

# Dating Revelation Based on Laodicea and Smyrna

*By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- April 28, 2013*

## INTRODUCTION:

- A. Thank you for joining us here on *Then and Now* for another look at first century history. In this session, we will be looking at a couple of arguments that futurists use to support their late date for the book of Revelation, based on two of the seven churches of Asia that are mentioned in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.
- B. To be more specific, the futurists use the historical situation of Laodicea and Smyrna, as it is described in Revelation and Church History, to suggest that Revelation could not have been written before AD 70.
- C. We will show here from both Scripture and History, that these two arguments of the futurists simply do not hold up under exegetical and historical scrutiny.
- D. We have a lot of ground to cover in this session, so I will dispense with my usual opening comments and get right into the thick of it. Let's pray:

*Our Heavenly Father, the Only True God, who fills the heavens and our hearts. We praise you for sending your Son to redeem us from our sins. Be with us here in these studies as we look at how You sovereignly and providentially acted in history to build Your Kingdom. Teach us how to seek your kingdom first in our lives, and live in such a way that we bring much glory and honor to You. It is in the Name of Your Son and our Savior Jesus, that we pray. Amen.*

## Two Big Arguments Used By Futurists to Date the Apocalypse in AD 95

The futurists use two main arguments from the seven churches of Asia to late-date the book of Revelation: (1) Laodicea could not have recovered from the earthquake in only two years, and (2) the church in Smyrna did not even exist yet in AD 62.

Both Ken Gentry and Don Preston have done an excellent job of debunking these futurist arguments, and I will share some of their comments here in this lesson. We will easily see that the futurist case for the late date of Revelation is not supported by Scripture, nor defensible historically.

### 1. Laodicea's Quick Recovery From the Earthquake

Several futurist commentary writers (Leon Morris and others) have claimed that the historical conditions of the churches alluded to here in Revelation 2-3 indicate that the Apocalypse was not written until after a long period of development. For instance, Leon Morris uses Rev. 3:17 ("I am rich, and have become wealthy") to make this very point that the church in Laodicea evidently had enjoyed a long period of development during which they became wealthy and lethargic. Leon Morris goes on to say:

"This [long period of development] would scarcely have been possible at the time of the Neronian persecution, the only serious competitor in date to the Domitianic period" [Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969. p. 37]. Mounce, Swete, Kummel, Guthrie, and Beale employ the same argument" [Ken Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 2002. p. 231].

**AD 60 – Earthquake in Laodicea and the Lycus valley**, which affected all seven cities mentioned in Revelation. It is mentioned in Tacitus *Annals* 14:27 (5:151), from which most scholars derive the date of AD 60. However, both Eusebius (*Chronicle* 64) and Orosius from the fourth century suggest that it might have happened after the Great Fire in Rome (i.e., after AD 64). But since Tacitus is the first century historian here, he most likely has the correct date (AD 60). The Roman government offered financial assistance to rebuild their city, but Laodicea was so wealthy that they declined the offer and quickly rebuilt their city without any help from the Roman government. Some of the other nearby cities (such as Colossae, Hierapolis, etc.) evidently took the relief funds from Nero to rebuild. The Laodiceans were very proud of their wealth and self-sufficiency, the very thing for which the book of Revelation reproves them (Rev. 3:17-19). The very fact that Revelation rebukes them for this pride, implies that their proud refusal of the offered assistance occurred recently. If this letter to Laodicea had been written 35 years later, long after they had recovered and a new generation had risen up who had not experienced the earthquake and its recovery, this rebuke would have no potency. The earthquake occurred in AD 60. This letter to them in the book of Revelation was written in late AD 62 (almost two years after they had declined the offer of assistance, and after they had recovered from the quake). Most of the late-daters of Revelation deny that Laodicea (and the other cities) could have recovered this quickly. However, other Roman cities had recovered this soon from similar disasters, and Laodicea was wealthy enough to do it. So this is not a problem for the early date. Ken Gentry deals well with this issue in his excellent book, *Before Jerusalem Fell* (pp. 318-322):

#### **Quotes from Gentry in Before Jerusalem Fell:**

Morris notes that in the Laodicean letter "we are told that the church in Laodicea was 'rich and increased with goods' (3:17). But as the city was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60, this must have been considerably later" (Morris, p. 37). Mounce and Kummel also endorse this observation, a major component of the complex of evidence derived from the seven letters [to the seven churches of Asia]" [Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1998. p. 319].

