

## Introduction and Greetings

The seven letters to churches occupy the first three chapters of *Revelation*, but from then on there is not a single mention of a church or churches. This indicates strongly that the letters to the churches have been inserted into the apocalypse, which otherwise has nothing to do with churches. No less an authority than R H Charles concur that the letters are a separate work from the rest of the Apocalypse. The word "church" is often a translation of Hebrew or Aramaic words used by Essenes to mean "assembly" or "congregation." Thus the word was taken into Christianity from the Essene usage.

Clues in the text show that these chapters are from that period when Christianity was just dividing from Judaism. These letters are written from the Jewish side of the divide and the "Nicolaitans" were Hellenised Jews, supposedly named after Nicolaus, one of the Hellenist deacons appointed in *Acts*. It was the wing of the church that Paul took it upon himself to represent. We are therefore reading in the seven letters a missive from the leaders of the Jerusalem Church not from anyone in Patmos or Ephesus. Proof is the emphasis on works not faith. Doubtless the Nicolaitans, like Paul, put emphasis on faith. These letters chime to the tune of the epistle of James the Just, though James is giving less parabolic advice.

The greeting (Rev 1:4) is just like the beginnings of Paul's epistles, suggesting they might have been contemporaneous with this part of *Revelation*. Because the first work in *Revelation* was this supposed letter to the seven churches, the greeting makes it seem that the whole book was a letter. Note that "him who is and who was and who is to come" is listed separately from Jesus.

Verse 1:8 is clear that the "Lord God," the "Alpha and Omega," the "Almighty" is the one "who is, who was and who is to come." It is not Jesus! Jesus is seen here as a faithful witness but it is God who comes to renew the world, from the subsequent descriptions, in his guise of the archangel Michael. These small points show that Jesus had still not yet been identified with the archangel Michael and the "Parousia" was still that of God, as the word is properly used, not of Jesus.

Seven spirits before the throne are mentioned, a debt to Persian religion that has the seven Amesha Spentas of Ahura Mazda, that translated into the seven archangels of Judaism. It suggests we are looking at a Jewish—specifically Essene—document that has been Christianised. An original Christian work would hardly interpose seven anonymous spirits between God's throne and his son. An explanation would be that verse 5 with its references to Jesus Christ was added. Christians of an evangelical bent, embarrassed by the absence of references to seven spirits in the Jewish scriptures, try to convince us the Holy Ghost has a multiple personality!

In verse 1:5, Jesus is described as "the first begotten of the dead," an important expression that explains the beginning of Christianity. Jesus was thought to have resurrected, when his corpse disappeared, because he was the first of the dead saints to be raised up by God in the general resurrection promised in *Hosea*. For the apocalyptic Jews this was the sure sign that the kingdom of God was coming. Matthew's gospel emphasises it by having more—but anonymous—saints resurrected as well.

Though Jesus himself expected the heavenly hosts on the night of the Last Supper, his followers persuaded themselves that forty years of cosmic war and disaster were now necessary before the renewal of the world. In that forty years Christianity began. The constant references herin to "patience" is surely because the patience of the faithful is being sorely tried by the failure of the second coming to come!

Jesus is also called "prince of the kings of the earth," a reference to his title of "nasi," a prince or leader, and "the earth" in the underlying Aramaic will have been "the land," meaning the Jewish land.

The reference to "made us kings and priests," in *Revelation* 1:6, is a Christianisation of the Essene conviction that they were all prophets, priests and princes. Exodus 19:5-9 has the promise that Israel would be God's priests if they stayed righteous. Essenes believed they were righteous and so this promise applied to them. Christians inherited these titles from the Essenes, they were not granted by Jesus.

In *Revelation* 1:7, Jesus is described as coming "with clouds" a reference to Daniel but most likely a misinterpretation of "coming with princes" meaning the armies of heaven. "Even so, Amen" at the end of verse 1:7 is interesting because both Jesus and the Essenes had the habit of repeating "Amen" and "Even so" is simply a translation of "Amen" into English.

## Seven Letters

In *Revelation* 1:9, the author admits that he is a member of a brotherhood, a concept that Christians other than monks tried to disavow. Next we get a typical Christian mistranslation. The author is made to say he shares tribulation "with you in Jesus" when properly he shares "the tribulation of Jesus." He links this with the kingdom and patience or endurance. So, the translators contrive to show that the recipients of the letter as well as the author were suffering external tribulations but were enduring them, when it is plainly a past tribulation—that described in the gospels—and the endurance was the agony of the absence of the kingdom of God.

