

Journeying Toward Transformation

Impacting the city through
understanding city types

Volume 2
ebook version

by
Martin Scott

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Volume 2

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Preface

This is the second volume and inevitably builds on what has gone before. The first volume focuses mainly into the area of strategic prayer, whereas this volume explores the area of city-gifting, or city-types.

It seems that this understanding becomes very relevant once some of the groundwork in prayer has been done. The concept being that the people of God should engage with the gift of a place, working with it, so that the land will produce what it was intended to produce.

The classifications used here should not be pressed too tightly as there are many factors that shape a place, and as with the gifts in a person gifts in a city are nuanced through a variety of influences, incidents and experiences.

I submit the content of this second volume as a tool to be used. Like all tools, it should be used when it is found to be useful. Normally I find there is a time when the concepts here prove useful; if you are finding it hard to make it 'fit' maybe you will discover that the timing is not yet right. This is volume '2', sometimes there is prior work to be done to open a place up.

Chapter 1

A Tale of Seven Cities

Even a small amount of travel quickly brings the realisation that every city has a personality. This is something that the biblical world-view simply accepts as a given, hence it was not considered strange behaviour to address a city as if it had a personality. So, for example, Jesus spoke directly to Jerusalem as a city with the words, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you' (Luke 13:34). Although every place is unique with its own personality, it also becomes self-evident that there are some striking similarities between certain cities. I consider that there are as many varieties of city-personalities as there are cities, and yet I believe that there are only a limited number of types of cities. (In due course I will be suggesting that there are seven basic types of cities.) An illustration that might help is to consider ministry types. There is a ministry gift known as 'prophet'. All who have this gifting can be called 'prophets' or 'prophetic ministries'. Yet the way they operate in the gift will differ from person to person. They are all prophets and yet each one is unique. No two prophets will be identical, yet in spite of their differences they are all anointed by the Spirit with prophetic gifts. Although unique, they all belong to the type of ministry we call 'prophetic'.

My inspiration for the material that follows is from three sources. The first source was simply that of observation through travelling. There is nothing like experience to help challenge one's theology, and encourage one to find an adequate expression within the biblical narrative to fit what has been experienced. I am persuaded that there are many keys in Scripture that we have not yet discovered. These keys are not at the level of 'primary' doctrine, so they should not be used dogmatically in order to divide the church. In writing this material I am focusing on the very practical issue of seeking to contribute to the breakthrough of the gospel in cities, regions and nations.

Nothing I write in these chapters is intended to replace the need of believers both corporately and individually living under the authority of the Gospel and being open in sharing their faith with others. So in using the specific Scriptures to help explore and describe the various city-types I am not implying that this should be the primary way for those Scriptures to be read - but I am suggesting that the specific Scriptures used are both an ideal point of reference for this exploration *and* also that they deliberately contain teaching on city types.

The second influence was from a set of tapes that contained teaching by Arthur Burk on the 'Redemptive gift of cities'. This teaching series certainly further fuelled my thinking. I found his teaching foundational on the subject and consider that everyone with an interest in this area would benefit from engaging with that teaching. Arthur uses the motivational giftings of Romans 12 as his basis. However, it has been the seven letters in Revelation (the third source that has influenced me) that has given me the connection and helped me find a way of viewing cities and the call on the church within those cities.

In making an appeal to the book of Revelation I am well aware that a number of readers will be somewhat suspicious! And with good reason, for there is probably no book that has been more abused. For this reason I have outlined my personal journey in the preceding paragraphs and will happily set out my presuppositions below.

Seven letters - seven city types

The book of Revelation is not an easy book to interpret, except for the first three chapters. Although these chapters are fairly easy to comprehend I suspect that there is a depth contained within them that can be mined over and over again. These letters are excellent examples of spiritual mapping (the battles that the churches are engaged in are expressed in the light of the respective city's history and geography), and illustrate so well that either the city will shape the church or the church will overcome and shape the city. Increasingly, however, I have come to believe that we can use these letters at yet another level. They can help us discern the personality of a city and understand the strongholds that are typical in that particular type of city.

In using these chapters in this way I am not making the claim that I am exegeting these letters in the sense of describing the original intended meaning by the author. I do, however, wish to maintain that what I draw out is

also one aspect of the diverse layers of truth that these letters contain.

My presuppositions have developed as I have read through the letters repeatedly, and they have been strengthened as I have been led to apply a specific letter to a particular city as the prayer teams have travelled. Here then are my foundational presuppositions:

- What is all-but universally accepted is that in writing to the specific seven churches Jesus is addressing all churches at all times. In other words these letters to the seven churches / cities are symbolic of the church in all places at all times.
- Although symbolic of the whole this does not mean that these locations are chosen at random. For the seven cities that are chosen are not the only ones in the area that could have been written to. Indeed there are some larger cities that are not addressed, hence I do not believe these are chosen at random. The ones that are specifically chosen I suggest contain specific truth for every subsequent concrete situation.
- The letters themselves are prophetic words to the churches. They contain teaching but the teaching is specifically shaped for each place. This is easy to illustrate in taking for example the words to Smyrna and to Laodicea and comparing them. In Smyrna they are told that they are rich, but in Laodicea where they claim to be rich they are told that in reality they are poor. The word given is dependent on the situation being addressed - these are prophetic words. Again the historic and geographic references indicate how the words are shaped for the specific situation.
- Each letter seems to draw from part of the Old Testament story for its framework. Ephesus (the first letter) begins with allusions to the garden of Eden, whereas Laodicea (the last letter) has allusions to the Exile. The letters in between follow the Old Testament story chronologically. When the whole Old Testament had been told Jesus was revealed. Here in Revelation each church has a story to tell, and I suggest that only when they each tell their part of the story is the whole story told, and the Jesus of chapter 1 can be revealed.
- The cities have different personalities, different gifts, and requires that the church in that place responds to the risen Christ in a specific way. So, for example, let me suggest that the church in Smyrna can learn

from the church in Ephesus but it cannot be a copy of that church. The church in Smyrna must be the church in Smyrna, not just in a geographic sense but also 'personality' or 'gifting' wise.

- The New Testament church was united in the city, so Jesus did not write to the church of such and such denomination in a city, but to the church in that city. By understanding this it strengthens the belief that he addresses the church in that city in order that the city might be impacted. The church was to be the specific redemptive agent for that particular city. The church has to connect with the city in such a way that is appropriate for its specific location. The calling on the church is to impact the city and so must be intimately related to the city. Although addressing the church, Jesus is calling the city to respond by addressing the church. It is not only that the church belongs to him but the city too is his. Hence, in addressing the church he is addressing the city.

Having laid out my presuppositions, it is time to be a little more specific as to how these letters can be applied.

It is my conviction that the letters to the seven churches in Revelation actually contain significant information about seven different types of cities. The seven cities are symbolic of all cities, but they are more than that - they are specifically symbolic of all cities with each place being a specific type. These seven prophetic words are addressed to the church within those cities and they outline both the call on the church in that city and also the specific battles that each place was called to fight.

Apart from the obvious and necessary uniqueness of the particular historical and geographical references, the following aspects of each letter indicates how unique each letter is:

- The description of Jesus in the opening greeting is unique (generally drawn either explicitly or implicitly from the revelation of Jesus in Revelation 1).
- The promise to the overcomer is unique in each place.
- The Old Testament history alluded to is unique in each letter.

Connecting earth and heaven

The church has to connect with the city in which it is planted if it is to reach that place, and this also means it has to connect with the *type* of city where it is planted. The church in Ephesus, for example, is not only to be the church in Ephesus location-wise, it has to be the church in Ephesus personality- or gift-wise. As already stated, for example, the church in Ephesus can (and should) learn from the church in Smyrna, but it cannot copy the church in Smyrna. It has to be the 'Ephesus-type' church in Ephesus. Practically, this is why we need to learn from situations all over the world, but need to be cautious about simply importing something from elsewhere.

This is further implied, I believe, by the strange way the letters are addressed to the 'angel of the church'. In apocalyptic writings it is always best to take the word angel to refer to a heavenly being, or, at least, to refer to a counterpart to something on earth. I know that many commentators have suggested that these angels are the bishops or ministers of the churches. But as none of the same commentators seem to claim that the seven angels who blow the trumpets are bishops, nor the four who had been kept ready by the river Euphrates and are to be released are human ministers! It seems best to me to take these references to angels at face value and accept that the reference to an 'angel' is actually a reference to a heavenly being. The letters then are provoking a connection between the earthly people of God with their heavenly counterpart.

This is a most significant concept. The angelic and the human do not operate the same way. We operate by the grace of God. By definition I can do nothing to make God love me more, and if I were totally sanctified God would not love me any more than he does amidst my imperfections. That is the wonder and challenge of the grace of God. The angelic though operate by divine commission. They leave the presence of God with a commission to fulfil. Gabriel was sent to Zechariah to announce that he and Elizabeth were to have a child that would be called John (the Baptist). Gabriel could not decide half way through the delivery of his message that due to Zechariah's unbelief that he would simply leave Zechariah and go find someone with greater faith. He had to fulfil the commission given him. He could not return to God having adjusted the commission claiming that the grace of God would cover him.

Although the church operates by the grace of God, if we wish to effectively connect with the angelic we will have to begin to increasingly

operate by divine commission. Angels cannot effectively fulfil their task if the church is not lining up with the heavenly commission. The church in Ephesus must become whatever God intends the church in Ephesus to be if there is going to be a greater effectiveness in warfare, for as Paul says our warfare is not at an earthly but at a heavenly level. If the church does not live by commission and line up with the heavenly beings that are sent to our aid by divine commission then we will not be as effective as we could be.

I believe one of the primary roles of prophetic and apostolic ministry is to help the church in the city to align rightly with the heavenly messengers that are commissioned to help so that we become as effective as possible. If a divine connection gives us an increase in effectiveness (God-connections yield a five-fold increase according to Leviticus 26:8) then I am asking the question as to what might shift very quickly when the church truly partners with the angelic. Hence it is vital that the church in a given city is the church God intends for that city (a church living under divine commission) so that it effectively participates in the advance of the kingdom.

I have a very good friend, Rich, in California who is a pastor of a church. He also has a most remarkable gift in the realm of prophetic dreaming. However the way the dreams operate is a little unusual. As Rich dreams he normally enters into a dialogue with whatever is going on in the dream in such a way that his side of the conversation can be recorded. One night on a retreat he was sleeping in the same room as one of his sons. In the night he began to dream and to dialogue. Not only that but he began with some energy to move his arm in a continual large arcing movement. Back and forth the arm went, until the movement and the conversation ended with an instruction to 'remember to shut the door when you leave'.

In the morning Matthew, his son, asked his father whether there had been anything unusual about the night just gone. Rich said nothing that he could remember but that he had obviously slept awkwardly as his whole arm was aching! With a few more questions it wasn't too long though until the dream came back to Rich. He explained that an angel had come to him in the night saying that the flames of God were present in California but that they needed to be fanned to a new level. To do this the angel was ready to take one side of the bellows but that nothing effective would take place without the church taking her side of the bellows. God's bellows only operated as the church and the angelic partnered. In the dream Rich had enthusiastically

grasped hold of the other side of the bellows and began to partner with the angel - hence the arcing arm movements.

This certainly explained the movements and the conversation. Matt was, however, intrigued by the 'remember to shut the door when you leave' line. Rich explained that there was an element of angelic activity that could be annoying. He said it is not good when they show up, leave by the door, but do not shut the door! On this occasion he said he wanted to make sure he got in early with the instruction so that the angel had no excuse!!

Whether an angel leaves a door open that we would rather have had shut is fairly immaterial, but what is essential is that the church partners with the angelic, and to do so it is important that the church in the city discovers what it needs to be in that location.

This need for partnership, or perhaps better put, to be harnessed to the angelic is expressed both at the death of Elijah (by Elisha) and at the death of Elisha (by king Jehoash). Both times the cry is 'My father, my father, the horsemen and chariots of Israel' (2 Kings 2:12 and 13:14 respectively). As a major prophetic figure is departing one of the burning issues is what will happen to the armies of heaven. With the departure of Elijah the armies of heaven are still connected to the people, but with the death of Elisha I suggest that the connection becomes very weak. Prophets who are called to stand in the presence and counsel of God are there to help the church connect with the angelic beings who also stand in the presence of the Living God. As fellow-servants of the one true God the earthly and heavenly messengers are to partner thus causing an acceleration of the purposes of God and a fanning of the flames of God's revival fires.

The types of cities

It is not an easy task to succinctly describe the different city-types and I am also aware that other writers would wish to utilise different descriptions. The names I have chosen to use as descriptions of the different city-types are based either on the part of the Old Testament story that the letters allude to (as is the case with of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira) or from the internal gifting of the city (as in the case of Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea). To some of the cities I will also give a second name as they carry more than one aspect of gifting, and their giftings are not always adequately described by one phrase.

Ephesus: a first city

The allusions here are to the Garden of Eden, for the overcomer is promised that they will eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God. I suggest that this type of city is a place where it is easy for things to be given birth to, where, for example, events, projects, organisations, etc., can begin. This is the essential and unique gift that these places have to offer.

Smyrna: a deliverance city

The people of God are experiencing extreme opposition here and the expectation is that it will actually become even worse before it gets better. However the promise is of deliverance. The allusions here seem to be to the Exodus. So this is a place where testimonies of God's deliverance will be discovered - but only as a result of persevering through hardship.

Pergamum: an establishing city

The allusions here are to the wilderness and the conquest (we read of references to Balaam and to hidden manna). The purpose of exiting Egypt was to enter the land. The danger in these places is of succumbing to the temptation to wander, rather than fulfil the goal of entering the Promised Land. I call these places 'establishing' as it is vital that they do not wander but begin to establish the promised inheritance. At their best they can take what has been done elsewhere and move those things forward, while at their worst they can stand in judgement over the prophetic word of the Lord and claim to have God's favour on them while in reality they are simply wandering in the wilderness.

Thyatira: a model city

The promise to those who overcome in Thyatira is that they will rule the nations; the opposition is described as being from 'Jezebel', who usurped the authority of the kingship in the Old Testament, and was a major contributor to the establishment of false worship in the kingdom of Israel. So the Old Testament allusions are to the days of kingship. The establishing of the earthly king was at best a mixed event, and at worst it was an outright refusal to accept the kingship of Yahweh. However, the Lord was willing to accept the kingship, particularly as manifested under David, as an earthly model for the

kingdom of God. When rulership goes wrong it is abusive and restrictive, yet it is the term 'kingdom' that was on the lips of Jesus to describe the order that he was initiating. Hence I choose the term 'model' for this city.

Sardis: a developing city

Allusions to a specific part of the Old Testament story are not as clear in this prophetic letter as in the others six. The practical instruction to 'wake up' though can be seen as rooted in the wisdom literature - the literature that chronologically came as a result of the establishment of the kingship, with much of it written or collated by Solomon. Sardis was a city that was exceedingly tolerant and where there was to be an abundance of the Spirit's presence. For these reasons I suggest that we have in Sardis a city that is a city of development, displaying the characteristics of the mercy of God, while offering refuge to many.

Philadelphia: a gateway city

Philadelphia had an open door set before it. Its purpose was to go forward and expand Graeco-Roman culture into new territory. Hence I am using the term 'gateway' as a description of this city. We read here of allusions to the building of the Temple and if there is a response to the open door of mission, Jesus makes the promise of his presence being among them. The establishment of the Temple of the Lord throughout the earth is particularly linked to that of mission.

Laodicea: a giving city

Laodicea was exceedingly wealthy and as such was called to be a giving city, not living in independence but ready to be a supply where others were in need. Ephesus began with allusions to the garden of Eden, but in Laodicea Jesus comes as the origin of all creation. The beginning of the story is one of a garden, but the end of the story is to be one of harnessing all of creation's resources for the purposes of God. So I suggest that Laodicea is not just a giving but also a finishing city. The allusions in this letter are to the Exile (being spewed out of the land / being spewed out of the mouth of Jesus) so the danger is of losing one's territory and the challenge is to see the fulfilment of the purposes of God in creation regardless of external circumstances.