The idea behind [their] argument is that such a devastating event as an earthquake must necessarily have severe and long term economic repercussions on the community. And in such a community, the minority Christians could be expected to have suffered, perhaps even disproportionately. If Revelation were written sometime in the period from [AD 62-70], it would seem to Morris, Mounce, and others, that the time-frame would be too compressed to allow for the enrichment of the church at Laodicea,

as is suggested in Revelation. But by the time of Domitian a few decades later, such an enrichment of the church would not be difficult to imagine" [Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1998. pp. 319-320].

[Mounce even admits that] "the material wealth of Laodicea is well established. The huge sums taken from Asian cities by Roman officials during the Mithridatic period [beginning 65 BC] and following indicate enormous wealth," [but then Mounce tries to mitigate the impact of that idea upon his late-date argument by saying that] "the wealth claimed by the Laodicean church was not material but spiritual ... the Laodiceans felt they were secure in their spiritual attainment." [Robert H. Mounce. *The Book of Revelation*. New International Commentary on the New Testament, p. 126] Quoted in Gentry, *BJF*, pp. 320-321.

[From Gentry] [If material riches are in view here, as most late-daters allege, then they need to deal with] "...the documented fact of Laodicea's apparently effortless, unaided, and rapid recovery from the earthquake. Tacitus reports that the city did not even find it necessary to apply for an imperial subsidy to help them rebuild, even though such was customary for cities in Asia Minor. As Tacitus records it, Laodicea "arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us" [Tacitus *Annals* 14:27]. This is as clear a statement as is necessary to demonstrate that Laodicea's economic strength was not radically diminished by the quake. Despite the quake, economic resources were so readily available within Laodicea that the city could easily recover itself from the damage. ...Furthermore, it would seem that the time element would not be extremely crucial [since] 'earthquakes were very frequent thereabouts, and rebuilding doubtless followed at once' [F.J.A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John*: I-III. London: Macmillan, 1908. p. xx.]." [Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1998. p. 321]

[From Ed] Both **Strabo** [64 BC - AD 19] and **Dio Cassius** [AD 150-235] support the contention that cities in Asia could, and did, recover very quickly from earthquakes. [Strabo, *Geographica* 12:8.16-18; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54:30]. Cited in Gentry, *BJF*, p. 321n. See quotes below:

[From Ed] **Strabo** says: "16. **Laodiceia**, formerly a small town, has increased in our time, and in that of our ancestors, although it received great injury when it was besieged by Mithridates Eupater; however the **fertility of the soil** and the **prosperity** of some of its citizens have aggrandized it. First, Hiero embellished the city with many offerings, and bequeathed to the people more than 2000 talents; then Zeno the rhetorician, and his son Polemo, were an ornament and support to it; the latter was thought by Antony, and afterwards by Augustus Caesar, worthy even of the rank of king in consequence of his valiant and upright conduct. The country around Laodiceia **breeds excellent sheep**, remarkable not only for the **softness of their wool**, in which they surpass the Milesian flocks, but for their **dark or raven colour**. The Laodiceans **derive a large revenue from them**, as the **Colosseni** do from their flocks, of a colour of the same name. ...the country **abounds with caverns** and is **liable to earthquakes**. For of all the countries **Laodiceia is very subject to earthquakes**, as also the neighboring district Carura. 17.