The word for tribulation which in Greek properly means "pressure" is used here metaphorically just as we might when we say, "The allied forces exerted pressure on the enemy." The tribulation is a "trouble" as the struggle in Northern Ireland is called "the troubles" by the Nationalists. The "tribulation of Jesus" shared by all, therefore was the Jewish nationalist uprising in which Jesus captured Jerusalem then lost his life. If Jesus's followers thought he had been the first of the dead to rise in the kingdom, they were waiting for the kingdom to come, and their patience was being tried because after 40 years it was showing no signs of appearing.

So, what it was intended to mean is that they suffered because the kingdom was yet far and they were being patient in waiting for it to come. If Jesus died in 21 AD and his followers expected a forty year cosmic war, then towards the end of this time the first Christians would have been anquished that nothing was happening. The older document seems then to have been re-edited and issued as a letter to churches around 65 AD.

What is slightly confusing about the chapters containing the letters is that, first, they assume in the audience a knowledge of the later apocalyptic chapters and, second, the letters have been set into the beginning of the apocalypse. At this stage the Jewish Christians who were receiving this letter were still awaiting the end—though they were beginning to worry about its continued

absence. Thus, they were familiar with all of the apocalyptic visions that appear later in *Revelation*. Nowadays, the letters would be better read after the apocalypse.

Verse 1:10 is really the beginning of the vision of the true apocalypse in chapter 4, but the letters have been slipped in at this point and make use of the same Watcher as the Apocalypse. He identifies himself with God's Spirit as the other references to the spirit (Rev 17:3; 21:10) prove.

The Watcher is told to write what he sees into a book and send it to the seven churches, and this is repeated at 1:19, but then the speaker dictates the letters. This reveals a join in the text—the Watcher having been brought from the Apocalypse, where he watches, into the letters, where he writes as an amanuensis. With the exception of the description of the archangel Michael in verses 1:12-16, everything from the list of churches in 1:11 to the end of the chapter looks like the join, though it draws on apocalyptic imagery.

### **Seven Churches**

The seven churches appear explicitly spoken by the voice of God. It is certain, if this is an edited Essene work that these churches cannot have been meant originally. What then were they? The names of the towns in which the churches were supposedly founded do have just about discernible meanings. Ephesus is desirable; Smyrna is Myrrh; Pergamum is marriage; Thyatira is incense or continual sacrifice; Sardis is a remnant or escapers; Philadelphia is a loving brotherhood; Laodicia is a judgement on people. There are tantalizing echoes of Essene beliefs in these names. Essenes were obsessed with puns and parallels in words as the scroll interpretations prove. Did diaspora Essenes pick these places to found communities because of the connotations of their names, and did the Essene congregations then evolve under Pauline influence into Christian churches?

Reading the letters to the churches themselves, one is inclined to think that no specific congregations were ever meant. Even Christian commentators question whether the letters really were directed at these churches because of their specific vices and virtues, but rather meant types of people.

In *Revelation* 1:12, the Watcher turns to see the voice speaking and saw seven golden lampstands—not candlesticks, apparently to be identified with the churches. Lampstands are not candlesticks—this is not meant to be a menorah—and link to Persian and Babylonian traditions of fire worship. The figure also has a girdle round the chest, not an item of sacred wear in Judaism but most important to a Zoroastrian. The figure the Watcher seems to be identified with the "one like a son of man" of *Daniel*, not the supposed messianic title of Jesus, and the "one like the son of man" in Daniel was the archangel Michael, the guardian spirit (Persian, Fravashi) of the Jewish people.

The expression used in *Daniel* however is simply the phrase used for the image of a man. So the author might just be describing an image illuminated by the seven lamps. This is just the sort of thing that the religions of the time did, and conceivably here is a brief description of the revelation of a hierophant to the faithful. The image of the beast mentioned several times later in the apocalypse refers to just such illuminated images, associated with Hellenistic religions.

In Persian mythology, the seven spirits are aspects of God that came into Judaism with Ezra. They then transposed into the archangels. Seven stars (Rev 1:16) also appear in Mitraism, another religion derived from Zoroastrianism. The two edged sword in his mouth pre-empts the apocalypse and seems rather unsuitable imagery for gentle Jesus.

