort and encourage believers. By speaking of the future, it teaches spiritual truths and strengthens the church in times of suffering.
  2. **Preterist View:** Everything described in the book was already fulfilled in the first century, during the time of the Roman Empire.
  3. **Historical View:** The scope of fulfillment is expanded beyond the first century. The events in Revelation are gradually fulfilled throughout human history.
  4. **Futurist View:** From chapter 4 onward, Revelation refers to future events that will take place at the consummation of all things.

Our position: We believe Revelation foretells future events, and that the futurist interpretation is the correct approach.

What Is Now: The Vision of the Seven Churches

- **Two Interpretations**
  1. **The Historical-Age Interpretation:** The seven churches represent seven periods in church history:
     1) **Ephesus:** the church of the apostolic age, **A.D. 30–100**
     2) **Smyrna:** the church of the early persecution age, **A.D. 100–312**
     3) **Pergamum:** the church of the state-church age, **A.D. 313–590**
     4) **Thyatira:** the church of the Roman Catholic age, **A.D. 591–1517**
     5) **Sardis:** the church of the Reformation age, **A.D. 1517–1790**

What Is Now: The Vision of the Seven Churches

6) **Philadelphia:** the church of the missionary age**, A.D. 1790–1900**

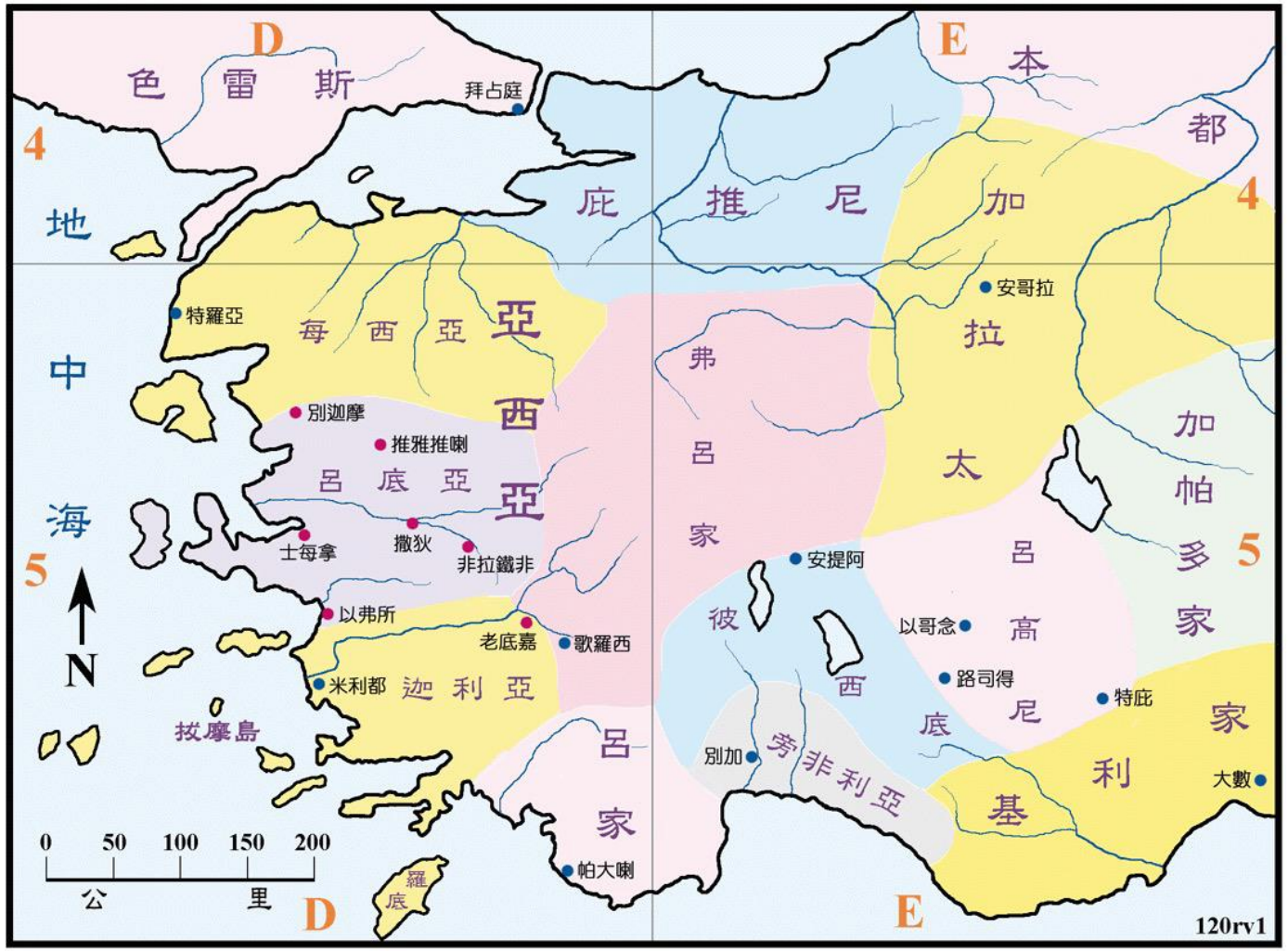
7) **Laodicea:** the church of the apostate ag**e, from A.D. 1900 onward**