...Nearly the whole of the country about the Maeander [river], as far as the inland parts, is **subject to earthquakes**, and is undermined by fire and water. For all this **cavernous condition** of the country, beginning from the plains, extends to the Charonia; it exists likewise in Hierapolis, and in Acharaca in the district Nysaeis, also in the plain of Magnesia, and in Myus. ... 18. Phrygia Catacecaumene (i.e., the Burnt), which is occupied by Lydians and Mysians, obtained this name from something of the following kind. In **Philadelphia**, a city adjoining to it, even the walls of the houses are not safe, for nearly every day they are shaken, and crevices appear. The inhabitants are **constantly attentive** to these accidents to which the ground is subject, and **build with a view to their occurrence**. Apameia among other cities experienced ... **frequent earthquakes**, and the king on his arrival, when he saw the overthrow of the city, **gave a hundred talents for its restoration**. It is said that the same thing happened in the time of Alexander. ...For earthquakes overthrew the present Magnesia, which is situated below that mountain, at the time that **Sardis** and other celebrated cities in various parts sustained great injury. [footnote: The number of cities destroyed were twelve, and the catastrophe took place in the night. An inscription relating to this event is still preserved at Naples. Tacitus *Annals* B. ii. c. 47. Seutonius in V. *Tiberii*]. The emperor [Tiberius] gave a **sum of money for their restoration**, as formerly his father [Augustus] had **assisted the Tralliani** on the occurrence of a similar calamity, when the gymnasium and other parts of the city were destroyed; in the same manner he had **assisted also the Laodiceans**." [Strabo, *Geographica* 12:8.16-18. Found here: <http://books.google.ca/books?id=KcdfAAAAMAAJ>]

[From Ed] **Dio Cassius** tells us that Caesar Augustus evidently considered that the average recovery time for those cities in Asia as being about *two years*: "The province of Asia also stood very greatly in need of some assistance on account of **earthquakes**, and [Augustus Caesar] therefore paid into the public treasury from his own resources their annual tribute and assigned them a governor [to manage the rebuilding effort] **for two years**" [Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54:30. Found here: [http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=1478418&pageno=57](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1478418&pageno=57)]

[From Ed] The above quotes from Strabo and Dio Cassius show three things: (1) Earthquakes were very common in the region of Asia Minor and the local residents were well-experienced in dealing with recovery afterwards. (2) They would have begun the recovery effort immediately, since their source of income and maintenance of their wealth depended on it. (3) Dio Cassius indicates how long a normal period of recovery lasted, i.e., about two years.

[From Ed] Gentry makes a good point when he notes that the Laodiceans had every incentive to rebuild quickly in order to restart their wealth-generating engine again. The area had several huge economic advantages which they would not walk away from, knowing that others would immediately come in and seize the opportunity. There was no time to waste. Any delay would have cost them a lot of potential income, especially from the black wool trade, and other profitable agricultural industries in the area. "Simple economic analysis demands that for the resources to survive, rebuilding would

have to be rapid." [Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1998. p. 321]

[From Ed] As we have shown previously in these studies, the book of Revelation was written in late 62, **almost two years after the earthquake** in Laodicea in late 60, thus allowing **enough time for them to have recovered** from it, and already taking **pride in their self-sufficiency by the time John wrote the book of Revelation**. Their recovery was probably quickened by the fact that they did not have to wait for the government to send relief money. They had enough wealth to fully finance their own recovery. So, the rebuilding could have begun immediately and been finished easily within the normal two year time-frame. Their pride in self-recovery would be easy to explain in such a circumstance, thus justifying the rebuke from Jesus in the Apocalypse.

## 2. No Church in Smyrna Before AD 70

[Quote from Gentry] Leon Morris' second evidence from the Seven Letters is that "the church at Smyrna seems not to have been in existence in the days of Paul." [Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969. p. 37. Quoted by Gentry in BJJ, p. 322]. Obviously, if the church mentioned in Revelation 2:8-11 did not exist until after Paul's death it would have to have been founded later than [that]. This would push the dates forward too far to allow any view of Revelation's dating that precedes [AD 70]. This late date objection is founded on the well-known statement in a letter to the church at Philippi by **Polycarp**: "*But I have not found any such thing in you [i.e., the church at Philippi], neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who were his letters in the beginning. For he boasted of you in all those churches which alone at that time knew God; for we knew him not as yet*" [Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 11:3]. Polycarp (c. AD 69-155), bishop of the church at Smyrna, is thought to have been a disciple of John the Apostle. He seems to refer here to the Smyrnan church when he writes "we knew him not as yet." This may mean: our church at Smyrna was not yet founded. R. H. Charles and James Moffatt deem this to be the most substantial of the arguments drawn from the contents of the Seven Letters. [And this argument] has found currency in a host of scholarly works. [Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1998. p. 322-323]

