

OpenTheo

The White Stone of Pergamum (Revelation 2:17)

September 2, 2019



Alastair Roberts

I discuss the significance of the white stone promised to the one who overcomes in Revelation 2:17 in the letter to the angel of the church of Pergamum.

The books I recommend are as follows:

Peter Leithart, Revelation 1-11 (<https://amzn.to/2zM9zuR>), Revelation 12-22 (<https://amzn.to/2ZLwmBs>).

James Jordan, The Vindication of Jesus Christ (<https://amzn.to/2NMuLjw>)

G.K. Beale, The Book of Revelation (<https://amzn.to/2ZJBRRl>)

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>. You can see transcripts of my videos here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/list-of-videos-and-podcasts/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these talks, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>. You can also support me using my PayPal account: <https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>.

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Earlier, my mother asked me about the meaning of the White Stone in Revelation 2, verse 17. I didn't have a good answer on the spot, so just had some inconclusive reflections. So I thought I'd give the question a bit more thought and then come back

with some of my findings in a video podcast.

And within this, I want to give some of my reflections upon the subject. The passage in question is in the letters of the Book of Revelation to the seven churches. And it's to the third church, the church in Pergamum.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write, The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you.

You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols, and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent.

If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone, that no one knows except the one who receives it.

So I've argued in the past that when we're trying to tackle a biblical question, it can be like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle. We can get a sense of where a piece fits, even if we don't know exactly where it fits. And so often our task is to narrow things down, to have a sense of where the piece belongs.

The other pieces that it's similar to in its image, where it might belong in terms of the different colors on the different parts of the puzzle. Think about the shape of the piece, what other shape pieces might it fit with. And to consider both the structure and the image of the puzzle.

So when we're putting together a jigsaw puzzle, we're paying attention to the edge pieces, and to the corner pieces, and then to particular shaped pieces that we know will fit with other particular shaped pieces. So we're paying attention to the shape, that will help you put things together. We're also paying attention to the image, and the image is another way in which you can associate pieces.

So those associations between pieces, both in structural form, and also in their content, is one of the ways that we approach Scripture. When you think about a question in Scripture concerning a particular passage, approach it like a jigsaw puzzle. Think about the shape of the piece that you're dealing with, the shape of the surrounding area, and think about what might fit there.

Think about the image upon the piece. What does it remind you of? What other pieces is it similar to? Where might it find its associations? And it takes a bit of patience, and

you're probably not going to find the exact place that the piece fits. Much of the time, what you'll do is narrow the question down.

You'll knock the question down to a far more manageable size. And so you may not know exactly where it fits, but you'll have a very good sense of more or less where it fits. And even if you don't place the piece exactly, you know it belongs in that general area, and associated with these other pieces.

And it becomes a lot less threatening, and it also yields insight in various ways. When I've been looking at this issue, I've found James Jordan's *A Brief Reader's Guide to Revelation* to be very helpful. And also, I would highly recommend Peter Lighthouse's recent Revelation commentary, which is a bit of a behemoth, but it is really, really good.

And I would recommend that you purchase a copy of it, if you would spend the time to read all the way through it. I'll give the links to that in the show notes. The following are some of the characteristics that help us to find the shape that at least the piece has to fit in.

And it will make the piece a lot more manageable. So when we're thinking about the White Stone, let's not go to the question of what is the White Stone directly. Let's think about where it needs to fit, and what are some of the features of where it fits that help us to understand what that piece is doing there.

So first of all, when you look through the letters to the seven churches, these seven churches have very similar letters in structure. They follow a fairly predictable pattern, and Ian Paul's recent commentary on the Book of Revelation outlines this pattern as follows. So first of all, you have to the angel of the church in so and so.

Right. Then next, thus says he who, and then there's some characteristic from Revelation chapter one. I know your, and then there'll be a list of the characteristics or actions of the church in the past or present.

But this I have against you in a number of the letters. This is what happens next, that there is some challenge to their behavior. And then there's a command to repent and amend their ways.

And then whoever has ears, let them hear what the spirit says to the churches. And finally, to him who conquers or those who conquer. And then there's a promise of gift and reward.

So this is the general pattern that most of the letters follow fairly closely. And so what you're seeing at the outset is that these are following a fairly formulaic structure. And that formulaic structure is one that associates the letters together.

They belong together as seven letters. They're not just random missives. There's

something that belong.

There are a set of letters that belong together. And as you look at them even closer, you'll see that they belong together in a richer sense than that. They're not just associated letters, but they're placed in a sequence.