2. **The Literal Interpretation**: This passage is written in a straightforward manner, not in symbolic language, and should therefore be interpreted literally.

- The seven churches were all actual churches in John's time. What is described concerns the situation of that time, but it carries lasting significance. Just as the Old Testament speaks of past events yet contains eternal meaning, these seven churches no longer exist, but the teachings concerning them still provide lessons for churches today.

John Nelson Darby
1800-1882

John Nelson Darby, a British preacher, was the father of **Dispensationalism** and one of the founders of the **Plymouth Brethren**.
The **Local Church movement** in China, also known as the **Little Flock**, was influenced in its early formation by the Plymouth Brethren and by Darby. It adopted the theological framework of Dispensationalism and interpreted **Revelation** and world history from that perspective.



The Seven Churches in Asia

- *"John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:" (Revelation 1:4, NIV)*

- *"On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.'" (Revelation 1:10–11, NIV)*

Jesus Christ

- *"and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." (Revelation 1:5-6, NIV)*

1. **What Jesus Christ Is:** He is "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."
2. **What Jesus Christ Does:** He loves us and "has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father."
3. **What Jesus Christ Is Worthy:** To him be glory and power for ever and ever!

Alpha and Omega

- *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8, NIV)*
- Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last. God is the beginning of the universe and also the end. He is our origin and our destiny. He is our Lord and our God. He is the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty — his name is worthy of our praise forever.

The Son of Man and the Seven Golden Lampstands

- *"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:12-17, NIV)*
- Daniel 7 prophesies the coming of the Son of Man; Jesus took on flesh and referred to himself as the Son of Man. The sharp, double-edged sword coming out of the mouth of the Son of Man is generally interpreted as the words spoken by the Lord — that is, the Word of God.

Holding the Keys of Death and Hades

- *"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'" (Revelation 1:17-18, NIV)*

1. **Fell at his feet as though dead:** The natural human response upon seeing the Lord is not joy, but awe.
2. **I am the First and the Last:** This carries the same meaning as "I am the Alpha and the Omega."
3. **I am the Living One:** God is the ever-living God; Jesus is the ever-living Jesus.
4. **I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever:** Jesus is the Lamb who was slain, the Lord of life who rose from the dead.
5. **I hold the keys of death and Hades:** Keys open doors — only Jesus has the power to release those held captive by death and Hades.

The Seven Stars and the Seven Golden Lampstands

- *"The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." (Revelation 1:20, NIV)*

1. **The Lord has already explained it:** Jesus himself interpreted the symbols — the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. What the Lord has explained in his own words, no one may alter.
2. **The angels of the seven churches:** This refers to angels. Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Some, however, interpret these as earthly messengers who serve the churches in the Lord's name.
3. **The seven churches:** These are the seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The Lord Jesus holds both hope and judgment for these churches — offering both commendation and rebuke.