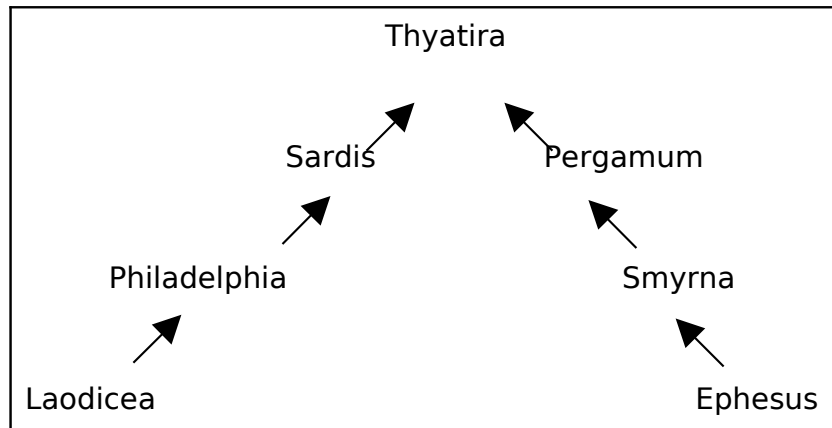
The table below summarises the material thus far:

| City | Type | OT allusion |
|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ephesus | A first city | Garden of Eden |
| Smyrna | A deliverance city | Exodus |
| Pergamum | An establishing city | Wilderness / conquest |
| Thyatira | A model city | Kingship |
| Sardis | A developing / mercy city | Wisdom literature |
| Philadelphia | A gateway city | Temple |
| Laodicea | A giving / finishing city | Exile |

There are so many patterns in the book of Revelation, with most of them centring on series of sevens that are often then further subdivided into threes and fours. It seems that these letters too are patterned in this way. A number of scholars see a pattern (known as a chiasmus) that indicates Thyatira is at the centre, thus giving further weight to the concept of that city to being a model for others to see.

This pattern that places Thyatira at the centre not only suggests that what takes place there is a to be a model (but model does not mean a blueprint to be copied) for other places, but that Thyatira-type cities will draw up into themselves characteristics that are manifest in the other six-city types. By using the term 'model' I am not implying that Thyatira is greater than anywhere else - indeed the city of Thyatira was the smallest and perhaps the least influential of the seven cities in Revelation. Further by using the term 'model' I am not suggesting that other cities cannot produce models that can be learned from.

Another way to signify this pattern and to emphasise how a model city draws aspects of the other cities up into itself, would be to lay it out as below:



City types - some clarifications

If a city is of a certain type this does not mean that the only gifting that will be manifest in the church in that city will be that gifting. An example from every day experience will illustrate this. Suppose a person has the gifting of prophet, this does not mean that they cannot also evangelise and share their faith - it simply indicates that their *primary* gift is that of prophecy. Likewise if a church as a whole has a teaching anointing this does not mean that there will be no prophets, evangelists, or pastors within that church. So by defining a specific gift for a city I am suggesting that that particular gift will need to be clearly manifested, regardless of whatever other gifts are developed.

It also means, though, that if the church in that city does not discover and flow in that gift it will be very difficult for that particular city to be harnessed for the purposes of God. Even if other gifts are manifested, but the critical gifting is not it would be most difficult for a breakthrough to be experienced. Hence, these categories should help bring focus and enable the church in the city to prioritise.

Another aspect that we will pick up later is where we discover a city having the same gifting as the nation has. (This might be the capital city of the nation, but this is not always the case.) If the cities in the nation that carry the same gifting as the nation can breakthrough then the nation will come through to her purpose much quicker, conversely if those cities do not break through it will be very difficult to get a clear breakthrough in the nation as a whole.

Cities - the basic pattern

- Jesus comes with a specific greeting. How he reveals himself to the church is how he wants them to know him. The church has to receive him in the way that he comes to them. What he reveals *to* them is what will be revealed *through* them. In the opening greeting from the risen Christ there will be some indications of the gifting that is to be manifest.
- In the course of the letter Jesus picks out where they have succumbed to the pressures that are within their city, or he picks out aspects where the church is to be commended. The former areas are descriptions of where they have come under the specific demonic strongholds that seek to ensnare their city; the latter areas indicate the strongholds that they have not submitted to. Either way we gain an outline of the typical strongholds that this type of city has to battle against.
- He gives each church / city a promise that relates to the age to come and will be fully experienced then. However the calling on the church is to show in the here and now what is to come, so we can see from the promises specific characteristics that are to be nurtured in the city. These promises fully manifest in the age to come will be partially (and significantly) manifest in this age - when the church is living under the specific heavenly commission.
- We can also gain some understanding concerning the purposes and calling on the particular city through paying attention to the particular aspect of the Old Testament story that is alluded to.
- Outside the scope of these letters (and an area that I will not develop within this book), but drawing on the teaching and experience of Arthur Burk, there is the discovery of 'the catalytic institution' that needs to be connected with in order to see a breakthrough catalysed. These institutions, for example, can range from church to business, from family to government. The specific catalytic institution is often the means by which the city came into being, grew, or gained significant momentum. Through specifically engaging with these catalytic institutions Arthur suggests we discover how best to release the specific birthright of that city. By the term 'birthright' is meant the absolute unique contribution that city is designed to make.

Drawing from the above points we understand that there are general truths

for all cities but that cities can then be subdivided into seven types, so we can say, for example, that not all cities are 'first' type cities. Then within the category of 'first' city not all cities will have the same catalytic institution that should be engaged with to gain the maximum effect in the shortest period of time. And finally, that each and every first city will have a unique contribution to make: that is their birthright.

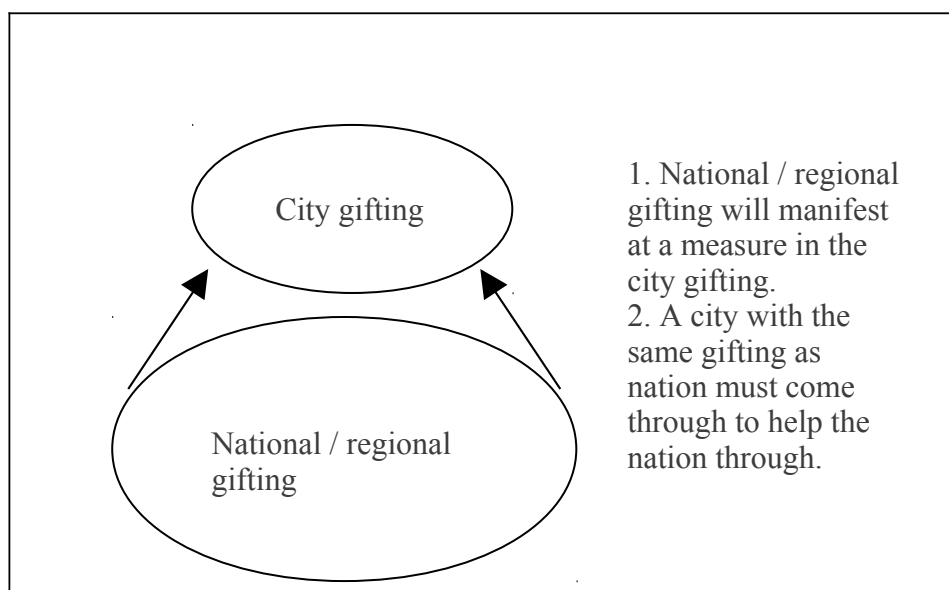
The further we take the process the more specific and unique the identity and purpose of the city becomes. However, given that the primary definition begins at the level of discerning the type of city we are wanting to impact, that will be the focus of the following chapters. Once that has been discerned and work has begun on the strongholds over the city, it will often become apparent what institutions will specifically need to be engaged with, as they will often be the area under severe attack or even bondage.

Some other comments

Each of the comments below could be expanded somewhat but a few headlines for now will suffice. I also suggest that there might be value in returning to these headlines after completing the subsequent chapters on the city types.

Each city has its own gift but this will be modified in at least three ways.

- Each city will draw gifting from the two cities that are placed either side of itself in the sequence. (As mentioned already Thyatira goes further than that and draws gifting from all other six cities.) So a city of refuge will also carry giftings related to a model and a gateway city. Hence in discerning a city it will be important to take note of the cities that are positioned either side. (As Ephesus and Laodicea are at the ends of the set of seven I need to explain that Ephesus has some of Smyrna and some of Laodicea; likewise, Laodicea has some of Philadelphia and some of Ephesus in it.)
- Second, each city will also carry some of the gifting of the nation or region where it is planted. So in looking at the gifting of a city there also needs to be some consideration of what is the gifting of the wider region.



- In defining the cities as I have I am presenting these as tools to help unlock the locality. If we use the analyses as tools we will find them useful, but if we try to make everything fit rigidly we will probably be frustrated. Just as with an individual the gifting in a city will also be affected by history. The gifting could well be perverted through what has happened (and this will certainly be true in measure until the church begins to act redemptively) or the gift could be suppressed through past experience.¹ As the city is impacted spiritually the historical experiences that have laid a negative layer over the city will have to be addressed.

Hence, given that the gift of the city is modified in these ways, the following chapters are not intended to present a simplistic solution to discerning the gift of the city, but to be a grid that with discernment and research will further aid us as we seek to harness the places where we live to the purposes of God.

Given that Thyatira divides the other six cities into two groups of three we will find that in an area or a nation that has a particular gifting that there will be a predominance of cities that sit in that pattern of three. (The two-sets of three are Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum; Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.) So if the region has a gifting of Smyrna, for example there will tend

¹ The giftings in Pergamum and Laodicea tend to be perverted; the giftings in Smyrna and Philadelphia suppressed; the other cities seem to have their gifts perverted or suppressed in equal measure.

to be more cities that belong from that set of three than from the other set of three.

In the pattern of two sets of three we will also note the close correspondence between the cities and the order they are presented within those two sets. Ephesus and Sardis; Smyrna and Philadelphia; and Pergamum and Laodicea will have strong similarities to each other. From Ephesus to Pergamum something is to be established in the land, and from Sardis to Laodicea something is to be harnessed from all creation. Smyrna and Philadelphia will often find themselves being squeezed as they seek to release what has begun either in Ephesus or in Sardis.

As these patterns are developed there are many possible combinations that will prove helpful. Here I outline just three for consideration:

- Different types of cities helping one another - so that the different gifts and callings can compliment one another. This is why it is necessary for cities to relate rightly together.
- There will be specific ways in which within the patterns of three there will be combinations. First places will need to partner with deliverance places in order to help bring establishing places through. Places of mercy will work with gateway places in order to release giving places.
- A city with a particular gift will be ideally gifted to connect to a nation with that same gift. I believe a person breaks through so as a church can break through; a church, so as a city can break through; and a city so as a nation can break through. If I, at a personal level, can testify to a specific breakthrough it is a strong encouragement to faith for those held in the same bondage and this pattern works all the way through the above examples. Once a city breaks through there is a testimony for the bigger unit under the same bondage - hence, a city connecting to a nation with the same gift (and therefore being under the same type of strongholds) will help that nation break through.

Another important facet to the understanding of cities should also help not only to bring focus but also perspective. Just because, for example, a church in a particular city is under extreme pressure (Smyrna-type) this does not necessarily mean that they are missing their way. Indeed in such places God desires a breakthrough that will become foundational for elsewhere. Often in those places - as opposed to the more 'successful' places - God desires to

raise up strong apostolic works, for they often understand the true nature of ministry as servanthood.

Suitable diagrams?

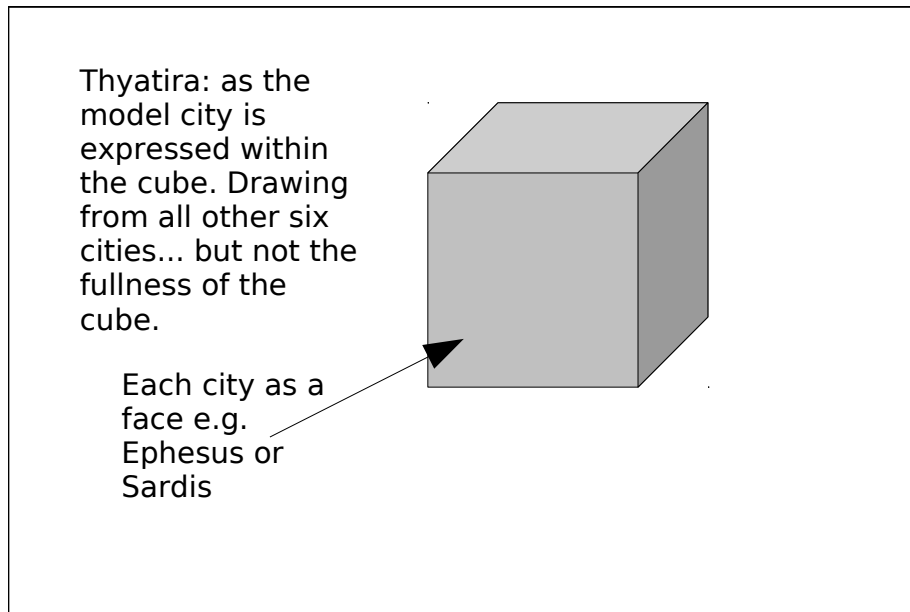
I have often tried to illustrate how the cities might interact together and sought to use diagrams to portray this. Inevitably whatever diagram is used will always have limitations, and it is vital to demonstrate that there is no hierarchy of cities, but there is the need for each one to play their part. This can mean, though, that one city will have a greater part to play at a given time than at another time. However, any 'greater than' aspect is only temporary for the fullness that Christ desires to be manifest will only come as unity and partnership arises between cities.

I am convinced that in due course there will be revelation showing the interaction of cities in specific ways, and also how the spheres of society fit to play their part. Let me first suggest that there could well be a connection between the cubic manifestation of the New Jerusalem and the seven typical cities of Revelation.

The book of Revelation takes us from chapter 1 of Revelation where we are presented with the fullness of the manifestation of God in the risen Christ to the closing chapters of the book where the fullness of God and Christ is resident in the New Jerusalem. The middle chapters are all about the warfare between the saints of God and the enemies of God, which are preceded by the letters to the churches in the seven cities. The churches are called in their settings to manifest their part of the fullness of the risen Christ. If the churches are not successful then there will only be a manifestation of the Babylonian city that rises up from the earth. In truth the church will be successful in part for it is only when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven that the completion of their calling will be made manifest. All that could have been revealed will then be finalised, with the kings of the earth bringing their glory into the new city.

This six-sided city, the bride of Christ, is destined to rule (the promise to Thyatira, the model city). The cities are to manifest an element now of what will be fully manifest then in that heavenly city, with the rule of God being expressed through the cities in six distinct ways, yet with that rule only being complete in the inter-relationship between them all. In using the illustration of the New Jerusalem each city would represent one face of the cube with

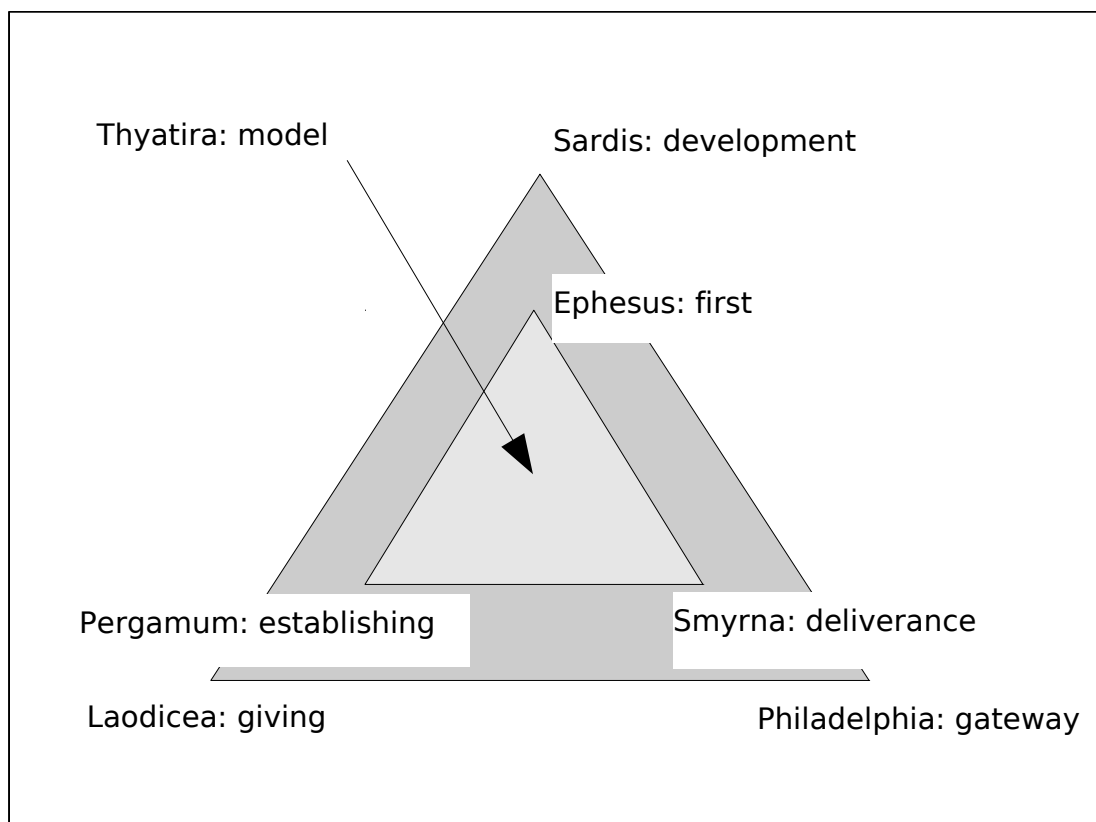
Thyatira filling the space between the cities, modelling something of the whole. The New Jerusalem then is to be made visible (in part) in every city as the church redemptively takes her place, and in turn the New Jerusalem is the fulfilment of what has been taking place in every city that has been responding to the call of God.



