

"The Seven Churches Of Asia -- Part One"

Revelation 2 Notes

The Church At Ephesus (vss. 1-7)

- The first letter is directed to the angel of the church in Ephesus. The reference is to the prevailing spirit of the church rather than to the guardian angel or ruling official of the congregation. It is appropriate that Ephesus receive the first letter: it was the most important city of proconsular Asia. By New Testament times it had grown to better than a quarter of a million in population.
- The works which Christ knows are not so much separate acts as they are an overall manner of life. The Ephesians heeded the words of advice, tested those who called themselves apostles and found them not simply self-deceived, but deceivers.
- The church is again commended for its patience, its willingness to put up with difficulty and its dedicated labor.
- The expression, "left thy first love," includes both love of God and love of mankind at large, but seems to refer mainly to their love for one another (cf. 2 John 5; Jeremiah 2:2).
- The church is called upon to remember the earlier days in which love abounded in the congregation. Memory can be a powerful force in effecting a return to a more satisfying relationship (cf. Luke 15:17-18). Repentance is always an active step.
- The Nicolaitans are mentioned in both the letter to Ephesus and the letter to Pergamum. Nothing specifically is known about the Nicolaitans; however, it is connected with the teaching of Balaam at Pergamum. Broadly speaking, they had worked out a compromise with the pagan society in which they lived (cf. Acts 15:29).
- It is appropriate that at the end of time the faithful be allowed access to this symbolic source of eternal life. In this type of literature the tree of life exists as a reward for the righteous following judgment. The "paradise of God" symbolizes that state in which God and man are restored to that perfect fellowship which existed before the entrance of sin into the world.

The Church At Smyrna (vss. 8-11)

- Smyrna is the only one of the seven cities still in existence (modern Izmir). The church at Smyrna was a persecuted church, so the letter comes from the sovereign One who died and come to life again. As

He was victorious over death, so they too can face martyrdom knowing that faithfulness is reward with eternal life.

- The linking of tribulation and poverty suggests a close connection between the two. In an antagonistic environment it would be difficult for the Christian to make a living, and thus many were economically destitute. Regardless of their national descent, these "Jews" had become by their bitter opposition to the church and its message, a synagogue carrying out the activities of God's supreme adversary, Satan.
- The devil is the one who would try their faith through imprisonment and tribulation. The "ten days" indicate a short period of time.
- The overcomer is promised that he shall not in any way be hurt by the second death. He cannot promise immunity from the death of the body, but He can promise immunity from that which condemns the soul.

The Church At Pergamum (vss. 12-17)

- Pliny called Pergamum "by far the most distinguished city in Asia." Of all the seven cities, Pergamum was the one in which the church was most liable to clash with the imperial cult. The proconsul in Pergamum was granted "the right of the sword," the power to execute at will. Christ with the two-edged sword would remind the threatened congregation that ultimate power over life and death belongs to God.
- Frequent mention is made of the great throne-like altar to Zeus which overlooked the city from the citadel. Pergamum was the official cult center of emperor worship in Asia.
- From the context, the "doctrine of Balaam" does not refer to a body of doctrine, but to Balaam's activity of advising the Midianite women how to beguile the Israelites into acting treacherously against the Lord (Numbers 31:16). "Things sacrificed to idols" probably refers to a meat which was eaten at pagan feasts rather than that sold in the open market after having been offered to idols.
- Only a portion of the church has fallen prey to the pernicious doctrine of the Balaamites, but all are guilty of not taking action against their presence. The fault is the opposite of Ephesus where the false teachers were exposed but love was missing.
- The "hidden manna" alludes to the proper and heavenly food of spiritual Israel in contrast to the unclean food supplied by the Balaamites. The "white stone" symbolized a token for admission to the banquet. It is white because it symbolized the triumph of faith.

The Church At Thyatira (vss. 18-29)

- The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the

least known, least important and the least remarkable of the cities. The writer of the letter to Thyatira describes Himself as "the Son of God." Only here in the book of Revelation is this title found, although it is implied in other places.

- The choice of the epithet, Jezebel, and references to fornication and eating things sacrificed to idols indicate a first-century parallel with the wicked queen of Ahab who fostered in Israel the idolatrous worship of the Canaanite Baal (1 Kings 16; 2 Kings 9).
- Pagan feasts often led to sexual immorality. Participation in the guild-feast with its penchant for licentiousness would involve the Christian in yet another kind of fornication. The concept of religious infidelity under the figure of harlotry is common in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 3:6; Ezekiel 23:19; Hosea 9:1).
- In contrast to the luxurious couch of sin on which she had led others to share in her wicked teachings and practice, she would be cast into a bed of pain and affliction which inevitably follows sin. It is not that she has the bed and they the tribulation, but the bed into which she and they are cast is a bed of great tribulation.
- Jezebel's spiritual offspring, those who had been begotten of her, succumbing to her influence and practicing fully what she taught, would perish in some significant manner by the Lord.
- Claiming to know the depths of God, they are told that the "depths" they claim to know are really the depths of Satan. Those who have remained faithful at Thyatira are described as not knowing "the depths of Satan."
- Authority over the nations and "the morning star" are promised to the overcomer, that is, the one who continues in the works of Christ until the end. It is by faithful allegiance to the cause of Christ that Christians overcome in the hostile environment of pagan values and practices.
- The description of this rule as the shattering of the potter's vessel speaks of the absolute power of the victorious Christ and His followers over the rebellious nations. The "morning star" is the assurance of the dawn and of the new day.