### The Meaning of Polycarp's Statement

[Note from Ed: Part of this verse (11:3) is missing from all the Greek manuscripts, so it has been supplied from the Latin versions. Also, unfortunately there are a couple of textual variations in this verse (11:3) in the Latin, but nothing which affects the meaning significantly. If the Latin text is not an interpolation, as some have alleged, then the meaning is clear: The Smyrneans did not **know God** (or the Lord) at the time Paul was boasting about the generosity of the Philippians "in all the churches which **knew the Lord**." That means that in AD 57-58, at the time when Paul was traveling among the churches on his third journey collecting the Gentile contributions to take to Jerusalem, and boasting of the generosity of the Philippians (in order to stir up the other churches to be generous as well), that the church of Smyrna had not been established yet.

[Note on Polycarp Philippians 11:3 from Michael W. Holmes] "The Epistle before us is not perfect in any of the Greek manuscripts which contain it. But the chapters [missing] in Greek are [supplied from] an ancient Latin version. While there is no ground for supposing, as some have done, that the whole Epistle is spurious, there seems considerable force in the arguments by which many others have sought to prove chapter 13 to be an interpolation."

**Roberts & Donaldson Translation (Ante-Nicene Church Fathers Volume 1):**

But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, in the midst of whom the blessed Paul laboured, and who are commended in the beginning of his Epistle. For he boasts of you in all those Churches which alone then **knew the Lord**; but we [of Smyrna] had not yet **known Him**.

**Lightfoot Translation of Apostolic Fathers:**

**Phili. 11:3** But I have not found any such thing in you, neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who were his *letters* in the beginning. For *he boasteth of you in all those churches* which alone at that time **knew God**; for we **knew Him** not as yet.

**Holmes Translation of Apostolic Fathers:**

**Phili. 11:3** But I have not observed or heard of any such thing among you, in whose midst the blessed Paul labored, and who are praised in the beginning of his letter. For he boasts about you in all the churches—the ones that at that time had come to **know the Lord**, for we had not yet come to **know him**.

[Quote from Gentry] R.H. Charles makes much of this argument: The Church of Smyrna did not exist in 60-64 AD, at a time when St. Paul was boasting of the Philippians in all the Churches. ...But though Polycarp's letter tells us that the Church of Smyrna was not founded in 60-64 AD, he gives no hint as to when it was founded. Hence several years may have elapsed after that date before it was founded. When, however, we turn to Rev. 2:8-11 we find that our text presupposes a Church poor in wealth but rich in good works, with a development of apparently many years to its credit. [R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. *International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920. p. l:xciv] [Gentry, *BJF*, p. 323]

[From Ed] There are a couple of assumptions made by R. H. Charles which simply do not hold up under closer investigation. First of all, he assumes that the time of Paul's boasting about the Philippians among the churches was not until AD 60-64. Secondly, he assumes that the church at Smyrna did not exist until after Apostle Paul had died, thus implying that "several years" may have elapsed before the Smyrnan church was founded. Here is the statement of Polycarp again: "*But I have not found any such thing in you [i.e., the church at Philippi], neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who were his letters in the beginning. For he boasted of you in all those churches which alone at that time knew God; for we knew him not as yet*" [Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*, 11:3]. Notice that the time before the Smyrna church was

founded is identified by Polycarp as being when Paul was boasting about the Philippian church to some of his other churches. This raises the question of when this particular boasting of Paul was done? There are a couple of scriptures which help answer that question. Keep in mind when these texts were written:

**2 Cor. 8:1-5 [written in late 57 or early 58 AD on Paul's third journey]** Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of **Macedonia** [Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea], that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

**Rom. 15:26 [written in early 58 AD on Paul's third journey]** For **Macedonia** and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

**Phil. 4:15-17 [written in late 62 or early 63 AD while Paul was in Rome]** You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left **Macedonia [in AD 51]**, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

[From Ed] In Phil. 4:15-17, Paul does not say whether he boasted about the generosity of the Philippian church in AD 51 after he left Macedonia and went to Corinth, but in 2 Cor. 8:1-5, written in late 57 or early 58 from Macedonia, Paul clearly boasts of the liberality of the Macedonian churches (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea). So, we know that he was boasting about the Philippians to the Corinthians in late 57 or early 58 AD. And in Rom. 15:26, Paul boasts of both the Macedonians and Achaians in his letter to the Romans, written in early 58 AD. That definitely gives us a lower limit for the date on which the church at Smyrna could have been founded – no earlier than early 58 AD. This means that the Smyranean church was probably not established until after Paul had completed his third journey in early 58 AD.