The only other time we read of a cube in Scripture is of the Holy of Holies, so this must be the challenge before every church - to manifest the presence of Christ within their city. We might even suggest that the book of Revelation is a tale of two cities: the Babylon that seeks to rise up and the Jerusalem that graciously comes down. If every city can harness its potential and allow the Jerusalem that is above to invade then our great hope is that the riches from within every city, and indeed every nation, can flow into that final city. This then is our call - let the church rise in every place, connect with heaven so that the heavenly city that one day will be manifest might in measure become visible in the here and now.

In the diagram that follows I outline a second approach. (Once the following chapters have been read the comments in the diagram will be understood.) The diagram illustrates that the first three cities relate together as do the last three; and that the last three are an expansion of the first three. There is a very real correspondence at the corners, seen in the descriptions that I have highlighted. It also illustrates that if, for instance, a first city cannot

find a deliverance city to relate with, then it is equally possible for this to be a gateway city.



There are some very interesting correspondences that come out in the above diagram. The inner triangle sets the pattern but the outer triangle takes the initial pattern further. First becomes developing – a developing place might not have as many 'firsts' but will tend to develop things beyond what has been done elsewhere. We note that Jesus comes to the first city with the seven angels and the seven lampstands, and to the developing city with the seven angels and the seven Spirits. Deliverance (from) becomes gateway (to). Both these places have to deal with a synagogue of Satan, and have issues concerning a crown. In Pergamum the issue is about the land and in Laodicea it is with respect to all of creation that Jesus comes to them.

Given the framework that I have set out in this chapter it is now time to look at the individual letters in more detail. In the following chapters I will follow the order that the cities appear in the book of Revelation. Every city is vital, for only when each one comes through to its destiny and relates to the other places will there be a fullness of the revelation of Jesus.

Chapter 2

Ephesus: city of firsts

Ephesus was a most significant and impressive city.² The architecture was something to behold, with one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis within it.

In referring to it as a 'first' city I do not mean that this type of city is the most important, or that they are the ones that are to rule over the others. I do mean, though, that they are called to give a lead, to go on ahead, to be initiators and to pioneer. If called to pioneer, mistakes will inevitably be made and there will be some testimonies of failure that come from this type of city. So, by first, I mean that these cities are called to break new ground.

I am writing these opening paragraphs while in the city of Leeds (a first city) and it has amazed us over the past few days how many firsts are in the city. Even when, for example, they began a 'kidz klub' style work among unchurched kids although it was not the first kidz klub in the world nor even in Britain, but it was the first one in the UK (and as far as we know in the world) where it was initiated, run and supported across a number of churches from the city.

It is a privilege to give a lead but there is also a pain involved in doing that. The pain of starting more than is finished, of seeing others do it much better and improving on what was prototyped, and in particular the pain of being misunderstood. These all go with the territory of being 'first'.

So with these comments serving as an introduction to first cities it is time to look at the prophetic word to the Ephesian church.

² I have used standard commentaries to research the historical background of the seven churches.

Jesus comes to a first city

He comes as the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden candlesticks. Each and every greeting to the seven churches is unique, but there is a particular area where the greeting to the first city is different to all the others. It is only in the greeting to this letter that the symbols used are ones that have been previously explained. Chapter 1 is full of imagery, most of which is not explained. The only explanations are given at the end of the chapter where the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands are interpreted. So there can be no debate as to what they mean.

A first city is a place where things need to be made clear. There should be very little room for misunderstanding. Because these cities have a gifting to begin things then it should not be surprising that there has to be clarity of understanding in them. By explaining these symbols we are provoked to work out what other symbols mean. As we take our cue from what has already been explained we begin to see what other symbols might mean. We have to therefore be clear over these symbols so that if we start right we can go forward from there, whereas if we start wrong it is going to be increasingly difficult to get back on line. So in first cities God wants to release patterns that can be followed – and even improved on. What is experienced in first cities (good and bad) is intended to help us make sense of what is going on in other situations.

First cities then need to be places where communication is clear. Where there is no confusion over what God has said. The prophetic word into these places is vital; for something can be released there which can serve to help other cities to take their cue from that. I have ‘accidentally’ begun the year with two weeks of prayer in the city of Leeds over a number of years and although I did not understand the nature of first cities until more recently I have always discovered that what we experienced there would then be released into other situations for the following six months or so. Each year we have always discovered something new there. I now understand that this is part of the redemptive gift of first cities.

Paul stayed for just over two years in his visit to Ephesus and we read that as a result there was communication of the Gospel throughout the whole of Asia (Acts 19:10). There were of course practical reasons for such a successful level of communication, but there is also the sense that this type of city can become a centre for communication.

This is normally the case in the physical realm too. One such first city in the UK has significant television and radio stations, which broadcast not only regionally but also nationally and even internationally. That city also has significant publishing houses and currently something around 65% of UK internet traffic goes through that city.

Some central characteristics

Although cities need to be spiritually discerned given that the material and natural realms speak of and reflect spiritual realities it is not surprising that there will be some specifics that can be seen or discovered that will indicate the presence of the gifting of a 'first city'. Some indications will include:

- A history or reputation of being one of the first to do something. So it will be a place of innovation.
- A place of communication, often with a significant media presence, or where the University has a leading media studies department.
- Impressive and ostentatious architecture.
- A significant economic presence.
- Areas of significant deprivation that (until the city begins to turn) are ignored.
- Ideologies birthed that are propagated and held to dearly.

In coming to the first city Jesus comes in such a way that there is a deposit here for all cities, for he comes holding the *seven* stars and walking among the *seven* lampstands. Those stars and those lampstands represent the whole, so Jesus comes to these places to assure the church that the destiny of the church (represented by the seven stars in his strong right hand) and his presence among the church is intact. So if ever there should be a place that has a spirit of faith and lives from a heavenly destiny it should be so in a first city. From these first places there should be a flowing of the prophetic word to the churches of their land to lift their eyes and know the Jesus who is on the throne.

Prophetic gifting needs to be part of the church in such cities and the prophetic gifting that is released will be to help align the earthly church (represented by the golden lampstand) with their heavenly counterpart (their star or angel).

Surface strongholds

At this stage it is fairly easy to understand some of the strongholds that first cities will have to deal with for the enemy will seek to pervert the true gift and lock it up from the people of God. Indeed one can make a quick judgement as to how free a city is by considering how free the church is to move in the inherent first city gifting. If there are no firsts taking place in the church then we know that the city is not very free. So we can summarise some of these early strongholds as:

- No firsts taking place in the church and no spirit of adventure or entrepreneurship manifested.
- Communication problems among the body of Christ, particularly where plain things become confused.
- Strong opinions keeping the body of Christ apart.
- Accusation from the enemy that the believers have nothing to give beyond their city. Given that the city will begin more than it finishes there can be a strong sense of inadequacy. This will often also be accompanied by 'together' places being very critical of what is going on in a first city because it is not impressive! Indeed the enemy will even cause rumours to be spread about what is happening in such places, for from the enemy's perspective the voice of the first city must be silenced at all costs. If the starting place is shut down or even just slowed down the work of God in a nation will be seriously hindered.
- An over-focus on finishing and a corresponding reticence to begin something. Although there is no virtue in starting without finishing, in a first city it is a sin not to initiate. The gifting to finish what has been begun might not be too present, but as one city after another comes on line there needs to be faith that in the right season there will be help that flows to the city to help with the finishing process. (Ironically in a first city there is also a measure of finishing gift, as each city draws up into itself something of the gifting to either side of it. I will explain how this comes into operation later in this chapter.)

A twinning gift

Given that a first city has a gifting to initiate and start, and also because a first city carries something of a mandate for the whole church (represented by the

heavenly and earthly 'sevens' in Jesus' greeting) there will be a strong gifting to twin with other places. It is vital that new things begin and old things that are stuck are kick-started to a new level. Hence, I suggest that first city gifting means that other cities need to call for their help to ensure that there is continual movement.

A spirit of humility must cover those who work from a first city. 'First' is not to mean above but before in the sense of being willing to go ahead, to make mistakes and get the bloody nose first. By using the term 'first', though, does imply that these places need to come back with news that there is a way forward, that there is ground to possess that has previously never been touched, that there are way of doing things we have not thought of before. These first cities need to willingly make themselves available to other cities even when they don't have all the answers for their infectious faith can open up new possibilities and by the grace (and intent) of God other cities might then be able to go even further than those first cities.

Enemy strategies

In this prophetic word to the Ephesian church Jesus rebukes the church in one area and strongly commends them in two areas. This indicates there were three key areas for the enemy to ensnare them so that their destiny would not be fulfilled. In the church in Ephesus, as recorded in this chapter of Revelation, they had done well on two of the areas but had failed in one aspect. So alongside the obvious surface strongholds there are three areas of life that has to be safeguarded above all others. Those three highlighted in this prophetic letter are:

- Introducing and establishing false apostles.
- Being complacent about the Nicolaitan heresy.
- Leaving their first love.

So seeking to look at these one at a time let us take them in the order that I have laid out. Paul had previously warned the Ephesian elders that when he left 'savage wolves' would come in to devour the flock, and that some of those destructive leaders would even arise from within their own company. A key element in discerning these savage wolves, Paul says is that they would entice disciples to become personal followers.

In a first city, where there is to be innovation, it is vital that anyone

gifted to give a lead in such a place does not rise up to become above others, producing their own following. As the city begins to develop there will be a desire to minister in it. It will draw ministry gifts to it (and so it should for true apostolic ministry needs to come to a first city and partner with it) but the danger is of apostles developing their own disciples and even their own churches in such a place. Apostles do not own churches, rather apostolic ministry belongs to the churches. Whoever the apostles are, Paul says they all belong to the church, and not vice versa (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

It is key then that there are overseers who will take responsibility - indeed it was to those people that Paul addressed himself in his farewell speech warning of dangers ahead (Acts 20: 17-38). Who are the ones who should take responsibility? I suggest that at times even the wrong ones need to take an oversight role! Let me explain. In the early stages of a city developing it is rare that all the right people are in place, and it is at this stage that God is looking for someone to stand in the gap until others are in place. It is simply vital that some people humbly, and with a measure of recognition, step forward to take responsibility. It might be in due course that they will give way for others, but if they can begin on a path with great humility they will have opened up a way for others to follow in similar humility.

There will come a stage as the church in the city begins to move forward that apostles will need to come into place. Prophetic ministry can open up new areas through the spirit of revelation, but it is apostolic ministry that can then begin to lay foundations as to what this means for the gospel. The message of the gospel cannot be changed. That has been delivered once and for all from Jesus through the apostolic church, and in that sense the twelve were unique, and even Paul did not belong to the twelve. He had no authority to change the gospel, but did have an authority to work out in God what the implications of the gospel were in a new context. This is apostolic work and, in a first city where the gospel will be expressed in new contexts, apostolic ministry will be essential.

A major mark on those who true carry apostolic ministry for a first city will be that they are those who come to serve and do not draw disciples after themselves. They will be those who come to dialogue and to learn as much as they have to impart. They will not come with their preconceived ideas, but drawing upon their wisdom and experience will be able to see it expressed in new ways in an ever changing and moving situation. They will be those who

willingly identify with the city and all its failures, being willing to work across a diversity of church expressions.

The second area where the Ephesian church had done well was in 'hating the works of the Nicolaitans'. There is considerable debate about what the Nicolaitan heresy was, but given that one of the central themes of the book of Revelation is one of overcoming and that the name Nicolaitan is a play on words being made up of 'overcoming the people', it seems most likely that we have here a description of a movement, a tendency, or a spirit of ruling over people. This is in contrast to Jesus who through his meekness overcame the enemy in order to release the destiny of people. It also stands in stark contrast to the constant call given to every believer in the book of Revelation to overcome through following Jesus. So I suggest that at the root of this heresy is a spirit that perpetuates false divides and promotes all forms of false rulership over people. By suggesting this I do not simply mean false divides of clergy / laity, but that in a first city it will work itself out in every context of the life of the city, with divisions on economic, racial, gender and every social distinction possible being propagated.

For success to come in a first city there has to be a hatred of all works that falsely divide. (In Pergamum there was a place given to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, but in Ephesus they had to even hate their works.) In a first city there has to be a calling for the voices from the margins. The voice of Jesus that comes through 'the sound of many waters' has to be called for (Revelation 1:15). The central ground has to be occupied by Jesus not by some super elite.

There is a controlling spirit that has to be confronted in first cities. That control spirit will seek to lock up initiative to the few, whereas the promise of Jesus is that he gives the right to all to eat of the tree of life in such a city (Rev. 2:7).

A key Scripture for first cities is Isaiah 54 where the barren woman is told that she will bear children. A first city is a mother city – a place of birth. In order to breakthrough there are some responses that have to be made, and one of the key areas is to 'enlarge the site of the tent'. In other words new ground has to be staked out. That new ground is staked out as the people of God move out into new areas of their city. This takes faith and risk on their part and it takes a leadership who are willing to permission people to move out. For birth to come, enlargement has to take place, for enlargement to take

place there has to be a spirit of permissioning that is granted.

The third area of ensnarement (and the one that the Ephesian church was guilty of) is that of losing a first love for the Lord. A passionate heart desiring after his presence must fill the hearts of the believers in a first city. Those cities can begin so many new things, projects can be initiated, but passion must always take precedence over projects. Love for Jesus must be at a higher level even than that of amazing worthy deeds.

Any passion for Jesus has to outwork itself horizontally. Relationships therefore are key. Even time wasted with each other will never be wasted in a first city. This might be seen as a luxury in many eyes, but this sowing into relationships will cut right across the tendency of separating on the basis of doctrine or practise.

Two other factors in Ephesus

When Paul came to Ephesus there were two major earthly confrontations. A confrontation with the heavenly power, as represented by Artemis of the Ephesians, resulted in a clash with the two powers that manifested on earth, represented by occultic and economic powers.

So in impacting such a city it is vital that we do not shrink from such encounters. First cities are places of significant bondage, and being birthing cities they attract some key occultic powers to themselves. There will have to be some heavenly warfare to see such a city come free. On the surface Masonic powers will be strong, but they are simply a modern manifestation of more ancient powers that seek to rob the Lord and his people of the city's gift. Alongside the Masonic will be hidden and overt centres for the occult. So warfare in heaven will bring the believers in a first city to come into contact with those who are committed to the occult (and I include the Masonic in that term).

A major key to seeing freedom come is to also recognise that the powers ruling over the economics of the city are strong. We are not to be afraid of wealth, but it is so vital that the believers in a first city do not sell out to the spirit of greed. There comes a point of time when the finances of such a city get unlocked to the kingdom, but this normally only comes after a period of the church in the city being stretched financially, and often after having found that the city has been blocking any significant advance on such things

as obtaining property in the city. Before there is a breakthrough the city will seek to determine where and what the church can have in the city.

When a breakthrough occurs a major shift takes place with respect to these two powers. This will often mean that where economic powers are wrongly tied up that there is an exposure of what has been wrong, and there can be an expectation of some who fall rapidly from power. It also means when there is the breakthrough there is a new beginning where the church receives favour, and sometimes from surprising quarters. In Acts 19 there is the riot that takes place in Ephesus and there is one intriguing verse that states that 'even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre' (19:31). Paul had wanted to enter the theatre to help quell the riot but this would have been a most dangerous situation for him. The disciples with Paul urged him not to do this, and then Luke records that *even* the officials took the same line. What makes this so remarkable is that it is these same officials, known as Asiarchs, that were the ones who were in power in the city and they were even the ones who made the appointments of those to position within the occultic Artemis cult. They were not disciples of the Lord, but were friends of Paul. Favour from surprising quarters!

Permission to eat

What a great promise from Jesus to those who live within a first city. Although these promises are eschatological and will be fulfilled fully when Jesus returns, we are to manifest in the here and now what it will be like in the here (not 'there' as Jesus is returning, rather than we are 'going') and then. So in a first city there has to be a tremendous freedom to go eat of this tree. What would that entail?