The description is that of a sun god—whiteness, gold, a furnace, flame and fire, burnished bronze or brass, a face like the sun, and stars in his grasp being mentioned in a few brief sentences. Michael is effectively the face of God and the instrument of His justice. He wears a golden girdle, the girdle being associated with Persian religion but most people take it to mean the breastplate (Essen) of a priest. The Essenes saw themselves as priests and angels.

*Revelation* 1:17 to 1:20 sound like a redactor's addition. In 1:20 mysteries are explained but they are left unexplained generally in this book, suggesting it is a later Christian interpolation, but the editor is thinking still in Persian terms, the seven stars being Fravashis, heavenly equals, of the churches, and the lampstands are declared to be the churches themselves. The actual letters to the churches begin at the start of chapter 2.

### **Ephesus**

All of the churches are judged on the basis of their works except for Pergamum and Smyrna. The Judge declares, "I know your works." Christianity is built according to the theology of Paul—salvation by faith. The Essenes believed in salvation by deed or works in life, just as Zoroaster did, and James the Just, the author of a derided epistle in the New Testament. Writings that base judgement on works and not faith are not Christian—they are Essene.

Pointedly, the message immediately turns to "evil men" and "men who call themselves apostles but are not." Paul in Acts and his letters faces up to false apostles too, but they cannot be the same because Paul saw salvation as by faith whereas his opponents saw it by works. One can hardly conclude anything other than that we have here the two sides of a disagreement. For this writer judgement was on works but, for Paul, judgement was on faith. The false apostles spoken of here therefore must be people like Paul and the false apostles of Paul's experience must have been those represented by this writer. It is an important and crucial distinction and one easily explicable when Christianity is seen as an evolution from Essenism.

Again we have the recipients praised for their patience, for bearing up and not growing weary. These early Christians had been convinced by the apparent resurrection of Jesus that the kingdom was on its way. Jesus was the first to be raised up into it and God and his heavenly hosts only had to win the forty years of cosmic battle against Belial for them all, as repentant and righteous people, to enter His presence. The angel Michael would arrive with the heavenly hosts to complete the victory started with the success of the Nazarenes over Satan, the Romans defending Jerusalem—the reason for Jesus's crucifixion as a traitor to Rome.

Their patience was being tried because more than forty years had gone by and nothing had yet happened. Paul with his false apostles was telling them it was because they did not have enough faith. This work was to counter their inclination to dismiss the whole story as a sham or an error, or to join the alternative sect that based itself on faith—Paul's. Interestingly, 1 Thessalonians 1:3

speaks of works, labour (kopos) and patience just as here we have works, toil (kopos) and patience but the rogue Paul uses each with a modifier to swing its meaning to his own view! Thus, "works" become "works of faith!"—completely reversing its meaning.

Christian commentators, depending on the ignorance and gullibility of their flocks, try to pretend that the "evil men" are criminals when they know that sin and evil are defined in terms of rejection of Yehouah's laws, not rejection of the criminal law. The evil men are men considered by the writer to be going against the conception of truth held by his sect—one guesses with some confidence here, the sect of Christian Jews centred on the Jerusalem Church of James the Just, especially as James proves that works were all important to his outlook.

The writer thinks the members of the congregation at Ephesus have been yielding to the persuasions of these evil men, making them abandon the "love they had at first," and he urges them to repent and return to their original way of thinking. If not the Watcher threatens to remove their lampstand, perhaps a threat of excommunication from the community since earlier the lampstands were identified with the churches.

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate," sounds as though the Ephesians are being commended now for hating the Nicolaitans, yet the Nicolaitans can only be the Hellenizers that have been spreading the belief in faith not works—the Paulinists, we would now call them—whereas hitherto the Watcher has been criticizing the Ephesians for being beguiled by the "evil men." Conceivably the Watcher is addressing a church that has split into two factions, and criticises one while praising the other. More likely "But this thou hast," is wrongly translated or corrupt. It is not saying what the Ephesians hold in their minds but what they ought to hold. It should be "But this you ought to have..." or "But consider this..."

