

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!

"Christ as the Ancient of Days and His Letter to Ephesus"

Lord's Day Morning

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Sermon Text: Revelation 2:1-7

Introduction

The book of Daniel, parts of which are apocalyptic in nature, just as is The Revelation – lies behind many of the images we meet in this last book of the Bible. This is a very, very important interpretive tool to get hold of when studying The Revelation.

We found this to be so before we had completed the very first chapter of Revelation. The risen Christ in His glory appears to John and John describes Him as *One like the Son of Man*. That title, as we saw, is derived from the Lord Jesus' favorite

designation of Himself, and it comes from Daniel chapter 7 –

NKJ Daniel 7:13 " I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.

The eternal kingdom and reign of the Son of Man is also seen in King Nebuchadnezzar's first vision, recorded in the second chapter of Daniel -

NKJ Daniel 2:31 " You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome.

32 "This image's head was of fine gold,
its chest and arms of silver,
its belly and thighs of bronze,
33 "its legs of iron,
its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

34 "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

36 " This *is* the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king.

37 "You, O king, *are* a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 "and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given *them* into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all -- you are this head of gold. 39 "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior

to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 "And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. 41 "Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. 42 "And as the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. 43 "As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

44 "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. 45 "Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold -- the great God has made known to the king what will come to

pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

And the King of this eternal kingdom, established by the God of heaven, is none other than the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there is still another allusion to Daniel in John's description of Christ –

NKJ Revelation 1:14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire;

Comparing this to Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days –

NKJ Daniel 7:8 "I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.

9 " I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; 10 A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to

Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened. 11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. 12 "As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

13 " I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.

NKJ Daniel 7:21 "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, 22 "until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made *in favor* of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom. 23 " Thus he said:

'The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all *other* kingdoms, And shall devour the whole earth, Trample it and break it in pieces.

Here in Daniel, the Ancient of Days is God the Father. In Revelation 1:14, the One with hair as white as wool and snow is the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Here then we see the deity of Christ in His identification with the essence of the Father.

So we must always remember *Daniel* as we study The Revelation. We will meet *beasts* who will also hearken us back to Daniel's visions and we will find help in Daniel as we work to interpret John's visions.

Clothed With a Garment

Before moving on to the first letter which addresses the church at Ephesus, we should make a comment concerning one aspect of Christ's appearance to John –

NKJ Revelation 1:13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

We said last time that we will deal with the details of Christ's appearance

in this vision to John as we move through the letters to the 7 churches. Christ emphasizes particular aspects of His appearance to each of the churches. But His garment is not mentioned later, so we should say something about it here.

Where else in the Scriptures do we find someone *clothed with a garment down to the feet, girded about the chest?*

NKJ Exodus 28:4 "And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest.

NKJ Exodus 29:9 "And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.

Christ is, in other words, dressed as the great High Priest. And so He is.

But something even more striking leaps out at us if we go back to the tenth chapter of – guess which book – *Daniel*:

NKJ Daniel 10:1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision. 2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

4 Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that *is*, the Tigris, 5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! 6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

7 And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. 8 Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me,

and I retained no strength. 9 Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.

10 Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and *on* the palms of my hands. 11 And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. 12 Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

14 "Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come."

15 When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. 16 And suddenly, *one*

having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. 17 "For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me." 18 Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. 19 And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!" So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." 20 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. 21 "But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince.

The parallels in The Revelation are obvious. The Son of Man is the same One who appeared to Daniel so long before. He encourages John just as He did Daniel –

NKJ Revelation 1:17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.

But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.

Dr. Edward Young makes this same conclusion –

"The Jews were wont to identify this figure with an angel. Others consider him to be Michael. However, the description seems to indicate that the majestic Person here presented is none other than the Lord Himself. The revelation therefore is a theophany, a preincarnate appearance of the eternal Son. This is proved by the very similar description (Rev 1:13-15) of the One whom John sees walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."
[Daniel, Banner of Truth]

This is our Lord Jesus Christ, our King. He really is *the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.* Without beginning, without end. He is not merely present at the beginning and at the end – *He is the One who preceded the beginning and effected the beginning of all things and Who brings the end of all things to the very point declared by the Father.*

Seal the Book/Do not Seal it

Let me point out one other very crucial fact that comes to us by comparing

The Revelation with Daniel. Here it is

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In Daniel, the fulfillment of the visions is *many days yet to come*. But in The Revelation, *the time is near*.

For instance -

NKJ Daniel 12:4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

NKJ Revelation 22:10 And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.

The time. The Church age. The last hour. It began at Christ's ascension. The end of the age is at hand, it is near. In fact, His kingdom is here now.

Well, there are the preliminaries! Let's move on now to the first of the seven letters, the letter to the church at Ephesus.