The tree of life is in contrast to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That tree offered a short cut way to being like God. In a first city we have to resist the temptation to make a name for ourselves through knowledge. It is by the grace of God, not through human achievement, that something will be established. In the garden of Eden we read that the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened and they realised that they were naked. The vulnerability of nakedness was not the problem, and in eating of the tree of life there will be a vulnerability knowing that only God can cover us. There must be a resistance to having all the answers in a first city. All we are to know is that he is calling

us to eat, and our experience of that is good. In a first city we do not know the end of the story but we are committed to beginning some new chapters.

In Luke's Gospel there are eight occasions when Jesus eats meals. The eighth (representing a new start) is with the two on the road to Emmaus (probably a husband and wife, thus paralleling Adam and Eve who took food and ate). When he gives them food and eats with them we read that 'their eyes were opened' to see Jesus. In the garden of Eden their eyes were opened to understand their own shame after eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, whereas once they eat of the tree of life true revelation follows.

Revelation does flow in a first city, but only in the risky environment of continual new beginnings.

Later in Revelation (22:2) we read that the tree of life is everywhere in the transformed city. Or more specifically the tree of life appears wherever the river of God flows. In a most enthralling book on Trinitarian theology (read it and you will never believe that theology has to be dull) C. Baxter Kruger throws out the challenge to find the river of God. He says

What happens to the poor people who work the program, who do the Church thing, who follow the blind man in his bizarre religious ritual? Do they find the river, the dance, the glory? They are left sad and empty and bored and angry and depressed, and most seriously confused about Jesus. What happens to little boys and girls who know in the depth of their souls that there is a river of glory running through life and are told that this thing that the Church has invented is the river?

The Western Church faces a new problem these days, the likes of which it has never faced. The problem for the Western Church today is that people have done what the Church told them to do, they have done what the preachers told them to do, they have followed the program, the bizarre religious ritual with its Bible labels. And they have found no glory, no river, no great dance.³

The river cannot be contained to our meetings, the river is to be found in our cities. If the tree of life is found wherever the river is, it is vital that in a first city the people are permissioned to take a risk and eat wherever the river is flowing. They must be allowed to go into the city, into all its spheres and discover the fruit that grows when the people of God connect with the presence of God.

Only by so doing is there a hope of there being fruit in every month.

3 *The Great Dance*, p 74.

'First' city and 'safe' city do not go together. First and risk go together; first and freedom; first and fruit. Sounds dangerous? Well the only safeguard has to be the passion for Jesus, not the passion for a project nor even for a new way of doing church.

Mother cities are destined to bear fruit, and wherever the life of God is found there is such an abundance, we are told, that even the leaves provide healing for the nations. So, finally, in a first city we are going to expect a release of peace and reconciliation for nations. There will be many who come to a first city to study or to work, but who will meet their destiny. Many will discover that they came and were part of God's great mission field, but left with mission and healing in their hearts.

What about finishing what we start?

Not to start something really is a sin in a first city. Yet there is no great value in starting many things and finishing none. God wants what we start to be finished. One way in which things will be finished in a first city is to partner with other places and receive help from them. But there is one other element in a first city, and that is that there is a measure of latent gifting to finish. It is key though to know how to see that gift rise, and the key is to know that the gifting rises when the city has experienced failure. (By the way failure is not all it is cracked up to be – sin and never risking everything is far worse!)

Peter, the disciple of Jesus, is someone who could certainly be described as having a 'first' gifting. He is always first to speak (and put his foot in it), first out of the boat to walk on the water, first to enter the tomb although he had been outrun by John. Peter assured Jesus that he was well aware of the weaknesses of others but that he would not fail him. How much he needed failure. Yet it is in the light of his forthcoming failure that Jesus speaks to him that that after his denial of Jesus and when he has 'turned back' that his is then to go and 'strengthen' his brothers. I suggest that his turning back is in his passion for Jesus, but also in embracing his call, in spite of failure. Indeed the grace of God is that through failure there will be a 'strengthening' gift released. This strengthening gift is the grace to enable others to complete their course.

So in a first city there is a latent finishing gift that is released after failure has occurred. A first city will have failures – and perhaps more than other cities. However, if they can continually be turned back in passion to the

Lord, and be encouraged to embrace their gift for the sake of the Gospel they will discover that they begin to increasingly see what they have started finished.

We say then to the first cities in our nations: come on you first cities. We need you to arise. You don't have to succumb to old unfruitful ways. You can persevere and hold to a passion for Jesus in the face of criticism. Press on and see all the dividing walls come down. Show us that there are always new beginnings in God. Come and tell us of the tree of life, come and partner with many who need your gifts. Come and be a first in our nations. Don't let failure put you off. Even if you fail we will call for you to rise again. We know that you will find levels of grace from heaven to persevere, and you will come to our aid to help strengthen us too. We need your faith and we need your partnership.

Chapter 3

Smyrna: city of deliverance

Smyrna was some thirty-five miles north of Ephesus, renowned for its beauty and civic pride. It was a deep-water port and the city competed with Ephesus over trade. Politically over the years Smyrna had made some very astute moves and was in excellent relationship to Rome. The city also had well-planned streets and a huge theatre.

The reason for calling this a deliverance city is drawn from the clear oppression that the believers find themselves in. It is reminiscent of the bondage of Israel in Egypt. I believe God wants to bring deliverance in these places to demonstrate that he alone is the Saviour and deliverer. We might also have called this type of city, a facilitating city, for in the purpose of God they are not intended to be in a place of rivalry with a first city (Ephesus) but to be in partnership, enabling what is birthed there to be further enhanced and facilitated.

Jesus comes to a deliverance city

Jesus is the 'First and the Last', the one who has 'died but is alive'. Taking each phrase separately it seems to me that the important element in the first phrase is that Jesus is the Last. He not only begins a work but he finishes it. As with the Exodus God did not just send Moses with a message but with a corresponding anointing to persevere and finish the work of deliverance. Jesus, the First and the Last, certainly suffered oppression from the powers, and eventually he offered his life up, but that was not the end of the story. He was raised on the third day, never to die again.

Grasping hold of the Jesus who comes with this greeting is key for these cities, for the church will normally find itself in a place of oppression in these

places, and needs to receive the Jesus who has also been oppressed but is now alive with the title of being the 'Last' as well as the one who begins all things.

It is vital that faith rises in these cities for a level of breakthrough that will result in stories being told from those places of what the Lord has done in their city. For this faith to rise strong persistence will be required (and as we will read later, they will often face even greater levels of oppression yet) so only a connection to the one who always finishes what he begins, and to the one who destroys death in his path will suffice.

Some central characteristics

Although the historical Smyrna was not a poor city, it is my experience that many times these deliverance type cities suffer from more oppression than other places, often times this oppression also has an economic dimension. A not uncommon aspect in their roots is that of having some measure of deeply embedded rivalry. So, for example, the city might have come into being, or gone through a period of significant growth, through the input of someone whose motivation was a vision of the place gaining a name of significance. This significance is often measured in direct comparison to somewhere else, so that a seed of rivalry is sown deep within. These cities are also often oppressed or exploited by a neighbouring city.

Seeking to make a name for themselves is a characteristic of Smyrna-type cities. Smyrna was called 'the pride of Asia' and a group of buildings on Mount Pagos was called 'the crown of Smyrna'. However, seeking to establish a name for oneself often flows from a sense of low self-esteem.

The fortunes of these cities seem to be able to swing enormously and bearing in mind that these cities can manifest enormous economical differences I, somewhat tentatively, suggest that some of the central characteristics of these cities are as follows:

- A root, or significant manifestation, of rivalry. When the city is successful then a level of pride will manifest, when not successful the result will be of inferiority and shame.
- There will be a tendency to compare the city to elsewhere, and when the city becomes unsuccessful it can even become a place that is the object of humour.

- It will tend to exhibit oppression from within when successful, but it will be oppressed from without when there is perceived failure.
- It will exhibit both a strong predatory element and also a victim tendency. The predatory element will again manifest from within when the city is perceived to be prospering, but will come against the city from outside at other times. This predatory element will often manifest in the political arena. The victim element will be experienced in the lives of many of those who live within the city.

Surface strongholds

There are a number of aspects that immediately present themselves as evidence of a lack of breakthrough. If there are no fresh initiatives in the church, or when there are no initiatives that are being seen through to the end we can be very certain that the city is not going to experience imminent breakthrough. Whenever the church is living from a spirit of insignificance, or motivated simply to demonstrate that it is a suitable rival to a church elsewhere, again we know that the spirit over the city is shaping the life of the church, not vice versa.

We can also be fairly confident that when only one expression of the church has developed in those cities to a place of prominence and that it is self-centred no real breakthrough is taking place. This is one of the more sobering aspects, for it is possible for one expression of church to dominate the church landscape in these places, but in all honesty they are as much dependent on the spirit of rivalry and oppression than they are of the Spirit of God. So even when a largish church manifests in those cities that can be most misleading. This might simply indicate that such a church has (unwittingly) come under the predator spirit and exploited the oppressed in order to make a name for itself. The church that will win through in such a place will be a truly servant church that does not succumb to predatory ways.

Enemy strategies

In the letter itself we find that Jesus directly highlights some areas that the church is in danger of being locked up by, areas that are strongholds over the church. However, the very context of the church indicates one of the major strongholds that manifest here. The church is said to be under affliction. The Greek word, *thlipsis*, carries with it the sense of being squeezed or restricted,

thus being put under extreme pressure. This is a good description of what takes place in this city-type. There is a two-fold spirit at work over the city, either in the sense that there are two spirits at work or that there is one spirit manifesting in two ways. Let me for brevity's sake explain the scenario as if they are two spirits.

Without seeking to be exact in my terminology, I suggest that the two spirits that co-operate together over these cities are that of the predator and of the victim spirit. These two actually need one another for they feed off each other. For there to be a victim there has to be a predator, and the predator is always in need of a victim to prey on. Ironically they are both based in poverty: the victim spirit can clearly be understood as fostering poverty at every level, but the predator spirit, too, in seeking to take possession of what is not its by right is also based on a poverty mentality.

Hence in these cities the discovery of where these two spirits are at work will be a major key in finding the means to bring the city through to freedom. The church will have to come in the opposite spirit to the dominant spirits over the city, and in due course we will explore what that would mean. (At this stage, though, it is important to underline that the church must not in any way succumb to the predator spirit.) As noted above, if it is even possible for the church to grow (to a certain level) in these types of cities through exploiting the needs in those in the city, then it is vital that the church is a servant seeking to facilitate true freedom. There can be a subtle twist on this where the church corporate takes a strong central position, and people have a sense of freedom through identifying with the success of the corporate body. This is normally where there is a strong centralised leadership structure with honour and respect flowing one way (to the centre) and truth flowing in the opposite direction. By fostering such a type of church it is possible to find some quick success, but this will not be effective in disempowering the actual spirits over the city. In fact, the irony of such a scenario is that the very powers themselves could be further empowered through the perceived 'success' of that expression of church.

It is vital that the church truly becomes the servant of all with a strong empowerment of the body being at the heart of what takes place in such a city. The gifting in the city is to set free and to facilitate. The story to be told is of God's deliverance of his people. So the church must not draw attention to itself as a corporate body but must place itself in such a way that it is among

the people and there to serve.

Given that there is a strong poverty spirit in these cities it will prove to be important that the church is reaching out to those who have found that circumstances have conspired to leave them poor. It is the disenfranchised that are always among those whom Jesus wishes to bless, and never is this more true than in these places.

(I will come back to these two issues of predator and poverty when we look at the keys to breaking through.)

Another aspect that affects the church in Smyrna is that of blasphemy (or slander) from those who claim to be something that they are not. (Like Philadelphia the church has to know that it is legitimate – as an accusation of illegitimacy is the central accusation that comes from ‘the synagogue of Satan’.) Jesus promised his disciples that they would be spoken against, but it is important that the different church expressions speak well of each other. They are not to submit to a spirit of rivalry among themselves. They must reverse every curse through a constant flow of blessing.

When slandered by those outside the church it is, however, the fear that can result from this affliction and slander that can become a stronghold over the city. This is particularly true when there is no promise from Jesus to quickly change things round. Indeed, to Smyrna, he promises that the circumstances that bring the pressures will even get worse, with some being thrown into prison. Perseverance that takes the church beyond the fear barrier is vital in these places, for breakthrough is not an overnight phenomenon.

Keys to breakthrough

There are three keys to breaking through that Jesus highlights. The first we find in Jesus’ instruction to the church to see themselves as those who are rich; the second is found in his command that they are not to fear; and the third is implicit within the promise that they will not suffer the second death – they have to set right priorities.

Jesus makes no promise about immediate deliverance from affliction, but he commands the church to acknowledge that they are not in any way poor. The church has to break the victim mentality. The church has to become a deliverance church. Even if it seems as they might have died they are to so know that Jesus is the one who is risen from the dead (and the one who raises

the dead), that their sense of richness increases.

The only way to break the victim spirit is to know that one is rich. But also the only way to refuse to succumb to the predator spirit is to know that one is rich. This means that the church is to be like a wedge standing between those two spirits. As the church takes this stand inevitably the affliction becomes worse. Through choosing this position the church willingly takes on the pressure from both sides. Often in the process of discovering and declaring their richness in Christ the church will come under severe criticism from outside, and there will be ecclesiastical powers that will seek to exert an authority over the church. The church in the city needs relationships outside the city, but they are also to know that they are not dependent on superior ecclesiastical knowledge based elsewhere for their breakthrough. Indeed any help from outside has to be marked by a true servant spirit that does not seek to own but rather comes in to affirm the richness in the Smyrna-type city.

Secondly, Jesus instructs the church not to be afraid. Difficult days are ahead, but as with Israel in Egypt, deliverance will come in due season. There are truly some wonderful stories to come from these places, and some of the early signs of breakthrough in a nation, I believe, will come in these type of cities. The pathway is not an easy one though, and severe affliction (and even death) will often mark that pathway. Through suffering there will be the experience of deliverance.

Alongside the declaration of richness and the perseverance in the face of fear, there is the need to set long term priorities. Jesus does not promise freedom from affliction, and indeed tells them to be faithful even to death, but he does promise them freedom from the second death.

The church in the city then must set out priorities that are not based on short-term gains, but on long-term transformation. The eschatological crown of life will be experienced, in measure, in the city becoming what it was meant to be. A crown will be gained, not from proving itself as superior to elsewhere, but as the city comes right through to be one of the places that releases so much help to enable other places to breakthrough.

The keys then seem to be that of receiving the affirmation of richness, of not shrinking back from the task through fear, and of setting long-term goals for transformation. Attitudes and actions that are mundane, but it is these that will connect with God's delivering power. The testimony will be one of God's deliverance not one of self-deliverance.

Smryna's gift released

From a superficial perspective the city might be doing well and prospering (and probably exhibiting a pride in its achievements), or it might be experiencing oppression, setbacks and living with shame, but either way as the church stands in the gap God will use the church as an instrument to release the intrinsic gifts of the city.

Stories of God's deliverance will often begin here in these cities. That is why I believe God will often bring through something truly apostolic in these places - for it is a people who have come through affliction that he can trust will not abuse his authority.

These places will also find an effective partnership with first places (Ephesus-type cities). They will be supportive to and facilitate the initiatives that spring from there. And in partnership together with first cities they will form an efficient team that will enable establishing cities (Pergamum-type cities) to find their destiny.

They will bring a gift of facilitation as they work with other places. And given the facilitating nature of the city there will often be ministries released in those places that will be solely committed to facilitate others breaking through.

Another gift is the release of models of radical lifestyle as the true priority of spiritual richness is explored, and the desire to live in the light of the second death is embraced.

We so need these places to break through in our nations. To let us know that the Lord does not abandon the poor and the needy. So we say, come on all you deliverance cities and nations. We must hear your story, that though you were poor and oppressed, that you found that in Christ you had all the richness that anyone could need. Come breakthrough and tell us that though affliction can increase that there is a day of deliverance that comes. Come and partner with other places, show us how to serve and facilitate the dreams of others. Come and work with the places that are so sure they have everything, but are truly in danger of submitting to the authority of Satan's throne. We need you.

Chapter 4

Pergamum: establishing city

This city was a place of great learning. Here was housed an enormous library which was second only to the library at Alexandria. The connection of Pergamum with literary activity was so close that the word 'parchment' was derived from the name of the city. It was also a deeply religious place with the god Asklepios (the god of healing) being a major focus for worship. Medicine was a feature of the city and the impressive medical school had a mile long entrance lined along the way with statues of body parts that had been healed.

Pergamum was a well-ordered city - being one of the first places to use city planning, with the top of the city being kept for public buildings, the next area for the wealthy, followed by the market place and then a place for the poorer residents beneath that.

Physical characteristics

Although a city has a spiritual life - and it has to be discerned according to the spiritual characteristics not the physical ones - there are often physical characteristics that show up in cities of different types. In these 'establishing' cities some of the characteristics tend to be:

- They make space for education. Typically this will be seen with the presence of significant places of education, such as a university and diverse schools.
- Hospitals and in particular medical research will prosper in these cities.
- Typically they give attention in the planning aspect to how the city is laid out, and they seek to ensure that there are open spaces such as parks. These cities are normally very pleasant places to live.