If you look through the letters, you'll see that they move through periods of history. So in chapter 2, verse 7, to the first church, the church in Ephesus, it says, He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Now, where does that remind you of? It reminds you of Genesis chapter 2 and 3. It's the very beginning of the story of Genesis. And so you have an allusion back to the situation in Eden. In the next letter to Smyrna, in verse 10, do not fear what you are about to suffer.

Behold, the devil is to throw some of you to prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

Now, what does that remind you of? What should it remind you of? Probably the story of Joseph, the one who was persecuted, placed in prison, and then was brought out of prison and raised up to rule. And so we have Eden, and then we have a later event in Genesis, at the end of Genesis, Joseph. In the third letter, the letter to Pergamum, you have a reminder of other stories.

But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. And then later on, to the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

So we've had Eden, we've then had Joseph, and now we have reference to the tabernacle. We have reference to Balaam and Balak. This is the wilderness period, the wandering in the wilderness, where the instructions for the tabernacle are given, and Balaam and Balak oppose the people of God in the end of the Book of Numbers.

Then, in the next church, in Tharathira, we have, But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. So that reminds you of the kingdom period, and associated with that you also have, the one who conquers, I will, and who keeps my works until the end, To him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earth and pots are

broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my father. It's the language of Davidic kingship that we find in Psalm chapter 2 and elsewhere.

So we've got a series of associations. Eden, Joseph, the wilderness period, and then the kingdom period. And then from there, we get to the church in Sardis.

Now, this reminds you of exile and remnant. It's the language of Joshua the high priest in the book of Zechariah. Joshua the high priest with soiled garments that are then made pure.

What we have in the next church letter, and the angel in the church of Philadelphia, right? The words of the Holy One, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens. And then later on in verse 12, the one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem.

This is the period of restoration. Think back to the language of the key of David and the opening of doors. The key of David is associated with Isaiah chapter 22, with Shebna, who is given, and Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah.

He's clothed with a robe, bind sash upon him in authority, is given into his hand. He's placed, on his shoulder is placed the key of the house of David. He shall open and none shall shut, and he shall shut and none shall open.

And I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house. And they will hang on him the whole honor of his father's house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the floggings. In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way, and it will be cut down and fall, and the load that was on it will be cut off for the Lord to have spoken.

Now that's the language that we find in the letter to Sardis, or the letter to Philadelphia. It's also something that we find associated with Cyrus, with the restoration. Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, this is chapter 45, verse 1 of Isaiah, to subdue, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him, and to loose the belt of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed.

And then it goes on, but it's associated with Lyacan. In the previous description of a Lyacan in chapter 22 is reminiscent or anticipates the description of Cyrus in chapter 45. They're going to be a pillar in the rebuilt temple of God.

And so God is about to bring back the people, reestablish them in the land, and he's going to build this new temple. And so we have a sixth reference to a pattern in history. So we have Eden, Joseph, the wilderness period, the kingdom period, we have the exile

and the remnant, and then we have the restoration.

And finally we have the Israel of Jesus' day, with the Pharisees and others who are proud, but yet fail to recognize their nakedness and blindness. That's all found in the letter to Laodicea. They're blind, but they don't realize it.

They think they're rich, but they're really poor, etc. And other things to note about these. So we've seen that there is a fundamental structure to each one of the letters.

They follow a similar pattern. There's a sequential ordering as they go through redemptive history. And then they all draw upon imagery from the first chapter of the book of Revelation.

Imagery from the vision, and also titles of Christ. So there is a sort of broken chiasm with the description of him in chapter one. The details included within the letters.

You have walking among the lamps with the stars in his hand in the first. He's the first and the last, the living one in the second letter. In Sardis he's the one with the sword in his mouth.

In the next letter he's got eyes like fire and feet like bronze. Then it's in Sardis, in Pergamum it's sword in mouth. In Sardis it's seven spirits of God and seven stars.

And in Philadelphia I think it's the key of David and keys of death and Hades. And then finally it's the Amen and the faithful witness. And these are all associated with language from the earlier chapter.

So it's associating the vision of Christ and the images belonging to that vision with the letters to the seven churches. They're connected, these two chapters or three chapters. The letters are loosely arranged chiastically.

So we've seen that there is a fundamental pattern that they all follow. There's a sequential ordering that they all follow. They are arranged in parallel with and in association with the images and the names of the first chapter.

But then they're also arranged chiastically. So a chiasm, it's like a bookend structure. You have bookends and then within that more bookends and more bookends and then you have a central section.

And so it's a pattern we see a lot of times in Scripture and it gives a particular ordering to a text. Now these connections are loose. It's not a very pronounced chiasm.

But you have a promise to eat of the tree of life, to Ephesus, and then that's the first. In Laodicea, the last, there's an invitation to eat with Christ. In Smyrna, the second letter, the Jews are described as a synagogue of Satan and they're told that there's going to be a coming tribulation.