As always in these biblical studies we are faced with peculiar coincidences that the experts in Christianity never seek to explain. All of these messages to the churches finish with a promise to the victor—"he who conquers," from the Greek verb "nikao," "to conquer." Yet the enemies of those who conquer, the Nicolaitans, are those who conquer! Nicolaitans is from the same verb, Nikao, and the word "laos," meaning a people! The explanation must be that we are looking at a split in a sect. The sect is the Jerusalem Church of Christian Jews who venerate their former leader, Jesus the Nazarene and call themselves Nazarenes. One interpretation of Nazarene is "victor" from the Hebrew word "nasach," meaning victory. The Nazarenes in the Greek world of Anatolia translated Nazarene into its Greek equivalent, Nicolaitan, but the believers in salvation by faith usurped this name for themselves and it seems the original Nazarenes abandoned this Greek name to them as a pejorative.

Irenaeus says that a deacon of *Acts*, a Hellenized Jew, one Nicolas of Antioch, founded the sect of Nicolaitans, implying that the sect was named after him. It looks like fake etymology aimed at disguising the truth, and even if there were such a man, he could have been named after the sect to which he belonged—the Nazarene of Antioch. W M Ramsey in *The Seven Churches of Asia*, sees the Nicolaitans as leaning towards Greek rather than Jewish culture, and this must be surely true. According to *Acts*, the division in the ranks of the first Christians was between "Greeks" and "Hebrews" within a few years of the crucifixion. It is not to be thought that "Greeks" meant ethnic Greeks. It meant Hellenized Jews—Jews that had adopted a Greek rather than a Jewish way of life.

In Revelation 2:7, the promise is made to the victorious Ephesians that they will "eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God." In short, they will enter the kingdom of God and be immortal. In Persian mythology, the king of trees is the Haoma, that grows by the Waters of Life, the spring Arduisar, and so has the alternative title of the Death Destroyer. The tree of life occurs in many mythologies: in Hindu it is the Halpasoma; in Arabic, the Tuba; in Greek, the Lotus. In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the fruit of the tree of life feeds the gods. The tree of life usually has twelve different fruits, suggesting its zodiacal and solar origins.

In the Jewish creation myth, the tree of life was on earth. Why then does it only appear later in heaven? The answer comes from the source of the Jewish myth—Persian myth! The original creation of the Good Spirit of Ormuzd was the Good Creation. Only later was it corrupted by the work of the Evil Spirit. Thus the Garden of Eden was on earth but it was an earth uncorrupted by sin—disobedience of God. The eschatological theory of the Essenes was that the world would be created anew but in an uncorruptible form into which all righteous people would be resurrected. Heaven and earth would be united so the heavenly tree of life would again be on earth and the righteous would live forever. The number for heaven was 3 and the number for earth was 4 so the number of the perfect, uncorrupted earth united with heaven was 7. That is why 7 is the number of perfection.

Note: Ephesus had a wonderful harbour but it was destroyed because the trees of its wooded slopes were cut down, leading to soil erosion that silted up the bay. The harbour became a malarial swamp and now the remains of the city are several miles from the sea.

### **Smyrna**

Trouble and poverty are mentioned here, the latter particularly tying in with the Essene valuation of poverty as a virtue (they were Ebionim), but they are rich because they can expect to inherit the kingdom of God (Jas 2:5), which they were plainly waiting patiently for. Then appears an effective admission that the people being addressed are Jews. These poor and troubled people are slandered by "those who say they are Jews, but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." This can only imply that the recipients of the message are Jews, but are not of the synagogue of Satan!

Remarkably, Christian commentators somehow contrive to believe that "those who say they are Jews but are not Jews" really are Jews! If Jews are slandering Christians, why should these Christians insinuate that they are not really Jews, as if real Jews were much nicer people who would not go around slandering Christians. The rationale these commentators give is that the Christians thought of themselves as the real Jews, just as they think of themselves as the true Israel. The later claim is explicable because the Essenes considered themselves as the true Israel—the righteous remnant of Israel—and this belief passed on to the inheritors of Essene tradition, the gentile Christians.

The only reason these people could have for thinking of themselves as Jews is that they were Jews. Christianity had not as yet separated from the Jerusalem church, but what we read here is that process in process. The sect promoted by Paul, according to Christian bibles, were people who adopted the Jewish sacred writings but rejected the law of Moses and circumcision. They therefore pretended to be Jews but were not because obedience to the law was the criterion of Jewish righteousness.

Paul does exactly this when he says that circumcision is not the symbol of Judaism, a Jew is Jewish from the heart (Rom 2:28-29), and that Christians are the true circumcision (Phil 3:3). He is unilaterally denying the criteria of Jewishness commanded by God himself and plainly no Jew could accept his revision of the law as re-defining Jewishness. Paul's Christians were pretending to be Jews, and Christianity came out of Paulinism, the rejection of the Jewish law in favour of faith in Jesus. Paul's followers were the ones who pretended to be Jews but were not. Who then were the recipients of this message? They were the Jewish faithful of the Jerusalem Church.