- Access to and through these places is often very good.
- There is often a focus on the past.

Jesus comes to the establishing city

Jesus comes to Pergamum with the sharp two-edged sword. That sharp sword issues from his mouth and is destructive to everything that opposes him. Of all the greetings this one is the most 'violent'. Jesus is very definitely in a warfare mood upon entry. This is an encouragement for even if Satan has established a throne here (2:13) we can be assured that Jesus will not make peace with the enemy. However, it is not only against Satan that comes against those who are within the church but have compromised (2:15).

His approach tells us that these cities cannot be allowed to rest back in passivity. They might be centres of learning and excellence but that is not enough for these cities are called to press in to their inheritance. There is a certain amount of imagery in the letter drawn from the wanderings of the people of Israel in the wilderness, and the great challenge facing those people (and this city) was of fulfilling their call. It is possible to have provision from heaven while in the wilderness, but the true calling was not to stay in the wilderness and give testimony to God's provision, but to establish a presence in the land itself, so that the land yielded its fruit for the people of God. So in coming to the city Jesus confronts them, calling them to move on and enter into their redemptive purpose.

These cities can be extremely hard to work with but when they break through they bring testimony of the very definite advance of the kingdom, with a good measure of signs and wonders.

Surface strongholds

As mentioned the imagery for Pergamum is drawn from the wilderness and conquest periods of history. The purpose of leaving Egypt is to enter the land, and the challenge is of journeying right through the wilderness and refusing to stop off prematurely. In the wilderness God made provision for the journey with manna, but this type of provision was only ever meant to be temporary. It was the fruit of the land that the people were to eat from. It seems apparent then that the immediate strongholds that will manifest in these cities are:

- Given the emphasis on education and learning there will be a reliance

on knowledge and traditions that have been passed on. There will be a tendency to reject anything new.

- Leadership will be non-confrontational at a relational level, but willing to teach publicly in such a way that others are put in their place. This is due to the teaching nature of the city, whereas Jesus comes with direct confrontation.
- Divisions that occur in the body will often be based on doctrine. Correct teaching is given a higher value than committed relationships.
- Given the orderliness of the city, there will be a sense that the church knows where everything fits but does not make room for the prophetic word of God. These cities are not good at handling prophetic ministry, wanting to qualify what has been brought to the point where it has all-but been disqualified. The message these cities send out to the prophets is that the church is doing well so don't disturb it.

Enemy strategies

The surface strongholds are what will become immediately manifest given the nature of the gifting of such a place. If the calling is to press in to the land and therefore be a place of effective strategy and warfare, it becomes self-evident that the enemy will love to see the church simply wander in the wilderness with no forward momentum. There can be great starts in these places but on closer examination all that takes place is history repeating itself. A new church or even movement can begin with great promise, but end up wandering while still believing its own publicity that it is cutting edge. Years later another church movement can begin in the same city only to repeat the cycle of history.

The deeper level strategies though can be seen through the discerning eyes of Jesus who releases his prophetic insight in this letter. It is to these central issues I now turn my attention. He highlights three aspects: that Pergamum was where Satan's throne was and that there were two areas of teaching that were a problem. I will begin by looking at the two aspects of teaching. Jesus says that they have those who:

- hold to the teaching of Balaam, and those who
- hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

In Ephesus they were commended for hating the *works* of the Nicolaitans, but given that Pergamum type-cities have a teaching orientation it is appropriate that it is the teachings that are causing problems here. Although there will be a tendency for pride to grow over having correct doctrine, there can also be a tolerance that allows these two issues to go unchallenged.

The first is that of compromise. Balaam was hired to curse the people of God but found that he could not curse what God had blessed. If that was all he had come against the people of Israel with that might have been the end of the problem but later we find that the real curse he introduced was the one of compromise. In Numbers 25 (and made clear in Numbers 31:16) we find that he had been instrumental in leading the people into false relationships through leading sexual relations with Moabite women. Even the leaders among the people had not stood their ground but they too had compromised. It was only through the violent response of Phinehas that the people were spared.

So the enemy will allow leadership to be present in this type of city who will teach good clear doctrine, but will go for the soft option. It will take those who rise up, like Phinehas, with a passion for purity that will be instrumental in bringing about a breakthrough.

The class system seems to me to be at the heart of the Nicolaitan problem. So in this type of city there is a two-fold stronghold around the leadership. There is the stronghold of control and the stronghold of compromise. Control will outwork itself in that there will be little room given for fresh initiatives to spring up. What is in place will be seen as enough. This is why I believe in these places the new often comes to the city through youth. It is not uncommon for something to break out in and around (for example) a University campus. The impetuosity of youth becomes a tool in the hand of God to shake up the status quo. In the story of Israel the wilderness became the graveyard for a whole generation who left Egypt with the promises of God but did not finish their task, and it was a new generation that entered the land.

In partnership with the control issue is one of compromise. Passionate discipleship will mean that risks are taken. It will mean running the risk of being misunderstood. A low risk leadership in these cities will never pattern the way to the breakthrough point.

The first stronghold that Jesus speaks of is that of 'Satan's throne' being

in the city. There is debate as to what this was a historical reference to. Among the many possibilities that are suggested we note the following as three likely 'candidates': it could have been a major Altar to Zeus, or the judge's bench where the proconsul sat, or it could even have been the shape of the hill on which the city was built. My own consideration is that given the inability of scholars to decide on this issue there might well be a more profound implication for us. Given that these cities are often pleasant places to live in, it is very easy to be fooled into believing the lie that everything is good and that problems are at a minimal level. The church then needs the very stark reminder that they battle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in the heavenly realm. Perhaps Satan's throne is also present in other cities but in a Pergamum-type city there needs to be a major reminder that he is present and present in power.

It is most likely though that the text does mean that there is a specific presence of Satan's strategic rule that has been established in these places. Seated in that place an influence will spread from there over a wider area. Hence, we can expect to find a strong presence of occult, often hidden, and that these cities can be found to be at the centre of elaborate patterns and even 'grid-systems' of the enemy's strategy.

In one such city in Scotland we discovered a pattern over the city of a hexagram that was pinned to one historical and natural site, and to five graveyards that circled the city. All graveyards were set up within a few years of each other (during a time of church division) and the centre point of the hexagram passed right through an artificial high place erected by the same person who was behind the establishing of the graveyards. (A pentagram in occult use is to draw the powers of demons to a place, whereas the hexagram is to hold them there.) It was no great surprise that the spirit of death is so prominent and even visible in the city.

In another city, this time in the USA, some time ago the pastor showed me the grid pattern over the city that converted Satanists had shown to him. These occultists had used this grid to position people on key points with the belief that they could hold back the church in its advance. This church has persevered, opened right up to the prophetic, invested in the youth, and as a result are seeing an amazing breakthrough in signs and wonders. In a recent short visit to the city I had four encounters that took me outside the church boundaries (I went to two restaurants, a coffee shop and a hotel), in all four

places I was met by staff in those places that were from the church. This church is making a sound in the Spirit that it is possible to establish something in the land. Their success, though, has only come through a violent and persistent embracing of what the Lord is currently saying and doing.

For this city to break through

I suggest that a major key (perhaps the major key) is for there to be courageous leadership that rises into place. By leadership I do not simply mean those who are the recognised pastors, but those who (even like Phinehas) have the passion of Christ in their hearts and are willing to risk it for him. This courageous leadership has to be free though from the spirit of control. No measure of legalism will bring about a breakthrough, only passion for Christ and his purposes.

There has to be a breaking with tradition. Room has to be made for the prophetic, particularly given that the city has a strong teaching orientation. Teachers and teachers and prophets don't make easy bedfellows but it is that combination that I consider can release something truly apostolic. Acts 13 tells us that the apostolic ministries of Paul and Barnabas were released when the teachers and prophets at Antioch spent time together ministering to the Lord. The church in the city needs not only to receive prophets, but what they put in place has to be prophetic. A large part of that has to be the empowerment of youth. Pergamum has a focus on the past, the empowerment of youth shows that we have a focus on what is to come. It demonstrates that regardless of how much of God's provision is currently being experienced it is not what we are settling for.

These cities must develop a warfare anointing. Jesus comes in warfare mode and they have to receive him in such a way. The teaching anointing finds the issue of warfare difficult, as certain aspects of warfare are less 'provable' than the exegesis of texts, yet warfare is part of what these cities are to develop.

The Israelites left Egypt and the journey through the wilderness was, in part, to prepare them for war. Entry to the land was by means of promise of God *and* through their participation in the warfare that God was initiating.

The calling over these cities to enter the land is high. They will not fulfil everything necessary for the whole body of Christ; they will not discover a

foolproof method of success; but they are called to demonstrate that it is possible to get something significant established in the land. They are to inform us that in spite of giants in the land there is fruit that can be enjoyed. This all comes though at a cost, and part of the cost is of developing a warfare anointing.

A major side benefit when these cities breakthrough is to discover a true well of healing. It was in the wilderness that God first revealed his nature as a healing God (Exod. 15:26). He had healed before but it was at the waters at Marah that the revelation came of who he was with respect to healing. It came at the price of first discovering that the waters were bitter. A church that sets itself toward healing will breakthrough but it will only come through persistence, and often after experiencing some bitterness. This well will also be strongly contested for the city of Pergamum had a focus on a false god of healing, thus indicating that the enemy wanted to steal part of the birthright of these city.

Finally, Jesus promises

There are two promises here to those who overcome. They will be given some hidden manna, and will be given a white stone with a new name on it that only those who receive it will know the name.

In Scripture manna is called 'bread from heaven' (Neh. 9:15; Ps. 105:40) and in the Septuagint was called 'food of angels' (Ps. 78:25). What is clear is that hidden manna is supplied from heaven. There is the promise of a supply on the journey that will sustain those who pilgrim. Against all the odds God will feed the people and strengthen them because entry to the land is not an immediate experience. Elijah had this experience when twice he was encouraged by an angel to eat food supplied from heaven (1 Kings 19:1-10). Elijah was in the wilderness and in the light of eating was able to go for forty days and forty nights without further food. This is so obviously a parallel to the work of Christ who went for forty days and nights into the wilderness after receiving an anointing from the Spirit of God under the approval of his Father.

Hidden manna then is strength from heaven, we might almost describe it as a 'secret' supply to enable travel through the wilderness, to sustain the people while they engage in the warfare necessary on the works of darkness. The battle is intense but there is miraculous provision for a successful outcome.

The white stone with the name on it again is debated among scholars as to what this refers to, but a good explanation has been suggested along the following lines. The natural stone of the area was black but for inscriptions on buildings, slabs of white stone were specially transported there for carving. If that is the historical background then the stone was shaped in such a way as to define the purpose of the building and to declare to whom, or for what, it was dedicated.

Putting these two promises to the overcomers would mean something along these lines:

They would be supernaturally supplied with bread from heaven for their journey in and through the wilderness, where they were destined for warfare. This would give them strength to overcome even where Satan's throne was, thus releasing the knowledge that the land itself will yield a harvest. They will then, like Jesus, plunder the goods through deliverance and healing, as they have been effective in first binding the strong man. These overcomers would also become those shaped by God rather than by the locality. And through knowing who they were, it would be them that defined what was being built and left their mark on it as to whom the building was dedicated to. They truly would be those who established a beachhead in the midst of enemy territory. They would be those who turn the desert into a fruitful place.

So we say, to all establishing cities and establishing nations. Rise up at this time. God will give you an incredible level of supply so that you can embark on, what others would consider is, a risky and courageous path. But you will be able to do what has not been done before. You will even be able to impact where Satan has placed a throne. You will show to the other cities that healing is not a past experience, nor even a rare experience. So welcome the prophetic in your midst. Invest in your youth. Do not be critical of the new things that God initiates in your city. As you do so you will be the ones who define your city; you will demonstrate that your city is not a place where the throne of Satan is, but the place that is dedicated to the Lord. You will have to be strong and courageous. His word will have to remain in your mouth and in your heart. But the promise is that the Lord will establish you in all your ways, you will be prosperous and successful. We call you through and rejoice at your success.

Chapter 5

Thyatira: model city

Of all the seven cities Thyatira was probably the least significant, certainly in terms of size. Pliny the elder dismissed Thyatira with the phrase, 'Thyatira and other unimportant communities'. Yet due to the roads that passed through Thyatira it was actually a busy trading place.

Although not significant size-wise yet I suggest that it is the city that comes nearest to being a model city. These type of cities, regardless of their size, are anything but insignificant as working models are so important. Structurally, in the set of seven cities in Revelation, it stands in the middle of the list of seven and draws its imagery from the kingly period in Israel. However, by using the term 'model' it is important that we do not err the other way and assume it will demonstrate every aspect of the coming kingdom. A model is not a blueprint and cannot be copied in every aspect. Indeed a model can even be improved on, but there always remains the need for working models that can be looked at and learned from.

The most unique aspect of the city of Thyatira was its great diversity. It is in this city that we discover more trade 'guilds' than elsewhere in Asia. It is this aspect of great diversity that is one of the central factors in a model city.

If, as I suggest, a model city draws up aspects of all the other cities into itself then again it becomes clear that such a city will manifest a greater level of diversity than elsewhere. So when we come to the church in such a city it is important that the church manifests significant diversity. Unity is vital, but a bland uniformity does not demonstrate kingdom realities. A unity displayed amidst diversity is the key to breakthrough in these places and one of the greatest challenges in a model city is for the diversity to develop in strength.

Some important notes on a model city

Diversity is the key word for the model city. This has so many implications that have to be noted as one seeks to help develop such places. I list a number of them below:

- A model city draws up into itself elements from all the other cities, hence the potential strongholds that can manifest in a model city will also be diverse.
- The central stronghold mentioned (that of Jezebel) will also manifest itself in the other cities. It is not unique here but can always find a concentrated expression in these places.
- The promise to rule is a promise to all the churches in every city. That is the destiny of the people of God, and ultimately the rulership of the earth is not simply for the believers in the model city, but for all believers in all cities. But here in a model city that rulership will be expressed as a picture of the whole, hence the DNA of rulership will have to be right. It will have to be Christ-like and also in these places it will have to be diverse. The ruling is not simply in relation to the church, but the nations. Hence any idea of a 'city eldership' in these places would have to include those whose setting is also in the spheres of the city.

Jesus comes to a model city

He comes as the 'Son of God'. This is a normal way by which believers describe Christ, but it is unusual in that this is the only reference to Jesus as the Son of God in Revelation. It stands in direct contrast to the worship of the local cultic worship of Apollo Tyrimnos (the sun god and son of the supreme god Zeus) and the claims of the emperor to be an incarnation of the gods. In a place where there were false claimants to the throne Jesus asserts his presence and claim. Further Apollo was the god of prophecy, and here in Thyatira where there is the manifestation of false prophecy (through Jezebel's presence), Jesus is indicating that he comes with searching truth. We see this further with the description of Jesus as the one who 'has eyes like a flame of fire' and 'feet like burnished bronze'. There is a very definite presence of Jesus coming to the city and that presence will be one of glorious holiness. He is the one who purifies because he hates sin. This is not a Jesus that one would mess

with!

So in this type of city we can expect there to be some sharp judgements on sin. There can be no room for tolerating compromise; there can be no rivals to Jesus. The city and church will manifest diversity, but the unifying factor will be that of Jesus' presence laying all things bare.

Jesus comes with piercing sight, and this sight connects the model city with the cities that help initiate new things through their prophetic sight, and he comes with his feet ready to be planted which connects the model city with those cities that establish a presence in the land and in creation.

Some central characteristics

Model cities will themselves be very diverse so it is less easy to describe the central characteristics. Such cities will differ from each other both in terms of their size and their history. The common element though that they will share is their internal diversity. This will likely be represented in some of the following ways:

- A great spread of nationalities and cultures
- The cuisine will be diverse, often with restaurants that offer food from cultures from around the world
- Numerous religious affiliations
- A larger spectrum of church denominations and styles than might be expected in a place
- A variety of trades
- A model city will have within it model projects, and be conducive for the release of pilot projects
- A number of headquarters will normally be located in the city
- A number of model cities will indeed be regional (and perhaps even national) capitals
- Many model cities will export something that might even go round the globe - Thyatira was famous for its purple dye (Acts 16:14).

Surface strongholds

The immediate strongholds that will manifest in these cities when they are not

breaking through will be related to the diversity issue. Either the diverse expressions of the body of Christ will not be held together in the bond of unity, resulting in widespread division, or the diversity that should be manifest in the city will not be expressed with the strongest voice silencing all other voices. So the immediate stronghold will either be that of division or of uniformity. The division will often be fed by the attitudes of a dominant leader, or church. The issue of unity is so important in these cities for that is the basis by which the diversity can be fruitfully held together.