[From Ed] Polycarp does not indicate who founded the church in Smyrna, nor when it was established, but in order for it to be addressed in the book of Revelation, which was written in AD 62, it would have needed to be in existence for at least a couple years before 62, long enough for them to have suffered "tribulation, poverty, and the blasphemy of those who were of the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). That implies at least a couple of years. If the church in Smyrna was established sometime in 58, then they would have had almost four years to experience all the things that the book of Revelation mentions. Let's look at some scriptural evidence which supports this.

[From Ed] In Ephesians, which was one of Paul's early prison epistles (composed in late 62 or early 63), and evidently written as a general letter (encyclical) to be distributed

among all the churches of Asia, he indicates that he had "**heard about the faith** in the Lord Jesus which existed among them." Commentators are quick to point out that Paul did not need to be told about the faith that existed in the Ephesian church. He had spent over three years there building the church in Ephesus. He knew that church personally. So, what other churches in Asia would be reading this general encyclical letter besides Ephesus, whose faith Paul had only "heard about" and not seen personally? I think Paul's epistle to the Colossians may help us out here:

**Col. 2:1** For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at **Laodicea**, and for **all those who have not personally seen my face**.

Here Paul implies that Laodicea was one of those churches that had not personally seen his face, but had evidently heard about him and been taught the gospel by some of Paul's co-workers. Epaphras comes to mind here, since he was from Colossae, and was one of Paul's fellow-workers ("bondslave of Jesus"), evidently taught and trained by Paul and sent out to preach the gospel in the region around Ephesus, especially near his home area of Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea. Note what Paul says about Epaphras here in the letter to the Colossians:

**Col. 4:12-13 Epaphras**, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in **Laodicea** and **Hierapolis**.

Notice the mention of the two other churches in **Laodicea** and **Hierapolis** for which **Epaphras** also had a "deep concern," implying that he may have been closely involved with them at one time, maybe even the one who originally shared the gospel with them. Four verses later, in Col. 4:17, Paul exhorts **Archippus** to fulfill the ministry that he had received. Archippus was another of Paul's co-workers who was evidently ministering among the Colossians at that time. There is no record of Paul establishing those churches in Colossae, Hierapolis, or Laodicea. Paul says only that he had "heard of their faith" (Col. 1:4) through some of his co-workers, evidently Epaphras and Archippus, who were probably sent out by Paul to do the original mission work there.

But these three churches (Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis) were most likely not the only churches that were established by some of Paul's co-workers, either while Paul was there in Ephesus during his third journey, or after he left in AD 57. What about the other five churches of Asia (besides Ephesus and Laodicea) that are mentioned in Revelation 2-3 (Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, or Philadelphia)? **Thyatira** is an easy one. On Paul's second missionary journey while in Philippi he converted Lydia, who was a seller of purple dye and/or purple cloth from Thyatira. She could easily have given Paul a list of contacts in Thyatira, and Paul could have sent some of his co-workers there during the three years he was in Ephesus on his third journey (Acts 19:9).

Note also that **Colossians 4:16** instructs the saints in Colossae to read Paul's letter that was coming to Colossae by way of the church in Laodicea, and to send a copy of the



Colossian letter to Laodicea. This is very suggestive and thought-provoking. Laodicea was one of the seven churches of Asia addressed in the book of Revelation. In fact, it was the last stop on the circuit, beginning from Ephesus, going up along the coast to Smyrna and Pergamum, then down the Roman postal road through Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia to Laodicea. All the commentary writers who deal with both Ephesians and Colossians have noted this connection. The letter coming from Laodicea was probably the Ephesian letter (a general encyclical) that had started its rounds in Ephesus and then passed through the other five churches of Asia on its way to Laodicea, which was the last stop on the Asian circuit. But since Colossae and Hierapolis were nearby, the letter was sent onward from Laodicea to them. It seems pretty clear from all the futurist commentaries that the Ephesian letter was a general epistle, designed as an encyclical to be circulated among all the churches of Asia on the circuit between Ephesus and Laodicea. As we know, Smyrna was the next stop on that circuit after Ephesus. This certainly suggests and allows for the possibility that the church was in Smyrna at the time Paul wrote to the Ephesians and Colossians (late 62 or early 63).

