



### Church in Ephesus

Ephesus was a significant city known for its agora, which served as a marketplace and gathering place. At the entrance to the agora was an incense burner; to enter, one had to burn incense in honor of the emperor. Ephesus was home to 14 temples, the most renowned Temple of Artemis, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Artemis was the goddess of fertility, and rituals performed in her honor included orgies and acts of castration.

Emperor Domitian erected a 50-foot-tall statue, and all citizens were required to worship him. Revelation 2:4 states, "You have abandoned the love you had at first." The Nicolaitans were nominal believers who blended Greek religious practices with Christianity, and this compromise was viewed as a path to spiritual downfall. The Tree of Life in Ephesus also symbolizes fertility.

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### Church in Smyrna

Smyrna was a thriving city in the 1st century, located in the port of Izmir. Rebuilt by Alexander the Great around 600 BC, it was a city that was once dead but brought back to life. Smyrna held exclusive rights to the exports and imports of myrrh, which was used in burial practices. Tribulations faced by the city meant to crush, press together, squash, hem in, and compress. The inhabitants experienced poverty, slander (due to the anti-family

actions associated with orgies and cannibalism), imprisonment, and even death in horrific ways, as exemplified by Polycarp. Despite these challenges, the Christians were reminded, “But you are rich” because they had Jesus. The crown served as a symbol of victory for the city, which Jesus promised to give them.

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### Pergamum

Pergamum was filled with many temples dedicated to the gods of Rome and Greece. Attalus III gifted it to Rome on his deathbed. The city was agriculturally rich, and Alexander the Great's conquests prepared the way for the gospel by establishing a common language. Every major deity had a temple in Pergamum, with Zeus being the chief god (king of kings), along with Asklepios, the god of healing—whose symbol of snakes is still used in hospitals today—and Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Pergamum was referred to as "where Satan's throne is," and it had Antipas, the Bishop of Pergamum. The Nicolaitans, associated with Balaam, were criticized for their compromise, which Jesus said, "I hate." For those who overcome, He promised to give them manna from heaven, as well as a white stone with a name on it that no one else knows.

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### Thyatira

Thyatira was originally founded by Alexander the Great as a military garrison. His soldiers worshipped the god Apollo, who was often called the son of God. The town was average but prosperous due to its commodities, particularly textiles. The local water was rich in minerals, enabling the production of vibrant red textiles that were unmatched elsewhere. Lydia, who met Paul and provided hospitality, was a seller of purple goods from Thyatira (Acts 16:12-15). Society in Thyatira revolved around guilds, akin to labor unions, and occasionally, guild gatherings were held in the temple of Apollo, during which orgies took place. Workers were pressured to attend such events, risking their jobs if they declined. Jesus addressed a prophetess referred to as "Jezebel," indicating an intellectual but misguided influence tied to the temple of Apollo.

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### Church in Sardis

Sardis was once part of an ancient Persian Kingdom but was liberated by Alexander the Great in 340 B.C. The city was central to the worship of Artemis in a polytheistic environment. Jewish believers and Gentiles from pagan backgrounds met in homes for fellowship. Jesus spoke to them, saying, “You look alive, but you are dead,” warning that He would come like a thief in the night, and they would not know the hour. The residents of

Sardis chose to merely coexist, avoiding the proclamation that Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life as they sought “peace.”

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### Philadelphia

Philadelphia was a prosperous city until it was struck by an earthquake in 17 A.D. The residents enjoyed a five-year exemption from taxes but felt neglected by the Emperor. Domitian destroyed their vineyards in favor of promoting Rome's vineyard interests, leaving the people feeling betrayed—especially the early Christians who had also been expelled from the synagogues. Jesus proclaimed, "I hold the keys of David; I have the Authority. I can open the doors that no man can shut and shut the doors that no man can open." He encouraged them to hold fast, promising, "I will make you a pillar in my Father's house." Notably, Philadelphia was the only church that Jesus did not correct.

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### Laodicea

Laodicea thrived due to its strategic location along major trade routes and was renowned for its eye medicine, which attracted many customers. After an earthquake, the city prospered and declined aid from Rome. However, it faced a water shortage and constructed aqueducts to supply water, which unfortunately turned out to be mineral-laden and unpleasant to drink.

In contrast, the nearby town of Colossae had refreshing mountain water, while Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs. When Jesus referred to being "hot or cold," He urged the people to be helpful like their neighbors rather than be comparable to their unpleasant lukewarm water. He pointed out their complacency by stating, "Because you say that you are wealthy and have prospered, and you have need of nothing." This serves as a reminder of the critical tests of faith and character, reminiscent of the challenges faced by Abraham.