The possibility of abusive rulership is always close to the surface in these cities. The promise is to 'rule over the nations', and although it is true that Jesus shatters the nations like a piece of pottery, that authority was gained through laying down his life for them.

Enemy strategies

We can almost sum this up in one word: 'Jezebel'. The only proviso that has to be put in place alongside this comment is that the strongholds that manifest in the other six city-types can also manifest themselves here in the model city.

It is not likely that Jezebel is to be identified as a specific person, but the use of the name indicates the presence of a major stronghold. The marriage of Ahab to Jezebel was for political expediency, but opened the door to a major attack on the purity of devotion to Yahweh among the people of God and then to an open attack on the kingship in the land. (1 Kings 16:30-32).

There was a toleration of this stronghold that is in such stark contrast to the Jesus who comes to this city with a burning passion for purity. This stronghold cannot be tolerated for the elements that are highlighted here are so destructive of the work of God.

The Jezebelic spirit will manifest itself in self-appointment, for we read 'she calls herself' a prophetess. Self-appointment is always a big give away. True servants of God carry a humility knowing that only God can appoint. The self appointed nature of this means that there will be significant opposition to what God has truly appointed - there will be an opposition to those that God has anointed to bring a godly lead.

There will be false claims made in the name of prophecy, and this will

be particularly focused against what is truly prophetic. In Elijah's day there had to be a showdown between the prophets of Baal and himself. The true prophetic voice had been silenced and not welcomed in the land. This false prophetic claim will often be outworked through teaching, for we read that Jezebel was 'teaching'.

We are told that Jezebel, through her teaching, was seducing the servants of God. The element of persuasion and relationship used is often very visible for the word used here to 'seduce' means to seduce through leading into error. There has to be a bringing to the light what the Lord has spoken and what he has promised so that sin is exposed and everyone held accountable to the word and promises of God.

Naboth (1 Kings 21) is a good example of what the spirit of Jezebel seeks to do to the servants of God. Ahab had desired to have his vineyard to turn it into a vegetable garden. The vineyard speaks of Naboth's place of fruitfulness in God, and although he refuses to give it up, Jezebel comes and joins herself to Ahab who abuses his position of rulership. Her challenge to him is worded, 'Do you not govern Israel?' (1 Kings 21:7). There is therefore strong attack against the servants of the Lord and it can come through a wrong allegiance of those in leadership. In other words this manipulating spirit is not simply a spirit that can work against leadership, but leadership can even be aligned to it and allow for people to be disinherited. Control, manipulation and even domination (the elements of witchcraft) are what people can exercise over leaders, or what leaders can exercise over people. Control is indeed just that - it is *over* people. We are not to have control over anyone, for Jesus died in order to preserve our freedom from control. When a Jezebelic spirit is strong false accusation is also part of what manifests (1 Kings 21:10).

The seduction involves elements of compromise (eating food sacrificed to idols) and sexual immorality. The eating of the food sacrificed to idols in Thyatira was almost certainly tied to the many guilds, and the compromise was in order to make commercial gain. So there is a strong warning here about compromising with the city into order to gain financially. The mention of sexual immorality is a term for false worship in the Old Testament, so it is not necessarily a direct literal reference to sexual immorality, although where there are allegiances given to other people, and where there is a toleration of control, sexual immorality often follows.

Family life and true order are very much the object of attack. When the

spirit of Jezebel is strong there is a perversion of the judgement that Jesus speaks. He says he will judge her with sickness and that her children will experience death (Rev. 2:21-23). The perversion that takes place is of sickness coming against everyone who seeks to pattern the work of God in these places and with a strong focus of attack on their physical and spiritual children.

Jesus exposes all that has gone on as being the 'deep things of Satan'. Thyatira-type places can easily draw from other places and so be open to change, but they must always bring everything under the scrutiny of Jesus. They cannot be overly-impressed and make a quick response, otherwise that which is embraced might prove to be totally destructive.

Breaking through

The Thyatiran church is told to 'hold fast to what they have'. There has to be a strong contention here not to move away from what God has done. The temptation will be to let go, but the judgement of Jesus is very strong in this city. Unity is not a luxury it is a necessity. Diversity is not an enemy it is a necessity. Holding those two together is a wonderful challenge that requires true humility and honour from one part of the body to the other. Diversity will have to be honoured, and the church will have to work hard to maintain the right of diverse expression for one another.

Thyatira was also a first line of defence against any invading army. It was a little frontier city, and, spiritually, model cities are to be first line of defence places. There are works of the enemy that can be stopped in their tracks there, and also ground can be gained there that can make for strategic advance into Sardis-type places.

As I write these paragraphs I am in a city in California. Last night I prophesied concerning two cities in California, one of which is the city I am currently in that today I understand is a Thyatira-type place. The other one I referred to is a definite and very classic Sardis-type city. I did not understand this element of 'first line of defence' places last night but now can understand the prophetic word in the light of that. (To protect the identity of the places I will use Thyatira and Sardis in what I quote.)

I spoke these words. 'Sardis is the big jewel to be gained, she carries the same gifting as the state, but the keys to her release lie in Thyatira. The

strongholds manifest themselves in Sardis but their roots are here in Thyatira. There has to be a bringing of this city into line in order to release Sardis.'

The promise through the model city

There are two promises. The first, in simple terms, is the promise of rulership. Our idea of what it means to rule has to be submitted to the rule that Jesus models. His is truly a servant rulership. In the words of the song he is 'the Servant King'. This promise is not about lording it over, but of establishing true order and rulership throughout the earth. The authority is immense and (undeniably) spiritually violent, but it flows from a place of humility and submission. The authority Jesus gives is one that has been given to him by his Father. There is an order to this authority: the overcomers have authority because they are under authority. Unless they exercise their authority in a Jesus-like way they will fail to see their city impacted.

The authority is an authority over that which stands against the people of God and their advance. The rod of iron is almost certainly the shepherd's club that was used for killing animals that endangered the sheep. In ancient culture it was not uncommon to inscribe the names of the king's enemies on earthen pots and then they were ritually smashed to symbolise the destruction of the kings' enemies.

So we can conclude that as the church in the model city preserves what God has given, and in humility submits to the true king that an authority is released that is truly a delivering authority to subdue the enemies of God. Hence, there are strongholds that can be broken here that will have an impact beyond the immediate geographical boundaries.

The second promise is that they will be given the 'morning star'. As with many of the symbols it is not easy to be definitive about the meaning. It could well be symbolic of life and light coming and the morning star was viewed in the ancient world as heralding the birth of a new day. Jesus himself is described as the 'morning star' in Rev. 22:16 which draws from the oracle from Balaam in Num. 24:17. There the emphasis is of a ruler arising who will crush the enemies of God. So in all likelihood the promise is another way of saying that there will be an impartation of authority from Jesus who has truly established God's kingdom, through destroying every enemy. Perhaps the added element in this promise is that they will be aware (and see ahead of others) that the new day of God's presence is being heralded.

Final comments

Thyatira is placed between two sets of three cities. Pergamum ended that first set of three with the mandate to establish something significant in the land. Sardis follows on from Thyatira and begins a new set of three cities. With these next three God intends that there is an expansion of what has gone before. However, they are unlikely to be too successful without the model city taking the ground apportioned to it. And although the model city draws from all other cities it is also key at helping release the Sardis-type cities that follow.

We call the model cities to rise. We call them to show us how the kingdom of God grows through crushing his enemies before him. We call them to maintain, and even rejoice in, their diversity. Show us how to be united under one Lord. Be the first line of defence when the enemy seeks to advance. Push back the enemy from the land that he has occupied. Come and open up space for cities of refuge to arise. Don't sell out to commercialism, stay true to what you have and you can cleanse so much in the nations. Don't submit to false prophecy but foster the Elijah anointing that will lead the way in bringing in the rule of Messiah.

Chapter 6

Sardis: city of mercy

One of the first things we note on reading the letter to Sardis is how similar the greeting is from the risen Lord to the one he brought to Ephesus. Both these cities are intended to be places of birth and beginnings, to initiate on behalf of others. Ephesus began a series of three cities and Sardis likewise begins a second series of three.

Sardis was a wealthy city with the gold bearing river, the Pactolus, running through it making a significant contribution to its wealth. In Sardis we have the beginning of money in the modern sense of the word with the first coinage ever to be minted in Asia Minor being minted here.

Sardis also claimed to have invented the process for dyeing wool and the city had been a major fashion centre. Alongside fashion there was jewellery making and the city was also known for its music. Given the list of characteristics mentioned above it is easy to see that this city then was a trend-setting city with a significant influence beyond its own immediate area. With arts, fashion and also its wealth this city was a 'happening' place. Creative gifts were honoured and flourished in this city.

Religiously the city honoured the Anatolian goddess Cybele and it was through the worship of this goddess of nature and fertility that another characteristic of the city developed. The worship was a wild frenzied affair with very few moral boundaries. Even on the lips of pagans Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, being both pleasure- and luxury-loving.

This last aspect means that the city was a place of great tolerance and here, as in so many cities of refuge, a level of acceptance and mercy toward people was exhibited. Mercy, that is, without judgement. This is not true

mercy, for although mercy triumphs over judgement it does not eliminate it.

The characteristic mix in these cities means they are very open to a New Age type invasion and will also allow all sorts of sexual practices to be accepted as a norm. (However, as per everything the enemy does, he cannot only pervert what is there. He does not come with an original creativity, but induces people to abuse the intrinsic characteristics of the place.)

In seeking to define the nature of this city we can call it a city of refuge (or mercy), but also given that it begins another set of three cities we will discover that it can also be described as a city of development. These cities have a gifting where they can take what is happening and bring significant development to it.

Jesus comes to the city of refuge

As mentioned already the greeting is similar to the greeting that Jesus brought to Ephesus. Both cities have the ability to birth new things for the sake of other places: Ephesus carrying the true spirit of initiation, whereas Sardis bringing the dimension of expansion and novelty. To both places Jesus comes with a universal aspect. In Ephesus he comes with the seven stars and walks among the seven lampstands; here in Sardis he comes with the seven stars and the seven Spirits of God. The seven stars indicate that there is a destiny for the church as a whole that is being worked out in these places. These types of cities need to hold a strong faith that Jesus is building the church, that the gates of hell will not prevail against his work. So, the Sardis-type cities, like the Ephesus-type, must have a strong prophetic element to them particularly with respect to the destiny of the church. The unique prophetic contribution in the Sardis-type cities will be that of communicating the mercy of God and encouraging the church to think outside the box.

Jesus not only comes with the seven stars, but also comes to Sardis with the 'seven Spirits of God'. I consider that this is easiest understood as a description for the fullness of the Spirit of God.⁴ This surely must indicate that if ever there were places that should manifest a fully orbed life of the Spirit of God it should be these types of places. A fullness of the Spirit will include a

4 Some commentators have suggested that these seven spirits are seven angels, but given 1) that the stars are the angels and these are mentioned separately in this greeting and 2) that the first mention of the seven spirits of God in Revelation come in a greeting that seems to be Trinitarian (1:4,5) it is best to take this as a numeric way of communication the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

charismatic element but that will not exhaust the work of the Spirit. The fullness of the Spirit will mean that these places should resonate with the creativity of God, so the arts will flourish here. It will not be possible to establish an effective church in these places that is a boring expression of church. It will be vital that creativity is at the heart of any church that is going to break through. The fullness of the Spirit will mean that the people of God as a whole will be empowered, and not simply some elite leadership. These places of mercy carry a destiny to see a people movement released.

Surface strongholds

Following our pattern that we are using it is now evident what some of the immediate strongholds that will manifest in these places of mercy.

- A stranglehold over creative gifts.
- A tendency for one expression of church to claim to have the Spirit, thereby writing off other expressions of the body of Christ.
- A lack of any new developments or trends.
- A controlling over-centralised style of leadership that seems to have a greater claim to having the Spirit of God than the body. And often alongside that stronghold, ironically,
- A teaching on grace that ignores the need for godly discipline so releasing a tolerance without discernment.

All of the above are surface strongholds. If those elements are being manifest we know that the church is not really breaking through to the place of harnessing the gifts of the city. There are, however, strategies of the enemy that we will need to understand in order to help the church bring the city to a place of openness.

Enemy strategies

Sardis, from Jesus' perspective had a name for being alive - it had a reputation, but this was no longer a current reality. Past accomplishments and victories are wonderful, as it is vital for every community to have stories of God's grace that can be recounted to subsequent generations. The danger though in the city of refuge is of only having past stories, rather than living testimonies. Sardis is rebuked for having a reputation for being alive. Having a

reputation can be a deception. In Sardis there is no excuse for living off the past, for it is here that Jesus comes with the seven Spirits of God.

There is also an inability to complete what has been begun, for Jesus says that their works have not been found perfect (or completed). Like the city itself, which had a great temple in honour of Artemis that was never completed, the church here had not brought to completion what they had started. Perseverance has to be developed in these places.

These two strongholds are related, for an over-focus on the past will mean that insufficient energies are given to the current task. This type of city is called to focus on the next phase of what God wants to release. These places need to be on the cutting edge of what is taking place, indeed when these places are healthy there should be something like a restlessness in the people of God as they continually press in for something new. Bringing pastoral leadership to such situations are a challenge, but what cannot be accepted is where the church settles down and becomes passive.

Passivity or sleepiness is a third major issue highlighted in this letter to Sardis. The fortress part of the city was built on what was supposed to be an unassailable cliff yet twice in its history the city was taken by surprise at night. Hence a significant stronghold is that of passivity due to a false sense of security.

The three strategies of the enemy then that are highlighted in this letter are:

- A dependence on a past reputation.
- A lacking of energy and focus toward developing new 'trends'.
- A passivity through a false sense of security.

The redemptive giftings

We can now put together the contribution that the Sardis-type of cities can make to the work of God in a nation. As cities of refuge they can become places that help everyone find their destiny and place. Even when people have felt that they have not fitted elsewhere they can flourish in these situations where they do more than simply find their place – they can also develop in their calling and significance. This will be particularly true for those who are creative and those who have gifts of innovation.

The seven-fold dimension of the presence of the Spirit of God in these places means that there can be wells of prayer and the prophetic open here for whole areas or even nations. These places can become significant refreshing places for many people to come to, with copious amounts of the Holy Spirit being there to be drunk from.

As trend-setting places the gifting that is released is not only to hear and see what God is doing but to be willing to do things in ways that have not been thought of before. They have the ability to break patterns, not being hemmed in by previously developed structures, and that ability is so essential if the church is to break out to a new level. This, perhaps more than any other aspect, is the gift of these places.

In one such city in the UK where I have travelled it is clear that room has been made for a great expression of the Holy Spirit. They have sought to honour the past, but not to live under a past reputation, and while they have continued to honour what has been, they are committed to open up a prophetic well in their area. One of the leaders sent me some papers on the future shape of the church and when I read them I was most excited. Excited, not because they contained a foolproof design for church, but because they were the first papers I had ever read where there was a plan not only for change, but for non-existence of what was here already. In other words the commitment to a new shape meant a plan to bring to an end what was already in place. It is easy to read material that uses such words as 'we are open to changing our structures' but it is (sadly) rare to read material that has a strategy that will leave the present leadership disempowered and the body empowered to do the works of service, and that will so release a new shape of church that the present shape will not survive. When I read the papers I was more than willing to make a commitment to those people.

Another aspect to these cities is that they are night cities. Jesus says in this letter that he will come as a thief at night. This aspect means that many of these places will have to develop prayer gatherings that begin to take back the night hours. 'Watch and pray' will be a significant part of their task.

I spent a few days in Paris (a Sardis-type city) at the end of 2002 and while there was asking the Lord for revelation concerning the city. I was even speaking to the city, calling for her to reveal her characteristic. I felt as if I saw so little for some two days, but in the middle of the final night there, around 2.40 am, I was awoken and it was as if the city was present in the room. It came

alive and there was revelation at night. Over the next two hours I had encounters with the Lord in the room as he showed me certain aspects of the city. The most significant being when I was taken in a vision to the bottom of the Eiffel tower (I had never been there physically before, and I consider it was a vision although it was possibly something stronger than that). In that experience the Lord was speaking to me as he showed me how so many people come to the city and viewed it through romantic eyes. To come to Paris to propose marriage or to celebrate togetherness is a good thing in itself, but I began to weep as I heard the city saying 'who will come here and make commitment to me? Who will love me for who I am? Who will love me enough to commit themselves to me?'

A central issue in these places is to find those who will come and pay the price of loving the city for its own sake, rather than simply viewing it romantically. These cities can be romantic places to visit and even to live in but they require a commitment, even to the level of covenant, in order to turn them around. Challenging indeed, but I believe incredibly rewarding.