In Philadelphia, again, the sixth church, the Jews are once again described as a synagogue of Satan and there's tribulation coming soon. In Pergamum, the third letter, there's a white stone received and then there's a new name given and Jesus is coming to them soon. In Sardis, the fifth letter, there's a white garment and there's a name in the book of life and Jesus is coming to them soon.

So you're seeing the associations here. It should be clear that there is some way in which these things all hold together. And then in the centre you have Tharatyra, Jezebel, and the need to hold fast, etc.

Now, there are other ways in which you can see a roughly chiastic ordering. The first and the last churches are all promised a single gift whereas the middle ones all receive a double gift. Now let's list these gifts.

Ephesus, which is the first, is told that they will get to eat of the tree of life. Smyrna, the second, is told that they will receive a crown of life and rescued from the second death. Pergamum, they will receive hidden manna and the white stone with a new name upon it.

Tharatyra will receive authority and a rod of iron and the morning star. And Sardis, the fifth, will receive white garments and a name that won't be erased from the book of life. They will be confessed by Jesus before his father.

Philadelphia, they will be made a pillar in the temple and they will receive the name of God and of the new Jerusalem. And then Laodicea, they will sit with Jesus on his throne. So, two gifts, one gift for each of the bookend churches and then all the middle ones have a double gift.

Lighthouse suggests that the gifts can be associated with the days of creation especially as those are fleshed out and developed in the creation pattern structure of Exodus 25. In Exodus 25-31 you see the description of the tabernacle and if you look closely you'll see it's a seven day pattern and it can map onto the creation days. I think I've done a video on this at some point but if I haven't just ask me a question and I can get into it.

I'm less persuaded by some of the connections that Lighthouse draws here but I think he's right in seeing some general associations and here are some of the associations that we can think about. So, the first day of creation is focusing upon the tree of life and the lampstand as in Exodus chapter 25. It's the light giving.

The light is at the heart. Christ is the light bearer. He's the one with the seven stars in his hand.

And so light on the first day. The second day, the much weaker connections. Division between death and life associated with the firmament perhaps.

I'm not sure. I don't think that's a strong connection at all. And so the third day, land from the sea and plants from the earth.

Maybe that's associated with stones and manna. Manna is food and stones from the earth. Again, this is not the strongest connection.

It maybe is drawing a contrast between the bronze altar which is associated with the third day in the account in Exodus and eating food sacrificed to idols. But again, I think that's a very weak connection. I wouldn't put much weight upon that.

The fourth day, you have heavenly lights and oil for the lamp of the tabernacle. The son of God is a ruler with fiery eyes on the fourth day account and he promises rule and the morning star. And so that fits very well.

He's the sun and he has the morning star. And so sun, moon and stars connection. You have the fifth day, fish, and it's also associated with priest's garments.

So it's fish and birds and the priests are associated with the birds in the firmament. And there's attention to the garments of the Sardis church. And they're priestly garments as they're described.

So I think that's a neat fit. The sixth day is the formation of humanity and it's the consecration of the priests. They're invested with garments declaring them to be holy to the Lord.

They're crowned and they're placed in the tabernacle. And that fits quite neatly with the Philadelphia letter. Particularly when you look at verses 11 to 12.

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never shall he go out of it and I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven and my own new name. So you have those associations on the sixth day. The seventh day is associated with rest and Sabbath.

And the promise to the church in Laodicea that they will sit in rest with Christ on his throne. He's seated down having won the victory and they will eat with Christ in a wedding feast. He stands at the door and knocks and invites them if they will let him in to eat with him.

So there is a series of associations here. Some of them I think are very strong and others are weaker. The ones for the church that we're focusing upon are weak.

And so I wouldn't put too much weight upon those. The letters anticipate also the themes for the rest of the book of Revelation. And we can maybe think of the rest of the book of

Revelation as the letter to the eighth church of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is about to be destroyed and so you have the letters to the seven churches that are examples, but then also associated with the church in Jerusalem. You'll see this theme in a number of different ways, how figures are associated together. Like the beast is associated with the dragon and the sea beast is associated with the land beast.

And all these different creatures and other features of the narrative that are associated together. So elements don't stand alone. Likewise, the churches are connected together.

Jordan writes in his reader's guide to Revelation. Moreover, the seven letters anticipate Revelation as a whole. The enemy of the seven churches are the Nicolaitans, literally people conquerors, Judaizers.

The false apostles pictured in Ephesus in 2 verse 6. The Jews, Judaizers of Smyrna take the main focus in chapters 6 to 12. The beast and the false prophet, Balak and Balaam, literally people eater, are in chapter 13. And Pergamum, the harlot Jezebel, chapter 17, is in Tharatarata.