An Example of Altering Jesus' Own Interpretation

- *"Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?" "An enemy did this," he replied. The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."'" (Matthew 13:24-30, NIV)*
- *"Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.' He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.'" (Matthew 13:36-40, NIV)*
- Jesus explained that **the field is the world (kosmos).** Yet some say the field is the church, and that we should allow wheat and weeds to grow together within the church. What becomes of those who favor their own opinions and alter the Lord's own interpretation?

1. The Church in Ephesus
(Toiling and Persevering, yet Having Forsaken First Love)

- **Jesus' self-description:** These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.
- **Jesus' commendation:**
  1) **Ability to discern true from false:** You have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.
  2) **Ability to endure hardship:** You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.
  3) **Ability to hate what the Lord hates:** But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- **Jesus' rebuke: Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first**.

What Is the First Love?

1. **Love for the Lord.** The church in Ephesus had many strengths — hard work, perseverance, intolerance of evil, and spiritual discernment. Over time, however, all of these became outward forms: the work continued, but the love for the Lord was lost.
2. **Love for others.** The work continued, but love for people was gone.
3. **Love for both the Lord and others.** The work continued, but love itself was lost — both toward the Lord and toward others.

Restoring the First Love

- **Jesus' command:** Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.
- **Jesus' warning:** If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.
- **The reward for the one who is victorious:** To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.
- **Application:**
  1. Strengthen the foundation of truth, so that one is able to discern true from false apostles (preachers).
  2. Do something concrete that demonstrates love for the Lord and love for brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel in Revelation

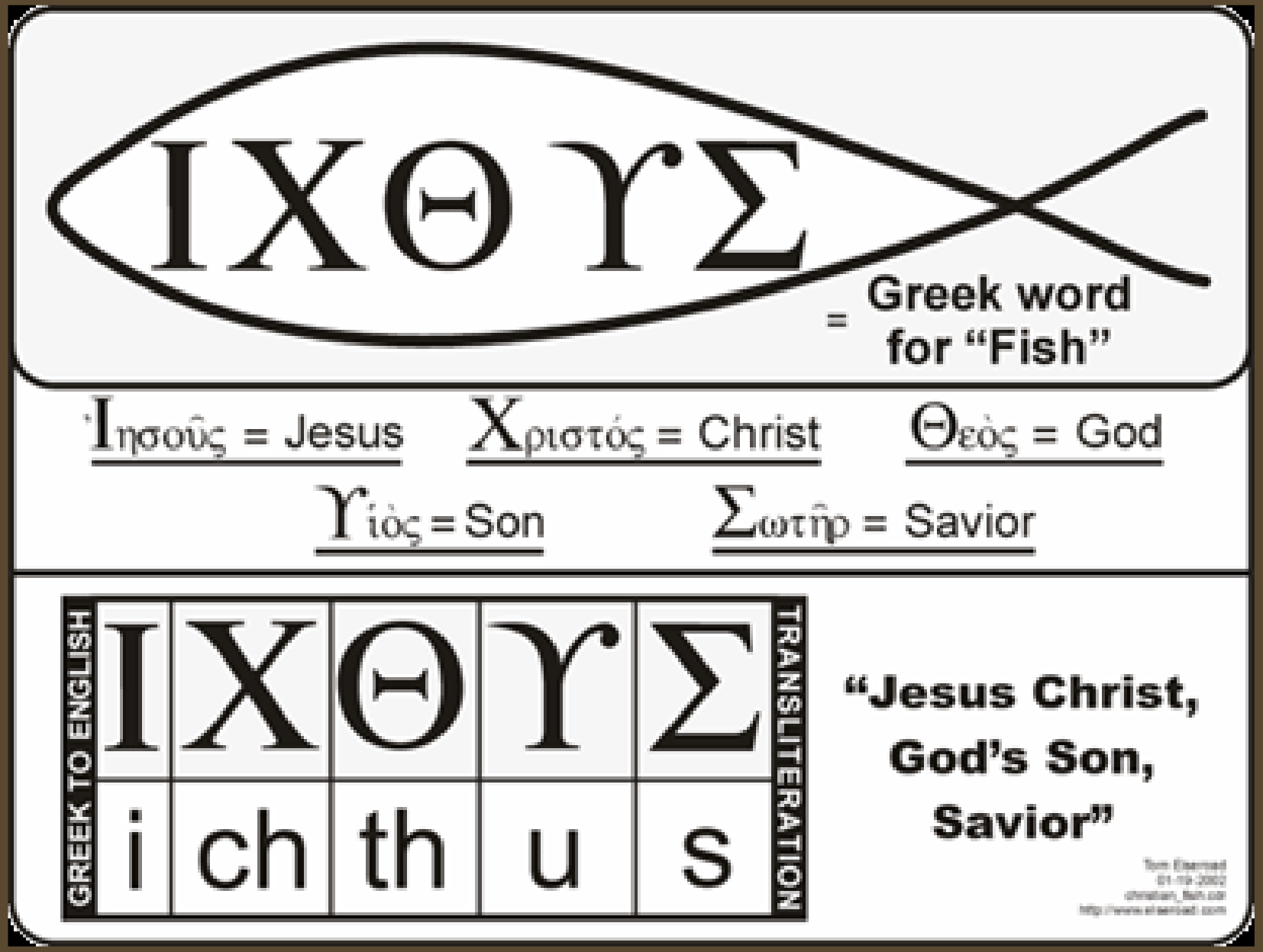
- *"But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." (Revelation 2:6, NIV)*
- *"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." (Revelation 2: 14, NIV)*
- *"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols." (Revelation 2:20, NIV)*
- The hallmark of the Nicolaitans was worldliness — blending with pagan culture and moral laxity. Balaam, operating in the role of a prophet, encouraged others toward worldliness. Jezebel went a step further, actively teaching God's servants to embrace worldliness.