It was when I found out that the city revealed itself at night that I realised this was a Sardis-type of city, and then when I later discovered that Sardis had been a fashion centre that is what confirmed to me the nature of Paris (and indeed the gifting of the nation of France as a whole).

In line with the night element these places will also be very conducive to revelation coming to people in dreams. In Scripture dreams was a very common way by which the Lord revealed himself or the future, and it is time that these hours are taken back. It is not uncommon to find believers being disturbed, particularly during occultic seasons, between 2.30 and 3.30 am, when the occultic curses come to a focus. We must proclaim that the night hours do not belong to the occult, and in Sardis-type cities it will become increasingly important to take them back.

A remnant will be enough

When Jesus speaks hope to Sardis it is on the basis that there are those who 'have not soiled their clothes'. Jesus does not call for the many to turn the situation, but calls for the few. He wants to work with the few in order to turn the many. Numbers are not the key, but the cleanliness of the clothing worn by the few. There is probably another element beyond cleanliness that is indicated by the mention of wearing white clothing for, in the Roman world,

citizens were often given white clothing to wear in order to celebrate a military victory. In Sardis' history it was taken twice because of not being alert at night. Now by way of contrast Jesus promises to give to those who are awake and watchful robes celebrating victory.

Alongside the white robes there are two other promises. First, their names will not be erased from the book of life. In both Jewish and Hellenistic cultures the erasure of a name meant exclusion from the community. (In Greek culture names were erased from the civic register if they committed a serious crime, and in the OT removal of a name was associated with capital punishment.) And second, their names will be confessed before the Father and the angels.

The word 'name' occurs four times in this letter (3:1 as a criticism of having a name for being alive; 3:4 the few 'persons' whose clothes have not been soiled is literally a few 'names'; and here in 3:5 where there are two references). The name in Scripture is an expression of one's identity and the means by which authority is released. So as with the other letters the promise is eschatological and will be finally fulfilled at the *parousia*, but what will be true then has to be manifest now, so the key element for Sardis-type places is the promise that they will have an identity that is permanent and a level of heavenly authority (indicated by the confession of their names in heaven). This heavenly authority is contingent on dealing with any compromise that comes through fear, for in the Gospels we read that Jesus will indeed confess the disciples before God and the angels provided they are willing to suffer (Matt. 10:26-33; Luke 12:4-9). For the promises to manifest there has to be a willingness to embrace whatever persecution is necessary.

Given this use of the word 'name' in this letter it becomes evident that those who want to engage in turning a Sardis-type place around will have to know who they are. Jesus does not work with the many, nor simply with the few, but he works with the few 'names'. The 'names' are those who know who they are and have a clear sense of their own identity. These ones are absolutely key in these situations. Such people then have to know that they have rights of inheritance (names written in the book of life) and that as a result their names are confessed in heaven. The promises for those who will commit themselves to these places are awesome. Angels can know the names of these people and so again an expectation of angelic activity would be part of the gifting of these places.

Final comments

Given that the church is told to 'strengthen what remains' and to 'remember what they received and heard' there is a strong exhortation to make sure that they lay hold of what has already been deposited. A good OT narrative for this is the re-digging of the wells by Isaac that his father Abraham had dug in a previous generation (Gen. 26:12-33). Twice he had to dig and contend with the Philistines over the wells that were re-opened, but then came the breakthrough as he opened up the well named Rehoboth (meaning broad or roomy place). Given that the Sardis-type cities are developing cities they have to make room for expansion and in order to do so they have to press through the contention and opposition.

The contention though is to enable the digging of a well that is a well of plenty. They are called to open up wells that have not yet been opened, to demonstrate that in spite of opposition that there is more water than was previously thought. A significant sign in these places of a turn around is when spiritually (and often symbolically) there is the breaking through to space and room to exist and to grow. Spiritually this is where there is the 'feel' of freedom to breathe and the lack of oppression; symbolically it will often be marked by the release of new property, or something similar, for the body of Christ.

This establishing of the Rehoboth is to lead to the opening up of the well of covenant or sevens ('Beersheba'). Sardis-type places are eventually to demonstrate that even the enemies will have to acknowledge the favour of God that is on the body of Christ. So these places truly are developing cities, cities that do not stand still, that do not simply repeat what has gone on before but demonstrate that boundaries can be broken. They become great partners for the Gateway cities (Philadelphia: the subject of the following chapter). They are gifted to enable Gateway cities truly to come into their own.

So we call you wonderful cities of mercy and refuge to rise. You have such a well to tap into, and we want to encourage you to do things that have not been done before. Be unashamed at developing what has been done elsewhere, and show that take it can be taken to new dimensions. You can open up the rich wells of creativity, you can release dreams and dreamers. We need you so much. Our God has never been boring, so come show us this God who is alive.

Chapter 7

Philadelphia: gateway city

Philadelphia was situated on the eastern edge of the Roman Empire on the main trade route from Smyrna and also lay on the major Roman postal road from Troas to Pergamum. It was ideally placed for commerce and was called 'the gateway to the east'. Philadelphia was expected to introduce the Greek and Roman ways to the peoples of the east, so we can call it a 'missionary city'. The predominant imagery used in the letter is of a door or gate being opened in order that there could be free flow out from the city, hence the terminology of Philadelphia being a 'gateway' city.

Jesus comes to the gateway city

Jesus comes as the holy one, the true one. This sets the city in line with its purpose, for as the holy one (a title often used for God in the OT, indicating his wholly otherness) Jesus is coming to them from another dimension, so that they will bring his presence into the dimension where they live. Like the city, which was to bring the presence of the empire into new territory, the church was to be impacted by the dimension of heaven in such a way that they become the gateway for heaven to the earth. As the true one the church is to experience Christ as the one who is the benchmark for everything else.

When Jesus comes he comes as the one with 'the key of David' with the authority to open and shut. This is a clear reference to Is. 22:22 where there was a shift of authority from Shebna to Eliakim. In this Issaianic passage this spoke of access to the king and his palace. (There is also probably an allusion to Rev. 1:18 where Jesus states that he has taken the keys of death and hades.) So, from this we understand that he is coming as the one who has taken authority and by inference the one who is giving the key to the church

so that they might exercise authority. The church is to know Jesus as the Gatekeeper and, therefore, that they are the ones through whom he wishes to establish true authority.

Surface strongholds

There will be some immediate signs that a gateway place is not breaking through to its destiny. These can be easily understood as the locking up of the calling of the place. The gates in a gateway place are obviously very important. The place is called to be a place of connection and to release the presence of Jesus and the message of the Gospel. So when isolation marks the church we know that no real breakthrough is taking place. The church in a Gateway city is to make connections. These connections need to be first with heaven, for if gates are going to open the first gate that must open is the gate between heaven and earth.

It is the presence of a heavenly dynamic that must mark the church. There should be an openness between heaven and earth, such as Jacob experienced at Bethel (Gen. 28: 10-22). There he experienced in a dream angels descending and ascending and understood that the place was a gateway from heaven to earth. These places should give good access for the inbreaking of the supernatural, which will include that of dreams.

Jesus coming as the holy and true one leads us to understand that if there is a twisting of truth in these places then there is no real breakthrough taking place. This twisting can be in terms of morality or doctrine, but when cults abound and the church is in a place of compromise then the gateway city is to be considered bound.

A very significant marker in gateway cities is the issue of who the gatekeepers are. The quote concerning the 'key of David' from Isaiah is all to do with a change in the gatekeeper. When the church is not impacting these cities there is a very strong opening for the wrong gatekeepers to take positions of authority. A major sign of shift in the spiritual atmosphere is when there is a change in the 'guard' with the result that those who occupy positions of leadership become favourable to the righteous rule of God. When the church begins to occupy her rightful place then the gates become open to those who will serve.

Enemy strategies

There seems to be three main enemy strategies that Jesus exposes over the city. The first is that of a spirit of blindness. Three times Jesus says 'behold' (the command form of the verb *horaō*, to see). Given the threefold emphasis in two verses (3:8,9) we can see how vital sight is in these places. They are destined for sight and the enemy will both seek to bring about blindness in the church and also to steal the gift of sight for others to wrongly exploit

Indeed given that Jesus immediately commands the church to see we can understand that the breakthrough in the city will begin with sight and will only be sustained through sight. If there is no sight then there will be no breakthrough. Jesus says the church has but little power, but it is vital that the church does not believe that an increase of power is the answer. Rather, it is an increase of sight that will release the power and not vice versa.

A gateway city should have more sight than it feels comfortable with. The vision must be beyond its ability to fulfil and the sight that is restored is not just for the immediate city. I was in a Gateway city in Wales back in 1999 before I ever understood the different nature of cities, but began to prophesy that in this city it was possible to see the whole of Wales, and said that 'in a gateway city it is possible to see a whole region or even a whole nation'. I now understand that this is the case. If one wants to see what is outside an area one has to go to the gate or the door. So the sight to be recovered in these cities will be sight for the region and this is why the enemy will work overtime in shutting down this gift.

Not only will there be a shutting down of the gift, but the nature of the spiritual realm is that when there is a failure by the people of God to take up the gifting of an area it is there for some alien spiritual power to pick up. Often times these places will have a significant historic presence of Freemasonry with their use of the 'all-seeing eye'. Given that they also use a blindfold (known as a 'hoodwink') in their initiation rites with the confession that the initiate is in need of sight through the light of Masonry it is easy to see how there is space for them to gain a significant position in the city if the church does not press in for the sight that the Lord intends.

The geographic setting of such a meeting place is often fairly central but as the city develops there is often the drawing to the gates (the literal physical entry points) such cultic groups as the Mormons. (Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, was a disgraced Mason and many of their rites simply

parallel that of Masonry.) In mapping such cities it is certainly a good practice to examine any old gates / entry points to the city and also the new entry points to see what has been established in them.

In one city where I have been in California there is an imposing Masonic Temple in the centre of the town, then on the south 'gate' a large Mormon Temple has been erected. Between the two is an archway proclaiming (rightly) that the town is a gateway, but when I was in a neighbouring town I had a dream of this archway being erected with some form of sacrifice. (This could mean that the arch was erected on an old sacrificial site, or perhaps it was erected with Masonic rites or through something like a Masonic connection.) I suggest that the town was being claimed as a Gateway into the region for wrong spiritual powers. While I was in that region in 2003, the church in the Gateway town prayer walked to the 'north' gate to proclaim it open. To the north lies a significant Sardis-type area and again to the South lies a classic Sardis-type city. This prayer walk to open the north gate, I believe, was a God-given strategy, partly to prevent the north gate being occupied by something else with false sight, and also strategic as the Jesus People Movement of the West Coast came to the San Francisco Bay area from the north. In due course the church will need to address both the issue of the arch and of the south gate.

The shutting down of true sight then is the primary work of the enemy. This was taking place in Philadelphia, so Jesus had to exhort them to 'see'. The challenge to sight was furthered increased by the internal situation. Jesus said that the church had 'little power', so the temptation to focus on their insignificance and to simply try and survive would have been strong. In the light of their little power the idea of an open door and the need to press through it with mission would have been somewhat of a challenge to their thinking. The only way to connect would be with true sight, with the eyes of faith - hence the threefold exhortation to 'see'.

The second stronghold is a related one. Philadelphia-type places are favoured by cults. Here Jesus expresses it by describing a 'synagogue of Satan' that are making claims to being the true people of God. This is the claim that cults continually make, and again, as noted above, many times these cults will establish themselves in an entry place in the city.

An example of how the gates are occupied can be seen in a note I received from a pastor in another city in California that I recently visited.

Although this city is significantly inland it was a major port for sea-going trade. While there I taught on the nature of a gateway city. The pastor later wrote me:

There are five Mormon churches in our city, all but one are on strategic entrances to the city and the fifth was on such a road but the city has grown around it. There are six Jehovah's Witness churches, four are on strategic entrances to the city, two of which are only a few blocks away from the Mormons. All the other strategic entrances to the city have old time Pentecostal churches on them which at one time were the carriers of the Fire in the city.

In the letter the church in Philadelphia is promised that such a synagogue will come and bow down acknowledging that the Lord has loved the church. This promise is dependent on the church seeing the open door and positioning itself in the light of it. It seems the church is not called to focus so much on battling the cults, nor of establishing that they are right, but to so live that the favour of God becomes clear to those around. It is vital to establish truth - and to Philadelphia we have read that Jesus comes as the true one - but it will not be enough to simply establish truth at a cerebral level. The church is to keep focused on its call and be the means by which the Gospel is released within and through the gateway city. Intimacy with the Lord is a major part of the warfare needed to breakthrough so that the final testimony is concerning love not truth.

The third stronghold here is found in the warning of Jesus who calls the church not to allow anyone to take away their crown. The type of crown mentioned here (*stephanos*) is the crown that the successful athlete who won the race would receive. Philadelphia as a city placed a high premium on the games so this was a most apt description. The crown surely speaks of competing for the gates and also completing the task set before them. It is possible to get so far but for the crown to be snatched away. This represents a call from God for the church through warfare to establish on earth what Jesus has already declared; they must not only open the gate but they have to press right in to see that gate established at the level where no-one can shut it.

The three central strongholds then are related together:

- the blindness that comes upon the church so that their calling and position is not discovered, with the result that (particularly in the gates)
- cults and false spiritual movements that promise sight and relationship with God flourish, with the consequence that deception is established

and the seeing gift is stolen from the church. Once the church begins on the journey of recapturing the true calling on the city there has to be a perseverance otherwise,

- the church will not establish the gates to the place of openness and find that their reward is stolen.

A promise of protection

In the midst of the letter Jesus makes a promise to those who 'keep' hold of this word of endurance, will be 'kept' from the hour of trial. Although there is an eschatological element to this, the promise is given here in Philadelphia for them to experience in the here and now. There will be a major battle to open the gates and pressure will come on the city and this same pressure will also seek to come on the church, but Jesus promises a protection on the church. Although the church in any given place is not totally exempt from the pressures around another indication that a gateway place is breaking through would be when the church is not experiencing the same hardships that are on the city.

Jacob's dream

I suggest an Old Testament narrative that resonates with the Philadelphia situation would be that of Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel. As he sleeps he dreams and then discovers that the place where he had slept was a gateway from earth to heaven. Like a number of Gateway places Jacob was at a boundary, and there are those scholars who consider that the angels ascending were the angels that had been assigned to the previous territory, and the angels that were descending were the ones God was assigning to journey with Jacob into the new territory. He had safe passage from there, and his 'going out and his coming in' was going to be protected. The open door for his journey though was because there was an open door from heaven to earth.

So gateway places have to create an opening from heaven to the earth in order to make effective openings on the earth. Once that is established there can be significant freedom of access for the angelic as part of the experience of such places.

To the overcomers

Jacob named the place Bethel – the house of God, and there is a promise to the overcomers that they will be part of the house (Temple) that God is building in that place. If Thyatira draws from the kingship imagery, and perhaps Sardis is reminiscent of the wisdom literature then in Philadelphia there are allusions to the building of the Temple. In Philadelphia the custom was for important citizens to have their names inscribed on pillars in the local temples, so the promise is particularly appropriate for this place. However, the name is not going to be written on some pillar in a pagan temple, but the people who hold through will be the actual pillars themselves that hold up what God is building, and they will receive the threefold name (God, the New Jerusalem and Jesus' name) themselves.

There will be permanence about their position within the Temple and they will not be driven out of it through local circumstances. (This was a reference to the many who had decided to live outside the city due to dangers caused by the continuing earthquakes in the region.) The region might be difficult to live in and establish something in, but the promise from Jesus is that they will indeed be established. They will not be established for their own sake but with the knowledge that God is erecting a Temple – a dwelling place for his name – in their city. This Temple will indeed be a place of divine presence and of divine visitation but will also need to be a house of prayer for all nations.

The connection of Gateway (opening the doors for mission) and the establishment of the Temple are also reflected in Matthew's gospel. Matthew's gospel is full of the concept of the fulfilment of Scripture, both in terms of specific OT Scriptures that are quoted, but also Matthew sets out the whole Gospel in such a way as carrying the message of fulfilment of the whole of the OT. In the opening verse he lets us know that what we are going to read is 'the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ' (in Greek the book of the *genesis* of Jesus Christ) thus he alerts us to the obvious allusion to the first book of the OT. Jesus is set as the one who comes in fulfilment of the OT Scriptures (he is the son of Abraham and of David). As the chapter continues Matthew sets out Jesus as the one who truly ends the Exile that 'his people' have been experiencing because of their sin. He comes to save 'his people' from their sins (1:21). He brings the people not only out of Exile but brings them the presence of God for he is called 'Emmanuel' (1:23). In this first chapter then

Jesus is presented as the one who is fulfilling the whole OT destiny. In the final chapter the book ends with the well-known 'Great Commission' but I suggest that there is more than a passing reference to what was (normally) the last book in the Jewish canon - the book of 2 Chronicles. In the closing verses of that book king Cyrus says that he has been given authority over the kingdoms of the earth and so he commissions those to go and return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, with the hope that the Lord will go with them (2 Chron. 36:22,23). Jesus' claim at the end of Matthew's Gospel goes so far beyond Cyrus' claim. There he says that all authority has been given to him, that there has been a total 'change of every guard', and that (by inference) the Temple will be rebuilt, not in a specific place, but throughout the whole earth as nations are disciplined. He also assures them that he will go with them (Matt. 28: 18-20). The NT commission is for the disciples to go out through the gate and participate in the rebuilding of the Temple, so it is not surprising that the Gateway place is the place where there are specific promises concerning the Temple.