The judgment on Jerusalem, chapter 18, is threatened against Sardis. The conquering army of saints in chapter 19 is pictured in Philadelphia. And the choice whether or not to enter the new Jerusalem is set before Laodicea in 3 verse 20.

And Lighthouse lists the promises and the enemies highlighted in the seven letters and shows that they anticipate the rest of the book's themes. So first of all, the promises. Ephesus speaks about the tree of life, given to eat of the tree of life.

And if you look in 22 verse 5, And night will be no more. There will be no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. Or earlier on.

Through the middle of the street of the city, also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. So you have the tree of life association.

In Smyrna, they're told that they will escape the second death. In 20 verse 6, Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no power.

But they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. In Pergamum, the promise of the hidden manna and the stone, a name correspond with an invitation to supper and a name given in chapter 19 verses 9 and 12. And the angel said to me, write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And he said to me, these are the true words of God. And in verse 12 of chapter 19, His eyes are like a flame of fire and on his head are many diadems. And he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

And so once again, that reminds us of the stone that's given, the white stone that's given to the one who conquers in Pergamum. And in Thyatira, he will rule with a rod of iron. And in verse 15 of chapter 19, From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. So you have the rod of iron there. And in Sardis, they will walk with Jesus in white.

In chapter 19, verse 14, you have the church and the saints, the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, following him on white horses, riding with Christ. Philadelphia, they're told that there will be a pillar in the New Jerusalem. In verse 2 of chapter 21, you have the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And then you have the New Jerusalem city described and its various architectural features, with certain things like the foundations being associated with the apostles. And so they will be a pillar in the New Jerusalem, just as the apostles are the foundation. Laodicea, they will sit on Jesus' throne with him.

In chapter 22, verse 5, you have another reference. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

So the promises are associated with the promises and other themes mentioned later on in the book. The enemies that are mentioned and the threats that are mentioned are also associated with things that we find later on in the book. Lighthouse doesn't see any threats or enemies corresponding to the first or the last churches of Ephesus and Laodicea, but we can see some of the threats that they're facing, the internal threats of the false apostles and Nicolaitans and then their lukewarmness and potential failure to respond to Christ's invitation in the case of Laodicea.

But in Smyrna, you have the synagogue of Satan, and that's like the demon horde that comes from the sort of inverted temple in verses 1 to 11 of chapter 9. Then you have Satan, Belak, and Belam in Pergamon. Now think about that. You have the dragon, Satan, and then two beasts that are elsewhere described as the beast and the false prophet.

The beast is the sea beast and then has a false prophet associated with him. So Satan, Belam, who's the land or the sea beast, and then Belak is the sea beast, and then Belam is the false prophet associated with the sea beast, and that's mentioned in chapters 12

to 13. And the association between the sea beast or the land beast and the false prophet I think is in chapter 16.

In Thyatira, Jezebel, and that's fairly obviously the harlot of Babylon in chapters 17 to 18. And then in Sardis, there's the threat of lethargy with Jesus coming as a thief. In chapter 16, verse 15, you have Jesus saying, Behold, I am coming as a thief.

Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed. And so again, focus upon garments, Jesus coming as a thief and being awake for his coming. In Philadelphia, there's the synagogue of Satan and the coming testing, and that may be connected with the harvest of chapter 14, verses 14 to 20.

Now how does all of this help us to address the question of what the white stone is? Well, in a number of ways. It gives us a sense of the rough shape of the place where we are trying to fit that piece into the puzzle. And so let's go back over what we've explored so far and see what we can learn.

First of all, the letters to the churches all follow a fairly formulaic structure. And so there's particular gifts, and they're mentioned at the end of the letters, and there's a sequential and there's a chiasmic pattern that suggests careful literary structure and design. So as we're looking through these letters, there's a very clear literary structure, and there is both within each letter that's shared with the other letters, there's a sequential ordering, and then there's also a chiasmic ordering.

So this is very clearly a design structure. Each church can be loosely paralleled with another church in the chiasm, which can prove to be mutually illuminating. As you see these churches alongside each other, the different elements that are mentioned can shed light.

So for our purposes, Pergamum can be paralleled with Sardis, and both contain elements described as lucas, or white, or brilliant, or dazzling. It's a stone in Pergamum, and it's the garments in Sardis. The gift of a name, Sardis, they receive a name, and then there's a name given on the stone in Pergamum.

So the name of the Book of Life and the name of the stone. There's also a reference to being clothed in white garments and having his name confessed before the Father and before his angels. So we've seen associations with those churches.

And so the color white is very significant. It's elsewhere associated with purity and holiness, access to God's presence. If your garments are white, you can come into God's presence.