I. To the Angel of the Church at Ephesus 2:1-7

Last time we heard the argument for these "angels" of the individual churches being the pastor/overseer of each church. But not everyone makes this conclusion (remember, the Greek word 'angelos' can mean messenger or

angel). Listen to Dennis Johnson's position –

"Others believe that each church's angel is its pastor, whom Jesus holds responsible for the church's spiritual condition. This is more plausible [ie, than the conclusion that the messengers are 7 messengers who will carry the letters to the seven congregations]...but it still faces two objections. Angels elsewhere in Revelation are always God's superhuman messengers, consistent with the word's usual meaning in the rest of the New Testament. And, although in the letters Jesus usually addresses each angel as a single individual, he sometimes switches to the plural forms of 'you' in addressing the angel of a church (see 2:10; 2:13).

"Probably Jesus is evoking in John's mind the picture of guardian angels charged with protecting the people of God and bringing his messages to them, such as the angel sent to Daniel, who reports having been delayed by 'the prince of the kingdom of Persia' for twenty-one days." [Triumph of the Lamb].

Whichever position we take in respect to the meaning of "angel," the message of these epistles is meant for Christ's Church, and this first one is directed to the historic church in the city of Ephesus.

The City of Ephesus

Now, we are going to find that a proper understanding of these letters largely rests in being aware of certain cultural and geographic facts concerning each one of the seven cities. So let's begin with a consideration of what we know about ancient Ephesus.

A. Biblical Data

1. Acts 18 & 19; 20:28-31

From these chapters, we learn these things about the city and about the beginnings of the church there –

- This church had enjoyed GREAT benefits. Apollos – a man *eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures* – had preached there. The Apostle Paul had an extensive ministry there, paying the city a brief visit (Acts 18) and then returning to preach for at least 2 years and 3 months! *Daily!* "So that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus."
- God validated Paul's Apostolic ministry by working miracles through him. The sick were cured – even by just touching a

cloth that Paul had touched! Evil spirits were cast out.

- "...fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."
- The city had a large occult following, but even many of these people believed in Christ and came "confessing and telling their deeds." Former magic practitioners brought their books together publicly and burned them, *"so the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."*
- Ephesus was a center of idolatry – the very economy was wrapped up in the worship of Artemis/Diana. The myth goes that Diana's image had fallen down from Zeus. This Diana cult was such a fortress that when the gospel threatened it, the people rioted, screaming "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"
- The last time Paul saw the Ephesians, he called the elders together at Miletus and *gave them a personal charge to watch over the flock, guarding them from the savage wolves which would surely arise.*

2. 1 Corinthians 15:32

NKJ 1 Corinthians 15:32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

Paul may be speaking figuratively here, or he may mean real beasts – lions in the arena? But this is clear – it cost something to be a Christian in Ephesus. Ephesus was a battleground between the City of God and the City of Man.

3. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

- This church at Ephesus was the recipient of one of the greatest letters in the New Testament. It was hand-delivered to them by Paul's own messenger.
- This is the letter in which we find direction for doing battle with the devil, putting on the armor of God.

4. 1 & 2 Timothy

- Paul left Timothy at Ephesus as an evangelist/pastor, writing two epistles to him to direct him in his work.

B. Extra-Biblical Data

EPHESUS - One of the largest and most impressive cities in the ancient world, a political, religious, and commercial center in Asia Minor. The ancient city of Ephesus, located in western Asia Minor at the mouth of the Cayster River, was an important seaport. Situated between the Maeander River to the south and the Hermus River to the north, Ephesus had excellent access to both river valleys which allowed it to flourish as a commercial center. Due to the accumulation of silt deposited by the river, the present site of the city is approximately five to six miles inland.

The earliest inhabitants of Ephesus were a group of peoples called Leleges and Carians who were driven out around 1000 B.C. by Ionian Greek settlers led by Androclus of Athens. The new inhabitants of Ephesus assimilated the native religion of the area, the worship of a goddess of fertility whom they identified with the Greek goddess Artemis, the virgin huntress. (Later the Romans identified Artemis with their goddess Diana.)

Around 560 B.C. Croesus of Lydia conquered Ephesus and most of western Asia Minor. Under Croesus' rule, the city was moved farther south and a magnificent temple, the Artemision, was constructed for the worship of Artemis. In 547 B.C., following the defeat of Croesus by

Cyrus of Persia, Ephesus came under Persian control. Disaster struck the city in 356 when fire destroyed the Artemision.