So in bringing this Scripture from Matthew to bear on the Gateway place we can also suggest that discipling, commissioning and sending will be a major part of the gift to be released in Gateway cities. These cities will prove to be strong places for mission training movements to be based, or for the churches to become strong mission sending bodies. There should be a strong expectation for the reality of God's presence among the believers in this type of city, and there should be released the dimension of the church as a house of prayer for all nations.

The second promise in this overcoming section is of the promise of a threefold name that will be given. The name of the Father, the new Jerusalem and Jesus' own new name will all be bestowed on them. The name giving indicates both ownership and identity. There will be no shame on the church, for there will be such an identification from heaven with these people. They truly will know that heaven has promised to be with them as they embrace their mission. Even the final destination (the new Jerusalem) will be written on them so they can have a strong confidence that once their eyes have been opened to what Jesus has opened for them that heaven will gladly identify them as carrying the very seeds of the age to come. They will indeed be a city that is living experientially at an intersection between heaven and earth.

Final comments

Like all other places, Gateway cities do not exist for themselves. The gate they open is to enable other places to release what they have. They have a particular relationship with the Sardis-type places (Refuge / Development) so that the well opened up there will have an outflow. They are promised a key which needs to be applied where they are, but the key released there will open many doors elsewhere. I also see a particular relationship with the final city that was written to, Laodicea. Although the church in Laodicea must open the door themselves there are keys in Philadelphia that will enable shut doors to be swung wide open.

Many Gateway places are small and many Laodicea-type places are rich and 'important'. Yet there is such a need for Laodicea-type places to break out of their independence and pride and receive help from what can be perceived as smaller and less important places.

So we call for the Gateway places to open. We call for the Gateway nations to rise to the challenge of leading the way with mission. We pray that Gateway cities and nations will connect for the sake of the harvest. Come tell us what you see, tell us that the fields are white to harvest, that the door is open. We invite you to come you're your key and help our doors to open. Come tell us of heaven's resources that can take us to the next level.

Chapter 8

Laodicea: giving city

This city was one of the main banking centres for the ancient world and as such became a place of great wealth. In 60 AD the city was all-but destroyed in a violent earthquake, but unlike Philadelphia and Hierapolis, Laodicea did not want any financial aid from Rome to rebuild. The statement of the church that it was rich and in need of nothing (3:17) was an echo of what the city had said to Rome. Alongside the banking element there were two other aspects that helped this city to develop wealth. It was known also for the soft, raven-black sheep's wool that enabled the city to eventually outstrip other garment manufacturers in the district, and finally, there was the famous medical school that had in particular developed a compound for curing eye diseases called 'Phrygian powder'.

There are clear references to all the above within the letter thus indicating that these cities perhaps have a greater propensity than others to squeeze the church into its own mould.

The well-known reference to the church being lukewarm is another clear allusion to the literal setting of the church. The city had grown very quickly but had one major problem. It did not have sufficient water to supply the city as a whole, so had to pipe in water from Denizili, some six miles to the south, via an aqueduct. The water was drawn from hot springs and did not have time to cool en route to Laodicea. The water also contained calcium carbonate deposits, so the net effect for the drinker of the water was to vomit it out. The church, Jesus is saying is simply a reflection of the city and he will vomit the church out of his mouth if there is no change.

There is one other aspect about the lukewarmness of the water. In saying that they should have been either hot or cold there is almost certainly

a reference to two other cities from the same region. Indeed Laodicea made a tri-city formation along with Hierapolis, some six miles to the north, and with Colossae, some ten miles to the east. In Hierapolis there were famous hot springs that were frequented for their healing properties, whereas in Colossae there was the only supply of cold refreshing drinking water with the region. In using this illustration and by provocatively comparing Laodicea unfavourably to the two other (lesser) cities in the region he is hitting at a major bondage – that of independence. Laodicea, like all other giving cities, desperately needs to recognise its need of help in order to release its destiny. Jesus certainly indicated that humility and dependence would be very necessary for the church to make progress in the city.

Jesus comes to a giving city

There is a cosmic dimension that surrounds the description of Jesus in this greeting: he is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. There is within the comment that Jesus is 'the Amen' an allusion to Isaiah 65:16 where twice we read that God is 'the God of truth' (Hebrew: the God of Amen). This leads to the promise of a new creation (65:17-25), which again fits so well here. Jesus is the faithful and true witness and the source (Greek: *arche*) of God's creation both in terms of the original creation and the new creation that is to come. He is the firstborn over all creation (Col. 1:15-16).

Jesus is going to bring all of creation through to its appointed goal, of that we can be sure because he is the Amen. He will do so because he has been the faithful and true witness – there has been no deviation from the Messianic task entrusted to him, and his faithfulness has even led to his own death. This though qualifies him as both source and Lord of all creation (*arche* can carry both senses).

He then calls the church to receive him in this way. They have to first receive him as the Amen – as the final word. His challenge is 'receive me without reservation, sign without even seeing the small print.!!'

Again applying the principle that how he comes to a place is primarily what they will have to reveal we can understand from this that the Laodicean-type church is challenged to receive truth and to line up under it to the extent that there will be significant personal cost. However, this will enable the church to lay hold of the resources of creation at an incredible level.

A finishing gift

It is this reference to creation that enables us to suggest that there is a second complimentary gift that will come forth in Laodicea-type places. Not only are they 'giving' places but they also have a 'finishing' gift. Ephesus, the city with the gift of beginnings draws upon allusions from the Garden of Eden, the place of beginnings, but the final goal is not of going back to Eden but of all of creation being transformed. Christ comes to Laodicea as the one who was both the agent of creation and through the cross as the one by which all of creation will be restored. Laodicea then is called to bring out the resources of creation at an unprecedented level.

An element that is important to understand in finishing places is that the growth and development is not even. The growth is incremental, and as one aspect is released the church is called to finish at each phase. As there comes the transition point there is the possibility of either birthing things to a new level or of allowing a spirit of death to completely shut it down. Closely aligned to this spirit to death is a religious spirit.

Some central characteristics

Giving / finishing cities will generally have some or all of the following characteristics:

- A strong financial element, drawing to itself financial institutions such as banking, insurance and the like that deal directly with the economics of that society.
- It will normally have been founded on a strong trading basis even when there were few natural reasons for a community to grow up in that location.
- A strong medical presence (Pergamum-type places too will have this element).

Surface strongholds

One of the cities I travel to in Europe is a giving city and indeed it is the capital city of a nation with the same gifting. The city has within it two locations where there has been a significant level of bloodshed. On one location is the headquarters of the national bank and on the other is situated the national stock market. In the book *Gaining Ground* I explain how bloodshed is one of the primary means that land is polluted and that such

pollution opens a place up to demonic strongholds. So given that bloodshed attracts the demonic it is clear that the enemy has sought to build up a significant bondage over these two very influential economic institutions. If the enemy can lock up the finances of the city then it is easy to see how this will be a primary place where the battle will be focused. Hence in such places whenever the church is not generous with its finances, or is continually in a place of lack we can easily conclude that there are significant levels of stronghold present.

There seems to me then to be three immediate areas where it can be easy to see the level of bondage. A lack of generosity by the church, as indicated above, is an obvious indication, as also is the experience within the church of continual lack. The third area I would suggest is drawn from the complimentary finishing gift. When there is a history in the city of not finishing what has begun we can quickly conclude that the church has much work to do to get her breakthrough.

Enemy strategies

In the letter there are a number of enemy strategies that Jesus exposes, and it would appear that this type of city strongly seeks to shape the church in its own image. Jesus speaks of independence, blindness and a corresponding unwillingness to be self-critical, and a lack of zeal. Running in and through all of the above is a propensity to succumb to a religious spirit with the church being reduced to being a religious version of the city. We have already noted the references to the city shaping the church with references to the water supply and the need to purchase true eye-salve. The shaping of the church by the city will always result in the church becoming a religious institution, rather than the body of Christ that seeks to be redemptive in and through every sphere. The religious spirit is also personified by the term 'I' (so we read in this letter that the church was saying 'I am rich; I am wealthy...'). Christ is no longer at the centre but the church is in the process of displacing him. That is religion where it is all about the church and the Saviour is sidelined.

These cities and the churches present in these cities have a default mode of falling into independence. This will manifest itself in the city being independent from other cities, particularly by giving off a signal of being superior to other places, and by one congregation standing aloof from another one in the same city. I can remember in one such city and addressing the

pastors who gathered together with the following challenge. I told them that their city was a prime place for a new church to be planted. I suggested that someone could come in and begin a new church. The result would be that various people would leave the existing churches and that the leader of the new church plant should be able to start with some 50 or so people and, due to the wealth within the city, that church planter would be happy with the new congregation and sufficient finance to live off. However, I informed them, that they, the existing pastors, were inviting such an event to happen. Although they would not be happy with the outcome I suggested that they were actually inviting such an event to take place, for as long as they lived in independence from each other they were 'inviting' independence to come in through the gates.

For a significant breakthrough to take place in such a city congregations in the city must be willing to express their need of other expressions of the body of Christ. Independence can have no part in the DNA of the church in those cities. The church has to develop something of an opposite spirit, and I suggest that there has to be a positive honouring of other expressions of church. There has to be a celebration of the diversity.

Beyond that those city leaders need to be ready to welcome input from the outside. The 'we have no need of help' spirit has to be broken. So not only do those cities need to be willing to give without strings attached, they must also be ready to receive. Paul, writing to Philippi - another giving city - said they had entered into partnership with him in 'giving and receiving'.

Jesus rebukes the church in Laodicea stating that it was blind and as a result made false statements about itself. The blindness here is not a lack of vision, but an inability to see itself self-critically. This is the blindness that pride brings about. Jesus calls for a recognition of the sorry state of affairs, and calls the church to respond by asking him for true wealth, clean garments and true eye ointment. There is no way forward in these cities without humble repentance. The wealth Jesus offers has to be purchased; the gold on offer is gold that has come through the fire. Both of these descriptions suggest that there will be no progress without embracing suffering. Breaking through in these cities will be costly, and the cost will often be in literal material terms. Sacrificial giving will be required in order to gain authority for a breakthrough.

There is clothing that must be received to cover their shame. Again there is a strong inference here of repentance and self-awareness that is required. They cannot hide behind a façade but have to acknowledge that

they have not done well and without the clothing of Christ they are shamefully naked.

Undergirding the above two issues there has to be a crying out to see themselves self-critically. The cry is not first of all to receive vision for the future, but for self-awareness in the present.

Zeal has to replace lukewarmness. The spirit of complacency is another major bondage over these types of cities. These cities have a key part to play in bringing to completeness the work of God in an area, and the enemy will keenly resist their breakthrough. Only those with a zeal and passion will be able to harness the wealth of the city for the sake of the work of the kingdom.

There is true wealth to come forth that will manifest itself not just in material aid but also through the gift of people. The people will come with a strong gift of perseverance.

When giving cities breakthrough they uncover amazing gifts. There is true wealth to come forth that will manifest itself not just in material aid but also through the gift of people. The people will come with a strong gift of perseverance for they will carry that finishing anointing to bring many situations to a completion. The enemy loves to keep these places in independence for when they are released and release their gift at the right time they will prove to be key to helping many

other places to complete what God has given them to do. This is certainly true in the Laodicea-type of cities.

Philippi - breakthrough for the city

Philippi is another city that I believe carries the same gift as Laodicea. I have already mentioned that an indication of this is that the Philippian believers had partnered with Paul in both giving and receiving. It is interesting to note how Paul came to the city of Philippi in Acts. Although I am not suggesting that there is only one way that such a city can be impacted there were some clear steps that Paul followed in this city.

He first went looking for those who were in prayer (Acts 16:13). There has to be a birthing of strategy in prayer for these places as the independence and supposed ability to make it through our own abilities is so high.

From the place Paul was able to share the Gospel and his heart with the result that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia. This woman was involved in

business and it is usually vital to find an inroad into the business community in these cities. From there the Gospel spread to her household. In this type of city we must think outside the box as the religious spirit is very quick to push us back in the box of predictability.

After this initial breakthrough Paul continued with the practice of going to the place of prayer. Again this continual habit is a significant key. The next impact is at so many levels. A child is impacted – and children in these cities are vital to be reached. The sophistication of ‘we have it all’ is often broken open through the offence of the simplicity of children. A demon is impacted, but this spirit of false prophecy is more than just a demon as it in some ways relates to spiritual powers over the area, and the work of this demon was also tied into the economic structures of the city.

Now something truly is moving, and there is a reaction against Paul and Silas, but the end result is the birth of a work of God and the shaking of the powers both heavenly and earthly in the city.

As I say this is not a blueprint, but I believe in the light of the pride of the city it does show us some significant elements. Those elements being prayer, business, children, power encounters that hit at the heart of the structures.

All the above elements undermine the arrogance, independence and supposed wealth of the city, and all are bathed in prayer. These cities can breakthrough, but will not without there being a confrontation with the powers. Of all the cities the battle is perhaps the most severe here as to whether the church will shape the city, or the city will make the church into its own image.

Finally - counsel released

Jesus had spoken that those he disciplines are those he loves. These are words that recall the OT Scripture that God is a father who must discipline his children (Prov. 3:11-12). So part of the release here is of knowing the fatherhood of God. As Father he is the one who is willing to confront us in order to make us ready to receive our inheritance.

The promises that are granted to Laodicea are dependent on responding to the knock at the door. Jesus requests entrance in order to be intimate with them. He wishes to eat with them, but the meal that is described is the meal at the end of the day. All work and activity is over, there are no time restraints. So the call from Jesus is to welcome him in as a lover

(reminiscent of Song of Songs 5:2) and for there to be intimacy. In a major financial centre where independence and self-sufficiency wishes to rule, the key to breakthrough is to submit to the discipline of the Father and to enter into intimacy with Christ.

It is from intimacy, and only from a place of intimacy, that the promise of rule opens up. This is not simply about an exercise of authoritarian rule, but that from the place of intimacy there will be counsel as hearts are shared, and then from that place the counsel of the Lord can be released.

This means that a giving place, when it breaks free from its independence and pride, and comes to live in an intimate relationship with the Lord will become a place where strategies will be revealed. The Lord will only reveal those though once the other issues are dealt with. This though is one of those gifts that such a city or nation has to offer. The pathway is one of humility, but the release is just what we need for there are so many places that have started well that will need the finishing cities and nations to come through to enable them to complete the task the Lord has set before them.

So we call you with all that God has graced you with to open up to him. We declare that if you will open up to him he will come to you with his presence. He will give you all the time you need and will grace you with divine counsel. We say that we need you, it is not your wealth that we seek, but the grace that is on from heaven. Open yourself up to the Lord, be open with others, be ready to give and to receive. There is a journey that you need to go on, and there are companions that need you so desperately.

Epilogue

The preceding chapters have tried to outline two major issues in helping us move toward transformation. The core material is intended to help us deal with the history and how to sow some fresh seed for a new future harvest. This is so important, as we need to be able to draw a line on what has taken place and then experience our geography as a fertile place for the Gospel. The second core element was in connecting the body of Christ to the geography, through connecting the body together (in unity) and in connecting the body to the (redemptive) gifting of the city (geography). There is of course much more that can be said on all the above, but I trust there is sufficient material included to help either catalyse or accelerate a suitable process.

There is an area which develops on what has been written here. It is the encouragement to occupy the gates of our community. The gates are the place of influence, the points of entry. This is an area where I am currently exercised as I have observed that there is a major need to see the culture we live in transformed. The field, the world, is a harvest field and the Lord asked us to pray labourers into the field. As we pray we will find many labourers being positioned strategically in the gates of our cities and regions.

Can we see our regions transformed. By faith and perseverance we can. Such activity will involve prayer from the heart, and application as we wrestle with what we encounter. But as we persevere the Lord will indeed release the body into the world and we will live to see a harvest come in. I say,

‘Can we carry your heavy glory into our streets? We can if you grace us to walk again where you wish to walk. So help us, Lord.’