And note that this association is something that's found in both the third and the fifth letters, which are parallel together. And that helps us maybe to recognize some more

significance between the presence of white, the presence of a new name, and bringing those things together. That some of the themes that come to the surface in the letter to Sardis might illumine what's happening in Pergamum.

The other thing is the letters move through redemptive history. And for our purposes, this suggests that the period in the wilderness is the most promising place to find insight concerning the meaning of the white stone. The period in the wilderness, the setting up of the tabernacle, et cetera.

It doesn't establish that it must be something associated with these things, but that's the best place to look. And it weights the likelihood of us finding promising solutions in that direction. That's where we're going to find things most likely.

The letters draw heavily upon the symbolism and imagery of chapter one. So we need to think about what that symbolism and imagery conveys. Christ is the priest, so he's in a temple context.

He's also the bridegroom. And so that presentation of Christ has all sorts of allusions back to the priestly garments and other things like that, also to the description of the beloved in the book of Song of Songs. So bringing those things together gives us a world in which we can look again for more promising associations.

The pairing of gifts suggests that they share a common theme. So if you look through the various gifts that are given, you'll see often there are clear associations with them. They form a natural pair.

And so the hidden manor and the white stone have some sort of pairing. And what that pairing is is maybe going to be revealed by recognizing that there is a pairing and then looking back through script to see what sort of pairing it could be. The hidden manor suggests the contents of the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant in particular.

Manor was placed there as a testament. So you have the hidden manor. It's not just the manor that comes from heaven in chapter 16 of Exodus given to all of Israel.

Rather, this is some of the manor that's been placed in God's special presence. So this is entering into the Holy of Holies and the contents of the Ark itself. We should also remember that the manor was described like white, coriander seed, and like bdellium.

I don't know exactly what that word means, but in the Septuagint it's described as like rock crystal. So it is something that is associated with the white stone itself. So the white stone maybe has some natural association with the manor itself because manor is like a white stone.

The association with the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant may make us wonder about the other contents of the Ark of the Covenant. What are the other contents?

There's Aaron's rod that blossomed, and there's the stone tablets. Now, the connection is harder to realize here.

So there are three main, these being the contents of the Ark, come from the book of Hebrews. Aaron's rod was placed in the presence in Numbers. It wasn't necessarily placed within the Ark itself, but within Hebrews it's described as being within the Ark.

And so you have two elements. You have the rod that blossomed, and you have the stone tablets. Now, what can we make of this? The white stone, Lighthouse suggests, might connect with the white blossoms of the rod and the stone tablets.

He presents that as a possibility. And the stone tablets because it's a stone. So the whiteness of the blossoms and the stones.

That way you'd have the threefold gifts of the Ark of the Covenant. They're entering into the enjoyment of the contents of the Ark that had been hidden. The manor, the rod, and the stones.

Maybe. The other thing to recognize is that those things within the Ark are associated with remembrance. And the rod is also placed before the presence as a memorial to the rebels against Aaron, that his is the true priesthood.

So those themes as we go through, numbers, chapter 15 to 17, are important. Because you have, first of all, they're told to have zizit on their garments. In chapter 15, we're told, The Lord said to Moses, speak to the people of Israel and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner.

And it should be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God.

I am the Lord your God. Now, what does that remind you of? It reminds you of the garments, hopefully, it reminds you of the garments of the high priest. Because the high priest is one that has a robe of the ephod being all blue.

And then he has something that's bound. The turban has a plate of pure gold engraved on it, like the engravings of a signet. Holy to the Lord.

And it's fastened on the turban by a cord of blue. The blue cords are reminiscent of the holy to the Lord statement that's bound to the high priest's garments upon his turban. And there it's described as being on Aaron's forehead.

Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead that they may be accepted before the Lord. So it's a means by which he's accepted.

It's a statement of his holy status. And here you find a similar thing declared of Israel. As they wear these tassels in the corner of the garments reminiscent of the things that hold the holy to the Lord statement upon the turban of the high priest.

They will remember that they too are holy to their God. And so they're associated with the high priest there. And so you have that at the very end of chapter 15.

Chapter 16 is about the rebellion of Korah against Aaron. And this statement that they want to have this higher status. And then after the rebellion of Korah is crushed, you have Aaron and the other leaders of Israel having to bring out their rods, place them in the presence of God.

And Aaron's rod buds. Now what is the significance of all of this? Israel is given a remembrance of the law and their status before God that they are holy to the Lord. This is like a wedding ring that they're wearing.

These different cords remind them that they are a people that have been set apart to God. It's a token of their marriage to the Lord. And they're supposed to see this and remember.