A synagogue now is thought of as a Jewish sacred building but it really means a congregation or assembly of people. Only by association have buildings been called by the same name because the assembly was customarily held there. Nor apparently was it Jewish in general at this time because Philo says categorically that it was an Essene word! They coined it as a description of the "sacred spots" where they sat on the sabbath to listen to readings. This is remarkable evidence for Christianity being a branch of Essenism because the word occurs many times in the New Testament, especially the gospels but occurs only once in the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures. Since most Christian and Jewish scholars claim the notion goes back to exilic times or even earlier, it seems remarkable that the Greek word for it only was invented AD.

Naturally, non-Essenic Jews had their own assemblies and communal buildings, but they seem to have been called other names, often simply a house. The words Philo uses for meetings of Jews, other than Essenes, are "proseukteria" and "proseuchai," but "scholars" habitually translate these as synagogue! It seems likely that since most diaspora Jews were Essenes who had specific rules for dealing with commerce with gentiles, the word became associated with Jews in general by non-Jews. When the Essenic Jews split from the Christians, the gentile churches rejected the word in favour of the Greek, "ecclesia." The Jews who remained non-Christian gradually abandoned the apocalyptic sect for the Rabbinic faith, but retained the popular word for a Jewish convention.

The prison into which some of them will be thrown is obviously death—physical death—but their reward will be that they shall not be hurt by the "second death" but will receive the "crown of life" (Jas 1:12). The Smyrnans are being told not to fear death because they will avoid the "second death," the soul being destroyed for good in a lake of boiling sulphur—the fate of the wicked in the Persian religion—the first death merely being physical death. Having avoided permanent death they will therefore receive the "crown of life," the "stephanos" or garland or crown of victory such as are won by victors in war or the games. Once again there is an implication of reward for a victory in conflict. A crown of authority is the "diadema" preferred by Popes.

### **Pergamum**

In *Revelation 2;12*, the Watcher is identified with the angel Michael, a personification of Yehouah—the one who has the two edged sword meaning God's judgement.

It is hard to maintain that Satan's throne was Pergamum. Satan in *Revelation* is the Roman empire or emperor, and one would expect Satan's throne to have been Rome itself. This hints that the original names of the churches, or some of them, have been changed. The motive in this case is that Rome soon became the centre of gentile Christianity and calling it "Satan's Throne" can hardly have endeared them to their hosts.

On the other hand "my witness, my faithful one" was killed among them where Satan dwells, which rather says that Jerusalem was meant because the faithful witness in *Revelation 1:5* is Christ. The mention of Antipas also suggests Palestine, if it means the Herodian king. The throne of Satan in Palestine would properly have been Caesarea, but the polluted temple priesthood of Jerusalem supported by their Roman masters might have been meant. The meaning of Pergamum as a marriage might suggest Jerusalem too, as the place where God and his betrothed, Israel, would join in wedlock.

The Pergamumites are praised for holding fast and not denying their faith but are criticised because some hold to the teachings of Balaam. Sins of fornication and consuming meat sacrificed to idols are euphemisms for apostasy, and appear for the third time to be a warning against the machinations of the Nicolaitans trying to lure the faithful into falsehoods. Indeed, in verse 2:15, the Nicolaitans are mentioned specifically but it looks like a copyist's clarification of the sins of Balaam.

Curiously, in the Talmud, the rabbis explain to us, Jesus is meant by Balaam. They had to use this as one of the code names for Jesus because the Christians would otherwise have burnt their books of oral law. In the scriptures, Balaam was a mercenary prophet hired by a foreign king, Balak of Moab, to cause trouble for the Israelites, persuading them into apostasy. The implication is that Jesus did just the same by luring honest Jews into apostasy. Now, here, according to our surmise, the faithful are themselves Jewish followers of Jesus in the Jerusalem Church. How could they then label Jesus as Balaam? Of course, they did not, but they saw the Jesus taught by the Nicolaitans as being Balaam, a false Jesus, and this was the Jesus that eventually became the god of Christianity.