But that is not all the evidence we have for a church in Smyrna before AD 62. Note the following texts which speak of many other Christians in Asia besides Ephesus:

**1Cor. 16:19** [written from Ephesus in AD 57] The **churches of Asia** greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

[Note the plural number of "churches of Asia" that are mentioned here in AD 57. How many churches were in Asia at that time? It was more than one. It may not have included Smyrna yet, but it certainly included others besides Ephesus.]

**Acts 19:10** This took place for two years, so that **all who lived in Asia** heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

[Luke tells us that the gospel had gone out from Ephesus while Paul was there, so that "all who lived in Asia heard the word." Did this include Smyrna and the other five cities besides Ephesus? It would not be surprising to find out that the folks in Smyrna heard the gospel at this time, but did not believe it and form a church there until after Paul had left the area.]

**Acts 19:22** And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in **Asia** for a while.

[Note that while Paul was in Ephesus and in Asia, he sent his co-workers out to other places. Could he have sent some of his co-workers to the other six cities of Asia, including Smyrna? We know that Epaphras and Archippus went to Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis. Some of the other co-workers of Paul could easily have been sent to Smyrna and the other five Asian cities as well. There is nothing in Polycarp's statements which forbid this, and even if they did, they are not inspired anyway. Polycarp's statements cannot trump scripture.]

**Acts 19:26** "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of **Asia**, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.

[Paul was accused of converting a "considerable number of people ... not only in Ephesus, but in **almost all of Asia**" during that three years he was in Ephesus. This may not have included Smyrna, but it must have set the stage and prepared the way for the gospel to bear fruit in Smyrna soon after Paul left the area. Smyrna was a major city in Asia, and it would be hard to believe that no converts were made there until decades later, even though "almost all the other cities in Asia" had churches planted among them at this time.]

Polycarp does imply that there was no church in Smyrna at the time Paul was boasting about the generosity of the Philippians (in AD 57-58). Polycarp said, "*we knew [God] not as yet.*" That certainly seems to mean that the church had not yet been established in Smyrna at the time Paul boasted about the Philippians. Polycarp says the Smyrneans did not know God yet at that time (AD 57-58).

If Polycarp can be trusted here, it means that the church in Smyrna could not have been established during the three years while Paul was in Ephesus on his third journey (AD 54-57), nor while Paul was boasting about the Philippians to the Corinthians and Romans (AD 57-58). But it does not rule out the possibility of the Smyrna church being established shortly afterwards (mid-to-late 58).

One of Paul's co-workers could have gone to Smyrna and established the church there anytime after Paul finished his third journey and headed to Jerusalem (mid-58 AD). Even if the church in Smyrna was not established until late 58, it still allows almost four years of church development time before John wrote the Apocalypse (in late 62). That is plenty of time for the church to be planted there and be suffering "tribulation, poverty, and blasphemy" by the time Revelation was written (Rev. 2:9).

All these scripture references and quotes from Strabo, Dio Cassius, and Polycarp are included in the PDF lesson outline for this podcast. If you don't have that yet, be sure to email me and request it to be sent to you. Also included in the PDF is an article quoted from Don Preston's excellent book entitled, *Who Is This Babylon?* Don deals with this same issue about the founding date of the church in Smyrna. He does a good job of refuting the arguments of the futurist Mark Hitchcock. You will want to read that! :-)

There are several other indications in these letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2-3) that the Apocalypse was written at a time before the Neronian persecution and before the destruction of Jerusalem when the Jews had the freedom and opportunity to persecute the Christians: ("synagogue of Satan", "come and bow down before you", "tribulation ten days", "great tribulation" about to come, etc.).

I would encourage you to spend some time this week reading these two chapters of Revelation (chapters 2 and 3), asking yourself whether it fits better in a before-70 timeframe, or in an after-70 timeframe. We will be looking at these seven churches again next week, trying to discover what happened to them during the Neronic persecution and afterwards.