Alexander the Great, who was reportedly born on the same day as the Artemision fire, took over the area in 334 B.C. His offer to finance the ongoing reconstruction of the temple was diplomatically declined. The rebuilt temple, completed about 250 B.C., became known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Under the Romans, Ephesus thrived, reaching the pinnacle of its greatness during the first and second centuries of the Christian era. At the time of Paul, Ephesus was probably the fourth largest city in the world, with a population estimated at 250,000. During the reign of the emperor Hadrian, Ephesus was designated the capital of the Roman province of Asia. The grandeur of the ancient city is evident in the remains uncovered by archaeologists, including the ruins of the Artemision, the civic agora, the temple of Domitian, gymnasiums, public baths, a theater with seating for 24,000, a library, and the commercial agora, as well as several streets and private residences. Also discovered were the head and forearm of a colossal statue of the emperor Domitian. Today the Turkish town of

Seljuk occupies the site of ancient Ephesus. [Holman Bible Dictionary]

Here are some further details –

It is to the temple of Diana, however, that Ephesus' great wealth and prominence are largely due. Like the city, it dates from the time of the Amazons, yet what the early temple was like we now have no means of knowing, and of its history we know little except that it was seven times destroyed by fire and rebuilt, each time on a scale larger and grander than before. The wealthy king Croesus supplied it with many of its stone columns, and the pilgrims from all the oriental world brought it of their wealth. In time the temple possessed valuable lands; it controlled the fisheries; its priests were the bankers of its enormous revenues. Because of its strength the people stored there their money for safe-keeping; and it became to the ancient world practically all that the Bank of England is to the modern world.

Not only was the temple of Diana a place of worship, and a treasure-house, but it was also a museum in which the best statuary and most beautiful paintings were preserved. Among the paintings was one by the famous Apelles, a native of Ephesus, representing Alexander the Great hurling a thunderbolt. It was also a

sanctuary for the criminal, a kind of city of refuge, for none might be arrested for any crime whatever when within a bowshot of its walls. There sprang up, therefore, about the temple a village in which the thieves and murderers and other criminals made their homes. Not only did the temple bring vast numbers of pilgrims to the city, as does the Kaaba at Mecca at the present time, but it employed hosts of people apart from the priests and priestesses; among them were the large number of artisans who manufactured images of the goddess Diana, or shrines to sell to the visiting strangers.

Though Paul was probably not the first to bring Christianity to Ephesus, for Jews had long lived there (2:9; 6:9), he was the first to make progress against the worship of Diana. As the fame of his teachings was carried by the pilgrims to their distant homes, his influence extended to every part of Asia Minor. In time the pilgrims, with decreasing faith in Diana, came in fewer numbers; the sales of the shrines of the goddess fell off; Diana of the Ephesians was no longer great; a Christian church was founded there and flourished, and one of its first leaders was the apostle John.

Finally in 262 AD, when the temple of Diana was again burned, its influence had so far departed that it was never

again rebuilt. Diana was dead. Ephesus became a Christian city, and in 341 AD a council of the Christian church was held there. The city itself soon lost its importance and decreased in population.

In 1863 Mr. J.T. Wood, for the British Museum, obtained permission from the Turkish government to search for the site of the lost temple of Diana. During the eleven years of his excavations at Ephesus, \$80,000 were spent, and few cities of antiquity have been more thoroughly explored. The city wall of Lysimachus was found to be 36,000 ft. in length, enclosing an area of 1,027 acres. It was 10 1/2 ft. thick, and strengthened by towers at intervals of 100 ft. The six gates which pierced the wall are now marked by mounds of rubbish. The sites and dimensions of the various public buildings, the streets, the harbor, and the foundations of many of the private houses were ascertained, and numerous inscriptions and sculptures and coins were discovered.

Search, however, did not reveal the site of the temple until January 1, 1870, after six years of faithful work. Almost by accident it was then found in the valley outside the city walls, several feet below the present surface. Its foundation, which alone remained, enabled Mr. Wood to reconstruct the entire temple plan. The temple was

built upon a foundation which was reached by a flight of ten steps. The building itself was 425 ft. long and 220 ft. wide; each of its 127 pillars which supported the roof of its colonnade was 60 ft. high; like the temples of Greece, its interior was open to the sky. [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia]

letter with this convicting and even ominous title of warning for every believer and every church –

"The Beginning of Decline"

These are the questions that lie before us.

There it is then. A powerful city of the world meeting with the power of the Kingdom of God.

As we leave off this morning, let me challenge every one of us to think very carefully this week about this statement we are going to meet in Christ's letter to the church at Ephesus –

NKJ Revelation 2:4 "Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. 5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent.

What privilege that church had enjoyed! And yet in a relatively few years, it had cooled and left its first love. What does this mean? How could that have been? Would the Lord Jesus say this to us? To me? Have I left my first love? Pastor Hoeksema entitled his chapter on this Ephesian