Alternatively, Balaam might have meant Paul, the self-styled apostle to the gentiles. Then the Jews of the Nazarene Church meant by Balaam, Paul, but later the rabbis compiling the Talmud took Jesus himself to be meant. Paul tells Christians (1 Cor 10:27-29) not to quibble about meat as long as they do not know its source, and only to refuse it, when told its source was idolatry, merely to please their informer. Paul is in the role of Balaam in this and in encouraging other violations of the law. Paul's Nicolaitan Christians would not burn incense to an emperor once a year, but would eat meat dedicated to a false god as long as no one told them!

In his *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, H A Ironside says the Nicolaitans had replaced the brotherhood of the first Christians by a hierarchy of figures of authority. Judging by the Pauline writings and the subsequent development of the church

that is true and shows that the Nicolaitans were the heresy that spawned Christianity. The Pergamumites were warned to repent of this apostasy or suffer the sword of judgement.

The promise to the victors of Pergamum is "Manna," which seems to be associated with some Jewish apocalyptic traditions, as this one where it must stand for the bread of life that equals immortality, and a white stone with a "new name" inscribed upon it known only to him who receives it. One wonders whether these Jewish Christians carried a white stone as a token of membership. White stones symbolized momentous days and were given to a victor, in the games, for example, giving him some civic privileges. Was the white stone symbolic of the victors—those who had won the victory over the Romans at Jerusalem—the Nazarenes? White stones were also used as amulets and as tickets to temple feasts, perhaps signifying entry to the messianic feast for Essenes. The stone would be blank because Yehouah's name is ineffable, but the righteous would be able to see it when they entered God's kingdom.

### **Thyatira**

The message to the Thyatirans also comes from Michael, the angel of God, because part of his description is given. Christians, with typical inconsistency, assume this fearsome figure is Jesus.

They are commended for their works including their patient endurance once more, but also apparently because they are improving, their "latter works exceeding the first," though perhaps it is being ironic and means they show more patient endurance than love and faith.

Their criticism however is just as before, apostasy blamed here on a temptress called Jezebel. Christian commentators like to ponder on what this woman got up to, just as they do with the wife of Hosea, but she is, like Balaam, a scriptural figure whose name represents apostasy whether or not any real woman got up to any sexual peccadilloes. In *Timothy 2:2*, Paul forbids women as leaders of the church, but the implications of the ban is that some women had been leaders, and his own acts and epistles place some women in evangelical roles.

Christian commentators suggest that Jezebel might have been the Lydia converted by Paul (*Acts 16:14-15*), though Lydia might simply have been a personification of the place. However, Lydia was supposed to have been a business woman and the scriptural Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, when she married Ahab, improved commercial relationships between Israel and Phoenicia, benefiting all. From the parallel, it seems the Thyatirans were being tempted into apostasy from the commercial advantages to be gained—yet nothing justified apostasy.

Jezebel, those tempted by her and children are threatened with severe punishments—indeed the children would be struck dead! The Christian bible threatens innocent children with death! Explain that, Christians. Let me save you the bother—children here means followers ("sons") just as in the gospels it means children of Israel, not infants, as Christian mythmakers love to pretend. Christian commentators realize the meaning here, but blindly and obstinately will not recognise that the children of the gospels are just as adult.

Finally, the Thyatirans that have resisted these temptations are commended by the Watcher for not learning the "deep things of Satan," "as they say." A popular expression seems to have been used, but it implies mysteries, and the popular religions in the empire at the time were mystery religions. Of course, the Essenes were fond of expressions like the mysteries of God, by which they will have meant heavenly secrets of the apocalypse and its signs, but they will have looked upon the mystery religions with disdain. Paul on the other hand effectively promoted Jesus as a dying and rising God, albeit one who died and rose once and for all (but then is celebrated annually as if it happened every year, making it functionally identical to its Pagan equivalents). Thus, the message of the Watcher is probably not merely of the mystery religions but of the use of Greek mystery symbolism in this Jewish faith—the very thing that Paul did and one guesses the Nicolaitans were doing. The faithful were urged to hold fast until the Watcher appeared with the hosts of heaven.

The promise to the righteous Thyatirans was to have power over the nations, to be able to rule them with a rod of iron. The belief was that the kingdom of God was a Jewish kingdom in which the righteous Jews would have authority over all the nations of the world. Here follows an interpolation that identifies the Watcher, hitherto the angel of God (God himself as Michael, leader of the hosts of heaven), but now equated with Jesus as son of God.