Hopefully this study has given us a better understanding of the seven churches of Asia, and what things were like for them just before the Neronic persecution struck in AD 64. Next time we look at what happened to those seven churches during the Neronic persecution and afterwards.

Well, that will wrap it up for this time. If any of our listeners have questions or comments about what we looked at here in this session, do not hesitate to email me. Please send me some feedback, positive or negative. I would love to hear from you. My email address is: [preterist1@preterist.org](mailto:preterist1@preterist.org)

Thanks so much for listening.

**For more information on this, I would recommend the following three books (all of which are available at IPA website): [www.preterist.org](http://www.preterist.org)**

- *The Beast of Revelation* by Ken Gentry. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 2002. (pp. 231-236)
- *Before Jerusalem Fell* by Ken Gentry. Revised Edition. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1998. (pp. 318-330)
- *Who Is This Babylon* by Don Preston. Ardmore, Oklahoma, 2011. (pp. 12-13)

### **Don Preston's Article:**

"Revelation 2:9 Smyrna: Did It Exist at an Early Date?"  
Found in his book: *Who Is This Babylon?* (pp. 12-13)

One of the seemingly strongest objections to an early date of Revelation is the claim that **the church at Smyrna did not even exist during Paul's ministry**, i.e., during the early 60's. Hitchcock cites Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, that "the Smyrneans did not know the Lord during the time Paul was ministering." [Mark Hitchcock, "The Stake in the Heart: the AD 95 Date of Revelation," chapter 6 in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice's book: *The End Times Controversy*, Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2003. p. 147]

Now this sounds impressive. However, what does the Bible have to say? Acts 19:10 recounts Paul's ministry in Corinth, where he ministered for two years. Luke says, "all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." There are two things to consider here.

First, it is well known that Paul always emphasized evangelism in the major metropolitan centers. His philosophy seemed to be that if the gospel was planted in these major centers, that it would naturally spread to the outlying regions. It should go

without saying that Smyrna was a major city in Asia, and would have been the focus of this kind of directed, if not personal, evangelism.

Second, the emphatic declaration that "all of Asia" had heard the gospel cannot be discounted, nor can one argue from silence, saying that since Smyrna is not mentioned that it is not included. One could exclude all of the cities in Asia based on that logic. Given Paul's *modus operandi*, and the comprehensive nature of the language, it is far preferable to accept the testimony of Scripture over that of Polycarp.

What is troubling, for those who accept inspiration, is the willingness of Hitchcock and others, to accept the testimony of uninspired men over statements of the Bible. Hitchcock argues like this: Polycarp says the church at Smyrna did not exist in Paul's day. Acts 19 says that all of Asia heard the gospel, but it does not mention Smyrna specifically, therefore, this silence means, "In the face of scriptural silence and the specific statement of Polycarp, it seems best to let Polycarp's statement stand" (Hitchcock, 148). The trouble is, that the scriptures are not silent. Luke does say that all of Asia, and that most definitely includes Smyrna, did hear the gospel. Thus, we have Hitchcock saying it is better to accept the uninspired testimony of Polycarp over the inspired testimony of Luke. Personally, I find it "best to let *Luke's* statement stand."

We cannot leave this section without noting that just like in Philadelphia, the problem for the saints in Smyrna was "the synagogue of Satan." It was those, "who say they are Jews, but are a synagogue of Satan." As we shall see below, this indicates an early period in which the debate over the identity of "the Sons of God" was raging at its hottest, and that fits the pre-70 scenario the best. The problem is not Roman persecution. It is a conflict between the old synagogue and the new synagogue of the Messiah. The old synagogue refused to be gathered into Messiah (Matthew 23:37), and consequently faced imminent judgment. This historical situation fits the pre-70 world far better than the post.

As Vanderwaal says, "Revelation, like the rest of the New Testament, contains a running polemic against the Jews and their rejection of Christ. It shares this theme with many of the early Christian passion homilies, which were testimonies against the Jews. The thesis that Revelation is directed against Rome is indefensible on scholarly grounds." [Cornelius Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy*. Originally published by Paideia Press in St. Catharines, Ontario Canada, 1978. Reprinted by Inheritance Publications, Neerlandia, Alberta Canada, 1991. p. 76]