But there's also another remembrance that's given. And that remembrance is given as the rod of Aaron is placed, or the staff of Aaron is placed before the Lord in the presence. The Lord said to Moses, put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign for the rebels that you may make an end of their grumblings against me lest they die.

And so it's placed there as a sort of memorial so that the people remember that the true priesthood belongs to Aaron. And it's also before God's presence. So God is recognizing the status of Aaron.

And the rod budding is, again, a fact that God is remembering the status of Aaron. Now put all those pieces together. What do we get? What are the buds on the rod? They're described as flowers, the flowering of the rod.

And they're white. But there's also something else. You have the zizit, which are the tassels on the garment.

But then you also have the zitz, which is the flower. So these things are associated with each other. So you have two forms of remembrance.

You have the remembrance of the buds on the flowers upon the rod, the staff. And then

you also have these tassels. They're associated with linguistically.

But then there's an even more significant connection. Where else do we find that word zitz in the story of the Pentateuch? We find it in the description of the garments of the high priest. And where exactly? We find it in the description of that thing on his forehead that's attached to his forehead with Holy to the Lord written upon it.

So putting those pieces together, there are various remembrances that are given, tokens of their union with Yahweh, that status that they have before him. There is the tassels, the tassels that are reminiscent of those things that hold that statement of being Holy to the Lord in place on the high priest's garment, those blue tassels. And those associate the average person in Israel, the average man, with the status of the high priest, that they enjoy priestly status too, that they're associated with him.

Now he represents them. But then you have Aaron as the high priest who has this rod that is a statement of God's acceptance of him, God's acknowledgement and validation of his priesthood. He has zitz on his staff, these buds or these flowers that are produced.

It's not a word we find often in Scripture. Where we find it is in various references, assorted references to flowers, and then in the reference to the plate, the clear gold plate or flower blossom that's on the forehead of the high priest and in the description of the blossom of the rod. And so all of these things, what's the association with them? They're remembrances of the status that the high priest has before God.

They're remembrances of the status that Israel more generally has before God. And they're remembrances both for Israel and for God. What does the thing on the forehead mean? Who's seeing that? Not the high priest himself, God.

As a high priest enters into God's presence, God sees that and he accepts and it's an acknowledgement of Israel's status before him. So look back again. So that's a remembrance for God.

And the presence of the rod in the ark would also be a remembrance for God. At first it's a token just for the rebels to say that look at this, God has accepted Aaron, he has validated his priesthood, he is the true priest and you must acknowledge that. And this is a testimony before you, placed before God's presence.

But it's also a remembrance for God that this is the true priesthood, that this is an acknowledgement of the priestly status of the person to whom this belongs. So those are important things to put together. They are remembrance tokens and they are associated with each other.

And so it doesn't necessarily mean that we must find some clear association with one or the others. Rather they belong within this complex of remembrances. We can think about the fact that is it connected with the rod that buds? Is it connected with the stone

on the forehead? Is it connected with the remembrances on their right hand that they have, the law? All of these things are different sorts of remembrances that they bind to themselves or that God binds to them or that are placed in God's presence.

The important thing is not so much which one it is associated with because they're all associated with each other. And what you have here I think is a token of remembrance for God and for his people. Now another possibility that has been raised is that it might be associated with the Urim.

You have the Urim and the Thummim which some have suggested are maybe white and black stones. They're associated it seems with drawing lots and choosing between yes or no decisions. One would be a white stone, one would be a black stone perhaps.

Others have suggested that these things were things that would change colour, that were the stones that changed colour under certain conditions. So under blood guilt it would turn red, if there was sin it would be black, if they were pure and could enter into God's presence it would be white. And so it could be a stone that declares innocence in that way.

Again, the Urim and the Thummim are associated with the garments of the high priest. They're placed in his breastplate. And all of this is very important because we have names upon stones elsewhere.

You have the Onyx stones of his shoulder, two stones, each one bearing six names of the sons of Jacob, sons of Israel in order. And then you have the names of the tribes held on the breastplate in precious stones that are supported by those shoulder things. And those shoulder things are supposed to hold it in place so it won't go skew.

It's the breastplate of judgement born before the Lord. Now all of this has great symbolism attached but I won't get into that. Epiphanius of Salamis and Augustine both think about the Urim as a white stone that changes colour, that is associated with purity.

So maybe the white stone is a sign that they have been given this token of acceptance and purity. Maybe. A very promising background is found in Zechariah chapter 3. In Zechariah chapter 3, Here now, O Joshua the... Just go back a bit.

And the angel of the Lord solemnly... Actually go back even a little bit further. Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, remove the filthy garments from him.

And to him he said, behold I have taken your iniquity away from you and I will clothe you with pure vestments. And I said, let them put a clean turban on his head. So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments.