A final reward is the morning star, evidently a messianic symbol, from the Star Prophecy of *Numbers*. The Essenes daily heralded the rising sun and must have been familiar with the brilliance and wonder of the morning star rising before the sun itself as if it were itself the herald of the sun, as the messiah was the herald of God's kingdom of light.

### **Sardis**

The voice of God continues its messages. It says that Sardis has the name of being alive though it is dead. Yet Sardis does not mean alive, it means a remnant or escapers. perhaps the remnant is identified with the remnant of Israel that always escapes God's retribution to keep righteousness alive in the world. "Remnant" was certainly a word the Essenes used of themselves, and they as the perfect and the righteous would gain eternal life rather than eternal death. The implication therefore could be that this church had become arrogant. Since the Essenes valued humility, this was a mortal sin.

*Revelation 3:2* warns them they are on the point of death, meaning everlasting death, because their works were not perfect in the presence of God. The command is not "Awake!" but "Watch!" The Essenes also had a name for themselves meaning the Watchers because they watched for the coming of the kingdom. The members of this church are warned to remember what they had been taught and to repent. Then they are reminded to Watch! otherwise God would come like a thief in the night and they would not know when—the coming of the kingdom would pass them by.

The worthy ones in Sardis, and there are a few, would wear **white** and would walk with God. The Essenes took care to wear spotlessly clean garments. It seems here that soiling their garments was a metaphor for sinning, but those who kept their garments clean would enter God's kingdom. Thus the reward to the victors of Sardis was to walk in white, not to have their name blotted

from the Book of Life and instead to have them declared before God and the angels. The Book of Life is from the Persian religion and came with Judaism from the Persian administrators, Nehemiah and Ezra. The names of people are listed in it with their good deeds and their bad deeds so that they can be weighed in judgement, though sometimes the deeds are supposed to be in another book. If the bad deeds outweigh the good deeds the name is blotted out. In *Exodus 32:32*, all Israelites are in it. The Essenes restricted Israel to the righteous ones only, supposing that unrighteous people could not be in it even if they were Israelites.

### **Philadephia**

Anouncing the message to the members of the church of Philadelphia, the Watcher declares himself to be the holy one and the true one, titles of God, according to a later verse (6:10) in *Revelation* when the martyred saints call out to God as "Sovereign Lord, holy and true." He also declares he has the key of David able to open that no one shall shut and shut that no one can open. The reference is to *Isaiah 22:22* where it is said of Eliakim whose key admitted people to the king. Plainly the gates of the kingdom of God is meant.

The people of this church which means the loving brotherhood are highly commended because the gates are left open for them, for even though they have little power they have remained true. Indeed, in verse 3:10, they are promised that they would not even have to suffer the trial to come. In Persian myth, the judgement consists of the earth being melted in molten metal—evidently the baptism of fire of the gospels. The coming was still awaited with patient endurance because of its evident delay, but this brotherhood would not need to bother. The trial is, of course, described in detail later in *Revelation*.

Those of the synagogue of Satan—those who say they are Jews but are not—are introduced again but in the context of them being made to worship at the feet of these righteous brothers. Here the description of the synagogue of Satan adds that "they lie"—lie being a popular word in the Qumran scrolls, the Essenes, from Persian religion, being keen to avoid falsehoods and deceit.

The reward of the victors is to be pillars of God's temple when it descends to earth at the renewal of the earth. They will be slaves of God because they will be bearing his name and the name of the New Jerusalem. The Essenes thought the New Jerusalem would be to the east of the old one, just where they made their own city at what we know today as Qumran. The passage seems to have been slightly Christianized, unless Michael has a different persona from God himself.

### **Laodicea**

In the message to the Laodicians, the Watcher declares himself to be "The Amen," the true one, a name of God according to *Isaiah 65:16*, where we meet the God of truth repeated. The other titles look like Christianizations.

A severe criticisms is reserved for these people because they are indifferent and so are rejected by God ("spewed from his mouth"). They are rich and prosperous but will be as if poor, blind and naked. They are therefore told to buy the gold of God, the white garments of the righteous Essenes and an eyesalve because the Essenes used the metaphor of blindness of denial of their beliefs (the source of many misunderstood cures for blindness in the gospels). This dislike of the rich and reversal of their fortunes in God's justice is typically Essenic.

They are advised to correct these defects, be zealous and repent because God was at the gates of the kingdom ready to admit the righteous to a knock. Those who are admitted will eat with God—the messianic meal of the Essenes. The reward for the victors of this church is to sit next to God on His throne.