2. The Church in Smyrna (The Suffering Church)

- **Jesus' self-description:** These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.
- **Jesus' commendation:**
  1. **Enduring affliction:** I know your afflictions.
  2. **Spiritual richness:** I know your poverty—yet you are rich!
- **Jesus' rebuke:** None.
- **Jesus' encouragement:** Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.

2. The Church in Smyrna (The Suffering Church)

- **Jesus' command:** Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your crown.
- **The reward for the one who is victorious:** The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.
- **Application:** The practice of faithfulness: the more unfavorable the circumstances, the more faithful we must be to the Lord — demonstrating this through Bible reading, prayer, service, giving, and evangelism.



The Fish Symbol: Born During a Time of Church Persecution

Fish: Ichthus (ΙΧΘΥΣ)

Iota (i): First letter of the Greek word Ἰησοῦς, meaning "Jesus"

Chi (kh): First letter of the Greek word Χριστός, meaning "Christ"

Theta (th): First letter of the Greek word Θεοῦ, meaning "of God"

Upsilon: First letter of the Greek word Υἱός, meaning "Son"

Sigma (s): First letter of the Greek word Σωτήρ, meaning "Savior"

Together, the "fish" symbol represents: **"Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."**

3. The Church in Pergamum (Initially Steadfast, Later Compromising)

- **Jesus' self-description:** These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.
- **Jesus' commendation:**
  - **Did not renounce the Lord's word:** You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.
- **Jesus' rebuke:**
  1) **Compromising with other religions:** Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.
  2) **Compromising with the world:** Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

3. The Church in Pergamum (Initially Steadfast, Later Compromising)

- **Jesus' warning:**
  - Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.
- **The reward for the one who is victorious:**
  - To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.
- **Application:**
  - In your own faith, are there areas where you have compromised with other religions?
  - In your daily life, in what ways have you compromised with the world?

4. The Church in Thyatira
(Doing Much Good, yet Tolerating a False Prophet)

- **Jesus' self-description:** These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.
- **Jesus' commendation:**
  1) **Good deeds:** I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance.
  2) **Growing in good works:** I know that you are now doing more than you did at first.
- **Jesus' rebuke:**
  - **Tolerating Jezebel:** Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

4. The Church in Thyatira
(Doing Much Good, yet Tolerating a False Prophet)

- **The reward for the one who is victorious:** To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.
- **Application:**
  1) Am I "tolerating a Jezebel" — allowing people who should not have influence in the church to influence others?
  2) Compared to before, am I "doing more good works than at first"?