And the angel of the Lord was standing by. And the angel of the Lord solemnly assured

Joshua, thus says the Lord of hosts, If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts. And I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.

Here now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are the men who are a sign. Behold, I will bring my servant the branch. For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts.

And I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, everyone will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree. So this is very promising background.

Once again, it's associated with the garments of the high priest. It's associated with purification, wearing clean garments, being established with a new turban and given a stone. And that stone is one that has an inscription upon it.

And it's a stone with seven eyes. Now, where is that stone going to go? Probably on his forehead. And so that forehead will have an inscription of the holiness of Joshua to the Lord.

It's a statement of his priestly status. And so this would give a way of connecting revelation back to the garments of the high priest. So you have Joshua being established with these clean garments.

Think about the promises to the church in Sardis. And in Pergamum, he's given a new stone. And so he's now established as someone who will rule in God's courts, like a pillar in the courts of God, in the courts of the temple.

The possible associations with the days of the creation and the different stages of the construction of the tabernacle are weaker here. It works for some days, but seems weak for the third day. And it seems to complicate our reading here.

And so the hidden manor is associated with the contents of the Ark of the Covenant, not with the showbread, nor with the food of the bronze altar, which we find on the third day in the account of Exodus, chapters 25 to 31. And so the stone has connections, I think, with the garments of the high priest, but those are associated with the fifth day. And so once again, I don't think the connections determine our reading one way or another.

But they do weight the possibilities and probabilities. And the possible connection with the days of creation either adds no weight to the position I'm holding here, or it weakens the strength of it, I think. But I think the connection with the cloning of the high priest is one that does hold.

And as you see that paralleled with the fifth day and the fifth church, with the church in

Sardis, that would give it weight. So think about the way also that the elements of the letters to the churches anticipate the rest of the book. Does this help us any further? So I've mentioned Lighthouse's suggestion that the enemies of the letter to Pergamum relate to the dragon Satan, to the beast Balak, and to the land beast or the false prophet Bala in chapters 12 and 13.

Are there any clues to be found here? First of all, the woman pursued by the dragon is nourished in the wilderness, just as Israel was nourished by the manna in the wilderness. That's found in chapter 12. In chapter 13, the beast causes people to be marked on their right hands and foreheads with his mark.

That's a sort of perversion and inversion of God's marking his people on his foreheads, on their foreheads, which we find in chapter 7 and elsewhere. So is there an association with the two gifts of the church of Pergamum? If there is, then the white stone may be designed to be worn on the forehead. Elsewhere we see white onyx stones with the names of the tribes of Israel on the shoulder of the high priest Ephod in chapter 28 of Exodus 9-12.

I don't think that that's primarily what's being referred to here, though. There's another possibility. You can think about the white stone.

It might be a brilliant, a shining or a dazzling stone. That's what Leucost could mean. Elsewhere it generally means white, but a sort of bright white.

Here it might mean something dazzling. Beale, whose *Comptr* and *Revelation* is absolutely superb, another book I'd very highly recommend, connects it with the golden stone or the golden blossom or whatever on the high priest's forehead. It may not be the most initially probable reading of the white stone for linguistic reasons, but the argument for it, I think, can be bolstered in various ways.

It's a stone with a name written upon it, which I'm not sure we have any record of the Urim and Thummim having the name written upon it. I think some do reference that, but it's not as strong as the association with the name written on the high priest's forehead. And that is a theme that you find throughout the rest of the book of Revelation.

Names written on foreheads, whether that's the perverse name written on the beast and his followers, whether that's the name written on the forehead of the whore of Babylon, whether it's the name that God writes upon the forehead of his servants, or it's the name that's written upon Christ's forehead. You have parallels with the church in Sardis, where the person is clothed in white and the name is confessed before God. In both cases, we seem to have some emphasis upon the garments of the high priest.

And the Balaam-Balak connection would also maybe suggest a connection with Phineas, who overcame the results of Balaam's temptation in Numbers 25. And he was given a

covenant of peace and a perpetual priesthood. So that would give a further background for what's going on there.

Peter Lighthouse suggests that particular connection. The gifts or the rewards mentioned in the letters to the churches also turn up later in the book in many ways that might shed light upon their meaning. So in chapter 19, verse 12, Christ wears many diadems and has a name written, which no one knows but himself.

So again, the association with the diadems suggests that the stone is probably going to be worn on the forehead. And you can see the background to that in Isaiah chapter 62, verse 3-5. And so the name on the forehead is a marital token.

It's associated with a high priest, but a high priest is also associated with marital themes. He represents Israel the bride. And so Israel the bride has this token of its marital status, born before the Lord, is holy to the Lord, has been married to the Lord.