These last two groups seem to be opposite ends of the spectrum of commitment. The loving brotherhood and the indifferent people. It suggests that, notwithstanding the names of the churches matching known places in Anatolis, the targets are really people standing for degrees of support for the Essenic cause. Possibly the original document was a categorization of the children of Israel in relationship to righteousness as seen by the Essenes, but in mid-first century was applied to Jewish Christians in the diaspora when the opportunity was taken to cast a few aspersions on their main opponents of that time, the Nicolaitans.

Elsewhere, I noted that descriptions of the Pharisees from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds divide them into seven different types as a warning against various forms of mistaken piety. One suspects that originally this categorization in the seven letters was a similar idea, but identifying them with specific churches has hidden the truth that they were probably how the Essenes saw Israel, ranging from themselves, the perfect, to the indifferent majority.

### **Conclusion**

Read properly, the letters to the seven churches offers an important insight into the division of Christianity from Judaism. It is from the same school as the epistle of James, placing its emphasis on works rather than faith, and it criticises those who are tempted, mainly by the Nicolaitans, into apostasy, signified in typically Jewish ways by fornication and eating food dedicated to false gods. If the Nicolaitans are the Hellenized Jews, like Paul, who were changing the nature of the original Essene beliefs, then these letters are meant to buttress the faithful against the apostates.

The reason for the temptation is also clear. The patience of the faithful is wearing thin because the kingdom of God was late. When it did not appear as Jesus expected in the Garden of Gethsemane, and instead Jesus was crucified, the faith of the Nazarenes was only preserved by the disappearance of Jesus's corpse, leading them to think that he had been resurrected into the kingdom as the first fruits of the dead—the first of the righteous to enter the uncorruptible kingdom of God.

Despite their apparent defeat by the Romans who returned to wrest Jerusalem out of Nazarene hands, God had noted their initial loyalty and had opened the doors of the kingdom wide enough to admit the first of the saints, Jesus himself. The cosmic battle between the heavenly hosts and the Satanic hosts would now rage for a final forty years until the leading angel, the angel of God himself, Michael, would lead the hosts to earth to defeat Satan in his final abode, and throw open the gates of heaven to the righteous of earth when earth united with heaven.

The forty years had passed and the faithful were despairing—their faith was being sorely tried. But a subset of the Nazarenes, calling themselves Nicolaitans in Greek, blamed the failure of the hosts to return precisely on this waning faith. They taught that salvation depended, not on good works throughout your life, but on faith in Jesus crucified.

Some leader of the Jerusalem Church tried to rally its members by writing these letters to counter the apostate teachings, perhaps basing it on an earlier work of categorization of Jews. It failed and the apostate Nicolaitans succeeded to form Christianity.

At some later point, another thirty or so years later, the letters were dug out and added to an Essene apocalypse to form the *Book of Revelation*. An editor updated it slightly, rounding off a suitable beginning and a suitable conclusion and adding clearer and more specific references to their new god. Because it refers to future judgement, meaning at the end of the world as we know it, it was declared to be prophetic and ever since has produced endless fanciful and, soon to be disproved, ravings by various Christian lunatics who thought they could see prophecy fulfilled in it. Whether they are frauds or deranged, these people should be ignored except for amusement.

Instead, the letters should be seen as historical documents addressed to followers of the original Jewish Christian faith and even to those who did not care less about it. The latter were surely to be condemned but at the other end of the spectrum, the loving brotherhood would surely inherit God's kingdom. Between there were various types of people subject to temptation, but among them all were those who remained loyal. These faithful victors would be rewarded with eternal life while apostates would suffer and die forever.

### **Letter to Seven Churches Restored**

This restoration simply takes the letter to the churches from the book of Revelation and shows it as it might have been as a separate work. Though it might have been based on an original Palestine categorization of types of Jew, no attempt is made to restore this document. So, we read here the document as it was modified for circulation to Jewish Christian churches in the diaspora warning against the temptation to follow the Pauline line of the Nicolaitans.

1:4 John to the seven churches from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loves us, 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. 1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

1:9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and in patience. 1:10 I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

1:12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; 1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. 1:14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. 1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 2:3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein my faithful martyr was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

2:19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

2:24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. 2:25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

2:26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 2:27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. 2:28 And I will give him the morning star.

2:29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before the angels.

3:6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 3:9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

3:13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

3:15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.

3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.