

Handout: Revelation Lesson 2



I, John, your brother and partner in hardships, in the kingdom and in perseverance in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos on account of the Word of God and of witness in Jesus (Rev 1:9).

The Roman government exiled St. John to the Island of Patmos because of his apostolic activity. Patmos is one of the Sporades Islands in the Aegean Sea off the western coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It is a rocky, crescent-shaped, volcanic island ten miles long and six miles wide at its widest point. John's punishment was consistent with the Roman custom of banishing political prisoners to islands (Pliny, *Natural History*, 4.69-70; Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.30).

Write down in a book all that you see, and send it to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev 1:11).

Ephesus was the largest and most important city in Asia Minor and, according to the Greek geographer/historian Strabo (c 64 BC-AD 23), the second most important city in the Roman Empire (only Rome was more influential). It was the center of Roman culture and influence in Asia, a center for trade and learning, and it was the city of St. John's

home church. The Greeks gave it the name “mouth of Asia” because the world of the West seemed to pour through Ephesus on the way eastward.

Smyrna had an excellent harbor and was surrounded by fertile farmland. Its location on the coast at the end of a major east-west road made it a trading center. The city’s leaders were loyal to Rome and in 195 BC built a temple dedicated to the worship of Roma, the goddess of Rome.

Pergamum was about 60 miles to the north of Smyrna and 15 miles inland from the coast. Ephesus may have been the largest and most important trading center in the Roman province of Asia, but Pergamum dominated the other cities because it was the administrative capital. The Roman governor resided at Pergamum and ruled the entire Asian province, making Pergamum one of the three most prominent cities in the region along with Ephesus and Smyrna. Pergamum was a sophisticated city and a center of Greek culture and education with a 200,000-volume library known and admired throughout the ancient world. It was also the center of four pagan cults and rivaled Ephesus in its worship of idols.

Thyatira (modern Akhisar, Turkey) was 35 miles southeast of Pergamum. The businesswoman Lydia, the seller of purple textiles converted by St. Paul, was from this city (Acts 16:14-15). Known for the dominance its trade guilds over the local economy, every business in Thyatira was strictly controlled by the powerful guilds. To work in any trade, one had to belong to the guild of that trade and to belong to a guild was integrally connected with the pagan religions that were approved by the Roman government.

Situated at the junction of five roads, Sardis was a wealthy commercial center. Severely damaged by an earthquake in AD 17, Roman Emperor Tiberius generously rebuilt the city, and the people of Sardis were immensely grateful. The city’s loyalty to the Roman Empire reflected their gratitude.

Located at the crossroads of the approach to the Roman provinces of Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia, the city of Philadelphia, was called the “gateway to the East” because the city’s prosperity came from its strategic position as a center of trade and because of its grape and wine-producing industry. As was fitting for a center of wine production, Philadelphia was center of worship of the Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and fertility (and every other kind of excess) but the city also had many other temples devoted to pagan gods.

Laodicea was at the junction of the Lycus and Maeander valleys and the intersection of three major Roman highways. The city’s strategic position helped to make it one of the wealthiest commercial and financial centers in the Roman Empire. It was famous for its local black wool, which helped to make the city a textile manufacturing center. Laodicea was also known for its medical school and for an eye salve that was famous throughout the Roman world. In addition to the city’s great wealth, Laodicea had one of the largest Jewish populations in Roman Asia.

A comparison between the visions of the “man” in Daniel and John’s vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:13-14:

Revelation	Daniel
<p><i>in the middle of them, one like a Son of man, dressed in a long robe tied at the waist with a belt of gold (Rev 1:13).</i></p>	<p><i>I was gazing into the visions of the night when I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven, as it were a son of man (Dan 7:13a).</i></p> <p><i>A man dressed in linen, with a belt of pure gold round his waist (Dan 10:6a).</i></p>
<p><i>His head and his hair were white with the whiteness of wool, like snow, his eyes like a burning flame, 15 his feet like burnished bronze when it has been refined in a furnace, and his voice like the sound of the ocean [many waters] (Rev 1:14).</i></p>	<p><i>His robe was white as snow, the hair of his head was as white as pure as wool (Dan 7:9b).</i></p> <p><i>His body was like beryl, his face looked like lightning, his eyes were like fiery torches, his arms and his face had the gleam of burnished bronze; the sound of his voice was like the roar of a multitude (Dan 10:6bc).</i></p>

Jesus identifies Himself to John by seven titles in Chapter 1:

1. faithful witness (1:5)
2. firstborn from the dead (1:5)
3. highest of earthly kings (1:5)
4. Alpha and Omega (1:8)
5. Son of man (1:13)
6. First and the Last (1:17)
7. Living one (1:17)

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