And so they're accepted in God's presence to the wedding feast. It's associated as an inversion again of the dragon and the harlot, who both are associated with names on foreheads. And the connection between chapter 19, verse 12 and 2.17 does suggest this marital intimacy between Christ the bridegroom and his bride.

With each person who believes in Christ, each person who overcomes, enjoying a stone with a name upon it that is known in an intimate way. Now, the name may not be an individual name for each person. It may be a name that is the name of Christ himself, the statement of holy to the Lord.

And Christ's own new name that is mentioned elsewhere in the book of Revelation. That new name that is given may be Christ's name. As Christ's name placed upon it, upon that person, and the only person that can know that is the person who bears it, the person who it's been given to.

That is something that could be known by all believers in common, but there's an intimacy to that knowledge. No one can know it except the person that it's been given to. And so the stone is connecting again symbols of remembrance.

Just as we have with the high priest and the tokens that the priest brought before God so that God would remember his people, remember that he was married to them. That there was this token of marital status of Israel born on the forehead of the high priest into God's presence. And there were also tokens of Israel in the Ark of the Covenant before God.

So God would remember his people, remember that he was married to them. And Israel would remember that they were married to the Lord. That they would have these tokens upon their garments and elsewhere that would draw their minds to the law, that would draw their minds to their priestly status.

And so I think this is fitting into that same world of imagery. It's fitting into the world of imagery associated with Joshua the high priest being purified for his service. It's associated with his being fitted for service in the house of God, representing Israel as a purified people, as a bride entering into the presence of the bridegroom.

And so all the people can bear the name of Yahweh, but it's only truly known by those who receive it. And the name in chapter 19 verse 12 seems to be the divine name, but one only known by the one who bears it most intimately. And so Christ bears it and those I think who overcome bear this unknown name.

And it stresses just how close Christ is bound to his people. That union of Christ and his people, that they're wearing similar garments. And there's also they're bearing the same name.

And there's priestly connotations, but there's also marital connotations. What other themes can we see as a background for this? Well, stones are seen as signs of acquittal in chapter 26 verse 10 of the book of Acts. You have Paul speaking of casting his pebble against Christians as a persecutor.

What does that mean? Well, one pebble would bear a black color on it. One pebble would bear a white color. And if you cast the black pebble, it was condemnation.

If you cast the white pebble, it was acquittal. And so maybe the white stone is associated with that. But then when you think about, and for Maccabees chapter 15 verse 26, there's the woman that holds the two voting pebbles.

And voting for the condemnation or acquittal of her sons. The stones are also seen as tokens for entry to feasts. You could bear this particular token.

Now, as you look through the letters to the churches, you'll see that these themes are present there. Particularly in Sardis, there's a reference to entrance into God's presence. That Christ will confess your name to his father.

And innocence, that your garments are pure, that's associated with whiteness. And both of these are associated with the high priest's garments. Now, with that parallel between Sardis and Pergamon, and bringing those themes together with the background of the story of Joshua the high priest in Zechariah.

Or the story of Phinehas being given this covenant of everlasting priesthood. And being declared righteous before God. But in each of those cases, I think you're seeing the same themes come up.

The high priest is one that has access to God's presence because of the token, the stone that he bears upon his forehead. The high priest also has access to God's presence as one who has been purified. And so those themes have a more general secular

significance.

The white stone is the stone referencing acquittal, referencing innocence. But associating that with the garments of the high priest I think gives us both a more broad secular meaning for these things. Which is part of the background.

Symbols we don't have to choose between one thing or another. They can be associated with a network of imagery. Both secular and symbols from the religious cult of Israel.

So we're not having to draw one connection or another. We can recognise both. Although I think the primary and most prominent connections here are with the garments of the high priest.

And so the high priest is one who represents Israel, can enter into God's presence. He's been purified. He bears the sins of Israel.

And those things are associated with that garment, that headdress and particularly the stone that's borne upon it. So he is given to eat of the hidden manna. He's given access to the Ark of the Covenant itself, this most intimate place.

The Holy of Holies. Something that the high priest of Israel was never able to eat. And then he's also given this white stone conveying purity, acquittal, forgiveness that God has covered all the sins.

And he's also, with that, he is recognised and admitted into God's presence. His name will be confessed before the Father. Putting all of this together, it helps us to see that recognising the puzzle pieces, recognising their shape, recognising the image upon them, will help us to solve a lot of problems that would be difficult to answer otherwise.

Thank you very much for listening. If you have any further questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you'd like to support this and other videos and podcasts like it, please consider doing so using my Patreon or my PayPal accounts.

Links for all of those are below. God bless and thank you for listening.