

Chapter 2

Letters to Seven Churches of Asia Minor

- A. Chapters 2 & 3 contain the only literary contribution Jesus ever made to the world, although John said, 'I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written' - concerning His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, etc. (Jn.21:25).
- B. The letters have a three-fold application:
- Contemporary. A direct message to local churches of that day.
 - Composite. There's something applicable to all churches, of all ages, in each message to each individual church. Too, there's a message to each individual Christian in each letter.
 - Chronological. The complete history of the church is outlined in these 7 letters, from Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost to the Rapture of the Church.

There are 7 dispensations of church history. The church at Ephesus represents the first, and that of Laodicea, the last. Churches of that day were much like those of today: Some good; some not so good.

I. **EPHESUS** (V.1). 'The Apostolic Church' (Pentecost to 100AD).

- Was chief city of province of Asia: wealthy, cultured, corrupt, and idolatrous.
- The Temple of Diana was there, which was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. The staircase in the Temple was carved out of a single vine from Cyprus.
- Its population was about 225,000.
- On different occasions, the church was pastored by Paul, Apollos, Timothy, or John. In fact, it was there that John wrote his Gospel, three Epistles, and the Revelation.
- 'Unto the angel of the church'. Appropriate that each letter is directed to the pastor, since, to a great degree, churches are what ministers make them. (What a responsibility to pastors!)
- 'These things saith He that holdeth Seven Stars in His hand' (Jesus). **Note:** A particular feature of the glorified Christ (from John's vision in chapter 1) is emphasized in addressing each church.
 - Commendations (vs.2,3,6):
 - Works (good works). Faithful works of Christian service (Eph.2:8-10).
 - Labor. Speaks of the person, not of his works.
 - Patience. A 'fruit' of the Holy Spirit.
 - Cannot bear those who are evil.
 - Patient, but not to tolerate trouble-makers.
 - Have tried (tested) those who say they are apostles. An apostle was required to have seen the Lord. They tested a man for his doctrine. (Acts 2:42)
 - One thing against thee (v.4). 'Thou hast left thy first love'. (How sad! God's blessings had become commonplace. For some, it was no longer exciting to be a Christian.) **Note:** Jesus overlooks nothing. He sees not only what we have, but what we don't have, as well.
 - Their zeal for Christ, once enjoyed, had now cooled down. (Honeymoon was over.) They no longer loved Him as they once did.
- Three things to do - quickly - or else (v.5). (1) Remember (2) Repent (3) Return
 - If they fail in these, 'I will remove thy candlestick'. **Note:** It's been said that the church at Ephesus has been gone for centuries. Moslems are now in control. Not a Christian church to be found in the region.
- 'Hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes' (v.6). Nicolaus, of Antioch, taught that a person must indulge in sin in order to understand it. Nicolaitans mixed paganism with Christianity, trying to harmonize the immoral

indulgences of idol worship with the Christian faith. They claimed that the actions of the body had no effect on the spirit.

- I. 'He that hath an ear, let him hear' (v.7). A phrase used often by Christ to alert those with dull ears.
- J. Promise to overcomers.
 - a. Will be privileged to eat of the 'tree of life'. **Note:** Because of sin, Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden to keep them from eating of that tree (Gen.3:22-24).
 - b. But in that day, overcomers will eat of it in the paradise of God. Amen!

II. **SMYRNA** (v.8). The Martyr Church (100AD to 314AD). The city, located some 50 miles north of Ephesus, had been overrun and destroyed centuries before Christ. Later, it became a safe seaport city, personally planned by Alexander the Great.

- A. It represents the period of Church Age that suffered terrible persecution.

Note: Polycarp, believed to be a convert of the Apostle John, became bishop of this church. He was offered freedom if he would curse Christ. He said, 'Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has done me nothing but good: how then could I curse Him, my Lord and Savior?' The Romans burned him alive at the stake in 155AD.

- Hundreds of Christians were brought into the amphitheaters of Rome to be fed to hungry lions, while thousands of spectators cheered.
 - Many were crucified. Others were covered with animal skins and tortured to death by wild dogs.
 - They were covered with tar, and set on fire to serve as torches.
 - They were boiled in oil and burned at the stake.
 - During these 200 years, it is estimated that some 5 million Christian believers died for the cause of the Gospel.
- B. 'Saith the first and last, which was dead and is alive'. (The Lord Jesus Christ.)
 - C. Commendations:
 - a. Works
 - b. Tribulation
 - c. Poverty
 - d. Jews outwardly (hypocrites), trying to creep into church.
 - e. Fear nothing. Many martyrs died singing praises to God.
 - D. Tribulation 10 days (v.10). Believed by some to be the 10 periods of persecutions by 10 different Roman Emperors, from Nero (64-68AD) to Diocletian (303-313AD). Others believe it to be a short 10-day persecution, of which we have no record.

Note: Diocletian is considered the most evil Emperor in Roman history; and, without doubt, he was the one who persecuted the Church the most. He attempted to destroy the Bible from the face of the earth. And while Emperor, many Roman cities had public burnings of the sacred Scriptures. Yet, in the midst of persecution, the church thrived. During this 200-year period, the Bible was translated into several different languages, and the Church was able to help spread the Gospel to other lands.
 - E. Faith unto death' (v.10) - martyrdom.
 - F. Crown of life. A 'special crown' for those who suffer. Smyrna, as a city, has been given a crown of life (in a sense). It has survived through all the centuries, and is now the largest city in Asia Minor, with a population in 2014 of 2,850,000. It is modern day Izmir.
 - G. 'Second death' (v.11). No believer will experience the second death (be lost and separated from God forever).

III. PERGAMOS (v.12). 'The State-Christian Church' (Paganism)(314 to 590AD)

- Pergamos, at the time, was the political capital of Asia.
 - Church embraced the ways of world. The two are wedded under the rule of Constantine.
 - And in 360AD we have the birth of Roman Catholicism.
- A. 'Saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges' (v.12). 'For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword' (Heb.4:12). Surely, the Lord is not pleased with His Church tolerating sinful indulgences. **Note:** The 'Word' is not only a way through the world, it's a way to keep the world out of the church.
- B. Commendations (v.13):
- a. 'Where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is'.
 - b. 'Holdest fast my name', even with world creeping into the church.
 - c. 'Hast not denied my faith'.
- C. Antipas. An unknown martyr of this period.
- D. Condemnations (v.14):
- a. Doctrine of Balaam. Israelites played the harlot with Moabitish women on advice of Balaam. Mixed marriages.
 - b. Doctrine of Nicolaitanes. Believers at Ephesus hated such, but Pergamos tolerates it.
- E. 'Repent' (v.16). The only cure for wrong-doing.
- F. 'Sword of my mouth'. The 'Word of God' is the answer.
- G. 'Hidden Manna' (v.17). Speaks of the person and death of Christ (Jn.6:32-35). As believers, we are to feed on the Lord, the 'Bread of Life'.
- H. 'White stone' (v.18), known to ancients as 'victory stones'. Also had a meaning of 'pardon'. **Note:** Judges of Old Testament had white and black stones. If a black stone was given, it meant the condemned person was guilty. But if a white stone was given the person was pardoned.
- I. 'New name'. Some think this is a 'new name' of Christ, and that we will always be learning more about Him. Others believe this is a 'new name' for the believer. (I'm not sure.)

IV. THYATIRA (V.18). 'The Pagan (Compromise) Church'. (Dark Ages) (590-1517AD).

- Had a temple for 'fortune-tellers' headed by an Occultic Prophetess named 'Sambathe'.
 - Here, she is given the descriptive nickname 'Jezebel'.
- A. 'Eyes like unto a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass'. Jesus searches out this church, and judges it. False religion, in the form of heathen practices, enters during this period. Yet, some were still faithful, even during the 1000 years of spiritual darkness (Dark Ages).
- B. Commendations:
- Works
 - Love
 - Faith
 - Ministry (service)
 - Patience
 - Last works more than the first. (Seemingly, built on works.)

- C. Condemnations (v.20):
 - Jezebel was tolerated (Roman Catholicism?) During this time, idolatry and pagan practices were mingled with Christian worship. 'Worship of the virgin and child', along with the 'mass', were made a part of church service. 'Purgatory' became a welcomed doctrine, and 'Mass' was said for the dead. In a sense, 'Jezebel' was a 'Conqueror of Kings', the 'Corrupter of Israel', 'Sponsor of False Prophets', 'Killer of Saints', and a 'Spiritual Adulteress'.
- D. Given space to repent (v.21). Ample time.
- E. 'I will cast her into a bed' (v.22). Not a bed of pleasure, but of punishment. The profession of Christianity, while practicing heathen rites, is 'spiritual adultery'.
- F. 'Great tribulation' (Rev.17:1-18).
- G. 'Children' (v.23). Those brought up under this abominable religious system.
- H. To those who refused to embrace this false religion, 'Hold fast till I come'. Stay with the 'truth' of God's Word. Refuse to compromise Bible doctrine.
- I. 'And I will give him the morning star' (Rev.22:16)